

THE ART OF SEDUCTION AND AFFECT ECONOMY:
NEOLIBERAL CLASS STRUGGLE AND GENDER POLITICS
IN A TOKYO HOST CLUB

BY

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation investigates the underground world of Japan's increasingly popular host club scene, where mostly young, working-class men "sell" romance, love, and sometimes sex to indulge their female clients' fantasy, often for exorbitant sums of money. I explore this commercialization of feelings, emotions, and romantic relationships — what I call 'affect economy'— in the context of Japan's recent socioeconomic restructuring, a reaction to globalization that is reshaping the nation's labor and commodity forms. Based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Tokyo between 2003 and 2005, I argue that selfhood, lifestyles, and social relationships have become commodifiable at the intersection of Japan's postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal globalization. My dissertation aims to provide a fine-grained ethnographic portrait of how hosts and their clients mutually seduce one another to foster a commodified form of romance whereby both sides seek alternative lives and cultivate their desirable selves —potentially successful entrepreneurial men and sexually attractive women—while it simultaneously underscores gender subordination, social inequality, and the exploitative nature of the affect economy in Japan. I illuminate how mutual seduction between hosts and their clients intertwines with Japan's neoliberal policymaking and governance that similarly capitalizes on and mobilizes individual hopes, dreams, and self-motivations to satisfy both their own and national interests. In turn, I theorize seduction as a form of power that entails suggestive speech and bodily acts to entice the other person(s) into acting for both the seducer's and the seducee(s)' ends. Seduction is, I argue, neither a mere sexual temptation nor a sinful deception, but a ubiquitous yet unstructured tactic that institutions and individuals alike employ to

manipulate the other and shape power dynamics. The art of seduction is, thus, a form of social governance-at-a-distance and also a pivot of speculative accumulation of capital.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This is an ethnographic study about *affect*—feelings, emotions, desires, and intimacy— and its commodification in Japan. Affect, which is rooted in the body and scripted through social interaction, is a vehicle for self-expression and interpersonal communication. It has increasingly become commercialized as a means of evoking excitement, pleasure, and a sense of ‘freedom’ in postindustrial consumer culture, and has accelerated in the wake of Japan’s recent neoliberal restructuring and market deregulation. As part of my study, I investigate Japan’s increasingly popular host club scene, where working class men “sell” romance, love, and sex to their female clients, for often exorbitant sums of money. In the club, hosts and their clients mutually seduce one another—fostering a commodified form of romance—whereby both sides seek alternative lives and perform and cultivate their desirable selves. I argue that the commodification of romance manifests and magnifies what I call an ‘affect economy’ in Japan’s socio-historical conjuncture of postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal globalization.

Affect economy is the term I use to refer to the so-called service industry and by extension postindustrial socioeconomy that capitalizes on affect in order to entice individuals into acting for both their own and various institutional or collective ends. It is not, however, merely capitalist manipulation of the mass or state governance of individual affect. Rather, it is a form of cultural politics within which individuals, as well as social institutions, strategize their speech and bodily acts and stir another’s emotions, desires, and psychology for advantageous trade in sexual, romantic, business, political,

and other social settings. Thus, I define an affect economy both narrowly and broadly: an affect economy is a form of highly personalized market transaction and also a market exchange in general that takes advantage of affect for persuasion and a better deal. As such, the affect economy in a broad sense crisscrosses the body, the social, and the political economy is a dynamic means, script, and process that social actors play out from their own positionality.

The affect economy mirrors global economic trends. In their influential book *Multitudes* (2004), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri claim that the global economy has, over the last two decades, shifted from industrial, or material, labor to immaterial labor—labor that “creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response” (108). Admitting that material labor still comprises a quantitative majority of the world’s labor forces, however, they contend that qualitatively the world economy is moving toward immaterial labor—commonly known as the information age and new economy. For them, “affective labor” is a principle form which “produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion” and shapes social life itself (108). Such affective labor is observed in today’s formal and informal service industry, including but not limited to: tourism, sexual amusement, counseling, self-help seminars, aesthetic and relaxation salons, nannies, maid, and so on (Cruikshank 1993; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Eng 2006; Joseph 2002).

Indeed, neither the affect economy nor affective labor—the production of *affect* for market exchange—is entirely new. The so-called culture industry, which includes image, information, and knowledge, for example, has long utilized affective labor to

appeal to consumer's aesthetics and sensuality, and has become very influential, particularly in late-capitalist societies (Baudrillard 1994; Haug 1986; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). It is now largely established, and widely circulated, via the expansion of global consumerism (Mazzarella 2003). While such industries based on mass production and consumption still distinguish between the affect producer and recipient, personalized service industries such as the host club, where both service providers and recipients mutually attempt to appeal to one another's aesthetics and sensuality to foster an intimate relationship, blur conventional binaries such as service providers and recipients, production and consumption, and the consuming and consumed subjects. The end result is that producer and consumer alike are drawn into the affect economy in the name of personal choice and responsibility and in the neoliberal market logic of self-entrepreneurship and self-fulfillment. The affect economy is thus closely linked with recent neoliberal globalization.

In the host club, both hosts and their clients "work" on their appearance, skills of seduction and persuasion, and flair for the dramatic so as to optimize their monetary and affective exchanges, i.e., their hard-earned self-fulfillment. Here, 'work' becomes a means and process of self-making, and is evaluated by its marketability and desirability. The self is given credit for his/her work metonymically. In other words, money and affect—romantic love, attentiveness, caring—become tokens for both successful work and the entrepreneurial self, the self that is simultaneously the object *and* subject of the work. Thus, inherited and/or acquired skills, knowledge, and sensibility consist of his/her desirability and market value, i.e., human capital that engenders only through market exchange in Japan's affect economy. By the same token, human capital becomes

inseparable from the individual (Gordon 1991). The affect economy in Japan that is built upon postindustrial consumer culture and fueled by neoliberal market logic encompasses both production and consumption as two sides of the same coin: a means of fashioning the desirable self and enhancing one's human capital.

This highly personalized business activity is, I argue, gaining rapidly amid Japan's socioeconomic restructuring. Over the past decade, the Japanese government has moved to privatize the nation's public-state sectors by injecting neoliberal market imperatives—individual creativity, knowledge production, entrepreneurship, competition for self-actualization, and personal freedom and responsibility. While heavily promoting restructuring (*kōzōkaikaku*), deregulation (*kiseikanwa*), and privatization (*min'eika*), the former Koizumi administration proposed to create over two to three million new jobs within five years by expanding service-based industries such as housekeeping, child/elderly care, beauty and health care, entertainment and amusement, and so on (Shimada 2004). This kind of commodification of hitherto public assets and the 'intimate' private sphere, Harvey asserts, is a feature of the neoliberal project and it is spreading globally (Harvey 2005: 160).

As I argue throughout my project, the host club is not just another example of Japan's ephemeral, fad-driven subculture, but a constitutive element of Japan's affect economy—an economy rooted in postindustrial consumerism and neoliberal globalization. The first host club establishment, in fact, opened in the mid-1960s, in Tokyo, where it remained relatively unknown to the public until the business suddenly began to draw media attention in the mid-1990s. This occurred for a number of reasons which I explain further in this chapter, but it is revealing that scholarly recognition of the

affect economy in Japan has closely paralleled the rapid business success of the host club, especially since Japan's neoliberal socioeconomic restructuring was first put into force in the 1990s. Studying how Japan's affect economy has evolved, I argue that Japan's postindustrial consumer culture, which has expanded enormously since the 1970s and increasingly places value on individual choice, self-fashioning, and personal 'freedom' against social constraints, has contingently paved the road for neoliberal restructuring and the rationale for individual creativity, self-actualization, result-oriented competition, and personal freedom and responsibility.

Scholarship on the genealogy of neoliberalism often treats neoliberalism as a continuum of 18th century Liberalism and traces the historical trajectory of Western politico-economic cultural hegemony (e.g., Brown 2003; Duggan 2003). In this dominant model, neoliberalism emerges as an economic doctrine in postwar West Germany and the 1960s U.S. Chicago School (Brown 2003; Lemke 2001; Ong 2006). Aligned with the popular understanding of neoliberalism is the association with U.S.-centered politico-economic principles couched in the rhetoric of so-called 'small government' and 'free markets' (Brown 2003; Ong 2006). Neoliberalism is often equated with economic globalization, largely disseminated through supranational organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Some scholars have problematized this blanket historicization and focused on the socio-historical specificity that shapes different market forms and their relation to the state (Clark 2004; Lemke 2001). Nonetheless, the study of neoliberal genealogy is still largely limited to Western contexts (Burchell 1996; Dean 1999; Ong 2006). Scholars who study non-Western contexts struggle with how to conceptualize historical transformation

in relation to neoliberal reformation on a global scale (Hoffmann et. al. 2006). My approach to neoliberalism by way of affect economics is particularly useful in non-Western socio-historical milieu such as Japan's, where liberalism has been selectively imported and articulated, but has not taken root in such a systematic way as in the West. As I argue, Japan's case foils the dominant Euro-American model of neoliberalism and highlights potentially multiple forms and origins.

Neoliberalism is not merely a politico-economic principle; it has underlying implications and logics, as well as its social effect. Marxist scholars, for instance, have criticized neoliberalism as a class ideology for upward distribution of social resources and a covert depoliticizing of structural inequalities on national and global scales (Brown 2003; Harvey 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). Foucauldian scholars have argued that neoliberalism is a political rationality that creates docile subjects who believe in "freedom" and thereby willingly govern themselves to become rational and responsible (Burchell 1996; Gordon 1991; Lemke 2001). These scholars have revealed that neoliberalism is not an ontological reality, but a constitutivist project that attempts to create new norms and rationalities (Brown 2003; Butchell 1996: 22; Dean 1999; Lemke 2002: 55). Nonetheless, they have largely missed how individual social actors, as well as politico-economic institutions, actually engage in the process of making of and/or struggling with new norms and rationalities.

In my project, I analyze how individual actors, who take advantage of an affect economy, imagine the implications of Japan's neoliberal reformation, strategize their performances, and act out neoliberal values and ethics from their own positionality. Male hosts, who typically have minimal education and poor job prospects, for instance,

devalue Japan's conventionally hegemonic salaryman model and idealize the hosting business for its flexible work style, result-oriented wage system, and opportunity for unhindered success. On the other hand, female clients fantasize romantic excitement as a means to realize a fashionable lifestyle, entrepreneurial self, and personal 'freedom.' Thus, both men's and women's narratives and practices are closely aligned with the neoliberal restructuring that has questioned Japan's existing social model and structure. This has occurred at the same time that the government has promoted highly personalized service industries and emphasized entrepreneurship, competition, and personal 'freedom' as new ethics. Indeed, both individuals and politico-economic institutions similarly engage in and act out the process of neoliberal reformation. Neoliberalism is then a social ethos and practice that shapes (and is shaped by) discursive speech and bodily acts critical of the status quo and seeks alternatives for 'freedom,' that is, freedom *from* conventional norms and ethics, but not necessarily *to* transcendence.

This practice is closely related to subjectivity formation because it is embedded in and derived from the frustrations, struggles, desires, and fantasies of the practitioners, who are socially situated in gendered, sexualized, and class-marked terms. The end game of their neoliberal practice —critique of the status quo for 'freedom'— lies in self-fashioning as desirable selves. As I will detail in later chapters, hosts, for example, denigrate salarymen and sex workers and differentiate themselves so as to identify themselves as self-motivated entrepreneurs, whereas female clients undermine their faceless mother figure symbolism and selflessly devoting wife stereotype so that they can self-narrate as individual and self-fulfilled women. As such, neoliberalism is not just about self-positioning in relation to existing social norms, practices, and identity

categories, but also about self-fashioning, carrying a feeling of desirability, achieving a sense of fulfillment, and a passion for ‘freedom.’ Action *and* affect is thus at the core of neoliberal practice, and neoliberal subjectivity formation is simultaneously the visceral and rational, the self and the other, and the personal and social that engenders through the practitioner’s speech and bodily acts and affective experiences.

The duality of neoliberal practice—self-positioning and self-fashioning—is not limited to individual social actors. The Japanese government is no exception. The Koizumi administration fiercely problematized Japan’s conformist structure in bureaucracy, employment, and education and put ‘restructuring without mercy’ (*seiiki naki kaikaku*) into force in order to improve Japan’s global competitiveness. Here, the governmental neoliberal practice also aims at constructing alternative ethics, practices, and systems so as to create a desirable national identity in the global economy. Thus, discursive neoliberal practices that crisscross individual aspirations, national agendas, and global trends are not different kinds of practices; they rather have different degrees of effect due to their unequal social, political, and geographic positionality. In this respect, Japan’s host club scene is a relevant lens to analyze and observe how the affect economy is taking shape in the era of neoliberal globalization.

Japan’s host club scene provides a unique and complex picture of the neoliberal practices that gendered, sexualized, and class-marked individuals participate in and interact—ones that the nation-state and global economy similarly engage in. Functionally, it opens a window to observe and analyze: 1) How affect economy such as host club business is built upon postindustrial consumer culture and fueled by neoliberal reformation in Japan; 2) the social situation in which neoliberal practices have become

thinkable and practicable; and 3) how individual actors engage in neoliberal practices and why they perform and cultivate ambivalent identities.

My ultimate goal lies in rethinking conventional academic practices that have largely overlooked affect as something bodily, subjective, and unobservable. In particular, academic criticism, which is an often language-centered and/or visual-oriented study of observable objects of social phenomena, I argue, has reinforced the Western modernist tradition of hierarchical binary systems. That is, bifurcating the mind/body, the rationality/irrationality, the objective/subjective, and the visual/other sensory organs, and valuing the former as solely reliable and legitimate sites for observation and scholarly writing. Even scholars who critically analyze modernity as a social mechanism tend to employ the conventional approaches to problematize and/or deconstruct it. Nonetheless, they also unintentionally reproduce the Western modernist practice of seeing, thinking, and writing. Thus, my study that aims to illustrate how individuals and institutions maneuver their ends through affect is not only about the affect economy *per se*, but it addresses the issue of modernity and academic criticism itself.

Literature Review

To further discuss the concepts and practices of the affect economy, I will review three bodies of literature on neoliberalism (genealogy of neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality), the affect economy, and gender politics in Japan. By doing so, I will discuss three interrelated issues. The first, neoliberal *situation*, examines the question of what makes neoliberalism thinkable and practicable and suggests a conceptual and

theoretical issue at stake: neoliberalism cannot be discussed in lieu of socio-historically specific local contexts, i.e., existing social norms, actors, and their desires.

The second issue is that of the methodology of studying neoliberal governmentality and affect economy. I argue that existing scholarship on neoliberalism tends to focus on how it is discursively operated as a whole based on language-centered analysis of economic doctrine, political campaigns, and cultural policy. Similarly, the study of affect economy has a tendency to use binary frames such as economics and emotions, exploitation and democracy, and instrumentality and affectivity. Instead of totalizing and bifurcating such framing, I propose the art of seduction—the deployment of suggestive bodily and speech acts to entice the other into acting for the seducer’s end, as well as the seducee’s— as a useful tool to analyze how neoliberal governance and the affect economy is put into action and what kinds of social effects the action causes.

The third topic concerns neoliberal subjects who tend to regard themselves as self-autonomous but in truth are governed through regulated choices, guided conducts, and social norms, i.e., neoliberal governance. I intend to further the discussion—the neoliberal subject *as the subjugated*— by asking not whether they are docile so much as cleverly performing subjection as a guise for subversive enactments that collectively pry open the gates to social transformation.

Genealogy of Neoliberalism

In an article titled “Notes on the Anthropology of Neoliberalism,” Lisa Hoffman et al. contend that while “ever more anthropological studies are concerned *with* neoliberalism, there have been few steps made toward an anthropology *of* neoliberalism”

in terms of a conceptual and methodological contribution as a discipline (2006: 9). In their critique, they raise three interrelated questions: 1) How can anthropologists write against the dominant conservative libertarian tradition that maintains liberalism-neoliberalism patrimony? 2) How can we grapple with similar, yet not quite the same features of historical transformations and socioeconomic reforms often associated with neoliberalism? 3) What conceptual and methodological tools are appropriate and useful for an anthropology *of* neoliberalism? (Hoffman et al 2006: 10)

In this section, I will elaborate on the notion of what I call “neoliberal situation” by borrowing Appadurai’s concept of the “commodity situation.” In his edited volume, *Social Lives of Things* (1986), Appadurai proposes to analyze socio-historical situations in which any ‘things’ become exchangeable for some other things and how the exchangeability becomes socially relevant (13). As discussed above, neoliberalism is not so much about the typology of economic doctrines that permeate and materialize everyday lives, but about the social situations and ethos in which existing social values and practices are maneuvered into certain neoliberal ethics such as entrepreneurship, result-oriented competition, and personal freedom and responsibility. In short, neoliberalism is a way of making new values and ethics thinkable and practicable, i.e., socially relevant, and the neoliberal situation is a social practice, context, and phase that enables it. In this way, neoliberalism is not a timelessly singular economic doctrine or imperialist device, but is situated in the tempo-spatial trajectory of the past, present, and future of both local and global contexts. In these contexts, values and telos are imagined, practiced, and articulated.

Challenging scholarship in anthropology and other social sciences concerning neoliberal globalization as U.S. imperialism, Occidentalism, and homogenization, recent work has treated neoliberalism as a social ethos that results from a complex cultural translation process arbitrated in socio-historically specific local contexts (e.g., Hoffmann 2004; Ong 2006; Song 2006). This approach opens a new venue in which to examine neoliberal situation. However, studies on neoliberalism, as John Clarke points out, still tend to treat state policy and political campaigns as if “they translate immediately and unproblematically into practice” in local contexts (Clarke 2004: 44). I particularly argue that the existing scholarship largely overlooks individual experience and interpersonal negotiations.

The concept of neoliberal situation directly speaks to the first two questions raised by Hoffman et al. Instead of projecting the hegemonic libertarian tradition or localizing socio-historical transformation, the analysis of neoliberal situation requires local sensibility, but allows us to examine crisscrossing tempo-spatial conjunctures that lie at the heart of neoliberalism.

As such, one way an anthropology of neoliberalism can grapple with neoliberal globalization is by tracing the social situations and ethos that allow individuals and institutions to criticize the status quo and constitute their own ‘liberal’ identities in the multiple scaling of the local, national, transnational, regional, and global. From there, anthropologists can theorize the cultural logics and politics of the process and further discuss cultural specificity, human agency, and social transformation, among other potential issues and debates.

Neoliberal Governmentality

Drawing on Foucault's notion of neoliberal governmentality, yet focusing on how it is put into (inter)action, in this section I will discuss what I call "the art of seduction" as a conceptual and methodological tool. In so doing, I intend to highlight action itself, interpersonal relations, and non-linguistic centered analysis that Foucauldian power-knowledge-governance overlooks.

Foucault defines governmentality as 'the conduct of conduct,' meaning that 'to conduct' is to lead, direct, guide, or affect the conduct of some person(s) with some sort of calculation (Dean 1999: 10-11; Gordon 1991: 2). In this conduct multiple authorities and agencies employ a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, derived from desires, aspirations, interests, and beliefs, in order to seek to act upon oneself and another's conduct for his/her own ends (Dean 1999: 11). Such conducts accompany a "diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects, and outcomes" (Ibid). This dynamic definition is useful for an anthropology of neoliberalism. Foucault, however, focuses mainly on the mechanisms and rationalities in the political domain, and overlooks the activities, actors, and interpersonal relations that involve some form of control or guidance (Foucault 1981: 226 in Lemke 2002: 54-55; Gordon 1991: 3). This is because he equates knowledge with practice by treating the power-knowledge-governance as the process of "systematization and 'rationalization' of a pragmatics of guidance," that is, inscription onto the individual body (Lemke 2002: 54-55; also see Butler 1990: 129).

Indeed, "practices don't exist without a certain regime of rationality" (Foucault 1991: 79 in Lemke 2002: 54-55). Nonetheless, practices don't exist without the

practitioners. I propose *the art of seduction* as a conceptual and analytical tool in order to draw attention to the actors and their interpersonal conducts instead of presuming the individual and the body as the docile object of language-based political rationalities. *The Art of Seduction*, for instance, claims that seduction is a kind of strategic game in real life, where a seducer uses “pleasure as bait, playing on people’s emotions, stirring desire and confusion, inducing psychological surrender” (Greene 2001: xxi). While seduction is oftentimes associated with sexual temptation, the scheme—the use of allusive utterances and gestures to capitalize on or dally with a person’s affect so as to entice him/her into acting for one’s end—is utilized in a wide range of business, social, and political maneuvers, including but not limiting to advertising, marketing, and political campaigns. Individuals also take advantage of it for favorable turns and exemptions. Thus, seduction is not an inscription practice, but a ubiquitous strategic game that institutions and individuals participate in and by so doing (re)shape the power dynamics from their own standpoint.

By no means do all individuals and institutions play the strategic games equally because of asymmetric distribution of socioeconomic and cultural resources. Here, Foucault’s notion of domination is useful: Domination is a particular type of stable and hierarchical power relationship that goes beyond the strategic games (Lemke 2002: 53). The hierarchy is shaped, however, not by different operational systems, but rather uneven degrees of maneuvering and extensions of its effect. Bruno Latour reinforces this point, stating, “the ‘macro-actor’ is not different in kind from the ‘micro-actor,’ but is merely one who has a longer and more reliable ‘chain of command’—that is to say, assembled into longer and more dispersed networks of persons, things and techniques” (Rose 1999:

5). From this perspective, seduction is, I argue, a conduct of conduct and a central locus of neoliberal governmentality, which requires social actors, whose capability of criticizing the status quo and acting for ‘freedom,’ have different ranges of maneuvering room and effect based on the size of institutions, as well as gender, sexuality, class, and other forms of social classification categories.

The art of seduction converges different interests, desires, and beliefs through mutual seduction and interpersonal negotiations. It entails at least two parties to interact; otherwise it doesn’t work regardless of the seducer’s intention and rationality. In other words, the seducee has to be persuaded or enticed for continuous seduction. As such, the art of seduction is never a complete state, but an ongoing process that yields indeterminate and contingent consequences. It creates a discrepancy between rationality and action, the different ends of two parties, and teleology and effect, where reorientation of conduct and discursive subversion collectively pry open for social transformations. This is where anthropologists can focus on in order to critically examine and reframe the questions associated with neoliberalism.

Affect Economy

In order to discuss how seduction has become an aptitude and source of human capital for sexual, business, and social maneuvers in the affect economy, I will detail the intersection between postmodern consumer culture and neoliberal restructuring in terms of subjectivity formation. While affect —aesthetics, sensibilities, and emotions— has recently drawn attention as a tool to analyze postmodern consumer culture, late-capitalist forms of labor, and neoliberal subjectivity, existing scholarship on this topic tends to

separate production and consumption. I intend to debunk the artificial boundary that exists between production and consumption by demonstrating how the self *and* one's labor for sale interweaves the binary and creates a dual sense of subjectivity, that is, being simultaneously the entrepreneurial subject and the sign object in the new millennium neoliberal capitalism. By doing so, I aim to reexamine the western tradition of subjectivity—either autonomous or subjugated subjects— and explore the potential consequences of the dual sense of selfhood —the subject and object of millennium capitalism—in the interactive transmission of affect and negotiation.

Incorporating sensibility into the Marxist analysis of the culture industry and consumerism, Wolfgang Haug theorizes commodity aesthetics as a form of manipulation of the masses. According to Haug, commodity aesthetics that consists of two kinds of beauty —appearance that appeals to the senses and sensuality that stimulates the onlooker's desire to possess and the impulse to buy— has become more important than the commodity itself to sell (Haug 1986: xx). In other words, appearance and sensuality is the instrument of accumulating capital and “whoever controls the product's appearance can control the fascinated public by appealing to them sensually” (Haug 1986: 17). This is because, Haug explains, capitalism is rooted in an illusionary world mold in which only the aesthetic objects but also human agency to make the object sensually appealing shapes a nuanced form of controlling power (Haug 1986: 47). Under this model, Haug reveals two important points: manipulation entails aesthetic sensibility and skills to appeal to an audience, and it is only effective when it meets the audience's interests.

Aligned with Haug's view, Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) have theorized immaterial labor that has become a central characteristic in the global economy

since the 1990s. Particularly in dominant postindustrial nations, the mode of production has shifted to less tangible forms of capitalist accumulation such as information, communication, and emotion. In this postindustrial economy, affective labor that produces and manipulates feelings, emotions, and intimate relationships in an information-intensive economy comes to embed economic values. While Hardt and Negri assert that the affective labor creates not only the emotionality but also the social life itself (2004: 108), their highly theoretical work does not take into account the actual social interactions and lives that the affective labor produces. Correspondingly, their theorization on the democratization aspects of the affect economy is less convincing and problematic.

Notwithstanding these studies, empirical studies of immaterial or affective labor in the form of emotion work, care work, and sex work have been done. Drawing from a Marxist analysis of labor, for example, Arlie Hochschild explores the commercialization of human feeling in her book *The Managed Heart* (1983) and introduces the concept of emotional labor, differentiated from physical labor in the classic sense. On top of the alienation attendant with physical labor, Hochschild argues that emotional labor, which requires emotional management from the likes of service providers such as shop clerks, flight attendants, and social workers, doubly alienates the laborer. While Hochschild's work focuses on flight attendants who have one-time encounters with their service recipients, sex related workers oftentimes have repeat customers and the multiple encounters, complicating the relationship between service providers and recipients. For example, Denis Brennan's *What's Love Got to Do with It?* (2004) explores the relationship between Dominican female prostitutes and European male customers and

highlights the instrumentality of romance that the prostitutes perform for their economic livelihood. Although her detailed ethnographic study teases out the performative aspects of romance, her idea of performance is limited to its economic instrumentality and does little with performativity per se. Brennan merely reinscribes the dichotomy between performance and the reality, commercial and true romance, and economic and emotional motives without unmasking the social reality of gender, sexuality, and romance as performatively constituted through repetitive acts and signification practices.

A service-based industry entailing mutual seduction such as found in the host club further complicates the seducer/seducee binary and blurs the above dichotomies. Such asymmetric, yet mutual interactions make a person simultaneously the subject and the object of the seductive process. This can be understood in the Foucauldian terms of subject and subjection, but I add a new dimension to the discussion by focusing on the performative or strategic subjection of individuals. As part of that effort I will shed light on the power of subjection in the affect economy by concentrating on neoliberal class struggle among male hosts and the gender politics of female clients. As I learned through direct observation, subjugation does not necessarily mean the docile reinforcement of the status quo; rather, it is a more complicated weave of individual self-practices—as both the subject and the subjugated, depending on positionality—that embodies the exercise of ‘freedom’. These embodiments and enactments are dramatized every night in Japan’s host clubs. On a larger scale, seduction has the power to (re)shape the status quo, ethics, and dominant form of ideologies to an extent underappreciated by many anthropologists.

Gender Politics in Japan

Subtle embodiments and enactments are particularly important to study in regards to gender relationships in Japan, where organized women's movements and overt social conflicts have been often avoided (Borovoy 2005; Kelsky 2001; Ogasawara 1998). Some anthropological studies have highlighted covert power negotiations between Japanese women and men and challenged stereotypical images of Japanese women as passive, submissive, and dependent. Studying the life cycle of Japanese women, for example, Takie Lebra (1984) has argued that Japanese men depend on their wives for housework, household finances, and their psychological well-being. Such dependence makes the wife and her work indispensable. Similarly, Iwao Sumiko (1993) asserts that men's formal superiority is coupled with women's informal dominance in the Japanese household. According to Iwao, women, who are marginalized in such fields of policymaking and business management, have less responsibility in the public sphere and more free time than their male counterparts who must spend long hours at work. While Japanese men, particularly middle-class salarymen, have been exalted in Japan's mass-production based economy, Iwao asserts that they are "the ones to be pitied" today because of their dependency on Japanese women. Iwao states, "The Confucian ethic of the three obediences formerly binding women could be rewritten today as the three obediences for men: Obedience to mothers when young, companies when adult, and wives when retired" (1993: 7). While Lebra and Iwao's claims put into question the stereotypical image of the subordinated Japanese woman, they take gender as an identity category into little account and neglect how such a category is socio-historically constituted and what it takes individuals to be a man and a woman. As a result, they unintentionally reproduce such

dichotomies as men and women, formal and informal, and public and domestic, and naturalize gender attributes within a binary frame.

Yuko Ogasawara (1998) makes a similar claim but denaturalizes the taken-for-granted differences attributed to gender by expanding the analysis of superior-subordinate gender relations from the household level to the workplace level. In the workplace, she claims that Japanese salaried men's formal superiority relies on office ladies (OLs, or female office workers) and the presumption that a boss is not a boss without subordinates. This dialectic power dynamic is, Ogasawara argues, derived from neither biological sex differences nor behavioral patterns but constituted by company policies and social expectations that set separate career paths for men and women in Japan. Men, who are assigned more responsible work and evaluated by their performance, strive to perform well for their career success, whereas women, who are merely expected to support their male colleagues with secretarial work and quit their jobs upon marriage, care less about their occupational success (Ogasawara 1998: 164). As a result, salaried men must cultivate serious attitudes, rational judgment, and self-control, while women, who usually do not do so, look irresponsible, irrational, and careless. Instead of taking gender difference at face value, Ogasawara thus reveals that gender is a system, where men and women are subject to different sociocultural constraints that condition their existence, whereupon they act differently (Ibid: 164).

Based on discussions of resistance by James Scott and Paul Willis, Ogasawara asserts that Japanese OLs do not organize social or labor movements but rather “collectively” pressure men as a group without directly confronting them. For example, they deploy methods of resistance such as circulating negative rumors, uncooperative

attitudes, and feigned ignorance in order to keep the meaning of their acts ambiguous and the actors anonymous but effectively voicing their defiance (Ogasawara 1998: 157). The uncooperative attitudes of OLs, she contends, disturb their male colleague's performance and promotion and therefore cause men to appreciate their work and listen to their subtle voices. This covert power negotiation is, however, double-edged. Ogasawara points out that such forms of resistance naturalizes irrational and childish behavior ascribed to be peculiar to females and legitimizes asymmetrical gender roles.

In his analysis, Ogasawara carefully unfolds how gender traits and stratification are systematically determined by the discriminatory Japanese corporate scheme. Nonetheless, her analytical scope is limited to gender dynamics *within* the foreclosed corporate space. Because of that, her argument leans toward a functionalist orientation, an integrated whole, i.e., the corporate system, where discriminatory practices, gender stratification, and resistance harmoniously function together and sustain the system in a state of equilibrium. In addition, while Ogasawa's account demonstrates how the gender system functions based on observable behaviors and practices, it pays scant attention to individual desire and the processes that men and women come to realize gender norms and corporate ideology.

The work of Anne Allison (1994), on the other hand, bridges this gap and illustrates how Japanese corporate practices and ideology shape salaried men's desire and behavioral patterns. Examining company-paid nighttime entertainment at hostess clubs, where young, attractive hostesses help their male clients relax and assure their masculine identity, Allison argues that such entertainment is institutionalized in the service of channeling masculine energy into work and the construction of corporate masculinity.

Challenging the static view of gender differences and attributions, Allison demonstrates how men's sexual desires and work ethics are managed by the corporate ideology and work ethic that underscores hard work as a Japanese work style and the means for self-fulfillment and economic success. Nonetheless, Allison highlights how Japan's nightlife activities are normalized as a custom rather than industrial policy; as a result, it becomes harder to recognize and resist the actual corporate ideology. Thus, Allison's work uncovers the process whereby masculinity, particularly hegemonic corporate masculinity in Japan, symbolically and ritualistically comes into being through male-bonding and socialization practices.

Despite her efforts to challenge the conventional functionalist orientation, her top-down presumption that ideology pervades desires, practices, and sociality ensnares her argument in what she tries to challenge. On group membership she states, "The rituals and routines indulged in by various groups in Japan are not ... functional equivalents. They all reflect and encourage group attachment, but there are *variations in how they do so*, with what constitution of 'group,' and with what implications for the individual members within those groups" (Ibid: 156 emphasis added). Although Allison acknowledges individual and group variations in desires and social practices and complicates the functionalist claim on society as an integrated whole, her theorization of corporate masculinity based on Lacanian psychoanalysis of subjectivity and Marxist notions of fetishism remains in the legacy of functionalism. She argues that ideology "make[s] a subject not feel subjected" and in turn subsumes human agency and the potentially transformative force underneath the hegemonic ideology (Ibid: 201). Thus, according to Allison, Japan's corporate system results in sustaining harmony.

In other words, Allison's theorization of corporate masculinity and subjectivity relegates subjects as a merely fictional construct of the dominant ideology, and neglects individual rearticulation of the ideology, dysfunctional aspects of social norms, and transnational flows of images, commodities, and capital beyond the cultural hegemony within Japan.

Combining gender, race, and the transnational flow of images, commodities, and capital, Karen Kelsky (2001) addresses the transgressive and transformative potential of Japanese women's internationalist narratives, particularly the narratives that young, educated, and ambitious Japanese women romanticize and yearn for in the West. More often than not, these are embodied by white males, who are held up as a modern, cosmopolitan, and liberal icons in comparison to Japan, or Japanese men, who are viewed negatively as traditional, nationalistic, and patriarchal symbols. Aligning existing scholarship on Japanese women, Kelsky stresses that their lack of formal superiority and responsibility affords Japanese women the flexibility and mobility to go abroad and pursue their romantic and career pursuits. Such nonconformist desires and aspirations threaten Japan's male-centered society and potentially transform it (Kelsky 2001: 4). Focusing on the trope that internationalist women wittily deploy cultural signifiers of the West and the East, in particular Japan, to reverse and reject gender stratification in Japan, Kelsky thus argues that they engage in projects of resistance (Ibid).

Nonetheless, Kelsky warns that internationalist women's resistance, which works within the logic of fetishism in late-capitalist Japan, is also "a deeply compromised one politically" (Kelsky 2001: 4). She writes, "[D]esiring 'liberation' and believing they lack it, they have fetishized the West ... to fill the lack. But the referent of a fetish is always

illusory and this fetishization forecloses *real political engagement*” (Ibid: 222 emphasis added). Kelsky’s seemingly discrepant claim of internationalist women’s narratives—a form of resistance but nonpolitical engagement—probably roots in her attempt to avoid the functionalist legacy, yet risks being caught by liberal identity politics, that is, organized movements based on an identity groups, in this case women, who have clear rationalizations and intended goals. Kelsky writes, “the fantasy West has come to proliferate as a decontextualized mediated image, an empty signifier that is infinitely manipulatable but ultimately *politically empty as a feminist emancipatory mechanism*. Internationalist desires derived from its fantasy image give birth to no social movement” (Ibid: 224 emphasis added).

Kelsky eloquently challenges the stereotypical image of Japan as a closed society and Japanese women as conformists by showing how individual women deploy internationalist narratives to potentially subvert hegemonic Japanese patriarchy. However, she also spoils non-conformist and subversive narratives and practices as a private activity and therefore merely non-political manipulation of empty signifiers. In spite of her efforts to complicate the picture of Japanese society and women with some rebellious aspects and their effect, she unintentionally reinforces the conventional private/public, individual/social, and fiction/reality binary. Acknowledging anthropologist Mariko Tamanoi, who contests that “Japanese must be looked for not in Western-style political/legal ‘stimulant[s] to profound social change’ but in individual women’s ‘everyday social practices’,” Kelsky finally turns to the “unwilled” effects of Japanese women’s internationalist narratives and practices in her conclusion (Tamanoi 1990: 26-27 in Kelsky 2001: 224). However, she never fully develops the political

implication of the “unwilled” effect nor does she thoroughly question the “woman” as a uniform identity category in order to argue for organized feminist movements.

Contrary to Kelsky’s approach to popular culture, Jennifer Robertson (1998) stresses that popular culture can be a political site of change where an ambivalent subtext is created, fantasized, and shared, in what she calls a “politics of ambivalence.” In her analysis of female actors playing “male” gender roles in Japan’s all female revue, Takarazuka, she argues that the female cross-dressing body embodies androgynous bodily traits of the “masculine” and the “feminine” and potentially destabilizes the essentialized sex differences and fixity in femininity and masculinity (Robertson 1998: 87). Thus, Robertson questions normative sex, gender, and sexuality coordinates, and interprets sex as the physical, gender as socio-historical conventions, and sexuality as a domain of desire and erotic pleasure, as well as the hegemonic construction of reproductive heterosexuality (Ibid: 17). In so doing, she highlights the politics of ambivalence as a means to effectively dissociate gender from sex and raise awareness of the arbitrariness of the feminine and masculine conventions and its performative construct. “The key to liberation,” Robertson asserts, “involves not a change of sex but a new gender identity, and by extension, a transformation in gender ideology” (Ibid: 17; 87). As such, what is political here is not about a wholesale subversion or transcendence of the sex and gender system, but how to disturb the pervasively fixed coupling of the female body with their assigned gender roles and identity within Japan’s marriage and family system.

The politics of ambivalence is, according to Robertson, not only the means to destabilize the dominant text of opposing binaries in sex, gender, and heterosexuality but

also a disguise to avoid social surveillance. Robertson demonstrates how non-normative Japanese women, who fantasize same-sex love, strategically deploy androgyny to “conveniently circumvent the issue of erotic desire and parried allegations of ‘abnormal’ sexuality” (Ibid: 71). Robertson pays close attention to subtext that superficially aligns with the ideological text of binary heterosexual convention, yet actually diverges from it and creates a tension that becomes a transformative force. Thus, she intends to move beyond the either/or dichotomy (e.g., masculinity or femininity, text or subtext, public or private, and so on) to the both/and ambivalence (e.g., androgyny, bricolage of multiple texts, and body politics), where messiness, inconsistency, and contradiction impact on nonlinear and non-progressive historical transformations.

Robertson also incorporates the body into her textual analysis and examines how individuals create bodies capable of being read or understood in more than one way. Her analysis, however, largely reduces the body to a text, i.e., a two-dimensional matter as she cites Butler’s work on signification practices and states that androgyny refers to a “surface politics of the body” (Butler 1990: 136 in Robertson 1998: 47). For both Butler and Robertson, what matters is the subversive possibility of “gender markers — clothes, cosmetics, gestures, speech patterns, and so on — in a way that both challenges the stability of a sex-gender system premised on a male (masculine)/female (femininity) dichotomy and also retains the components of that dichotomy” (Ibid: 47-48). In short, their notion of body politics centers on subversive signification practices and the creation of counter texts; nonetheless, it diminishes the complexity and dynamism of bodily acts and interaction, which is by no means limited to the surface visibility, to the two-dimensional still picture-like text (see Massumi 2002: 3-4). Thus, the surface politics of

the body overlooks how gender signification and identity is imbued with constantly shifting subjectivity formation, day-to-day interactions, and transmission of affects that are always in motion.

Dorinne Kondo (1990) challenges this cultural matrix that subtracts motion from everyday experience of subjectivities and takes into consideration how moving, acting, speaking, etc., embodies multiple selves. For example, she illustrates how an artisan at a small confection store in Tokyo displays his masculine narratives and performance through his refined craftsmanship in front of his feminine audience, who are part-time workers that pay respect. At the same time, his masculine identity is undermined in Japan's economic transformation toward ever-larger scale corporate businesses, which guarantee their employees stable wages and welfare security. As such, the artisan's self-identity is not fixed but determined in a relational context where subjectivity positions continually are shifting. (Ibid: 46). Kondo argues that the self is neither coherent nor bounded, but crafted multiply in specific social settings and contexts. She in turn problematizes the western linguistic and historical convention that assumes the individual as the coherently bounded and autonomous self, and deessentializes the identity category such as the Japanese, the woman, and the individual self.

Kondo challenges not only the western tradition of unified identity categories but also the notion of individualism and the transcendental model of resistance, which is built upon dualism such as self and society, personal and political, and freedom and repression. Unlike Kelsky and Robertson's textual analysis of narratives and the body surface, which complicates the coupling process but remains tied to the binary framework, Kondo criticizes the binarism itself that roots in the legacy of the Cartesian mind/body spirit and

Sossure's one-to-one signifier/signified coupling. She argues that the binarism forecloses open-ended possibilities for play, subversion, and change (Kondo 1990: 224-225). As the case of the artisan's multiple subjectivities exemplifies, there is no utopian space of resistance to transcend the constantly shifting socio-historical contexts even though selves strategically deploy signifiers. Thus, Kondo proposes to reconceptualize the self and reconsider the nature of power and resistance rather than simply comply with the prevailing western model of the subject, resistance, and liberal politics (Ibid: 307). Resistance is not mere reproduction of social relations within a closed system as Ogasawara and Willis theorize (Ogasawara 1998; Willis 1977). It is not an illusionary private activity, either (Kelsky 2001). It, as Kondo stresses, grounded in and derived from the specific nexus of power and meaning (Ibid: 301).

Kondo's critical accounts on multiple selfhood also reveals that scholars are not free either from shifting theoretical paradigms in academia and historical convention in the west. Along with the so-called "linguistic turn," the functionalist orientation — the symbolic and ritualistic representation of the integrated whole — has yielded its path to the postmodern and poststructuralist paradigm — multiple truths and discursive construction of identity categories including the self, gender, and society. To which Kondo alerts scholars who are still vested in the western conceptual convention of the unified subject, binary opposites, and transcendental resistance. Which is not to say that Kondo's own ethnography, which is situated at a particular historical moment and cultural context, is exempt from historical transformation. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, selves are no longer determined by context, as Kondo has argued, but rather expected to produce and manipulate the context itself in today's Japan, where the

neoliberalism of individual creativity, entrepreneurship, and freedom is promoted. Such selves —what I call “affective selves”— are not merely multiple selves but also creative selves who produce affective settings and deploy the art of seduction to attain what they want and assure their self-importance, as desirable neoliberal subjects.

The affective selves are imbued with Japan’s neoliberal situation and new notion of subjectivity within a globalizing affect economy—the economy that capitalizes on affect to entice individuals into acting for both their own and various institutional or collective ends. In the following section, I will review the literature on the affect economy and situate my project.

By illustrating commodified romance in Tokyo host clubs, in the following section I will demonstrate how neoliberal situation, the art of seduction, and subjectivity formation in the affect economy has emerged in contemporary Japan. By doing so, I will show how the host club scene manifests and magnifies socio-historical transformation in commodity situation, lifestyles and work styles, and subjectivity formation.

Of Japan’s Host Club

In the teeming center of Tokyo lies the Kabuki-chō red-light district, the largest in Asia. The majority of Japan’s host clubs (called *hosuto kurabu* in Japanese) are located here. In lavishly decorated spaces, female customers—housewives, office ladies, hostesses, and sex workers—pursue a fantasy of “freedom” and romance. Many simply want escape from the constraints and stress in their day-to-day lives; others seek intimacy, including sexual encounters. Their young male hosts (who typically have a limited education and come from lower class backgrounds) are motivated to “sell”

romance, love, and sex for more tangible returns—money. Both hosts and their clients mutually seduce one another and in the process foster a commodified form of romance whereby they simultaneously attempt to satisfy their fantasies and desires and cultivate their desirable selves: occupationally successful men and sexually attractive women.

Not long ago, host clubs were practically unheard of in Japan, and far less known about than hostess clubs and *geisha* entertainment establishments (Allison 1994). In the last decade, however, concentrated media exposure has cleared much of the mystery that once surrounded the host club, which has its origins in the mid-1960s. It was during this robust economic period in Japan that the first host club opened as a dance hall close by the Tokyo Station. Mostly upper-class matrons and wealthy widows stopped by and enjoyed themselves on the way back home from shopping at department stores. The male dancers in the club called were called “hosts.” Over their comparatively long history, the host club has been a highly exclusive establishment and has remained largely unknown to the Japanese public until recently.¹ This was partially because women secretly visited the club to avoid ruining their family and social reputations, as associating with hosts was viewed as disrespectful or promiscuous behavior. At the time, hosts were called “*otoko mekake*” (male mistress or “lover”) and socially stigmatized as gigolos—men who “sell” themselves to women for a living.

As a result of news reports and other media attention in the last decade, however, the Japanese public has become intimately familiar with the host club enterprise. A plethora of TV dramas, hidden camera exposés, magazine articles, and comic book

¹ While there are a few establishments where cross-dressed female hosts entertain, I focus exclusively on the recent development of *josei senyō hosuto kurabu* (host clubs for women only) since the number of such clubs is rapidly increasing and receiving sensational treatment in the media.

serials have exposed the inner workings of the business and highlighted the excesses of Japanese women, who are typically represented as wantonly spending thousands of dollars on bottles of champagne and other items, often making their lucky hosts millionaires. Indeed, many hosts themselves today enjoy household name recognition and a few are genuine celebrities in Japan. For example, Reiji, a former host and now a host club owner in Roppongi, Tokyo's famous upscale neighborhood, has been featured in Forbes magazine and appears regularly on Japanese TV variety shows as a love counselor and commentator. (Like Madonna, he is known throughout Japan by his first name.)

In tandem with the increased media attention, the hosting business has flourished in the last decade despite Japan's lackluster economy. While mostly found in big cities like Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya, recently host clubs have sprung up all over Japan, with an estimated 200 clubs and over 5,000 hosts plying an increasingly lucrative trade within Tokyo's Kabuki-chō entertainment district alone.² Why did this little-known subculture suddenly emerge so prominently? While the host club phenomenon is sometimes viewed as just another example of Japan's fad-driven, trendy culture, I maintain that it manifests and magnifies the convergent gender, sexual, and class coordinates of subjectivity formation at the nexus of postmodern consumer culture and neoliberal restructuring.

Starting in the 1980s, during the period of Japan's so-called bubble economy, significant numbers of single women were hired in newly developing financial, service, and leisure industries. With their newfound disposable incomes, Japanese women have, over the last two decades, greatly diversified their lifestyles and pursued greater self-

² Accurate official numbers are not available. Unofficial estimates suggest that the number of host clubs in Kabuki-chō is 200, employing 5,000 hosts; figures based on Nakatani (2001: 98), Sakai (2001: 151), as well as information obtained via interviews.

fulfillment, including romantic and sexual satisfaction (Kelsky 2001; Ogura 2003; Sakai 2003; Ueno 2004). They have increasingly avoided the confines of Japan's marriage and family system for *jibun no jinsei*, "a life of one's own." Such attitudes are manifested in the recent trends toward late marriage, declining birthrates, and higher divorce rates in Japan.³ This trend is significant in comparison to the social norms applied to women of previous generations, whose life values and self-worthiness were and are often inseparable from their expected roles as mothers and caregivers in (extended) families (Borovoy 2005; Long 1995). Along this line, their sexuality was restricted to conjugal (and reproductive) sex, and women who engaged in extramarital affairs or "sex work," were denigrated as either "promiscuous" or "commercial" women (Allison 1994).

Naturally, the Japanese media has picked up on and promoted the changing attitudes of today's Japanese women. In the realm of advertising, the individual rather than the nuclear family has become the iconic unit of consumption and heterosexual romance, rather than marriage *per se*, is promoted as an ideal tool for expressing womanhood. This shift in emphasis occurred in the early 1990s, coinciding with Japan's so-called *ren'ai būmu* (romance boom). The *ren'ai būmu* relentlessly promotes romance as a means of beautifying everyday life and cultivating *aisareru* ("desirable" and/or "lovable") women through self-expression involving fashion, hairstyle, body care, communication skill, and the overall presentation of the self. A book genre called *ren'ai*

³ One of the ways that women attempt to avoid the system is postponing or avoiding marriage and having fewer children. The average age of first marriage, for example, rose from 24.4 in 1960 to 27.4 in 2003 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research). Meanwhile, the fertility rate dropped from 2.16 in 1971 to 1.29 children per couple in 2003, a record low.

ron (discussion on romance) and women's fashion magazines have continued to fuel the boom.

Latent in this discourse, moreover, is the incitement to married women to pursue the same goals in order to maintain or recuperate their youth, beauty, and feminine attractiveness, even when they exceed the spousal relationship. Married women are to seek romance too —and to seek it outside marriage if their husbands cannot oblige.

In this context, where Japanese women's changing attitudes have coincided with the romance boom, as I argue in Chapter 2, heterosexual romance has become a technology to lure both single and married women to pursue new ways of fashioning selves and lifestyles. Aesthetic salons, self-help seminars, fortune telling, Internet match making, erotic novels, female-oriented pornography and other market niches have all expanded to satisfy this quest women have for discovering their ideal selves through romance. The host club is one such niche. Thus, as Wolfgang Haug has argued, the capitalist market appeals to the romantic and sexual sensuality of aesthetics, well-being, and excitement in order to sell products, image, and information, i.e., the commodity aesthetics. In this respect, romance is not a sacred private matter, but it is commodifiable.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, however, female consumers are not merely passive recipients of consumer commodities and commodified sensuous experience. Through consumption, they manifest their criticisms against the social constraints such as Japan's marriage and family system and distance themselves from the other women who are caught in the status quo. They also actively enact for 'freedom' by performing and cultivating their desirable selves. Thus, they engage in neoliberalism. As such, the host club space is situated simultaneously in the market-driven consumer culture and

neoliberal practices. It is more than just skin deep: the host club, I argue, is deeply woven into the fabric of Japan's socioeconomic transformation, including neoliberal restructuring and class formation.

The prolonged economic stagnation that followed the bursting of Japan's bubble economy in the early 1990s forced the former Koizumi administration to carry out major socio-economic restructuring in order to safeguard the nation's global competitiveness (Allison 2006; Yoda 2000). The reformation in turn fractured the lifetime employment and seniority system, which had long protected the salaried man in mass-manufacturing based core industries in Japan's postwar economy. Instead, newly created business fields such as information technology, financial investment, and the so-called service industry have become heavily promoted by government policies, and entrepreneurial creativity, self-motivation, and results-oriented competition have been increasingly emphasized. Such a highly competitive environment has yielded an emerging class-consciousness, popularly expressed in such terms as "*kachi/make gumi*" (the winners'/losers' groups) and "*serebu*" (the celebrity-like or nouveau riche), largely overwriting Japan's predominant middle-class consciousness known as "*chūryu ishiki*" (Kelly 2002; Sato 2000; Yamada 2004).

The content of the emerging class-consciousness is, however, gendered. For example, a popular term, *make inu*, translated directly as "loser dog," has recently emerged in Japan to describe women over 30 who have yet to be married but still stubbornly cling to office jobs with no future for promotion. The implication is that no matter how successful these women may be in their professional careers, because they have miserably failed to achieve their most important "mission" as women—being

desired and “chosen” by men to marry and procreate—they will always be a loser in Japan (Sakai 2003). Thus, Japanese men are largely classified based on their occupational success, whereas Japanese women are evaluated by their desirability. This social valuation system reinforces romance as a way to attest to women’s desirability and also to yield business opportunities.

Amidst this socioeconomic restructuring, the host club has attracted not only Japanese women but also increasing numbers of young, working-class men who have little education and poor job prospects, and middle-class men who do not fit into Japan’s corporate system. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, hosts, much like their female clients, actively engage in neoliberal criticisms in pursuit of ‘freedom’ via host clubbing. They criticize both the conventionally hegemonic salarymen and the stigmatized “male mistress” so as to justify and perform and construct themselves as desirable entrepreneurial male citizens under the terms of Japan’s neoliberal reformation. They also fuel Japan’s postindustrial consumer culture by commodifying themselves and their affective labor. Hosts work on their appearance and attempt to acquire and polish their skills and sensibilities for seduction in order to enhance their seductive power, i.e., human capital, as the vehicle to accumulate money and social recognition as successful entrepreneurs. Although Haug separates the aesthetic product and its producer, the host is simultaneously the commodity itself as well as the producer/salesman. Hosts often describe themselves as such when they say, “*Hosuto wa jibun ga shohin*” (For the host, the self is the commodity).

Thus, the host club is both a site and an element that consists of Japan’s affect economy and is fueled by dint of the market-driven consumer culture and neoliberalism.

By itself, the neoliberal situation in Japan has not been solely determined by U.S. imperialism or Occidentalism, but embedded in the socio-historical trajectory of changing attitudes of Japanese women, expansion of new market niches, and the deep funk of the Japanese-style corporate system. At this conjuncture, both male hosts and female clients engage in the art of seduction at the level of interpersonal relations involving economic transaction, as well as of neoliberal governance. In the frame of neoliberal governmentality, they become the entrepreneurs of themselves who cultivate their desirable selves and accumulate their human capital. Nonetheless, their self-entrepreneurship underscores a gendered and class-marked social valuation system.

Sites, Methodology, and Self-Reflection

I conducted field research in Tokyo between 2003 and 2005 at several host clubs over the course of sixteen months. I employed participant observation, in-depth interviews with hosts and their clients, and representation and textual analysis of Japan's romance boom and host club development in the mass media, e.g., TV programs, popular books, magazines, and newspaper articles. I also conducted archival research at the National Diet Library of Japan in order to examine how ideal femininity, gender relationships, and women's self-identity have historically transformed in relation to Japan's socioeconomic transformation from an industrial to the postindustrial society. I focused on a women's fashion magazine, *an.an*, which has been popular and influential since its first publication in 1970. I examined back issues and analyzed articles on idealized womanhood and selfhood, women's lifestyles, and romantic relationships.

For my doctoral research, I received the dissertation fellowship grant from the Japan Foundation. The grant covered most of my living expenses in Tokyo. It, however, wasn't enough to fund my visits to the host clubs as a client. For my participant observation as a female client at host clubs, I took advantage of first timer's special deals. Most host clubs have a special rate for the first-time visitors. Usually, it is between 5000-10,000 yen (50-100 US dollars) for two hours or so. It covers the table charge, a bottle of *shōchū* wheat liquor, and bottles of water. A variety of hosts will introduce themselves to new potential clients, setting the stage for possible repeat visits. I began my research by visiting five host clubs for one time in Kabuki-chō and two clubs in a Tokyo's upscale neighborhood, Roppongi, I tried to observe similarities and differences in atmosphere, price range, and the type of clientele and hosts.

I eventually settled on and conducted most of my ethnographic research at one club, *Fantasy* (not real name), located in Kabuki-chō. It is one of the largest and best-known host clubs in Japan, fed largely through free advertising from TV and radio broadcasting and magazine and newspaper articles on the club and the hosts working there. Club *Fantasy* is also one of the most prestigious host clubs in Japan. The club owner, who used to be a so-called "number one" host in back 1960s, opened his own club in the early 1970s. Since then the owner has opened two more host clubs in Kabuki-chō. Because of its long history, business success, and name value, *Fantasy* enjoys a reverential status in the host club marketplace. When hosts go to other bars and host clubs in Kabuki-chō and introduce themselves as hosts at *Fantasy*, they usually elicit respectful greetings. When a woman patronizes other host clubs and tells a host working there that

she visits club *Fantasy* as well, the host often remarks, “Kaku ga chigau” (The club is in a class by itself).

I was a patron at *Fantasy* every night for a total of four months (July 2003 and between October and December 2004) except for nights when the club was too busy and the manager asked me not come.⁴ *Fantasy*'s niche lies in the diverse ages and backgrounds of its hosts and customers compared to newly established host clubs. The club is also one of a few which has two shifts: an earlier “business-hour” shift between 7:30 p.m. and 1 a.m. and the customary “regular” hours between 1 a.m. and dawn. The majority of hosts in *Fantasy* who work the earlier hours are typically in the early 20s to mid-30s age range, but also include men in their 60s who have been employed in the hosting business most of their life. They serve female customers such as company owners, landlords, wealthy widows, upper-middle class housewives, office workers, nurses, and so on, most of whom are in their late 20s to early 40s but also include women in their 60s. In contrast, hosts who work the later hours are mainly in their 20s, serving predominantly young hostesses and sex workers. Despite the differences in their occupations, ages, and marital status, female clients enjoy flirting with their male hosts.

I was only permitted to conduct my research during the early hours. This is because, as I will describe later, Japan's Entertainment and Amusement Law (*Fūzokueigyō Torishimari Hō*) bans business transactions after 1 a.m. that involve “intimate” services and physical proximity to host club businesses in order to “maintain a healthy living environment.” In the club, I was allowed to stay in the corner, where hosts

⁴ I also conducted a one-month interview research at a host club in a Tokyo's upscale neighborhood, Roppongi, to make an area comparison to Kabuki-chō, known as its sleaziness.

rested and waited for their clients for the night's visits. I usually went to the club around 6:30 p.m., when the lower ranking hosts started work and stayed on until 1 a.m. I interviewed voluntary interviewees, mostly one-on-one and occasionally in semi-formed group conversation. As hosts became more comfortable with me, they began to invite me to their table and "after hour activities." At the table, I was permitted to interview their clients and also observe their interactions. Some hosts and their clients also invited me to restaurants, karaoke bars, and other host clubs after normal business hours. This allowed me to observe their interactions more closely. In so doing, I became a "friend" and an "interlocutor" of some female clients. I met these women alone and had in-depth interviews outside the host club. Through my ethnographic research I was able to observe inside and outside the host club setting and also to hear stories from both hosts and their clients that are oftentimes discrepant.

In my interviews with hosts, I mainly asked them about their socioeconomic backgrounds, motivations to become hosts, difficulties they had encountered, life goals, business techniques, and relationships with their clients. In particular, I asked them to describe their methods for seducing women into having romantic relationships *and* spending money on them. In interviews with the female clients, I asked questions about marital and occupational background, their reasons for visiting the host club, the meaning of hostclubbing for them, and their relationships with their hosts. I also inquired how they "fall for" their hosts (or hostclubbing) and what it meant to spend money at the host club for them. Interviewing hosts and their clients, as well as sometimes their helper hosts, I tried to patch together their narratives in order to ascertain how those with different interests and goals communicate and negotiate with one another to optimize individual

fulfillment. In my observations, I carefully studied hosts' stylized speech and body acts such as seductive movements, body touching, and suggestive word usage in order to understand how they dramatize the scene and their clients' reactions to it. In short, throughout my interview and participant observation research, I tried to figure out the ways in which social actors such as hosts and their clients carry on the art of seduction, and the effects of their cooperative interactions.

My positionality as a Japanese woman researcher who had been studying in the United States simultaneously put me in the position of being a cultural insider and outsider, and also a seducer and seducee. Although I had studied feminist scholarship and queer theory and become critical about patriarchal heterosexual norms, as a female researcher I unintentionally reproduced gender roles such as feminine-audience-of-masculine-display and narratives, female-dependence-upon-paternalistic-support, and a potential-female-client-of-the-host-club. When I transcribed taped interviews, I realized that I often giggled and my tone of voice tended to be high. While interviewing, I intended to create a relaxed, comfortable environment for the interviewees so as to enhance productive research. I admit, however, that the "comfortable environment" was inevitably gendered and that my intentions and efforts reinforced socially expected gender characteristics of Japanese women. My effort to produce a feeling of ease, for instance, was an 'affective labor' that I had tried to isolate for study. I did not provide the affective labor in exchange for money, however, only for purpose of research cooperation. But the way that hosts cooperated was also gendered, too. Despite the fact that I was older than some of the hosts I interviewed, I sensed their paternalistic manner toward me in general. Some hosts verbalized this, saying "You are such a brave *girl* to

come to this kind of place alone and interview us!” and “You don’t look someone familiar to night work. Ask me anything.” Indeed, not only my gender but also my “student” status and lack of perceived knowledge and experience in the domain of night work unintentionally allow hosts to infantilize me and be paternalistic.

Nevertheless, subordinated positionality does not mean total surrender to the other, i.e., the host. Being a woman showing an interest in the host club scene also made me a potential customer. As I will discuss further in Chapter 3, most female clients I interviewed had only a general interest in the host club and did not expect to become repeater customers or spend great sums of money on their hosts. They highlighted their exceptionalism and typically described a friend or acquaintance taking them to the club and unexpectedly “falling for” a host. In the same manner, for the hosts, who are familiar with women’s narratives, I could be viewed as another case of such exceptionalism. A couple hosts asked me what my intention was to conduct research at the host club; they told me that there were clients who identified themselves as researchers, journalists, and reporters. This potentiality, I suspect, put me in the position of seducer. In this way, my unintentional seducer position, along with my intentional affective labor, was complicit with the art of seduction. Thus, I was always already imbricated with the affect economy. This is a point that I wish to highlight: There is a fluidity and indeterminacy to the art of seduction in the affect economy in which social actors are always already situated, positioned, and guided beside their agentive, intentional, and strategic acts.

Organization of Dissertation

My dissertation consists of six chapters: Chapter 1, “Introduction,” situates the host club phenomenon at the juncture of Japan’s postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal globalization. The Introduction lays out the theoretical stakes, contextualizing the project in what I call the ‘affect economy.’

Chapter 2, “The Triumph of Romance: Affective Self and the Art of Seduction,” traces the historical transformation of socioeconomic change, subjectivity formation, and gender reconfiguration in post-industrial Japanese society since the 1970s. Analyzing a women’s fashion magazine, I demonstrate how the postmodern condition in Japan, in which signs are exchanged and circulated in the form of commodities, has fragmented not only gender, class, and national identity but also affect such as romantic feelings, intimate relationships, and a sense of well-being. I argue that scripted romance has become commoditized as part of Japan’s romance boom since the 1990s.

In Chapter 3, “Commodified Romance in a Tokyo Host Club,” I situate the Kabuki-chō red light district, where majority of the host clubs are located, and establish my ethnographic site, the host club *Fantasy*. I analyze the spatial formation that enables monetary and affective exchanges between hosts and their clients to occur and also focus on the often fluid and indeterminate interaction between hosts and their clients as they resemble intentional speech and body acts manipulated to look spontaneous and accidental. In effect, I argue that the indeterminacy blurs the binary between the commercial and emotional romance, economic and emotional motives, and fantasy and reality.

Chapters 4 and 5 ethnographically demonstrate how hosts and their clients seduce one another and in the process foster a commodified romance whereby they perform and cultivate their desirable selves—potentially successful entrepreneurs and sexually attractive women. In particular, Chapter 4, “Neoliberal Class Struggle: Self-Narrated Entrepreneur Hosts via Commodifying the Self,” focuses on the ways that hosts engage in neoliberal class struggle through commodifying their body/self and self-narration as ‘desirable’ entrepreneurs. Though hosts are aware of social inequality and their exploitative working conditions, they nonetheless help sustain the capitalist market system in their quest for success (against the norms of Japan’s rigidly defined work culture) and the luxurious lifestyles within the system. I argue that this self-feeding, self-exploitative endeavor is an effect of the art of seduction, and aim to demonstrate how hosts, who attempt to seduce their clients, are seduced into the speculative affect economy.

In Chapter 5, entitled “The Gender Politics of Passivity: Transgressing Norms and Self-Fashioning ‘Desirable’ Women,” I focus on female host club customers, particularly married women, and examine how they play out and negotiate their desires, familial obligations, and social expectations through their hostclubbing. I demonstrate how they perform passivity, e.g., playing the role of the ideal mother, in order to ‘safely’ pursue their extramarital romance. I argue that their passivity is a merely a guise that reinforces yet destabilizes gendered social norms such as the extramarital-relationship-as-male-prerogative and desexualized images of married Japanese women.

In Chapter 6, “Conclusion,” I situate my dissertation project and summarize my main queries and arguments. In particular, I link the thematics of the commodification of

affect on the one hand and its gender and class implications in terms of subjectivity formation on the other by exploring the malleable and perpetual nature of postindustrial capitalism. Revisiting my main concept, the art of seduction, I illuminate the importance of critically analyzing econo-emotive motives and maneuvers in social life, which I argue is rapidly being commodified at the juncture of postindustrial consumerism and neoliberal globalization.

A key goal of my dissertation is to provide a fine-grained ethnographic portrait of the ways and the processes that women and men foster erotic intimacy and attempt to create alternative lives for themselves, lives which run counter to national agendas and global trends. Recent work on transnational tourism and global consumer culture has introduced small numbers of women in post-industrial Euro-American countries and Japan who pursue romance and have sexual aspirations with Caucasian men and local “beach boys” on such resort islands as Hawaii (e.g., Brennan 2004; Kelsky 2001). The coupling created by women’s eagerness for erotic intimacy and men’s commodification of their sexuality, however, remains unexplored despite its potential subversive aspects within patriarchal, heterosexual norms surrounding romantic love, courtship, and marriage. Commodified romance in Japan provides a compelling case to comparatively understand not only changing notions of womanhood, masculinity, and subjectivity in the postindustrial market economy but also the increasing commercialization of erotic fantasy and interaction that crisscrosses gender, sexuality, class, and by extension race/ethnicity.

At the same time, my dissertation also engages in the discussion of modern romantic love, which has spread throughout the world in the context of globalization,

modernity and capitalism, and its attendant forces of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). Despite the intimate interplay of romantic love and socioeconomic development, existing literature in anthropology has largely separated “true” and “false” love based on emotional and economic ties (Ahearn 2001; Constable 2003; Rebhun 1999), and dismissed the latter as transient performance or simply an instrument to earn money. This tension between the noncommercial and the commercial relates to the question widely debated in recent social science studies about market-centered neoliberal reformation and its globalization, within which cultural difference and various aspects of human lives have increasingly become commodities (e.g., Brown 2003; Burchell *et. al.* 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Duggan 2003; Harvey 2005; Hochschild 2003). While the commercialization of “private” or “sacred” aspects of human lives is largely problematized, in-depth study of actual processes and experiences of affective relations and commitments remains understudied in both sexuality studies (Babb 2006: 118) and the anthropology of emotions (Lutz 1986). My dissertation seeks to shed light on this rupture by focusing on the globalizing market economy that capitalizes on human sentiment, desire, and intimate relationships, and examining subjectivity formations through such an economy within Japan.

CHAPTER 2: THE TRIUMPH OF ROMANCE: AFFECTIVE SELF AND THE ART OF SEDUCTION

Romance is the backbone of life. I feel that I am in the mode of pseudo-death when I don't have anyone I love. ... No matter how much history evolves, romance is one of the greatest necessities for the human being (Kadota Mitsuyo, a writer).

Romance that brings extraordinariness is a nutritious tablet. The feeling of romantic excitement is a vitamin that shines the skin. The tears of hardship are calcium that strengthens oneself. ... Romance must be the best nutrition for the mind and the body (Ogawa Yayoi, a comic artist)

Happiness without romantic love is incomplete. It is true only for men that worthy occupations complete their happiness. No matter how occupationally successful women are, they cannot feel truly happy from the bottom of their hearts without boyfriends. The fact that there is a man in the world, who loves me, provides tremendous mental stability (Umeda Mika, a scenario writer).

To understand how Japan's little-known host club subculture, along with its idealization of romance, has emerged so prominently in contemporary Japan one only has to scan the headlines of a fairly recent issue of a women's magazine. The above quotes were pulled from a 2005 special issue of a highly popular weekly magazine called *an.an*,⁵ entitled "Romance Supremacy" (*Ren'ai Shijōshugi*). Like many other magazines aimed at young Japanese women, *an.an* intensively emphasizes romance in its editorial and advertorial pages. More than a third of the magazine's issues focus on romance-related themes, with weekly titles such as "Lecture on Romance for the Adult," "The Way to

⁵ *An.an* has been always provocative and pioneering in women's fashion and cosmetic trends, lifestyle, and gender relationships since it first published in 1970. In the beginning of the 70s, women who stylized their fashions based on *an.an* are called *an.non* tribe (*an'non zoku*), along with those whose fashions are based on another popular fashion *non.no*.

Polish Your Romantic Skills,” “Secrets of the Beloved Women,” and so forth. Though Japanese women’s magazines have long peddled romance to its readers, the abundance of romance-inspired themes blaring from magazine covers nowadays is significant compared to 1970s and ’80s, when fashion magazines like *an.an* rarely featured romantic themes and imagery. As I will discuss later, until the 1990s, romance in Japan was regarded mostly as a fateful encounter or a lighthearted, playful game between a man and a woman. Today, romance is a highly marketable commodity, inseparable from Japanese women’s self-identity, and closely intertwined with their self-actualization and self-fulfillment. Indeed, romance is no longer viewed merely as a pleasurable interlude on the way to marriage or an accidental gift from above. It is, as *an.an* surmised, “the nutrition of the mind and the body,” “happiness” itself, and “one of the great necessities for the human being.” Indeed, for many contemporary Japanese women it is the yardstick by which ideal womanhood is measured and expressed.

The story of how romance became such an iconic expression of Japanese femininity and womanhood has its origins in western notions of romantic love, which I discuss later, but only in the last decade or so has romance become the driving force behind theme parks, high-end restaurants and hotels, Louis Vuitton stores, and host clubs. Since the early 1990s, Japan has witnessed one of its most enduring booms, the so-called *ren’ai būmu* (romance boom). Featured in countless magazine and newspaper articles, television dramas, movies, and popular books and comics, the *ren’ai būmu* has coincided not only with the phenomenal success of the host club industry but also propelled neoliberal-influenced paradigm shifts in women’s lifestyles, self-identity, and gender relationships.

While the average lifespan of a ‘būmu’ in Japan is typically shorter than a firefly’s, the romance boom has showed remarkable staying power. A number of factors have contributed to this longevity. Japanese women, who enjoy greater education and employment opportunities than ever, have dramatically increased their disposable income since the 1980s. At the same time, they have postponed marriage and raised fewer children, contributing to the nation’s current demographic crisis. But perhaps most telling is Japanese women’s changed attitudes. Many younger Japanese women today no longer seek self-fulfillment in the domestic sphere, and avoid or reject traditional marital and familial expectations. Instead, they seek a life of their own—*jibun no jinsei*—and pursue a lifestyle that emphasizes greater self-satisfaction compared to previous generations. In marked contrast to women whose happiness was considered to be solely found in either family life or occupational success, women today feel increasing pressure to succeed in marriage, childrearing, occupation, and romance to maximize and complete their happiness.

Attendant to this change in attitude and lifestyle, Japanese women’s expectations toward men have also shifted. Not long ago, women sought so-called “*sankō*” (three highs) when prospecting for potential mates: income, educational background, and height. These days, women say they seek companionship and want the “3Cs”—comfortable, communicative, and cooperative—in men (Miller 2003: 54). Japan’s mass media and popular culture have highlighted women’s changing attitudes and idealized romance as a form of embracing individual ‘freedom’ and ideal womanhood. Trendy TV drama series in the early 1990s such as “Tokyo Love Story”, “Tell Me You Love Me” (*Aishiteru to Ittekure*), and 1996’s “Long Vacation” (*Rongu Bakēshon*) served not only as

entertainment but also instruction manuals for women to study and learn the codes of romantic situations and settings, as well as fashion, lifestyle, and the effective presentation of the self (Lukacs 2007). But it wasn't until two writers who worked on these highly popular dramas, Saimon Fumi and Kitagawa Eriko, as well as other scenario writers and essayists, established a book genre called *ren'ai ron* (discussion on romance) in the early 1990s that romance became an essential element of women's consciousness. It was *ren'ai ron* that actively disseminated the notion of romance as an ideal state in relation to womanhood and self-identity. Since then, romance has been relentlessly promoted in Japan as a means of beautifying everyday life and cultivating desirable selves through fashion, hairstyle, body care, communication skill, lifestyle, and more (Takeyama 2005).

A unique aspect of Japan's mass mediated representation of romance in the 1990s is found in its close linkage with women's self-growth. The linkage is, I argue, embedded in Japan's neoliberal socioeconomic reformation, which is the product of a number of convergent factors. On a macro level, starting in the 1970s, Japan's economy began to shift from industrial to postindustrial, placing increasing emphasis on consumer spending and setting the stage for later reform. By the late 1980s, Japan's so-called "bubble economy" had collapsed following a particularly heady period of rampant stock market speculation and real estate inflation, which prodded the Japanese government to carry out drastic economic deregulation and governmental restructuring. Meanwhile, on the political stage, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, the dominant political party since 1955, lost its majority in Parliament in 1993, giving way to a newly formed coalition government. It marked the abrupt end to 55 years of political hegemony and became

symbolic of the breakdown of postwar Japan's politico-economic foundation. The resulting administrative and economic reforms have, by fits and starts, reshaped socioeconomic norms and reinforced the attitude that every one — including Japanese corporations, bureaucracy and individuals — needs to reform.

Ironically, with its similarly self-empowering message of rejuvenation, the 'romance boom' has come to echo this new, reformed mindset among many Japanese women. The title of a 1996 issue of *an.an*, "It Is the Feeling That I Have to Change That Becomes the Energy to Make Women Beautiful and Smart," for example, stresses the influence of romance on self-growth and the creation of a desirable self. It states, "The energy of romance first polishes your exterior appearance and wakes up the [woman's] mind within yourself [to grow] as if a budding beauty is coming into full bloom. ... Regardless of the result or the experience, romance enhances your attractiveness as a woman and as a human being without fail" (*an.an* 1996: 24). Here, romance is understood as a magical energy that guarantees to stimulate one's untapped reserves and fully charge both mind and body. In spite of the hype and hyperbole that often accompanies women's fashion magazines, romance has become a process of self-improvement and a vehicle for self-fulfillment for many women, largely because it resonates strongly with Japan's neoliberal agenda I argue.

Furthermore, romance in the new millennium Japan has increasingly come to be understood in such business or war terms as planning and strategy (*senryaku*), preparation or staging (*shikake*), and victory (*shōri*). Such a competitive attitude parallels the former Koizumi administration's goal-oriented slogan of "Reformation Without Sanctuary for the Rebirth of Japan," a rallying cry put forth to bolster the nation's global

economic competitiveness. *An.an*'s "The Way of Seducing Men" issue (2004), for example, insists that romance requires careful planning and bold strategies to effectively manipulate men's minds and win 'victory'. It metaphorically treats romance as a kind of war game and states, "The first step of the battle is to learn about the enemy. ... Carefully observe his behavioral patterns and judge what pleases him. Strategize your seductive moves and approach him so as to win his heart and become a winner at romance" (*an.an* 2004: 12). In this view, romance is understood as a results-oriented battle where combatants' capability in information gathering, strategic planning, and seductive skill is tested and validated. Unlike the romance of the 1990s, which underscored women's attractiveness regardless of outcome (*an.an* 1996: 24), romance in the new millennium is set on the goal of winning. This has changed the conventional cause-and-effect understanding of fatal encounter found in traditional romantic narratives. For instance, a 2006 issue of *an.an* headlined "A Fatal Encounter" claims that not fateful encounters but the well-calculated art of seduction turns any sort of meeting into a fateful one. That is to say, romance is no longer something that occurs accidentally or a sacred gift from religion or fate; it is now something one needs to work on to make happen. The issue suggests that a woman exploit existing social scripts that say sharing values and having a sense of ease signifies a good match, and therefore will persuade him to believe in their relationship as a fateful one). By purposefully creating common interests and a friendly atmosphere based on advance observation and ad-lib performance, *an.an* insists that a woman can manipulate a man's psychology to believe that she is the 'fated woman' (*unmei no onna*) (*an.an* 2006: 18). In such a way, the magazine argues, she can 'win' the romance. The art of seduction —systematic observation, strategic moves, and persuasion

skills— thus secularizes romance as a man-made product. Hence, romance in the new millennium has come down to earth for everybody. By the same token, romance becomes a must that individuals are responsible for.

In this specific socio-historical context at the intersection of Japan's postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal reformation, immaterial products such as information, imagery, and knowledge of romance become socially relevant commodities. Affect — feelings, emotions, passions, and desires — is no exception. While affect has tended to be viewed as spontaneous and removed from capitalism, Michel Hardt stresses that affective labor, that is, the labor that produces a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, and excitement, has become “not only directly productive of capital but [also]... one of the highest value-producing forms of labor” (Hardt 1999: 90). Indeed, the profitability of Japan's host clubs, where the experience of romance itself has become purchasable, bears this notion out. Hardt claims that the increase in affective labor lies in the shift from manufacturing-centered industry to the information- and service-based economy in advanced capitalist countries such as Japan's. But while his conceptualization is useful for a macro-analysis of the global economic trend, it is less helpful to trace specific socio-historical situations in which certain affect such as romantic experiences and relationships have become commodifiable and how such a commodity becomes socially relevant (Appadurai 1986: 13).

I maintain that it is important to understand the historical transformation in Japanese women's subjectivity formation and gender relationships in order to comprehend the ways that affect such as (heterosexual) romance has become commodifiable in Japan's postindustrial consumer culture. In this chapter, I intend to

trace this historical trajectory since Japan post-industrialized in the 1970s. In particular, I explore how neoliberal subjectivity formation—the construction of a self that is skillful, progressive, and competitive—has been made thinkable and practicable since the nation’s neoliberal reformation took root in the 1990s. Analyzing *an.an*’s back issues since 1970, I will demonstrate the ways in which Japanese women’s self-identity has transformed from the ‘genuine’ self of the 1970s and fragmented multiple selves in the 1980s to the current form of the neoliberal subject at the turn of the century. I argue that Japan’s postindustrial consumer culture has enabled intense fragmentation and multiplicity of the self through diversified modes of fashion and lifestyles, and paved the road to the neoliberal subject.

As I will discuss further, the formation of the neoliberal subject is a self-improvement project that implores subjects to constantly equip themselves with artful skills to flexibly adjust to rapidly changing social situations and maximize self-fulfillment in any given opportunity. Accordingly, the neoliberal subject is both a defensive and offensive mechanism for social change as much as it is a performative construct. Judith Butler theorizes that gender identity is not the product of biological sex difference but the effect of repetitive citations and enactments of socially scripted masculine and feminine characteristics (Butler 1990). Similarly, the neoliberal subject is the product of acquired skills and the habituation of a multi-talented body quality. Nonetheless, mere performativity does not create a neoliberal subject. The subject is supposed to be goal-oriented and therefore, manipulative, productive, and successful. Drawing from Butler’s concept of ‘performativity’ and Hardt’s notion of ‘affective labor,’ I call the neoliberal subject, who is armed with the necessary skills to produce and

manipulate affect to fulfill certain desired ends, the ‘affective self.’ In the example of the host club, the affective self skillfully takes advantage of social scripts such as fateful encounters and ideal femininity as baits in order to affect the other’s psychology and action and accomplish one’s goal, whether it is self-growth or winning in audition-like competitions. In the new millennium Japan, I argue that the affective self—the performative and artful neoliberal subject—has become an ideal women’s subjectivity.

In order to demonstrate how affective selves come to be idealized, I first examine how the intense commercialization of self-identity has dramatically altered Japanese women’s subjectivity formation and gender relationships, particularly within the so-called “postmodern condition.” I will then examine the interaction between Japan’s postindustrial consumer culture and the nation’s neoliberal reformation in order to extrapolate how the political economy and subjectivity formation are mutually constitutive. To wit, I argue that individual female consumers, who have learned how to exploit the postmodern sign economy, are now motivated to substantiate the sign economy in the body and in their communicative interactions. In other words, they are encouraged to maneuver the signs (messages, images) and reconstruct an apparently ‘natural’ self and communication that actually manipulates their social interactions, including romantic relationships. As a result, the current state of Japanese women’s self-identity and conduct of gender relationships in romance is characterized by seemingly opposing natures: the highly calculated self and the ‘natural’ selfness (*sarigenai jibunrashisa*), and the seducing subject and the simply beloved woman (*aisareru onna*). I argue that this contradictory subjectivity formation and interaction is both the cause and the result of the affective selves. In the end, I attempt to assess some of the aspects

underlying postindustrial consumerism and neoliberal restructuring as they manifest the affective self and the increased commercialization of affect, particularly romance, in Japan's neoliberal era.

“Genuine” Self: Cute Culture in the 1970s

Japan's postwar economic success has been oftentimes described as an “economic miracle.” Technological innovation coupled with large investments in industries such as automobiles and electronics succeeded in achieving a high economic growth rate. Within ten years from the nation's defeat in the WWII, the Japanese economy had fully recovered to the prewar level. Much as it had in the U.S., the privations of life during wartime created a pent-up desire for refrigerators, washing machines, and TV sets, which were idealized as emblems of progress and the good life. By 1956, the Japanese government had proposed a plan aimed at doubling income within ten years, called the “Plan to Double Income in 1960”. The plan became a reality and Japan's GNP reached the second highest in the world in 1969. Owning color TVs, air conditioners, and automobiles were the new benchmarks for the nation's prosperity.

As Japan's mass industrialization hastened urbanization and the propagation of the nuclear family, Japanese corporations hired vast numbers of male workers to work as salarymen with guaranteed lifetime employment, insuring built-in social and economic stability for generations. Along with Japan's rapid economic growth, the socioeconomic welfare provided by corporations helped create the illusion that the entire Japanese population belonged to (or would eventually belong to) the middle class. By the end of the 1960s, the so-called “middle-class consciousness” (*chūryū ishiki*) had emerged

(Vogel 1972). Nonetheless, this middle-class consciousness, as some scholars also have argued, concealed the actual gap that existed between the haves and the have-nots and served to mobilize the national population to achieve the government's economic development objectives (Inoue 2006: 167; Gordon 2002; Ivy 1995; Kelly 1986, 2002).

Surprisingly, during this period of heady economic expansion, characterized by an extreme self-sacrifice to the corporation, a budding leisure industry emerged. Although the leisure activities were considered primarily as outlets for overtaxed Japanese workers (who were notoriously viewed as 'economic animals' in the West), numerous bars, clubs, dance halls, pachinko pinball parlors, and bowling alleys opened to meet the demand. It was during this period, in 1966, when the first host club opened for business in Tokyo. Named Club Ai, meaning "love", the club was established as a dance hall, which was located close to the Tokyo Train Station. The club targeted wealthy widows and wives of corporate executives and high government officials who would ostensibly stop by after their department shopping for some light entertainment while their husbands enjoyed their own nightlife activities at bars and hostess clubs. They soon became popular, and led to more host clubs opening in other parts of central Tokyo within a few years. Nonetheless, the host club establishment was highly exclusive and remained largely invisible to the public. Most female clients secretly visited host clubs during this era. In 1960s Japan, women were expected to be virgins until marriage, and once married, they were expected to be faithful wives and self-devoting mothers (Allison 1996; Borovoy 2005; Uno 1999). Patronizing host clubs was viewed disparagingly as shameless and promiscuous behavior (see Sakai 2003: 57).

Despite the rise of the leisure industry, service-based industries were still limited in the 1960s. By the early 1970s, however, environmental pollution and the Oil Shock placed Japan's high rate of industrialization and modern technology into question (Morris-Suzuki 1994). Gradually, the Japanese economy began to shift its reliance on heavy industries to the emerging 'knowledge-intensive' or high-tech industries (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 210). Japan's transformation from an industrial society to a postindustrial 'information society' followed in step with other industrialized countries such as the U.S., where the mode of production shifted from the Fordist model to what David Harvey calls the 'flexible accumulation' of capital or, simply, the post-Fordist economy (Harvey 1989). In such a new economy, information and imagery that added signs and meanings to commodities created greater surplus value in advertising and marketing. Consumption of signs and meanings became directly productive of capital in postindustrial societies (Baudrillard 1979; Lazzarato 1996; Hardt 1999).

At this historical turning point in the shift from a production-centered industrial society to a consumer-oriented postindustrial economy, the fashion magazine *an.an* first published in 1970. Established by the French fashion magazine, *Elle*, *an.an* began life as *Elle Japon*, introducing cutting-edge fashion, products, and lifestyles from Europe to the Asia Pacific region. In many ways, *An.an* exemplifies how an informational commodity depended for its circulation and profitability upon the consumer's needs and demands. Michel Hardt explains that unlike the Fordist model based on the mass production of standardized commodities, the postindustrial informational economy entails a constant and immediate feedback loop from consumption to production (Hardt 1999: 93). *An.an* validates this by adjusting its content to feed the demands of the Japanese readership. In

earlier issues, for example, the magazine was filled with predominantly European models, featuring Western style cosmetics and fashions with lessons on how to make Japanese women's faces and outfits look like beautiful and sophisticated Caucasian women. The content, however, shifted in the mid '70s to cover Japanese trends and Japanese women's self-identity, although models were still mostly European white women. Along with the content change, the magazine also adopted the magazine's pet name, *an.an*, as the official magazine name. Indeed, *An.an* was named after a lovable panda bear (*an.an* 1970: 1).

An *an.an* editorial that reflected Japanese popular culture and women's self-identity in the 1970s was an article entitled, "I Want to Be Loved by Ken. I am a Cute Woman." The article mirrored Japan's emergent cute culture in the 1970s, and directly translates as follows:

In any age, women who are loved by men are cute women (*kawaii onna*). On a date, I show up at the meeting place earlier [than he does] and wait for [Ken]. While waiting, I constantly look around and earnestly look for him. When he comes in my sight, I delightedly wave my hand toward him and make a big smiling face in such a way that it looks as if I loved him single-mindedly. Everyone thinks it is cute. ... As soon as he approaches me, I immediately start to speak to him with one breath as if I couldn't wait to talk to him any longer, and take in a big breath once I finish speaking. The gesture seems to be cute [to men]. ... I am such a girl who lets a man say, "My girlfriend has some childish aspects." Like a small child, I sometimes shed tears when I all of a sudden feel sad. ... I burst into laughter at the next moment once something pleasant occurs to me. It is cute. ... If there is unkindness, jealousy, untruthfulness, meanness, stubbornness, vanity, ... and something evil in my mind, I hide them deep inside for the time being. It is hard [to be cute] unless I become a good-natured person from the bottom of my heart. All women want to be "cute women" who are loved. Even a woman who eagerly self-presents as an assertive woman and competes against men at work wants to be loved, once she falls in love. Nobody is unkind by nature. It may reflect the

natural state of the [women's] real mind. In any case, men like cute women (*an.an* 1974: 57)

I quote this lengthy passage in order to assess Japanese women's notions of ideal femininity, self-identity, and conduct in gender relationships in the context of 'cute culture' and the social environment prevalent in 1970s Japan. While the article is written in a female voice, I argue that it reflects male perspectives. It assumes that all women want to be cute because they know that men love cute women and they need to be loved by men. Being cute here is understood as behaving like innocent children. The childlike demeanor is, however, selectively applied. To meet societal expectations, it must impart sweetness, innocence, and pleasant surprise, not something selfish, uncontrollable, and troublesome. In other words, the tamed childishness—docility and purity—is prerequisite in the state of ideal femininity and gender relationships.

Thus, women's desire to be cute is defined by the male gaze and projected on women's behavior and self-expression by women themselves. Despite a male-dominated understanding of ideal femininity and women's self-identity, the desire is understood as a woman's "real mind." In such a way, the male-centered perspective is naturalized. If it is not 'natural' to a woman, then the article suggests that she is supposed to hide all negative thoughts, emotions, and doubts within herself so that she "becomes" a good-natured, cute woman. The underlying message is that socially desirable women neither compete against men nor show rebelliousness to male-centered Japanese social expectations.

As such, "I" in the article, "I Want to Be Loved by Ken. I am a Cute Woman," attempts to create a distance from those women who are assertive, competitive, and

opinionated. While not being specific, those women can be easily associated with feminists who heavily criticized Japanese men and patriarchal society during Japan's 1970s "women's lib" (*ūmanzu ribu*) movements. "I" considers their attitude unkind and unreal because they ultimately want to be loved, once they fall in love. In this vein, women's rebellious attitudes are treated as a guise to neglect or hide their 'real mind' and 'genuine' self. Women's self-identification therefore evolves around the conceit of being loved without questioning the real mind and genuine self itself. Such an assumption is closely intertwined with Japan's male-centered marriage and family system. Since social norms surrounding women's life goals lay primarily in getting married in their early twenties and raising children, their lovable characteristics were the key to finding salarymen husbands who supposedly would provide the family with a stable income and corporate welfare. Women's low status in the workplace and in society in general made it hard for them to avoid marriage and live alone. Women's effort to internalize cuteness was then, I argue, a strategic move, to both enjoy premarital 'freedom' and achieve a practical end, i.e., marriage, eventually. In this regard, being cute was not a forceful discipline, but rather a discursive embodiment of competing meanings. Cuteness reinforced the patriarchal social expectation that feminist movements attempted to challenge. At the same time, it undermined the view that ideal femininity is essentially an inherited characteristic and gender identity is a mere reflection of the 'genuine' self.

Such subversive potential was significant in 1970s Japan, where maintaining and/or recovering "genuine" self-identity was more or less social ethos. Not only Japanese women's gender identity but also Japan's national identity was believed to be in crisis, and bereft of its 'pure' past in the wake of postwar industrialization, urbanization,

and modernization. Japanese women's effort to re-fabricate their self-identity by recalling childhood and its purity and innocence paralleled the effort to reconstruct the "authentic" national identity by recovering lost traditions and Japaneseness. One of the better examples of this national effort was an advertisement campaign for Japan National Railway, "Discover Japan" (*Jisukabā Japan*). The campaign urged Japanese people to discover the nation's lost past through traveling (Ivy 1995: 34). Analyzing the advertising discourses, Marilyn Ivy reveals the connection between the national and gender identities. The campaign mainly targets female consumers to interact with nature and tradition so as to "discover themselves as Japanese" (Ivy 1995: 43). As such, both national and gender identities became targets to recoup identity in the midst of unprecedented change. Ironically, the effort to come to terms with industrial modernization is made via the postindustrial economy, e.g., information, advertising, and leisure industries. In short, the lost authentic self depends for its recovery upon the postindustrial capitalist system, whether it is gender identity or national identity.

While the "Discover Japan" campaign, along with the popularity of the *nihonjin-ron* book genre on Japaneseness, tends to illuminate essentialized Japanese tradition and national characteristics, the essentialization itself is a reaction against fragmentation. Similarly, I argue, Japanese women's cute culture also hinges upon such duality, simultaneously reinforcing ideal femininity to feed male-centered social fantasy and yet destabilizing it as highly stylized art. Thus, the 'genuine' self of the 1970s gradually yet steadily grows faint, summoning the desire for its maintenance or recovery. The fragmentation of self-identity becomes more prominent during Japan's "bubble economy" in the 1980s.

Fragmented Self: Sign Economy in the 1980s

During the 1980s, while Japan's export-led economy was creating a bubble of inflated wealth, a movement toward global free trade and privatization of state-run industries was seeding its collapse. Led by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the movement sought so-called "small government" in an open, deregulated market economy. The rapid increase in transnational flows of information, money, and commodities that resulted enabled multinational corporations to seek out cheap raw materials and labor anywhere around the world. Japan's state-led, highly regulated economy was caught flat-footed. The Plaza Agreement of 1985 floated the Japanese yen on the world currency market and forced export-based companies to seek capital abroad, forcing the hollowing out of Japanese industry. Largely as a result, the predominantly manufacturing-based domestic economy was grudgingly compelled to further move toward a market-centered consumer economy (termed *sofutonomikkusu* in Japanese) encompassing information, finance, and service industries.

Like other industrialized nations, Japan jumped on the privatization bandwagon. Under a new slogan of "Small Government" and "Tax Reform Without a Tax Increase", Japan's then-prime minister, Nakasone Yasuhiro, cut back funds for social welfare and education and began privatizing state-run enterprises in earnest. Japan Railway, for example, was privatized in 1987, along with phone giant National Telegram and Telephone (NTT) and the Japan Tobacco Bureau.

At the same time, new markets for consumer goods and services rapidly expanded Japan's domestic consumer market. In the mid 1980s, men's fashion and hobby

magazines, among others, emerged, and the fashion and cosmetic industries expanded their product lines to male consumers. In this postindustrial, service-based consumer economy, fashion and catalogue magazines such as *an.an* served not only to advertise particular styles of fashion and commodities but also to disseminate ideal lifestyles. As understood by ethnographers and other social scientists, a lifestyle is not about social status or economic capital *per se*. It is embodied through self-expression in consumption patterns, fashion tastes, and cultivated via cultural sophistication. An outfit one purchases, a location where one buys it, and the way one wears it, and the space one has access to signifies one's lifestyle and by equation who one is and what class one belongs to. In many respects, lifestyle, masculinity, femininity, and class are signified by consumption patterns. In today's sign economy, the self is a consuming subject constituted in the sign of differences. In other words, the consuming subject itself is the object of the sign, and the consuming body becomes a site where multiple signs are played out. In this way, the self is constructed of a chain of signs and inevitably fragmented.

Japanese women's involvement in the sign economy was hastened in the 1980s as increasing numbers of young women were hired in newly developed service industries. Both the labor and consumer markets celebrated the new "women's era," the era women were "empowered" as consumer subjects (Inoue 2006: 173). Along with their increased spending power and social status within the context of Japan's postindustrial consumerism, Japanese women became more selective when choosing their mates. The aforementioned "three highs" (*sankō*)—income, educational degree, and height—were blocks to be checked when evaluating husbands (Inoue 2006: 173; Miller 2003; Ogura

2003). Women's qualified entry into the labor and consumer market affected the reconfiguration of ideal femininity, gender identity, and the conventional (gendered) division of labor.

Matsuda Seiko, an influential singer and actress who became famous for her cuteness, well illustrates the dynamics of Japan's sign economy. Since her debut in 1980, Seiko has embodied cute culture in Japan with her blend of cute and childish demeanors—baby face, innocent smile, high-pitched tone of voice, and very thin (seemingly undeveloped child-like) body. What is significant about her, however, is that she no longer attempts to internalize her cuteness, but rather performs it as a sign to toy with. Ogura Chikako, a feminist scholar who studies Seiko, reveals that romance in the singer's songs is treated as a game of two signs, a "girl" and a "boy," played by Seiko and her shy boyfriend in urban and resort settings. Neither mature masculine men nor sexually aggressive young males are chosen to play the game with her; her partners are shy "boys" in the sense they are embarrassed to behave like men (Ogura 1989: 207). Seiko then attempts to enjoy the game of romance by taking initiative and maintaining control of the relationship. In the lyrics to her hit song "Secret Garden," for example, Seiko admonishes her boyfriend that he doesn't know how to seduce her: "[Did you ask me,] 'Can I kiss you?' Gosh, I am embarrassed, you don't know how to create [a romantic] mood [do you?]. . . . If you want to seduce me, just hold me tight under the new moon." In another hit song, "Kiss in the Heaven," Seiko confesses her manipulative ways: "Because I wanted to let him say 'I love you,' I looked still into his eyes; I am a little bit of a bad girl who is [actually] seducing him and pausing as if I were seduced" (Ogura 1989: 202). Seiko is, as Ogura argues, a metonym for a cute "girl" who is aware

of her performative and manipulative self in the game of romance (Ibid: 209). Thus, gender identity is here a role to perform and romance is a game that consists of various signs such as codes of romantic mood, seductive gestures, and calculated timings.

An.an disseminates similar messages during the 1980s: ideal femininity is a performance and romance is a strategic game. *An.an*'s "Special Issue on Date Plan" (1983), for example, carries a subsection entitled, "Dating Techniques that Please Men," and stresses the importance of skillful "use of all sorts of women's weapons (*buki*) — depending, tantalizing, and crying— to tickle men's minds and succeed in seducing men" (*an.an* 1983: 65). The article advises readers to practice different approaches to men in different age groups. Finding a common interest is a way to 'naturally' seduce the same-aged male, and for the older man, the article insists that it is better for a woman to be a *burikko* (fake child) and pretend as if she is dependent upon him because he likes to be relied upon (*an.an* 1983: 65). Since an older man is also weak for a woman's tears, the article advises that a woman take advantage of that and win his heart (Ibid). Here, ideal femininity is variable depending upon the audience and therefore doesn't have to (and can't) be genuine. It is a merely a calculated performance and tactic to seduce men.

Unlike the 1970s *an.an* article that presumes men as the dominant subjects who define ideal femininity, men in the 1980s articles are no longer such subjects. They are made to matter as objectified subjects in the sign economy. More pointedly, they are objectified as a target in the game of romance and then reconstructed as subjects whom women's romantic fantasies and desires are projected upon. In contrast, women are represented as practical, dominant players who are capable of subtly enticing men to seduce them. Put differently, as Seiko's lyrics and the *an.an* article stress, in a new form

of romance women are encouraged to intentionally perform ideal femininity and covertly control the gender relationship in such a way that men appear to be charge of seducing and loving them, even when they aren't. Such pretense allows women to perform their socially expected role of being loved by men, yet their agentive play liberates them from the merely objectified cute woman who passively waits. The sign economy deconstructed the conventionally essentialized self-identity, femininity, and gender relationships in patriarchal terms, and enabled women's agency such that romantic fantasy and desire, as well as women's and men's subjectivities, are ever objectified as signs. In brief, women's agency is always already objectified in the sign economy, the economy that fuels late-capitalist consumerism.

Within the sign economy, class mobility and national identity also become matters of signs and styles. Compared to the prewar period when there was less movement between social strata, class mobility in the late 1980s was realized by semiotic capacity of consumption (Inoue 2006: 200-201). Owning such brand-named commodities as Louis Vuitton bags, Feragamo shoes, and Helmes scarves, for example, signifies that the owner belongs to the upper class. Miyako Inoue succinctly states, "the idea of 'moving up' started deferring not so much to actual material social relations between classes, but to itself as a sign of a sign without reality (Ibid: 201). Class mobility in turn apparently becomes something available to everyone. (I will discuss this further in Chapter 3). The loss of integrity is also observed in Japan's national identity in the 1980s. It is evidently clear comparing the Japan National Railway's advertisement campaign in the 1980s, "Exotic Japan," to the 1970s "Discover Japan" campaign. Marilyn Ivy explains that "Exotic Japan" had neither the lure of traveling as a way of discovery of the

genuine self nor offered a totalistic narrative about the authentic national identity (Ivy 1995: 49). In order to make Japan look exotic, the campaign instead employed seductive and rare signs of difference such as the Silk Road, the iconic object of the non-Japanese Orient, and Mount Kōya, seat of the esoteric Buddhist sect. Juxtaposed imagery and textual signs faintly took contours of the national identity. The “Exotic Japan” is thus reduced to an object of signs and a matter of style (Ibid: 51; also see Kondo 1997).

In the development of the commercially driven sign economy of the 1980s, Japanese society as a whole became an object whose meanings are discursively determined in relational and context-specific terms. In this socioeconomic milieu, maneuvering fragmented multiple selves becomes a social skill to smoothly cope with any given situation and social relationship (Asano 2005: 84). Like fashion styles, the self becomes a mere mode (*mōdo*) or character (*kyara*) to perform rather than an essential ontology (Saito 2005: 153). Matsuda Seiko, who skillfully played the sign economy and become a role model for young Japanese women, is a good example of this subjectivity formation in the 1980s. Seiko got married in 1985 and had a child, but continued her singing career and even launched an entrepreneurial boutique business. Her expansive lifestyle as a wife, mother, singer, and business owner was significant in contrast to women in earlier generations like Yamaguchi Momoe, a super idol in the 1970s, who retired at the peak of her popularity in order to become a housewife. The happiness of her generation was almost solely associated with marriage and family life. Seiko, however, became the embodiment of a new lifestyle for women, based on multiple modes of selves, prompting many women to idealize her ‘super woman’ model for self-fulfillment (Ogura 2003; Sakai 2003). At the same time, women’s pursuit of self-fulfillment and

lifestyle diversification was greatly enabled (and pushed forward) by the huge expansion of the labor and consumer market for women during the bubble period.

In effect, consumption can be considered an emancipatory activity that expands women's life options and mobility within the spheres of marriage, family, and occupation. As Miura Atsushi, an influential marketing manager and critic of social trends in Japan explains, marketing technology employed in the 1980s increasingly stressed that individuals are the creator of their own self-narratives rather than passive recipients of meta-narratives created for them by the nation-state, the family, and the corporation (Miura 2005: 105). Miura explicates that 1980s marketing appropriated the same concepts as employed during the 1960s social movements in Japan that rebelled against social norms that constrain individual freedom and sensibility (Ibid). Yet, despite the similarities underlying 1960s social movements and 1980s consumerism, I would argue that the latter finds postindustrial capitalism as a convenient sanctuary and secret weapon to fight against other forms of the status quo such as Japan's marriage and family system, meta-narratives of the national identity, and the nation's stratified class system. A result was that rebellious consumer activity becomes a handmaiden for the late-capitalist system. In essence, the 1980s sign economy deconstructed the genuineness of social identities and the fixity of social relations. Nonetheless, the socioeconomic condition results in further encompassing even social criticism and strengthening the postindustrial capitalist fortress. As such, the condition has become pervasive, but at the same time greatly depends on the active engagements of social institutions and individual actors alike that do not remain static.

In a sense, the consumer-oriented sign economy is both a reflection of consumer demands and the effect of marketing technology. Indeed, the postindustrial consumer culture to an extent helped Japanese women to free themselves from the status quo. By the same token, they are “liberated” *into* the further intensified postindustrial capitalist system that becomes so pervasive in creation of the self, lifestyle, and social relationships. Thus, consumerism based on the sign economy is not a mere the effect of manipulative capitalist ideology, but it is not an entirely emancipatory activity, either. In the sign economy, nothing is beyond semiotics. Anything potentially comes into being a commodity to be exchanged and circulated (Kondo 1997). The self, as well as affect, is no exception, as I will discuss further in the following chapters about the host club phenomenon in Japan. “Within this dynamic,” Yumiko Iida states, “the desire and subjectivity become a direct target of commercial marketing strategies whose effect is to ever further objectify and transform the subject, imbricating it into the intensive chains of differing signs, and ultimately to subjugate the empirical body to the brute structuring forces of the market” (Iida 2002: 182). Such a claim more or less takes place in 1990s Japan when the collapse of the nation’s bubble economy forced individual citizens to work on their body and self as projects to optimize their human capital. In short, the body becomes not merely a site where signs of difference are played out, but an enterprise, along with Japan’s neoliberal economy.

“Natural” Selfness: Neoliberal Economy in the 1990s

After the Plaza Agreement dramatically strengthened the value of Japan’s currency on the global market, the resulting flood of available capital inflated the price of

stocks, finance, and real estate. But by 1991 the party was over as equity values took a nosedive. The Heisei recession gradually settled in. The burst of Japan's bubble had ripple effects throughout the economy and government. Perhaps most significantly, it exposed the cozy relationships that have sustained postwar Japanese business and politics and led to widespread distrust among citizens about their system of government. In Japan, the 1990s are commonly referred to as *ushiinawareta juu-nen* ("The Lost 10-Years").

The economic stagnation, as well as the political distrust, undermined the respect and reputation that Japanese salarymen and (male) politicians had gained during Japan's postwar economic prosperity. Japanese women, on the other hand, were quietly making gains. In 1986 the Equal Opportunity for Occupation legislation was passed, barring gender discrimination in hiring practices, and by 1989 for the first time more Japanese women than men pursued postsecondary education. The 1993 National Diet Election was called "Madonna Sensation" (*Madonna senpū*) due to the large numbers of Japanese women running for election. They succeeded in occupying the largest number of seats in the Diet since Japanese women gained suffrage in 1945. Although these changes still function more nominally rather than in actual gender equality in terms of the ratio in politico-economic managerial positions, they became proof of the social perception that women were "empowered," whereas men were increasingly disempowered or in masculinity crisis (Ito 1996; Takeyama 2001). As greater numbers of Japanese women postponed marriage and pursued other life-enriching opportunities, men—particularly working-class men and men in rural areas—suffered from "marriage difficulties" (*kekkonnan*) (Ito 1993; Miller 2003).

With these socioeconomic and demographic changes reshaping women's lived experiences, Japan's so-called *ren'ai būmu* (romance boom) appeared in the early 1990s. This boom did not drop unannounced. At every turn, advertising, TV shows, hit songs, fashion magazines, comic books and mainstream books either promoted or implied that romance is the ideal state of womanhood and happiness. Romance, which is more or less intangible, is represented as a means to serve multiple purposes including stress relief for career-oriented women, fulfillment of a void for single women, and recovery and maintenance of youth, beauty, and attractiveness for middle aged or married women. In short, romance signifies multiple meanings and functions. Saimon Fumi, a popular cartoon artist known as the Goddess of Romance, writes that in her book *Ren'ai-ron* (Discussion on Romance) that romance offers salvation from loneliness and is also an exciting drama that generates extraordinary power and emotion and surprises the self (Saimon 1990: 24; 32). Kitagawa Eriko, who is known for her insights into romance as a screenwriter, also states, "It is only romantic love that saves us from the hardships and unhappiness in occupation, family, and life in general" in her book *The Way of Romance* (*Ren'ai-dō*) (Kitagawa 1996: 206). Discourses on romance, particularly in fashion magazines and self-help books, have highlighted romance not only for its redemptive qualities but also as a tool for self-growth. Romance in these discourses has become a means to polish women's fashion, beauty, and communication skills, and nourish their sensitivity. *An.an*, which has substantially increased the number of romance-related headlines on its covers since the 1990s, increasingly puts stress on the project of the self. The "project" is discursively expressed in language such as self-producing (*serufu purojūsu* or *jiko ensyutsu*), self-reformation (*jikokaikaku*), polishing the self (*jibun*

migaki), and becoming the self one wants to be (*naritai jibun ni naru*). In the pages of women's magazines such as *an.an*, work, marriage, childrearing, hobbies, art and culture centers the self and everything else, including romance, becomes a means to actualize the distinctive individual self.

This self-centered attitude, predicated on self-growth, also mirrors socioeconomic trends dominant in the 1990s, when the Japanese government enacted various reforms aimed at liberalizing the economy and encouraged corporations, the bureaucracy, and individuals to transform themselves as part of the reconstruction process. Behind the reforms was a series of U.S.-Japan consultations for the restructuring that were held since 1989. The U.S. Trade Representative, Mickey Kantor, pressured Japan to take drastic measures to transform its conventional politico-economic structure into a more “transparent” and democratic system through further deregulation and market-centered economic reforms (Tomoyori 2006: 147). Following these consultations, the Japanese government pushed to break down the vaunted Japanese-style management system (typically represented by lifetime employment and seniority) in order to create optimum labor conditions. Japanese corporations in turn increasingly adopted a more result-oriented salary system and replaced many lifetime employees with contract workers to cut back on labor costs. In her book *Gendai Shihonshugi to Shin-Jiyūshugi no Bōsō* (*Contemporary Capitalism and Neoliberalism That is Out of Control*), Ninomiya Atsumi asserts that excessive deregulation in the name of “natural selection” based on the market principle is a form of “deregulation fascism” solely designed to adjust labor and the employment system for more flexible capital accumulation (Ninomiya 1999: 78). Despite any underlying fascism on the part of business and government, the phrase

kawaranakucha (“I have to change”) has become ubiquitous in Japan’s mass media and everyday conversation. Self-help and self-improvement seminars in turn became a boom in the early 1990s. As such, the idea of reformation for betterment has gradually permeated Japanese culture and become a social ethos for individuals.

What is commonly referred to as neoliberal reformation in English and “*kozōkaikaku*” in Japanese makes individuals and their bodies matter as *projects* to cultivate self-value rather than mere sites where the spectacular (elaborately-decorated) self is displayed through signs of difference. Individuals are encouraged to acquire useful skills into their bodies and substantiate their self-improvement, whereupon the results are assessed. This social attitude is well depicted in *an.an* articles that encourage female readers to cultivate and polish themselves so that they are acknowledged as a valuable or beautiful. A 1991 column entitled “In Order to Become A Chosen Woman,” written by Tanaka Yasuo, now the Governor of Nagano Prefecture, suggests that happiness is a competitive audition for which a woman needs to constantly apply herself:

In various scenes such as career, romance, and marriage, the most suitable human being is carefully selected. In order to be selected and to experience the joy of the [victorious] moment, tireless effort is absolutely necessary. Everybody is equally eligible to participate in the screening process, i.e., the audition. Even if one is not selected today, one needs to make continuous effort to become a selected woman and achieve the unselfish victory (*an.an* 1991: 7).

An interesting element of the audition metaphor is that the result depends upon judges—male bosses at work and men in romance and marriage—who decide who gets selected. On this point, women to be selected in the audition make a parallel to the 1970s ideal women, who were the objects to be loved by men. Women’s screening in the ’70s

was limited to a marriage partner (and by extension courtship mate) and the judge was presupposed as men, whereas the range of audition in '90s is expanded to include occupation and romance and the gender of judges is unspecified (but simply implied as men). Compared to the 1970s, when women were expected to submissively please men in order to be loved, the 1990s model has a neoliberal twist. Unlike the previous criteria that lay primarily in cuteness, the recent auditions expect women to strive to flexibly transform themselves into the fittest candidate depending upon the content of the competition. Women are in turn required to be agentive in acquiring the necessary skills and become competent. In the competition, everyone has a chance to be selected and is also responsible for one's own result. Victory is unselfish, but failing is one's fault, i.e., reflecting a lack of individual effort and talent. Thus, the 'audition' spotlights women's agentive effort and competence in the 1990s. Nonetheless, women are still the objects to be selected despite the fact that they are said to be "empowered."

Indeed, Japanese men are not exempt from the audition-like competition in Japan's neoliberal reformation. However, I would like to note that Japanese men's competition is mostly fierce within the sphere of work, not romance. Feminist scholars have revealed that Japanese men's well-being is primarily evaluated by their occupational success, whereas women's is by their lovability (Ogura 2003; Sakai 2003). No matter how successful women are in their career, they are still expected to be 'lovable'. Otherwise, they are pitied for being lonely and solitary or looked down upon as women who have nothing like childrearing or romance to devote themselves (Sakai 2003: 86; Ogura 2003: 175). The social calculation that equates single women—particularly, those who do not have romantic partners—as loners fuels, and also is reinforced by, the

romance boom. So, while women today are excused for postponing or avoiding marriage, they're allowed no excuse for being out of romantic relationships (Ueno 1990: 60). The idealization of romance, which is intimately intertwined with the gendered evaluation system and social understanding of women's happiness, impacts heavily on Japanese women's subjectivity formation and gender relationships. Women in the 1990s are encouraged to be more than just cute or pleasant, but their competence, smartness, and competitiveness are not supposed to be overtly expressed because it threatens male subjects and consequently spoils their own lovability. Women are encouraged to be competitive enough to win multiple auditions in a way that the victory is (or looks), as Tanaka states above, unselfish.

This seemingly contradictory message —the unselfish victory— manifests women's paradoxical self-identity —the 'natural' selfness— in the 1990s. The natural selfness is an artful product that entails individual agentive efforts, calculated techniques, and presentation skill to enhance self-value and achieve victorious results in the way that the artful self looks unintentional and 'natural.' *An.an*'s 1996 article, "Everyone Has the Potential to Become Popular", for example, asserts that popularity is an indicator to assess individual self-value but at the same time warns, "Obvious calculations and techniques to gain popularity disgust others. Only *natural attractiveness* draws positive attention" (*an.an* 1996: 7, emphasis added). The presentation of the selfness in fashion and make-up aligns with this emphasis on 'naturalness.' *Sugao meiku*, literally a "bare-faced make-up", meaning a make-up that is disguisedly natural looking, is, for instance, promoted in the mass media, advertising, and women's fashion magazines. *An.an*'s "Advanced Techniques for the *Sugao Meiku*" issue (1996) also values this make-up

technique as a way to express the natural selfness (*shizen na jibunrashisa*). Idealized ‘natural’ beauty here is, however, not the bare face itself. It is, as *an.an* describes, the face that “gives an impression of the bare face as if no artificial processes have been added to it even though the face is an end product of all sorts of calculations and techniques” (*an.an* 1996: 6). Thus, the creation of such a paradoxical face requires abundant knowledge about cosmetics, beauty, and trendy facial features, as well as advanced make-up techniques that make the fully painted face appear natural. Similarly, the ideal ‘natural’ self entails habituating socially valued characteristics into their bodies so as to cultivate the valuable self and body.

What I intend to highlight here is not that the artificial face looks more ‘natural’ than the actual bare face (as Jean Baudrillard has already argued that the postmodern condition created hyper-reality), but that image- and information-based reality has become more real than the material reality (Baudrillard 1979: 24). Neither do I intend to argue that the ‘natural’ self is a fake. I would rather note that something significant in 1990s Japan is that hyper-real beauty and self-value celebrated during the 1980s sign economy is brought to the level of materiality in the neoliberal project of the self. Individuals are no longer mere consuming subjects who play with signs and put them on their bodies to express self-greatness through conspicuous consumption. Instead, consumers and producers are alike encouraged to flexibly and creatively embody socially valued qualities in their bodies and enhance their human capital so as to self-actualize ‘victorious’ results. The materialization is also considered to be a reaction to the superficiality of the sign economy (Iida 2002). In either case, the corporeality is centralized. Ann Anagnost, who has studied neoliberal reformation in the case of China,

argues that corporeal quality, which has been built into the body, has increasingly become a site of investment and a locus of technology of the self (Anagnost 2004: 192; also Gordon 1991: 44; Lemke 2001: 199). I also argue that Japan's neoliberal economy, which is built upon postindustrial consumerism in the name of market-centered economics, permeates the empirical body and human life itself as a milieu where human capital is cultivated and accumulated. The body becomes the enterprise for the neoliberal subject, and the subject in turn becomes an entrepreneur who is evaluated in a variety of social and life events (Gordon 1991; Lemke 2001).

Along with the romance boom in the 1990s, the socially valued quality of female lovability directs women's subjectivity and desire toward cultivating so-called *ren'ai taishitsu* (body quality for romantic love). This body quality has been increasingly promoted and idealized at the turn of the 21st century. *Ren'ai taishitsu* usually refers to someone who has a tendency to fall in love easily, be in love always, and/or has had various romantic experiences (Sakai 2003: 22). *Taishitsui*, which originally means bodily nature by birth or acquisition, is usually used to describe one's health condition, e.g., *futoriyasui taishitsu* (the bodily nature that tends to be fat), *kyojaku taishitsu* (a weak constitution), and *taishitsu kaizen* (continuous improvement of the body). Such health-related vocabulary has been applied in popular discourses on romance since the 1990s. In one of *An.an*'s 1990 issues, "The Way to Make *Ren'ai Taishitsu*", for example, responsiblizes an individual self, particularly her vanity, for an unsusceptible woman and suggests modifying herself to cultivate *ren'ai taishitsu* through what *an.an* calls a *taishitsu kaizen* (improvement) program. *An.an* proposes first to meditate and eagerly wish to have *ren'ai taishitsu*, then simulate a woman susceptible to romance as if one

were playing an interactive computer game, and finally do whatever provokes desire for romantic love like drinking champagne and reading romance novels (*an.an* 1990: 113). If one follows the program, the *an.an* article promises that the *ren'ai taishitsu* naturally inculcates the body like water flow within the body (Ibid).

The body quality discussed here is considered as an environment or a set of conditions where certain behavioral and thinking patterns are habituated through meditation, simulation, and actual body moves. It is therefore modifiable and transformable by changing behavioral and thinking patterns. The body quality for romance that consists of image-based simulacra and materialized body condition manifests the intersection between the sign economy in the 1980s and the neoliberal reformation in the 1990s. As Baudrillard argues that material objects, to which images and meanings are attached, form the simulacra, the empirical body itself has become an object for the entrepreneurial subject to work on and hyper-realize self-worth in Japan's neoliberal economy. Within the substantiated simulacra, a variety of interactive games and rituals such as romantic love and intimate relationships become socially scripted events, and any given social setting becomes a stage. On this stage, body quality is both the milieu and the media that one flexibly modifies to fit the stage setting and 'naturally' perform the socially valued self. The body is then neither a mere exterior that mirrors the interior, i.e., the self, nor a site where signs are displayed. The body in the 1990s Japan is rather a frontier where one cultivates and naturalizes the self of values—the values that are created, evaluated, and exchanged in the neoliberal social economy. This corporeal substantiation, I argue, is based upon the postindustrial sign economy of 1980s Japan. Individuals, who are aware of socially valued characteristics as mere signs or faking,

flexibly habituate them into their bodies to actualize self-fulfillment, self-worth, and well-being. This kind of creation and manipulation of the body and affect, as I will argue below, has closely intertwined signs with the body and affect and paved the road to commercialization of affect in the new millennium Japan.

Affective Self in the New Millennium

Despite the neoliberal restructuring of the 1990s, Japan's economy failed to recover from the Heisei recession. In 2002, the unemployment rate reached a record high of 5.5 percent with an estimated 3.8 million employees (male 5.9 percent and female 5.1 percent) out of work. (Since many are left uncounted in government statistics, the actual unemployment rate was closer to 8 percent.) (Sōmuchō 2003) The prolonged economic stagnation, along with result-oriented neoliberal reforms, has led to an emerging class-consciousness, popularly expressed in such terms as 'winner's group' (*kachigumi*) and the 'losers group' (*makegumi*), largely overwriting Japan's predominantly middle-class consciousness (Kelly 2002; Sato 2000; Yamada 2004). Many Japanese feel that there is a widening gap between rich and poor and that Japan has become a "society with a disparity in hopes", in which only a few can realize their dreams, and the rest cannot afford any dreams whatsoever.

Amid this general economic malaise, the Koizumi administration (2001-2006) stepped up its campaign to advance neoliberal reforms under the slogan "Restructuring Without Sanctuary". These structural reforms introduced market mechanisms and principles of competition to every social stratum through deregulation and privatization. In order to increase the competitiveness of multinational corporations, for example,

Koizumi reduced barriers that limited mergers and acquisitions, and continued the “Big Bang” reforms started by his predecessor, Prime Minister Hashimoto, to create “free, fair, and global” financial markets. The government also supported such prospective industries as IT (Information & Technology) and the service economy with tax breaks and other subsidies. At the same time, in order to survive competition at home and abroad, companies have made cost reduction and greater outsourcing a top priority. This has helped create an underclass of drifting young workers—a highly politically and economically productive reserve army of labor known as *furīta*. Japan’s *frīta* have helped propel Japan’s service economy, performing as short-term contractors for major airline and automotive companies, government offices, restaurants, convenience stores, security firms, and host clubs.

The expansion of Japan’s service industry has been promoted by neoliberal-minded government reformers as the magical solution to simultaneously meet consumer demand for quality of life improvements and to absorb the unemployed. Foreseeing further increases in women’s entry into the labor market, continued diversification of values and lifestyles, and an aging society, the Koizumi administration stressed that the service industry is a potential area where creativity and innovation can expand the labor and consumer market (Shimada 2004: 3). Calling his plan to expand the service industry “bright restructuring” (*akarui kōzōkaikaku*), the Prime Minister launched his “Program to Create 5.3 Million Employment Opportunities” in 2003. The service activities outlined for individuals and families, as well as corporations and local communities, included house chores, childrearing, health care, elderly care, adult education, fitness, aesthetic salons, entertainment, financial management, legal services, and so on. In this rubric,

affect—feelings, emotions, desires, satisfaction, and intimate relationships—is increasingly fabricated into the service-based market economy.

Such commodification of intimate life and human relationships is not peculiar to Japan. It is a global phenomenon. In their influential book, *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, “Today, productivity, wealth, creation of social surplus takes the form of cooperative interactivity through linguistic, communicational, and affective networks” in dominant capitalist countries (Hardt and Negri 2000: 294). They also argue that such a form entails “immaterial labor,” that is, labor that creates knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response (Hardt and Negri 2004: 108; also see Lazzarato 1996). Immaterial labor, Hardt and Negri claim, consists of two principles: one is labor that produces “ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images, and other such products,” and the other principle form is what they call an ‘affective labor,’ that is, labor that produces or manipulates “affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion” (Ibid). Particularly, affective labor is increasing in demand in postindustrial capitalist societies where affective laborers — nurses, nannies, maids, and sex workers— migrate (Ehrenreich and Hochschild eds. 2003). And affective production and exchange in the service industry increasingly entails more direct human contact and blurs the line between the commercial and noncommercial as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

The host club business has coincided with and flourished amid Japan’s intensified neoliberal restructuring and expansion of the service industry. Indeed, as most media reporting has emphasized, host club goers’ consumption has not withered during Japan’s bad economic times, but expanded into intangible commodities like “pseudo-romance”

(*giji ren'ai*) and male sexuality. Some might ask how private and intimate spheres of life such as romantic feelings and experiences has become commodifiable. I would argue that the sign economy in the 1980s uncovered not only identities but also affect that is performatively constituted through a chain of signs rather than essentially immanent. The idealization of scripted romance makes romance something that is externally stimulated rather than internally derived. It is not men's 'instinct-driven' seduction but scripted codes that arouse women's romantic fantasy. Kitagawa Eriko, the screenwriter and "Goddess of Romance," for example, introduces some of the romantically coded locations, situations, and gestures that she uses to produce and manipulate affect in the viewing audience: twilight, beach at night, fireworks in the summer, a merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, taking shelter from the rain, and such gestures as a man putting his overcoat over a woman's shoulder on a cold winter day or holding her hand in a taxi (Kitagawa 1996: 180). Thus, such affective labor, provided by a screenwriter, generates an emotional impulse and produces a certain affect via a TV screen in an image-based society. As such, romantic feeling itself becomes an immaterial product whether a screenwriter or a "real" boyfriend produces it, or it is manipulated in commercial or non-commercial settings.

In today's information society, affective labor increasingly becomes accessible to the 'ordinary' people. Women's fashion magazines such as *an.an*, for example, provide the reader with copious information, knowledge, and advice on romance. In *an.an*'s "Romance Supremacy" issue "*ren'ai kagaku*" (science for romance) reveals that physical proximity enhances mental intimacy and therefore, having side-by-side seats at a table creates a better romantic mood than face-to-face seating; the seating is also useful for a

woman to ‘naturally’ touch the arm of a love target or whisper into his ear (*an.an* 2005: 36). Another tip advises that women stop contacting men for a week or so after exchanging short text messages everyday. (The method makes him think about her and their relationship.) (Ibid). Romantic feeling is thus decoded as something that affective labor in physical and psychological interactions is able to catalyze and manipulate. By the same token, anyone who acquires the knowledge and technical skills potentially produces and manipulates affect for business, sexual, and other purposes. In this respect, affective labor is ubiquitous and has economic value only when someone pays for it (see Lazzarato 1996: 138).

I argue that affective labor has social value, if not an economic value, in Japan’s growing romance boom. Its value increases once the labor becomes scarce. Yamazaki Koichi, an influential columnist and trend watcher, argues that this is because Japanese men are caught in a triple-bind: they are objectified by women and the mass media, who expect them to act as leading masculine subjects but yet are not allowed to be domineering over women (Yamazaki 1995: 122). In other words, women’s fantasy and mass mediated messages paradoxically idealize the sensitive yet leading male “subject,” by whom women want to be selected and loved as a ‘naturally’ lovable “object.” Nonetheless, the objectified male subject is not supposed to actually dominate the relationship. Increasing numbers of men are, Yamazaki states, “timid with the binds and discouraged at devoting themselves to play such a role and please women” (Yamazaki 1995: 122). Men are then allowed to withdraw from the scripted romance obligation because their self-worth can be fulfilled elsewhere such as in their occupation, hobby, and social network. I argue, however, that women too are under the threat of romance

supremacy and yet are not allowed to withdraw even though they are caught in a similar triple bind—the subjectivized female object, who is encouraged to be a competent agent but not supposed to threaten men’s self-esteem. The more scarce the resources, i.e., romantic partners, become, the more valuable and competitive romance becomes for women. In this gender null zone, men’s affective labor such as hosts’ “service” becomes commodifiable.

Indeed, the host club commodity has become so successful that it is now self-perpetuating. Televised representations, which are plentiful, typically feature a young, good-looking man in a designer suit who drives a brand new Mercedes and escorts his female clients to department stores, takes them to dinner, and finally his host club to relax. He embodies all the romantic codes: taking women to places known as romantic hot spots (e.g., amusement parks, fashionable bars, and places with lovely night views), treating them like “princesses,” and providing them with “ladies first” service such as opening doors, holding bulky shopping bags, and helping them put on their jackets. He also utilizes “scientific knowledge” on romance: having seats side-by-side at bars and restaurants, touching lightly on women’s arms and shoulders, and sending text messages to show his caring attitude toward them. Hosts I interviewed told me that they often read women’s fashion magazines like *an.an* in order to understand the kinds of romantic situations women fantasize about and how to practice pleasing them. In doing so, hosts equip themselves with the information, knowledge, and techniques that help interactively produce romantic affect in exchange for money. Several hosts told me that it was a pseudo-romance that hosts and their clients foster (even though they pretend as if they were serious) because money is involved and hosts’ feelings are not genuine. However,

they insisted that the pseudo-romance should be more ideal for their clients than the “real” romance. Hosts are paid to perform as idealized male subjects, by whom women are treated as if they were loved. In the host club, women ‘become’ the subjectivized objects, who are “lovable” despite their financial power. Thus, the “cooperative interactivity” between the service provider and the recipient — hosts and their clients — actualizes an ideal form of scripted romance in the market economy.

This cooperative interactivity is increasingly stressed in Japan’s rapidly changing, yet still asymmetric gender relationships since the 1990s. As I have discussed, the notion of cuteness has been central to communicate with men, and please them, so as to be loved in return, whether the cuteness is genuine or fake. Cuteness used to flatter and please men so as to be thought of better is known as “*kobiru*”. The idea of *kobiru*, however, has given way to a more subtle show of conduct in the new millennium. Since the 1990s, *an.an*, for example, increasingly uses the word “*kontorōru*” (controlling), to describe the state of Japan’s contemporary gender power dynamics. *An.an*’s March 2005 issue, “How To Control His Mind”, for instance, proposes the use of “hypnotism for romance” (*ren’ai saimin*) in order to entice men to voluntarily act for a woman via tickling their self-respect. *An.an* offers the following snippets of advice:

Even if his sexual performance is dissatisfactory, you should say to him, “It was very good. Can you try this for me because I want to feel even more pleasure?” Such a way of asking motivates him to make greater effort to please you. ... When you want him to call, don’t accuse him ... because accusation makes him think that calling is something that is obligated and unpleasant. In order to make him voluntarily contact you, the key is to let him expect that there is something good waiting if he calls you. In this case, you should say, “Since I feel so lonely when I don’t hear your voice, I feel so delighted when you give me a call.” ... Here, the rein called freedom (*jiyū*) is the key for the manipulation (*an.an* 2005: 23).

This kind of psychological manipulation through calculated, yet suggestive speech acts, I suspect, also entails ‘natural’ performances expressed in such moments as when she says she is satisfied with his sexual performance or phone call, for example. The creation of the ‘natural’ selfness in Japan has extended its logic— an artful construct that is naturalized by advanced knowledge, calculated techniques, and stylized performance—to intersubjective communications and relationships where one manipulates the other as if it were unintentional. While the ‘natural’ self in the 1990s strove for social credibility on the self/body of values under Japan’s neoliberal reformation, in the new millennium the goal also seems to be to use the body in order to psychologically manipulate the other and extract advantageous deals.

Competitive hosts stress that this kind of psychological manipulation is their most important business skill. In his popular book, *Hosutoō no Sonokinisaseru Shinrisakusen-jutsu (How the King of Hosts Wins Hearts)*, Reiji, a charismatic host often referred to as the King of Hosts in the media, for example, states, “The tactics used to seduce women are applicable to any sort of business situation with men or women” (Reiji 2001: 5). The key, he says, is to find the right spot to tickle his/her self-respect and psychologically manipulate him/her to have “better deals” (Ibid). In this way, hosts use their affective labor to create pseudo-romance not as an end product but as a means to entice their clients into spending more money on them. The affective labor thus becomes productive of social surplus and accumulative of capital in the market exchange. For male hosts, it becomes a means to cultivate neoliberal male subjects who self-actualize upward mobility via carefully calculated tactics, whereas for female clients, it is a way to perform as neoliberal female subjects who are financially competent and ‘unselfishly’ victorious

in romance. In the affective sphere of the host club, romance functions as a means and a process for both parties to self-actualize socially valued gendered selves and also manipulate the other, who has different interests and goals, for one's own ends. Ultimately, fostering romance is about the production of the self, cooperative interactivity, and strategic negotiation. The multilayered meanings of romance are well depicted in the quotes at the beginning of this chapter: romance is “nutrition” for the self and “happiness” *per se* but also about planning, strategy, and victory.

The manipulative self—what I call an ‘affective self’—is made matter in this kind of subjectivity formation and intersubjective communication. The affective self is the term I use to refer to the self who has cultivated the bodily qualities of ‘natural’ selfness and is equipped with artful skills—seductive knowledge, communicative tactics, and persuasive performance—in order to entice the other into ‘voluntarily’ acting out for both his/her own and the one's ends. The affective self is in this sense is the self who strategically provides the other with affective labor so as to take advantage of the other's affect—self-respect, a feeling of ease, and passion—for the one's personal gain, whether monetary reward or affective labor in return. *An.an*, as well as hosts themselves, use the term “self-producing” (*serufupurojūsu* or *jikoenshutsu*) to refer to this process. *An.an*'s “Fatal Encounter” issue carries an article entitled “26 Self-Producing Techniques to Draw More and Better Romance” with an illustration of a woman manipulating two puppets: herself and a man (see figure 1).

運命の人と出たいのなら、待っているだけではダメ！ 出会いがないという人ほど自分が動いて、好みのタイプの男性を見つけて、誰かにあなたを見初めさせるか。恋の種を芽吹かせるための努力を始めよう。

まず、前半の2ページでは、**「外見」「意識」「行動」「会話」**の4つの要素から、出会える自分に変身するコツを研究。

「一番変えやすいのは外見。まずはオープンで話しかけやすい雰囲気作りを。出合いの第一歩です」(心理学者・伊東明さん)

「醸し出す雰囲気や言葉遣いも、女らしい穏やかさを演出できると、確実に男性にとって好印象」(放送作家・中野俊成さん)

そして、貴重な出合いを逃さないために、日頃から恋のイメージをしておくことも大事。「出合いに敏感になるためには、恋愛映画や小説に積極的に触れるようにして、自分を恋愛モードにしておくといいですよ。男

性の魅力を見つけてやすくなるはず」(作家・狗飼恭子さん)

後半2ページでは、**出合いのバターン**を分析して、**攻略法**や**具体的なテクニック**もアドバイス。あとは実践あるのみです！



イラスト・米澤よう子 22

Figure 1: (From *an.an* 2006: 22)

The article suggests there are two steps to bringing on romance: The first step is to “reform the self” through changing appearance, consciousness, behavior, and conversation in order to draw men’s attention (*an.an* 2006: 22). The second step is to “let a man believe” that you are his ‘fateful woman’ through such affective labor as creating a feeling of comfort and a sense that both share common interests (Ibid: 32). Here, ‘self-producing’ means to manipulate the self (a woman) and the other (a man) puppet-like so as to conduct and persuade him to modify his beliefs, values, and conduct.

The affective self is thus a performative self, one who creates, reforms, and manipulates to ‘self-produce’ certain effects on oneself and the other. Judith Butler (1990) has theorized that gender identity is not essentially inherited, but performatively

constituted in a way that repetitive speech and body acts of “men” and “women” refer to socially recognizable gender codes such as masculinity and femininity. Similarly, the affective self is a performative construct that consists of signification practices and the body quality of someone who is socially valued. It, however, entails not only signifying but also *habituating* the values to the self and the body so as to avoid uneasiness and distrust in interactivity. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has conceptualized the notion of “habitus,” the acquired bodily characteristics, posture, and movements through which socialization into hegemonic social norms occur. While theorizing performativity and habitus is helpful to rethink the seemingly ontological reality of gender identity and body quality, neither Butler nor Bourdieu situate human agency in the process of subjectivity formation and use of the body—what *an.an* calls ‘self-producing’ and what I call an ‘affective self.’ The affective self, I argue, sheds new light on the process of agentive engagement. The affective self is neither a mere subject who (re)signifies a certain identity such as gender and sexuality nor a product whose socialization process largely fixates his/her conducts. The affective self is, rather, an entrepreneurial neoliberal subject whose self-identity and body quality is made matter as an enterprise for the subject to maneuver for personal gain.

This model of the affective self is, I contend, a central feature of neoliberal governmentality because it allows individuals to act ‘freely’ to govern the self and the other, while simultaneously being governed by the other and by extension collective social norms and values. Michel Foucault defines governmentality as the ‘conduct of conduct.’ In his book *Governmentality*, based on Foucault’s lectures, Mitchell Dean describes the ‘conduct of conduct’ and writes:

[The ‘conduct of conduct’] *is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes* (Dean 1999: 11, emphasis original).

As Dean states, the affective self is the one who equips with diverse knowledge, techniques, and communication skills in order to shape the other’s conduct through affective labor (and satisfy one’s ends). The conduct of conduct is about suggestive speech and body acts that attempt to manipulate and govern the other’s conduct. Foucault calls this subtle direction of the conduct of the governed the *art of government*, suggesting that “governing is an activity which requires craft, imagination, shrewd fashioning, the use of tacit skills and practical know-how, the employment of intuition and so on” (Dean 1999: 18). In a postindustrial, service-intensive society such as Japan’s, I would argue that the art of government entails the affective self and its labor to conduct production of the agentive neoliberal subjectivity, social relations, and surplus value. I will demonstrate how the art of governance is undertaken by multiple agencies that are socially situated in class and gender terms in the later chapters.

Chapter Conclusion

Since the 1970s, Japanese women’s subjectivity formation, ideal femininity, and gender relationships have transformed in tandem with Japan’s shift from an industrial to postindustrial economy. In the process, both men’s and women’s increasingly fragmented self-identity has been concomitant with Japan’s information-based sign economy where

informational, image-based, and communicative messages have created greater surplus value than before and helped fuel the nation's flexible accumulation of capital. As I argued, the socioeconomic shift toward the sign economy resulted in the neoliberal subject, who is encouraged to flexibly substantiate socially valued signs in her body and artfully naturalize the ideal body/self. I also argued that the neoliberal subject is a prototype of what I called the affective self, that is, the self who utilizes the artfully *naturalized* self to manipulate the other's affect and conduct in intersubjective communications. This manipulation of affect, i.e., the affective labor, has increasingly become a gear that drives the postindustrial service-based economy (Hardt and Negri 2004).

While affective labor has long existed, I demonstrate how it has become commodifiable via examining the case of the commodification of romance in contemporary Japan. I theorize that like self-identity, affect in the sign economy has become a performatively constituted experience through a chain of signs rather than essential immanence. Romance, for example, became overwhelmingly scripted in Japan during the romance boom of the 1990s, when knowledge of romance and techniques of seduction were decoded and re-scripted. Commodification of romance also reflects the changing, yet pervasive social valuation system based on sex differences that trap increasingly successful and prosperous Japanese women in a dilemma between being "empowered" individuals and "lovable" women. In this socio-historical context, men's affective labor that fosters women's feeling of being loved, respected, and satisfied becomes a commodity of value in the market. Thus, romance is transformed into a socially relevant commodity once it is exchanged in a market establishment such as the

host club. In my ethnographic study, the burgeoning host club business opens a window into understanding the mode of affect production, gender power dynamics, and the triumph of postindustrial capitalism.

The historical reshaping of subjectivity formation, social relations, and policy making in the last 40 years was a story about the triumph of postindustrial capitalism. Japan's neoliberal reformation has been a politico-economic solution to overcome crisis in national identity and economic stagnation. Today, the service-based market economy is proposed as a means to solve the nation's unemployment and aging issues and enhance national competitiveness in the global economy. In the postindustrial sign economy, nearly everything is potentially commodifiable, including intimate life experience, romantic experience, sexual satisfaction, well-being, human relationships, and the self, itself. In the next chapter, I will examine how the commodification of affect is transacted in a Tokyo host club.

CHAPTER 3: COMMODIFIED ROMANCE IN A TOKYO HOST CLUB

Recently, the landscape of prime-time Japanese television has become littered with shows about host clubs. Among the abundance of programs on air, the Super Television Series (*Supā Terebi Shirīzu*) by the Japan TV Broadcasting has featured an hour-long documentary program on host clubs every year since 2003. The station's reporting focuses exclusively on clubs in the Kabuki-chō red light district, depicting the entertainment district as an extraordinary place within Tokyo, where women wantonly spend money on their hosts in exchange for fun and romance. A show named "Actual Recording! Hosts' Prosperous Path" (*Jitsuroku! Hosuto no Hanamichi*) show, which aired in July 2003, was a typical example of Japan's media representation of host clubs.

The documentary opens at night with the sound of a loud siren and follows an ambulance rescue unit as it tries to prevent a young woman from jumping off a multistory building. The woman, who is dressed in a pair of jeans and T-shirt, screams, "Don't come! Go away!" The program's narrator begins, "The cause seems to be an emotional entanglement between a woman and a man." A rescuer attempts to calm her down, saying, "There are so many men and women in the world. Death is a dead end." After a few more tense moments, the rescuers succeed in stopping her from committing suicide. Spectators gathered below clap their hands and leave as if nothing has happened. The narrator comments, "In a big city like Shinjuku, life's danger is no more than a spectacular sideshow." Indeed, in these scenes of noise, darkness, messy relationships and sporadic happenings, anonymous individuals encounter the extraordinary but are safe within the familiar confines of Tokyo, Japan.

Juxtaposed with the rescue scene, the TV program cuts to a host club scene in which female customers are flirting with their hosts at tables crammed with expensive bottles of liquor and multi-layered fruit plates. The show zooms in on Kazushi, a 26-year old top-ranking host who has just lost a few of his clients and is trying to reclaim his number-one status at the club. One day Kazushi is shown taking a trip to visit a wealthy client who lives in the city of Niigata, about 200 miles northwest of Tokyo. Wearing gray sunglasses, a black shirt, a pair of dark jeans, and brushing back feathered hair of medium length, he moves with the self-conscious demeanor of a celebrity. A woman dressed in black — long one-piece dress, stockings, and shoes — waits for him at the airport. Her face is fuzzed out for privacy, but a plump body is revealed below. “A company owner in her late 20s,” reads a caption. As Kazushi puts his right hand in his pants pocket and casually walks toward her, the client runs with short steps as she were about to melt in his arms. “If you say it is a sales activity on business, that’s exactly it,” explains the narrator. “Nonetheless, she must care for a man, who came all the way to see her,”

On their way downtown, the woman asks, “You came all the way here to see me?” “Yes,” Kazushi says, “I came all the way [to see you or visit Niigata]. Niigata is so far away, isn’t it? I sort of understand how you feel [about the relationship or the distance].” The next scene shows her walking arm in arm with Kazushi to a men’s boutique. She looks for the same suit that Kimura Takuya, a popular singer and actor in Japan and other East Asian regions, wore in a TV drama series and buys Kazushi a similar one for 450,000 yen (\$4,000). After shopping, they relax at a high-end bar before Kazushi has to fly back to Tokyo for the night’s host club business. She asks, “Can’t you stay?” “I have to go back,” Kazushi replies looking away. The client pleads, “The

airplane doesn't fly tonight." "I will let it fly," he says, turning toward her. "You know, a liar cannot look into another's eyes directly while speaking because of a guilty conscience. Today, I came here to see you because I am confident looking into your eyes and speaking. You know what I mean." However, Kazushi's speech and body language are disjointed onscreen. When making the remark he looks straight ahead, then at her, then straight ahead. He says no more and the scene abruptly ends.

Despite the minimal communication, two weeks later the rich customer comes to Tokyo and orders Kazushi dozens of huge flower bouquets on his birthday, enough to fill the entire host club. Kazushi wears the new suit she has bought for him and makes her smile. Fifteen \$1,000 bottles of Dom Perignon are placed on a table specially set to fill the so-called Champaign Tower — a pyramid piled four feet high with wine glasses. There is also a thousand-dollar fruit plate served. On that night, Kazushi's client ends up spending over 2,000,000 yen in cash at the club, or roughly \$20,000. The narrator says in disgust, "Her monetary sense goes beyond our common sense. Economic stagnation in the real world seems like a wind that is blowing somewhere else." The money spent that night boosts Kazushi's sales for the month and he recovers his number one status. The program ends with Kazushi smiling and having a drink with another client. The narrator concludes, "People might look down upon the hosting business, but hosts are doing their best. The host club is a men's battleground, where hosts resolve their lies and insincerity with alcohol and play the game of romance on any given night."

Although the TV program displays the iconic extraordinariness signified by bundles of Japanese yen bills, as well as the game of romance and the speculative business of hosting, it does not attempt to examine the fluid and indeterminate

interactions between hosts and their clients. For example, how can sales and sincerity go hand in hand? What effect does Kazushi's highly vague and ambivalent statements to his client have on her affect? In this chapter I demonstrate how the fluidity and indeterminacy of encounters and interactions between female clients and their hosts engender a romantic atmosphere and generate intimate feelings. Their cooperative interactions remain ambivalent, for instance, because they consist of a series of calculated speech and body acts embedded in seductive utterances, flattering words, and suggestive gestures that look "spontaneous" and of *accidental* touching and other occurrences that are manipulated to appear intentional. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter how 'natural' selfness is paradoxically an artful craft that is designed to appear desirable and valuable by nature, I insist that an unexpected or 'fateful' encounter is an effect of these highly calculated, yet apparently unintentional speech and body acts that refer to scripted meanings of romance. In this respect, Kazushi's strategic visit to his wealthy customer—a business trip, really—is highly calculated to appear as an act of sincere love. In this way, Kazushi's business activity is turned into a socially acceptable form of personalized "dating." I argue that the intimacy engendered within this carefully constructed ambivalence blurs the dichotomy between the participants' economic and emotional motives, commercial and "true" romance, and fantasy and reality.

In order to demonstrate how the codes of romance are communicated and blurred in actual interactions, the goal of this chapter is twofold: to describe the topography of Kabuki-chō and what interactions with hosts are like and to analyze the ways that affect is provoked and manipulated through the communicative signs attached to the space and interactivity. I first demonstrate how Kabuki-chō as a space is formed through various

signs of differences in gender, sexual, ethnic, and class terms. Then, I illustrate my own experience of being a Japanese female researcher walking in Kabuki-chō, visiting a host club, and engaging in ‘after-hours activities’ with a host. In particular, I discuss how hosts’ affective labor in specific tempo-spatial contexts imbues a romantic atmosphere and produces intimate feelings, while simultaneously obscuring the line between the commercial and the personal. I use my own case as an example because I have found that other female clients who I have interviewed have had similar experiences. I also intend to highlight how hosts capitalize on their knowledge of romance and seduction tips gleaned from popular books and women’s fashion magazines. I argue that hosts are seductive not because they are womanizers in their own way but because their acts refer to and capitalize on romantic fantasy that women are familiarized with.

This chapter later introduces cases where female clients have “fallen for” their hosts. I analyze how female clients’ anticipation (including mine) of meeting a host in the host club slips into unexpected “happenings,” and point out that the uncertainty of the actual interactions make the romantic experience passionate and seductive. In his book *Seduction*, Jean Baudrillard writes, “Seduction ... never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice—never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals. ... Every discourse is threatened with this sudden reversibility, absorbed into its own signs without a trace of meaning” (Baudrillard 1979: 2). The romantic experience is then neither a final product nor a fixed order of nature. It is the communicative process itself that hosts and their clients mutually engage in and also put their assumptions and positionality under the threat of sudden reversibility. The fluid and indeterminate meaning-making and positionality of seducing and being seduced thus functions both as the threat and the

excitement of an encounter. This illegibility of the seducer and the seducee and of the victory and the defeat in a continuous cooperative interaction becomes the spark of both erotic fantasy and capitalist accumulation (Baudrillard 1979: 22). The nature of seduction hinges upon the affective and economic activities in the host club and therefore, it is important to investigate the art of seduction.

Kabuki-chō in the Sign of Differences

Shinjuku's Kabuki-chō red light district, which houses the highest concentration of sex-related businesses in the world, is located in the heart of Tokyo. Initially established as an entertainment and amusement center after World War II, it helped spur the recovery of war-devastated Tokyo. In 1950, it was the site of Japan's Exhibition of Industry and Culture, and the addition of the Seibu train line in 1952 rapidly accelerated the town's development. Comprising an area roughly one-tenth the size of New York's Central Park, Kabuki-chō today is packed with coffee shops, restaurants, public bars, theaters, karaoke boxes, game centers, pachinko-places, mah-jongg courts, hostess clubs, love hotels, and thousands of sex-related businesses such as pink salons (oral sex and assisted masturbation), peep shows, S&M clubs, and much more. The town is often called a "*fuyajō*" (sleepless castle) and a "*yokubō no meikyū*" (labyrinth of desires), where sexual activities are carried out all night long. Famous for offering all manner of erotic and sexual opportunities, images of alluring and scantily clad women are everpresent in Kabuki-cho, inviting the male heterosexual gaze.⁶ Information booths,

⁶ By contrast, Shijuku 2-chōme, a well-known gay boy's town, is located a few of blocks from Kabuki-chō. While there are a few transexual/transgender bars in Kabuki-chō, these are mostly for the amusement of heterosexual customers and tourists.

which are scattered throughout the district, display free brochures advertising a smorgasbord of male-centered sexual fantasies —bathroom peeping, subway molestation, costume plays, erotic massages, assisted masturbation, and so forth. Except for a few co-habit public bars, karaoke boxes, and game centers, Kabuki-chō manifests Japan’s longstanding male-centered heterosexual entertainments.

Estimates on how much income Kabuki-cho’s sex-related businesses generate each year varies from hundreds of millions of dollars to more than a billion dollars. One reason why accurate figures do not exist is because of organized crime. In Kabuki-chō, several gangster (*yakuza*) groups territorialize the land and extort “rents.” Business owners largely see the *yakuza* as a necessary evil and pay them to receive protection from ‘troubles’ that other gangster groups create within the territory. Because of the gangster’s easy association with underground money, sex, and crime, their ubiquitous presence overshadows the image of the district. Not only the socially deviant *yakuza* but also ethnic minorities are associated with crime in Kabuki-chō. In particular, illegal immigrants have been problematized. A branch office of the Immigration Bureau was established in Kabuki-chō in 2003 to expose the high numbers of illegals, mostly from Korea,⁷ China, Thailand, and Russia, known to work in the district. While official numbers of illegal immigrants are unknown, a Japanese White Paper on Crimes (*Hanzai Hakusho*) blames foreigners for the increase of crimes in Japan in direct proportion to the increase in illegal immigrants. To many Japanese, ethnic mixing in Kabuki-chō is symptomatic of unlawfulness, deviance, and fear.

⁷ The north edge of Kabuki-chō borders on Okubo, a town that is famous for the largest Korean town in Japan. There are some Korean restaurants, supermarkets, and entertainment establishments in Kabuki-chō too.

The presence of gangsters and ethnic “others” and the sporadic incidents of business trouble, fighting between drunks on the street, acute alcohol intoxication and the near constant presence of police car sirens, ambulances, and fire trucks intensifies the sense of uneasiness. These ubiquitous visual, auditory, and sensory signs signify Kabuki-chō as an unsafe, yet fascinating phantasmal space within central Tokyo.

Such an exotic, erotic, and monetaristic consumer space lures both those who want to earn fast money and those who want to pursue pleasure and excitement. Kabuki-chō is known as a site where jobseekers with little occupational skills and socioeconomic capital can try out their ‘bare’ self (*hadakaikkan*) or one’s arm (*udeippon*), both of which mean that such people have nothing else but the physical body itself to rely on. This type of unstable, non-salaried job was greatly marginalized by Japan’s corporate system up until the 1980s (Kondo 1991). Amid Japan’s neoliberal reformation, however, this perception has been changing. While working in Kabuki-chō is still looked down upon among mainstream Japanese due to the negative image of night work, the district today lures workers and jobseekers who do not fit Japan’s corporate system or who value ‘entrepreneurial’ work over salaryman jobs. The opportunity myth that lucky women and men earn fast cash or gain sponsorship to open their own businesses is instilled among them. Indeed, Kabuki-chō has long attracted these people but as I will discuss further in Chapter 3, artisan-like or affective labor is increasingly valued as a way of expressing individual entrepreneurship. Hosts, for example, were once called “*otoko mekake*” (male mistress) and stigmatized, but hosting is today represented much more like a professional entertainment or service business in the media.

While Kabuki-cho has long fed heterosexual men's erotic fantasies in Japan's postwar era, the consumer market also has expanded to feed heterosexual women's romantic and sexual desires since the 1990s. No information is available about booths for women's sexual fantasies, but hosts themselves work throughout the district to draw female attention and interest and to advertise hosting. Young hosts with stylish haircuts and fashionable suits are often seen hanging out with other hosts on the street. They typically smoke cigarettes and chat with one another while checking women passing by to tout for their host clubs.⁸ Each night hundreds or thousands of them prowl the streets of Kabuki-chō, making every effort to get women's attention. With their slim bodies, tanned skin, and perfectly set medium-long hair, they show off their assets like peacocks preening for potential mates. On the crowded streets, once a host finds his target, usually a dressed up woman carrying an expensive designer bag, he intercepts her, imploring, "Good evening, are you going back home? Why don't you stop by our club to relax and enjoy yourself?" Many women ignore their come-ons, but a few will eventually go on to spend tens of thousands — and in some cases millions — of dollars at host clubs.

The majority of the host clubs in Japan are located in Kabuki-chō, which is not only signified in sexualized terms but is also class-marked. The host clubs of nearby Roppongi offer a study in contrast. The Roppongi area is nearby government offices and

⁸ The increase in such hosts' touting (which they call "*kyacchi*", to catch), along with the rapid growth of the host club business, has become problematized as troublesome. As a result, a new regulation, "Rules to Prevent Troublesome Behaviors" (*meiwaku bōshi jōrei*), was put into force by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in April 2005. This new regulation now bans street vendors, as well as hosts, who insistently solicit potential customers. If they are caught, they may be imposed a less than six-month penal servitude or a less than 500,000-yen fine. Despite the regulation, hosts' come-ons are not disappearing, but have become covert, with "catching" occurring secretly on the narrower streets and behind buildings.

TV broadcast stations and has recently redeveloped into Tokyo's most upscale neighborhood. On top of high-end boutiques, jewelry shops, restaurants and bars, the newest symbol of the area, Roppongi Hills,⁹ a gigantic 54-story building compound consisting of office, commercial, and residential areas opened in 2003. The Hills has come to symbolize Japan's new-money wealth created from the IT business sector, which occupies most of the office spaces. Many corporate executives reside in the residential area.¹⁰ The wealthy image and sophistication of the Roppongi area is also projected on its host clubs, where fashionable "high-class" women like models, TV announcers, actresses, and Ginza hostesses pay visits. Roppongi hosts I have interviewed are proud of their club's location and differentiate themselves from the Kabuki-chō hosts who, they describe, look sleazy and act greedy.¹¹ They stress instead their "clean" and "fashionable"

⁹ People, who work and live there, are called "Hills Tribe" (*Hiruzu-zoku*) and envied as members of the "winner's group" (*kachigumi*) for their business success and privileged lifestyles. One of the better examples representing the image of the Hills Tribe is Horie Hirofumi. Although arrested for an illegal stock transaction, he was once directed his own start-up Internet company, Live Door, and was celebrated as the child of the age due to his business success, stock investments, and M&A management at the time I was conducting my research in 2003 through 2005.

¹⁰ Rental for a Hills residence ranges from the equivalent of 5,000 up to 45,000 dollars a month, easily exceeding the average monthly income for a household in Japan. The average annual income per household in 2004 was 5,797,000 yen and has been declining in the past nine years in a row. (Fifty-six percent of the households reported their hardships.) The Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Koseishō*). 2005. "2004-Nen Kokumin Seikatsu Kiso-chōsa" (The 2004 Basic Research of National Livelihood). "<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/k-tyosa/k-tyosa04/2-1.html>" accessed on July 16, 2007.

¹¹ Hostess clubs in Kabuki-chō are similarly codified in class terms particularly in contrast to the hostess clubs in Ginza. Ginza is located nearby government and municipal offices and has a high-class image. In contrast, hostess clubs in the Kabuki-chō red light district are oftentimes associated with sleaze. Hostesses in Ginza have long been perceived as well educated, refined, and culturally sophisticated—able to serve government officers, CEOs, foreign VIPs, etc. On the other hand, Kabuki-chō hostesses

(*oshare*) image. In my interviews, hosts at Kabuki-chō's *Fantasy* admitted that host clubs in Roppongi were more sophisticated and fashionable because of their location, but they also highlighted the fame, prestige, and history that *Fantasy* enjoys and the wealthy clients it consistently attracts.

As such, the image of host clubs is closely associated with the topography of location and the signs that the location signifies. In this sign system, hosts, as well as the host clubs and Kabuki-chō, are always already classified by the sign of differences. At the same time, they take advantage of the signs of refined differences to manipulate meanings and affect in the same way Kabuki-chō hosts elevate their image status by mobilizing signs of fame, prestige, history, and clientele. Thus, space is not merely formed by the physical infrastructure but also shaped by production and manipulation of multi-layered signs: gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, values, ethics, and other forms of differences.

Walking Alone in the Red Light District

One late summer night in 2004 I was walking alone in Kabuki-chō, observing the street scene for my research. I had just left a host club after interviewing some hosts. Since I had already conducted a month of preliminary research at a host club the previous summer, this was not the first night for me to be by myself in Kabuki-chō. But the street scene on this particular summer night seemed different because I was alone without any

are thought to be recruited on the street and have little education. Indeed, the so-called "scout man" on Kabuki-chō's streets, scouting for young women for "modeling," hostess business, and sex work was once a well-known presence. They have disappeared from sight since the regulation was established.

specific purpose to be on the street except my observational research. After my research, I usually hustled through the crowded streets directly for the subway station to avoid hosts' "catching" and catch the last train. (Whenever I was invited to after hour activities, I stayed with hosts and their clients.) At this point in my research, I was waiting for permission from some host club owners to conduct my doctoral dissertation research on site. My visual, auditory, and sensory perceptions reflected not only the tempo-spatial specificity of the night but also my positionality as a Japanese woman who had studied Japanese society and culture at U.S. institutions.

On the streets were mostly young men and women socializing and hanging around, interspersed with salaried men in their business suits passing by. Fashionably dressed young women in small groups of two to five people were merrily chatting with one another, showing off their designer outfits, hairstyles, makeup, designer handbags, as well as accessories and other personal belongings. They looked like pages excerpted from young women's fashion magazines. Their free and easy manner and occasional side glances created unguarded moments whereupon men on the street would approach and speak to them. They apparently enjoyed the male gaze and advances despite their bodily objectification. Juxtaposing these women in their 20s or so against my own image reflected on a window, I felt that I was an unattractive, isolated, and lonely woman who didn't belong. This was a moment when my insider/outsider positionality as a Japanese woman/researcher prominently emerged. Because I had studied how the male gaze objectifies female bodies in Japan and other societies, I was critical about gender and sexual dynamics. At the same time, I was also raised in and exposed to the same cultural environment where the gaze itself paradoxically "empowers" women to be female

subjects of attractiveness and value. Kabuki-chō's red light district at night is a microcosm of the latter cultural environment.

With these mixed feelings, I walked alone in Kabuki- chō. A young man spoke to me obliquely from behind, "Hey, big sister, how do you like a host club?" (*Onesan, hosuto kurabu wa ikagadesuka?*) It was sudden and unexpected. I quickly stepped ahead as if to ignore and avoid him. My initial reaction was confusion: 'What does he mean by 'big sister'? Do I look that old? I have to be cautious. Who knows what kind of sleazy host he is? Wait a minute! I am here to learn about the hosting business and this is a good opportunity, isn't it? Oh no! I should have dressed up and worn cosmetics. I must look awful and am not ready for a host club! Should I just walk away? Should I talk to him about my research? I finally looked back and found that he was right next to me waiting. Unlike other hosts, who dyed their hair, wore gorgeous accessories, and pretended to be playboys, he had short black hair, wore a simple suit, and looked polite. Moreover, he was a handsome young man. I was at a loss for words. "Well, I . . ., I am researching host clubs. But, I . . ." "Why don't you come over to see my host club?" he said. "It's only 5,000 yen for the first time visit." "Where is your club?" I asked. "I work for club *Fantasy*." "*Fantasy* is a famous club, isn't it?" "Yes, it is one of the oldest clubs." By then, I had made up my mind and followed him.

To be frank, his handsome features and polite demeanor helped finalize my decision, but clearly I also had my (research) interest in the host club scene. Going to and hanging out in the district was my own agentive act. Nonetheless, I also want to highlight that I expected neither to meet a host nor visit a host club on that particular night. Thus, while my agentive act set myself up for entry into the host club world, the concrete

encounter that had been made by someone else, i.e., the host, made the encounter accidental. As I will discuss later, this combination of general interests and unexpected actual encounters is a commonality that myself and other female clients share as host club goers.

On the way to *Fantasy*, which was a less than a ten-minute walk, I mentioned briefly that I was a graduate student in the U.S. and was studying Japan's host club phenomena. I learned that he was a 23-year-old host who had just started working at *Fantasy* five months earlier. His host name was Shin, which he said was his brother's name, and he was the eldest son among four children. Upon finishing his middle school education, he began working for his father's construction company but soon quit because of the hard physical labor. He then took a job at a men's clothing store for a while but soon got bored, he said. While he was looking for something new in a job magazine, he happened to see a host club ad and decided to become a host. He said his plan was to make enough money to open up his own clothing store in the future. He now devotes himself to the hosting business and does not have a girlfriend. He talked openly about his family and educational background and occupational and romantic experiences. His sincere attitude embodied in his talk and manner convinced me that he was an honest, trustworthy person. Walking with him abruptly transformed my sense of unfamiliarity, fear, and loneliness to that of familiarity, comfort, and joy. Thus, as I come to know Shin and walk with him, both my feeling in and perception of the space is transformed.

I would argue that this transformation was an effect of Shin's affective labor that created and manipulated my feelings (see Hardt and Negri 2004: 108). It was also a cooperative interactivity between him and myself to meet two ends: fulfilling his goal to

“catch” a customer on the street and my interest in conducting participant observation. I also want to note that the contrast between the sense of alienation I felt in wandering alone and the feeling of ease in walking with someone made the latter more meaningful and pleasurable. Thus, Kabuki-chō, which is an encoded space with the excitement of various opportunities, relief from daily stress and constraints, pleasure of anonymity, anxiety of risk-taking, and sense of transience, yields not only a dreamlike, phantasmic atmosphere but also an affective environment—the environment where hosts capitalize on women’s affect and provide them with affective labor.

Affective Labor and Intimacy in Club *Fantasy*

Fantasy, one of the oldest and largest host clubs in Kabuki-chō, employing over 90 hosts, is located in a basement and officially opens its doors at 7 p.m., but business really only gets going after 9 p.m. and typically lasts until dawn.¹² Outside the building’s street-level entrance, a large, spot-lit glass showcase features glossy photos of the club’s top-ranking hosts who entice women passing by with their seductive and reflective poses, oblique glances, gentle gazes, and sometimes ecstatic facial expressions.

Upon entering the club, customers descend like Alice in Wonderland into an opulently decorated open set, with gold-colored chandeliers, red carpet, mirrored walls, and neatly arranged marble-like tables in rows separated by various objects such as gold-painted sphinxes and lions. A dance floor is set in front of a band playing live music. The

¹² The current Entertainment and Amusement Trade Law in Japan forbids host clubs to operate between midnight and sunrise in order to eliminate “unhealthy” sexual encounters. Nonetheless, the host business prospers during those illegal hours and silent approval is given by the authorities.

splendid setting connotes glittering Las Vegas casino rooms or *shakokai*, a ‘sophisticated’ society where dressed-up men and women socialize. The smooth, glossy, superficial atmosphere derived from the club’s décor, the hosts’ polished etiquette, and dressed-up female clients renders the host club space otherworldly in contrast to the world outside.

Shin explained that the club’s expensive image differentiates *Fantasy* from other “sleazy” small clubs.¹³ On this particular Saturday night, nearly every table was filled with female clients and their hosts. Looking at the rich- and beautiful-looking clientele, I felt completely inadequate. This sense of inadequacy was, I learned, a common feeling that many women in the club shared. Even Sachiko, a female client in her 40s and mother of two daughters, who had spent more than seventy million yen of her husband’s insurance money (roughly 700,000 US dollars) over three years, told me that she felt inadequate because she neither thought she belonged to the upper class nor wore expensive designer clothes. In this respect, affect is not a thing or a product that *something* like a host club space externally stimulates or *someone* like a host creates for a customer. It is rather an effect of how she positions herself in relation to *and* interaction with them as signs. As Sachiko’s case (and mine) exemplifies, the positionality is then neither determined nor fixed by the actual degree of social, economic, and cultural capital

¹³ Host clubs are largely divided into two types based on the size of business floor and the number of employees: the so-called “big box” (*ōbako*) and “small box” (*kobako*). The former has a dance space with live music and employs over 50 hosts like *Fantasy*, whereas the latter usually has only a karaoke set with no live music and employs at most 20 to 30 hosts. Majority of the host clubs in Kabuki-chō are the small ones. There are only a handful of “big” ones due to the necessary expenses. The table charge and prices of food and drinks are set higher at the big clubs. The minimum charge at a small club would be roughly 15,000-20,000 yen for a night, whereas it would be about 25,000-30,000 yen at *Fantasy*. Because of the price, female clients who visit *Fantasy* expect better service in return.

one owns; rather, affect is reflectively shifting as the positionality changes depending upon signification practices of (inter)relational contexts.

Once I was seated, Shin smoothly sat down next to me and immediately started up a conversation. “How are you doing? What do you think of the club?” Meanwhile, two helper hosts greeted me and sat down on small chairs on the other side of the table to make alcoholic beverages and keep the conversation going. They quickly lightened the mood and established a friendly atmosphere. Another helper host appeared to carefully lay a lace napkin on my lap and provide a steaming towel. All hosts in the club offered a seductive masculine image — fit, tanned, and exceptionally well-groomed. Shin, for instance, was average in height, but had a lean body, smooth facial skin, and a narrow nose, thin red lips, and neatly set short hair. He wore a dark navy suit with a three-button jacket over a white and light blue striped shirt with a salmon pink tie. His suit fit perfectly, without any noticeable dust or wrinkles, and his smooth hands and manicured fingernails disassociated him from dirt, sweat, and hardship. He did not smoke.

In contrast, one of the helper hosts at the table looked much wilder and athletic. He was in his mid 20s and wore a casual dark brown suit coordinated with a brown shirt and dark orange tie. He introduced himself as a surfer. His tall and athletic figure, tanned skin, lightly set medium-long brown hair, and gold chain bracelet associated him with the iconic image of surfers. However, his appearance, as well as Shin’s, seemed to be carefully sanitized so that he wouldn’t look sweaty, rough, or illiterate. Like the club’s décor, hosts’ appearances are carefully constructed so as to present themselves as phantasmic objects through which their clients evoke certain images and associate the images with their fantasized romance. In the host club, the exchange of signs creates

meanings and manipulates affect through the cooperative interactivities between clients and their hosts.

Once alcohol was served to everyone at the table, I was given a toast. Since the customer is responsible for paying for the entire table, they also individually said to me, “*itadakimasu*” (thank you). Despite the casual atmosphere, I was nervous in the beginning because I didn’t understand the rituals in the club. Mild intoxication from alcohol consumption and hosts’ witty talk, however, soon broke the ice. “What is your name?” asked a host. “Akiko,” I replied. “No wonder you are pretty! Women named Akiko tend to be beautiful. Haven’t you ever been told that you look like a TV announcer?” “Um . . . , no, not really,” I said. “You know, the announcer in a local TV station, who has the unsophisticated beauty of the rural area!” Everyone burst into laughter. Harmless and meaningless conversation further kept up the lively atmosphere.

Later I learned from other hosts that such blandishments and flattery was a business technique hosts often used. They told me that the key is to elevate a person to the summit of praise and then let her drop in order to harmlessly please and amuse her. Unlike excessive flattery that sometimes annoys or disgusts a customer, the technique allows the host to leave her an aftertaste tinged with subtle pleasure. Although I didn’t pay much attention to the flutter directed toward me, I remember that I didn’t think the remarks were mean or rude but rather felt pleased. Thus, hosts’ flattery is a form of affective labor that has elevated my positionality and created my pleasant feeling by covertly guiding me to associate with the socially popularized image of the female announcer. To put differently, the host’ affective labor that manipulates signs created an arbitrary meaning—I am an ideal woman—and flattered me.

Hosts' affective labor consists of not only speech acts but also attentive service. While listening to the entertaining talk, I looked around the club. At any given table, four to five hosts surrounded one or two females. The hosts made sure that drinks were always fresh and food was served on small plates. This attentiveness was also highly stylized. If a woman stretched her hand to reach for a cigarette, for example, a host would reach for his lighter and flip it open elegantly with quick and smooth finger movements and lay it on his palm while he waited for her, all in one motion. Helper hosts immediately replaced the ashtray with a clean one once she had finished smoking her cigarette. They constantly removed empty bottles and dirty dishes to keep the table clean. They made every effort to treat women as extraordinary VIPs. The extraordinariness is illuminated in contrast to women's day-to-day life experiences. Whether it is at home or at work, it is usually 'women's work' to serve food and drinks, make sure that family members, colleagues, or customers at the table are taken care of, and to clean the table (see Kondo 1990). The artful servitude of hosts inverts expected gender expectations for Japanese women and heightens their sense of self-importance, as several female clients commented in my interviews. In the sign-laden atmosphere of the host club, even the most prosaic gesture cannot be overlooked, as it is usually packed with significance and meaning. In the act of providing the cigarette light, for instance, a symbolic power hierarchy was observed: A person of inferior status exhibiting exaggerated servility to a person of superior status, ala a scene in a gangster movie. Sachiko, the widowed mother, told me that hosts' fastidious servitude provided her with a feeling of freedom and satisfaction since she felt that she had been always a caretaker in her life. Akemi, a sex worker in her forties, praised hosts for their attentiveness in comparison to the majority of Japanese men, and stressed that

the host's attitude made her feel like a princess. Again, host's affective labor signifies inverted gender roles and hierarchy that evokes and drives their clients' sense of self-importance and freedom, as well as feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. Thus, the host's affective labor is a form of production of signs and meanings through strategic speech and body acts to provoke certain affect, and consume it. In short, the affective labor is both productive and consumptive simultaneously.

Host's affective labor also serves to blur the line between the commercial and the noncommercial and complicates the host-client relationships. One of better examples is hosts' intentionally personalized conversation as part of their affective labor that confuses a client as to her hosts' intention. Behind their utterances and questions, is it commercial or personal? Hosts' seemingly unconcerned questions and casual statements seem to be all for their business purposes in the commercial space of the host club. Nonetheless, their apparently "genuine" interest in their clients as women or persons in the conversational interactions undermines this suspicion. The indeterminacy of whether their intentions are commercial or noncommercial is something that is never completely resolved.

Noticing that I was looking around and not paying attention to the conversation at the table, hosts began to alternately ask me personal questions. Here I will juxtapose the dialogue I had with the hosts with the actual subtext of the conversation as I simultaneously deconstructed it. I wish to note the indeterminate distinctions that casual utterances in personalized conversations can create between commercial and noncommercial natures.

Shin: Do you like drinking? How often do you drink?

Myself: Well, not much. I don't dislike drinking, but I don't drink much, either.

I suspect that Shin was trying to find out if I would be a customer who would repeatedly visit the club. If a customer dislikes drinking, there is no point for her to visit the club and spend money unless she were "in love" with her host. Although my answer was honest about my alcohol consumption, I admit that the answer was more or less strategically ambivalent because I didn't want them to have excessive expectation of me, but at the same time I didn't want to lose their cooperation for my research, either.

Shin: That's best for girls. It is ugly for them to drink too much and get awfully drunk, isn't it?

I thought his response was similarly strategic to mask his intention of asking these potentially loaded questions. He simply responded in general terms to my vague answer so as to maintain his courteous engagement in the conversation. The surfer host, Natsuki, asked next:

Natsuki: Where do you live?

This innocuous question could be an inquiry about my social and economic capital. Had I said that I lived in Roppongi, the newly developed upscale neighborhood, I am sure that I would have impressed them. Since the host club is a space where customers enjoy

playing the game of signs, some fabricate another self and hosts pretend as if they believe in them. For my part I honestly answered:

Myself: I live in Shinjuku.

Natsuki: Wow, do you?

He sounded impressed. The image of Shinjuku is not as wealthy and sophisticated as other well-known locations in Tokyo like Denenchōfu, Aoyama, and Daikanyama, but due to its centrality Shinjuku is still expensive to live in compared to other parts of Tokyo. He continued:

Natsuki: What kind of structure does the housing have?

Myself: What do you mean?

Natsuki: Is it an apartment or a house?

Myself: Oh, it's an apartment.

Natsuki: How many rooms does it have?

Myself: It's just 1K (one room and kitchen).

I again wondered if these questions were intended to assess my assets, lifestyle, and family situation. It was, however, hard to tell why he asked about my housing in such detail. But, if I asked him why, I thought that I might ruin the conversational flow or that he would just say he was interested in moving to Shinjuku. Another helper host, Yuji, then interjected:

Yuji: What do you usually do?

Myself: Well, I am still a student and researching about host clubs.

Yuji: So, do you write reports and essays?

Myself: Yeah, something like that...

Yuji: That is a luxurious lifestyle, isn't it? You must enjoy afternoon tea every day. What kind of sweets did you eat today?

They could guess my consumption patterns and lifestyle based on the kind of confectionery I ate and whether I bought it at a high-end department store, a widely known confectionery store, or a local supermarket because these commodity signs classify myself in Japan's postindustrial consumer society. I didn't want to reveal my financial condition and said:

Myself: Oh, I just had a chocolate bar.

The hosts at the table broke into laughter.

I said so even though I didn't have the "afternoon tea" because I felt obligated to say something to keep the conversation going.

Here, I must note my positionality as a researcher (rather than as a client) that shaped my conceptualization of the conversational exchange. With a little knowledge from my preliminary research about the host club business, I assumed that there was

some intentionality behind hosts' speech and body acts and constantly tried to analyze the underlying messages. I presumed that everything they said and did was a business decision. On the other hand, I also need to note another aspect of my experience as a client. Hosts' highly personalized questions and apparent interest in my answers made me feel as if they were interested in me as a person rather than as a potential client. Asking personal questions signifies his/her intention to get to know the interlocutor better professionally, personally, and commercially, particularly in the service economy. The ambivalence of tempo-spatiality in the host club—the personalized interactions taking place in the commercial setting— confused me as to whether their displays of interest were commercial or personal. The experience was particularly confusing because unlike a legal office or a hospital, the host club is a consumer space where no discrete professional treatment but rather romantic fantasy, intimate relationships, and personal services themselves are the commodities. As a result, some women interpret these indeterminate encounters as fateful and fall in love with their hosts as I will further detail below. I do not intend to bifurcate women's interpretation patterns into either business assumptions or romantic beliefs, but I do wish to highlight the nebulous nature of the interactivity that creates room for multiple interpretations.

While engaged in the Q & A session and trying to decode their intentions, I realized that Shin's left knee was slightly touching my right knee. I first thought that it was unintentional, and moved my leg slightly away. But the fabric of his pants kept touching mine again. I realized that Shin had inched slightly closer to me, and I could smell the cologne he was wearing. As the scent further intensified, the rubbing of fabric became a clear sense of touching when Shin turned around to me and directly spoke into

my ear amid the loud laughter and noise. He simply asked me, “Are you having a good time?” I just nodded with a smile. This trivial interaction, however, left a ticklish feeling in my ear and created a sense of secrecy and intimacy. Indeed, Shin’s affective labor, i.e., the act of whispering, catalyzed a sense of sharing something that “we” were withholding from the others at the table. Along with his cologne, knee touching, and whispering in my ear, however, other factors such as my sense of mild intoxication, the dim and noisy atmosphere in the club, and the presence of other helper hosts synthetically created an intimate feeling. Thus, host’s affective labor depends for its effect upon other interactive factors and sign codes.

It was approximately 1 a.m. when the music died down and many of the hosts started to walk toward the cashier. It was closing time for the club’s early business hours. Shin brought me a bill on a tray held with both hands as if it were a very important thing. The bill showed the total amount of only 5,000 yen. I felt that I had gotten a great deal even though I had paid five times as much as the retail price of what I had ordered on the table: a roughly seven-dollar bottle of *shōchū* (wheat liquor) and a couple bottles of mineral water. My contentment did not mean that I was satisfied with the service *per se*. It rather derived from a comparative sense. I felt good about the special rate knowing that the regular price for the same package would normally cost more than 20,000 yen. Handing me a receipt, Shin spontaneously asked, “Are you hungry at all?” I was at a loss for words. I wasn’t that hungry but I felt as if I could eat something. Shin asked me again, “Do you wanna have something light?” I just nodded since I couldn’t come up with a reason to say no. Shin grabbed my bag from the sofa and escorted me outside. All the

helper hosts followed us, and saw us off by deeply bowing and saying, “Thank you very much!” (*arigatōgozaimashita*).

Intensified Intimacy in the After Hour Activity

As much as hosts’ affective labor can create a feeling of ease and intimacy, feelings of intimacy are further intensified outside context of the host club, i.e., during so-called “*afutā*” (after hour activities). After leaving *Fantasy*, Shin took me to a casual style public bar (*izakaya*) in Kabuki-chō, where the prices were reasonable. Asked at the entrance if we preferred a counter or a regular table, Shin immediately chose the counter and told me that side-by-side seating enhanced proximity and promoted a relaxed mood compared to face-to-face seating. (Seating, I learned, was an important part of a host’s business technique.) Under the bright lights of the bar, Shin looked drunk. His eyes were reddish and watery, and his speech and movements were slow. “Are you drunk?” I asked. “Yes, I usually don’t drink this much. I feel special tonight. I feel good.” His response made me feel good. Making this kind of statement —“being with you is special and pleasant”— was another seduction technique that, like the seating arrangements, *an.an* had suggested to female readers to take advantage of and signify their special feeling to their romantic target. Shin’s table choice and statements mirrored what women were advised to do in order to seduce men. Nonetheless, Shin’s behavior appeared so spontaneous due to his smooth performance (if it was) and physical indication of “real” intoxication. He seemed much more relaxed, as if the weight of his work had been unloaded. That might have been the effect of my own affective labor and also his labor to make me feel at ease about the situation. Both of us had soft drinks to cool down and had

some fried shrimp, grilled fish, and salad. Once the food was served, however, Shin immediately divided it onto small plates and gave to me first. Since he was drunk and his hand was shaky serving the food with his chopsticks, I tried to help him. But he insisted, “Please go ahead and eat. Ladies first!”

Mindful of my role as a researcher, I asked if it was common for him to engage in after-hours activities with his clients. “Only when a client asks me or when I feel like doing it,” he said. While he answered in general terms, he might not have meant anything. Because of my ambivalent positionality as a researcher and a client on that night, however, I couldn’t help wondering what he wanted to do that tonight *with me* since I hadn’t asked. Shaking off my distracting thoughts, I continued to ask, “So, when do you feel it’s appropriate to have after hour activities?” “When I am interested in the woman and want to know her better,” Shin said. “What kind of persons do you tend to be interested in?” “Well, I like a person who has something missing in myself such as ... intelligence,” he said. Shin looked toward me and casually, yet semiseriously added, “I like an intelligent woman,” as if to observe my reaction. I was at a loss for words. It was one of the few moments when the division between researcher/client, occupational/emotive motive, and the truthful/pseudo reaction had collapsed. For a second, I wondered if he meant he liked me but then I thought he was a host after all, someone whom I should not be taking seriously. I jokingly said to him, “You were hungry, anyway.” Shin kept looking at me and teasingly said, “You don’t understand men’s minds, do you?” Although I wasn’t (and am not still) sure what he really meant, with my later research on hosts I learned such suggestive statements and gestures are part of the game of romance that hosts play. Instead of saying, “I like you,” as Shin did, they

would typically make generalized statements like, “I like a woman like you” and “You are my type” to subtly direct women to voluntarily (mis)understand and assume that he likes her. Shin’s phrase, “a man’s mind,” would be another example of carefully created ambivalence in both general and personal terms: it could be interpreted as both “women in general do not understand men” and “You don’t understand my mind.” Hosts use this uncertainty and ambivalence to guide women to enhance their imaginative romance because, as Baudrillard, among others, argues, the imaginative romance is more romantic than the real one (Baudrillard 1979: 12).

Trying to change the topic, I asked Shin about his hosting experience. He confessed that he had lost a few clients recently, and I asked why. He said that probably he had become too busy to pay personal attention to his clients after being promoted to *kanbu* (a chief). He sighed and quietly said to me, “It is such a crucial time for me to keep the position, you know?” I was glad that he shared his vulnerability with me because his “honest” voice was valuable as a friend as well as a researcher. At the same time, I also wondered whether he intended to evoke my sympathy and lead me to support him as a client. My research and his business interests evolved around friendship and intimacy that again blurred the distinction between a “true” and “calculated” relationship. I could clarify myself as either a researcher or a potential client. I was, however, afraid of losing his interest in the “relationship” I needed for my research. Much like the hosts I was bent on researching, my own equivocation was equally calculated.

Once he finished his stories about his hosting, romantic, and life experiences, he suddenly grabbed my left wrist and brought it toward his chest. It was so sudden that I didn’t know how to react. I just felt the warm, smooth, and soft skin of his hand against

my wrist. He looked at my wristwatch asked what time it was. Then he looked at me, saying, “Oh, it’s past 3 o’clock. Shall we go?” I nodded. Shin added, “By the way, this watch is nice. Who is the designer?” I said, “Oh, it’s just a fashion-label watch,” while he kept holding my wrist. I noticed that my sensory attention was concentrated on my wrist and the pleasant tension created a feeling of intimacy. Again, “touching” is a common seduction technique in Japan and other cultures. Attendant with the side-by-side seating arrangement that allows ‘natural’ touching on the arm and knee, for example, *an.an* stresses that the effect of touching lies in drawing attention to the adjoined body part that evokes physical and mental proximity and by extension erotic passion (*an.an* 2005: 24). Based on hosts’ interpretations of Shin’s moves in my interview research afterward, I now think that his actions had at least four related but discrete functions: He literally wanted to know the time; he concomitantly checked my wristwatch to assess my financial capability; he also attempted to evoke my intimate feelings by touching, and/or he indirectly tried to gauge my reaction to see if I wanted to stay with him for the rest of night. His single act had multiple functions and meanings that could have proliferated with a variety of possible combinations.

Meanwhile, the waiter brought us the bill. It was about 4,000 yen. I tried to pull out my wallet, but he stopped me. “It’s on me. This is something I wanted to do. So, ...” He wouldn’t let me pay. This was, as I learned later, another hosting technique that confused business activity for personal ‘dating.’ For hosts, paying a small amount of money outside the club is a gesture to reciprocate their clients’ favor and also a business investment for later high returns in the host club, where clients are fully in charge of paying. This act whereby a host pays even a small amount of money for his clients

confuses clients' perception as to whether their relationship is commercial or noncommercial. This is because in the act of paying inside and outside the host club for the time and "service" the relationship is demarcated as commercial. In particular, the commercial aspect is highlighted in contrast to the pervasive social expectation that men pay in dating or at least split the cost.¹⁴ If women pay, it is an indication that they are well off and can "buy" men. Therefore, once hosts pay for their clients, the act of hosts' paying causes conceptual slippage that turns acts of commercial purpose into fulfillment of a socially expected men's role. Thereby, their clients become confused about whether their relationships are commercial or not.

Some women addressed this confusion. A woman in her 50s said to me that she believed that her host thought of her as special because he invited her out for a dinner and paid for the meal. In her mind, when out with hosts women are supposed to pay because they are the clients. Because of this assumption, when her host pays even small bills, the relationship becomes ambiguous to her. For a female client who wants to be thought of as special and wishes the relationship were for real, men paying is selectively highlighted to mask the fact that she pays the big bills at the host club.

Once out of the pub, it was drizzling. Shin said that he would help me find a taxi. We started to walk without umbrellas. My sandals got wet and I couldn't keep up with

¹⁴ The gendered expectation has been changing in concomitance with the increase in Japanese women's disposable income, and more couples split their dating costs. Nonetheless, the gendered social expectation still remains in a more nuanced form. For example, it has become pretty common to go Dutch with pretty much everything except the cost of the so-called "love hotel," where intimate and erotic interaction occurs. This is because men are still largely perceived as the ones who are in charge of sexual matters and play active roles in both sexual encounters and paying. If a woman pays for the hotel cost, that fact signifies that she is active in sexual matters and risks being labeled as a promiscuous woman.

Shin. I was walking one or two steps behind. We had no conversation. I then realized that we were walking on the so-called “hotel street” (*hoterugai*), where “love hotels” line both sides of the street for three blocks. The street reminded me of a host’s account I had read: hosts who did *makura eigyō* (literally pillow business, meaning to have sex with clients for money) intentionally walked the street to lure their clients into the hotels. I suddenly felt uncomfortable about the silence, and innocently resumed the conversation. “I’ve read a host’s account about the pillow business ...” “Oh, did you know about that? What did it say?” “Well, those who do pillow business intentionally walk on this street and those who don’t avoid here.” Having said that, I realized that the statement assumed Shin was a potential pillow host, looked down upon as a sex worker even among hosts themselves. Reservedly, Shin simply said, “These are just buildings and mean nothing to me.” I was impressed with his answer. Indeed, they were just buildings if all the conceptually and morally attached erotic signs and sexual meanings were removed from them. I still wondered why he took the route, however, despite the fact there were many other ways to get to the main street. Did he try to mask his real intentions? Or, did I interpret his accidental street choice intentionally by assuming that Shin was a potential pillow host? I asked Shin, “Why are we walking here?” “No special reason,” said he.

On the main street, Shin hailed a taxi for me. He pulled out my business card from his jacket and said, “I will call you. Please call me anytime if you have a question or anything.” I thanked him. His phrase, “I will call you,” echoed in my mind because he said earlier that he rarely called his clients. The everyday exchange in turn became significant in relation to his earlier remarks. I got in the taxi. Leaning his upper body

toward me, Shin said loudly, “Please come to research me again.” I smiled and said, “Bye.”

The next day, he sent a text message to my cell phone, asking me how my research was going. We had text message exchanges for a few days. I gradually came to notice that his personalized messages to me were replaced with the mass mail he sent to his clients indifferently. While his earlier personalized messages had referred to me by name and involved some back-and-forth dialogues, the mass-produced ones did not refer to me and tended to be shorter, general, and one-way. With the fewer and less personal messages that I received, the attachment and friendship I had felt earlier quickly faded. Shin stopped contacting me once he learned that I had officially received permission from *Fantasy*'s management to do research at the club. The permission allowed me to be less dependent on Shin and at the same time, it probably meant for him that I would no longer be a potential client who would spend money on him. While some scholars have argued that modern technology such as Internet and cell phone can facilitate feelings of intimacy despite actual physical distance, I would stress it is not about the technology itself that overcomes the distance. It is rather about the affective labor embodied in the frequency of *personalized* contact via the technology that creates intimate feelings, whether it is a commercial or non-commercial setting.

Various “Falling For” Hosts

Like any other human relationships, romance entails a processual set of mutual encounters, interests, and investments in the relationship. The process, however, tends to be taken for granted, whereas the spontaneous and accidental aspects tend to be

highlighted in dramatizations of romance among women I have interviewed. Their narratives on the relational development with their hosts tend to stress unpredictability and fatalism. This is because despite the well-known nature of the host club, female customers do not necessarily expect to actually fall for their hosts. As such, their actual encounters with hosts become “unexpected” against the backdrop of their general interest in the host clubs. As my own encounter with a host on the Kabuki-chō street showed, I was no exception. My research interest brought me to the district but I didn’t expect to meet a host on that night. Unintentional encounters with hosts were also a common theme among three other women I interviewed who regularly patronized *Fantasy*.

Sachiko, the 42-year-old widow and working mother of two daughters, for example, visited *Fantasy* with her friend after a year-end party on a December night in 2002. She told me that at the time she was just curious to see what kind of place a host club was since she saw some host club scenes on TV. She never imagined that she would become involved with a host as a widow and mother. In fact, she said to me, “I thought that flirting with hosts was really stupid (*bakabakashii*).” As a first time visitor, Sachiko had many hosts who came to introduce themselves and gave her their business cards. Hikaru, a 29 year-old new host, was one of them. It was Hikaru who changed her original intention completely. Sachiko told me that she fell for him at first sight and added that he also seemed to feel the same way. She described that Hikaru sensed her feeling toward him immediately since she couldn’t stop keeping her eyes off him. She liked him because he didn’t look like a host at all and gave her a “clean” image. According to her, he wore a simple suit with his short black hair and looked very athletic. Although she wanted to get to know him better, his senior host eagerly approached her and intervened. The senior

host invited Sachiko for an after-hour activity and also brought along some other younger hosts including Hikaru. While he was seducing her, Sachiko said that she kept brief eye contact with Hikaru. In order to get rid of him, she suggested to him that she would pay to take him home by taxi since he was drunk. As soon as she took him home, she swung back to Kabuki-chō to see Hikaru. The obstacle the senior host created, Sachiko said, made her passionate about Hikaru, and the re-encounter with him intensified her feelings toward him. She went on to visit *Fantasy* to see Hikaru twice a week and helped him become a top-ranking host within a few months. Sachiko said, “If Hikaru wasn't at the club, I wouldn't go there. I like him as a person, a person who happened to be a host at that moment.”

Not all clients, however, have had a dramatic encounter with a host like Sachiko. Lisa, a 33-year-old divorced mother of two sons, for instance, also faced an “obstacle” but took a different approach. She and her neighborhood friends decided to visit a nearby host club one night in a Tokyo suburb to enjoy themselves. She simply designated a young host since she thought all hosts were more or less the same. But she soon became attracted to Koji, a tall and senior host, who she thought sincerely listened to her. She wanted to, but couldn't, replace her designated host with Koji because of the monogamous designation system in the club. She followed the rules and tried to enjoy her short conversations with Koji when she visited the club once a week or so. Three months later, she was able to designate Koji because her host quit. Since then, she has been a client of Koji's for three years. Lisa told me that her relationship with Koji is more like friendship since Koji has been very supportive when she has had troubles in her marriage with her ex-husband, who was addicted to gambling. Her female friends were

too busy for their own childrearing to consult with her concerns, she said, whereas Koji was always there. She is now a single mother and cannot afford to visit the host club frequently. Koji, however, still maintains the friendship, which Lisa appreciates, but is wary of validating his feelings for fear of furthering developing the relationship while she is in financial distress. For her, things have just happened for a reason. She does not feel that she has done much and comments, “Maybe it is fate, the fate that things happen as they are meant to happen.”

Like Lisa, Fumi, a single and self-employed sales woman in her mid-40s, ended up designating a host who was not her first choice. A good friend of hers took Fumi to *Fantasy* after her birthday party for the first time, and she was immediately attracted to her friend’s host, Tsutomu. She told me that Tsutomu took her breath away because he was her ideal type — a masculine, humorous, and warmhearted handsome man in his 30s. She had to give up him up, however, because her friend was in love with him and she didn’t want to disturb their friendship. Observing the radical transformation of her friend from a careless middle-aged woman to a young-looking and attractive woman because of her romance with Tsutomu, Fumi said that she also wanted to experience it for herself. Tsutomu introduced his friend and host, Daisuke, who was not her type. Even so, it was a way for her to maintain her close friendship with Tsutomu and enjoy group activities between the two couples. As time went on, however, Fumi told me that Daisuke’s eagerness and sincerity to have a serious romantic relationship gradually changed her feelings toward him. He showed how much he cared about her via telephone conversation, text messages, and through his friend, Tsutomu. Although she didn’t take him seriously in the beginning, she told me that she was eventually convinced that he was

serious. Since then, she became his “girlfriend” and helped him become a top-ranking host.

While all of these three women I interviewed somehow got interested in the host club scene, none of them originally expected themselves to actually become romantically entangled with hosts. Sachiko and Lisa, for example, perceived that flirtation in the host club was a waste of time and individual hosts were indifferent. Even Fumi, who envied her friend’s drastic makeover, indicated that she was interested in her own transformation rather than romance with a host itself. Interestingly, Sachiko and Fumi’s narratives suggest that paying for romance is either “wasteful” or instrumental in getting something else but romance *per se*. I will discuss women’s motives further in Chapter 5. The intentional distancing of the self from the game of romance paradoxically creates exceptionalism. For Sachiko, Hikaru was not like a host and for Lisa, Koji was a distinctively caring person among indifferent hosts. In addition to the exceptionalism, some sort of “obstacle” enhanced their feelings toward their hosts and dismantled their resistance to the idea of romance in exchange for money. In the consumer space of the host club, where customers supposedly enjoy fantasies, these customers were constrained still by social obligations and ethics such as friendship, hierarchy at work, and the club’s rules. These socially created obstacles, I would argue, stimulated the female clients’ affect and made them passionate about their relationships and appreciative of even trivial and limited interactions. Furthermore, the social aspect in the commercial environment blurs the line between everyday reality and fantasy, and socioeconomic and emotional motives. In short, “true” and commercialized romance becomes inseparable. Thus, the indeterminate tension between the conceptually produced exceptionality and the

externally imposed constraints intensifies the sense of intimacy and leads the client to make the relationship with the host meaningful and real to them despite their original intention.

Chapter Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I argued that the affective self, who provides affective labor and manipulates the other's affect to entice him/her into 'freely' acting for both ends, is a central feature for neoliberal governmentality in a postindustrial service-intensive society. Along with Japanese governmental programs to expand the postindustrial service-based industry in the new millennium, the affective labor in extensive interpersonal contacts would be in greater demand in the labor and consumer markets. In this respect, the personalized interaction in such a commercial area as the host club provides a unique window into the fluid and indeterminate interactivity that undermines dichotomies between instrumental and emotive acts, commercial and "true" caring, and phantasmal and real relationships. Because of its ambivalent nature, affective labor could be exploited by the other (clients, employers, and by extension national policy makers). Likewise, however, it also has the seductive potential to manipulate the other, mobilize the other's assets, and make greater surplus for personal gain. In other words, affective labor potentially triggers speculation in the production of phantasmic or hyper-real affect.

Indeed, such affective labor can be used for dishonest trading, too. The so-called "*furikome sagi*" (money transfer fraud) has become a nationwide social issue in Japan since 2003. The scam, which is well plotted out, takes advantage of familial concerns and

affections to swindle money. A typical plot goes something like this: a victim, who tends to be a woman or an elderly person at home alone, receives a call from the “police,” a “lawyer,” or a “gangster,” who claims that her/his beloved husband, child, or grandchild is in a big trouble because they have caused by an awful traffic accident, misappropriation, or other misbehavior. An authoritative voice over the phone persuasively convinces the victim to transfer money to a bank account immediately so that he/she can “rescue” the family from the criminal and legal charges. The victim even has the “family member” on the phone, who apologizes and begs for help in an uncontrollably groaning and lamenting voice. The unexpected conversation usually compels the victim to go to the bank immediately without consulting anyone. The fraud, which has increased rapidly since 2003, counted 21,612 reported cases and damage amounted to 25.1 billion yen (equivalent to 250 million U.S. dollars) in 2005 (*The 2006 White Paper on Crime*).¹⁵ Despite improved social awareness and preventive efforts by the National Police Agency, the problem continues to get worse because the scam has increased in sophistication. In addition, similar to many host club clients, the victims in TV interviews insisted that they knew about the fraud but never expected that they would actually become victimized. But the telephone conversation they had sounded so real and so disturbing that they ended up believing in and involving themselves in the fabrication.

I do not mean to imply that the host club business is a swindle or Japan’s service industry is dishonest and manipulative. Nonetheless, I do highlight the scheme that

¹⁵ According to the National Police Agency in Japan, the reported *furikome sagi* were 3,807 and damage amounted to over 4.3 billion yen in 2003. *The 2006 White Paper on Crime*. 2006. The Ministry of Justice. <http://www.moj.go.jp/HOUSO/2006/hk1_1.html> accessed on July 21, 2007.

affective labor gears individual affect toward economic transactions, whether for a personal, commercial, and criminal purpose. In this sense, I am not concerned about the nature of ambivalent affective labor and its impact on social relations, production and consumption, and value making in Japan's service-based postindustrial society. While affective spells in transient interactions like fraud are soon broken, interactive relationships for extended periods between service provider and recipient might even muddy the discrete line of legality and illegality since the participant, who is part of the cooperative interactivity, is in the position of judging and reporting a transaction if it is criminal. With this in mind, hosts' affective labor that sustains ambivalence works to avoid illegal claims by leaving room for the client to make her own decisions and voluntarily act them out. In such a way, the conduct of conduct is based on not forceful coercion but suggestive guidance in the name of 'freedom,' and remains in the realm of legality.

The ambiguity of affective labor, which has multiple functions as part of the creation of affect, manipulation of the other's acts, and maintenance of legality, is largely overlooked in mass mediated representations of hosts and taken for granted among female clients. As the women above exemplify, their narratives about their relationships with hosts tend to stress the accidental nature of their encounters and they perceive hosts' affective labor not as work or business but as an expression of their passionate feeling, caring personality, and love. I argue that this perception is exactly the effect of the host's affective labor that is *work*, yet is not allowed to look as such. In short, the labor consists of highly calculated acts and learned skills that are manipulated to look spontaneous and unintentional. In the next chapter, I will discuss what motivates hosts to acquire such

acting skills and demonstrate how the skills are counted as human capital — the capital that allows them the opportunity to dream of upward class mobility via mobilizing their female clients' affect and economic assets.

CHAPTER 4: NEOLIBERAL CLASS STRUGGLE: SELF-NARRATED ENTREPRENEUR HOSTS VIA COMMODIFYING THE SELF

Hosts are the commodities. Here [in the host club] hosts have nothing particular to sell except outrageously inflated drinks and food. So, if we provide or sell something, that's ourselves. (Hide, a 33-year-old host and former computer salesman).

[Unlike salarymen] hosts are more like self-employed entrepreneurs who simply rent the host club space to do their own business (Daisuke, a 34 year-old host and ex bar owner).

If asked, hosts usually say, "Hosting is an occupation to sell dreams" (yume wo uru shigoto). For those who want us to allow them to dream, we become a cool guy, a funny person, a romantic lover, and an interlocutor. You name it (Yoshi, a 24 year-old host and former part-time worker).

What is a host? This is a somewhat misleading question. In the context of the hosting business, which by its proximity to Japan's normative sex industry is often associated with the sordid underground of gangsters and female exploitation, the typical answer offered by the media and other commentators is that hosts are akin to male geishas or prostitutes, professional entertainers, or barely distinguishable from gigolos (*Associated Press* 1996; *Marketplace Radio* 2003). Such reactionary, stereotypical categorization reflects not only the novelty and fascination the public has about men "entertaining" women, but also a general unease about the seemingly inverted traditional sex roles, women's speculative spending during the nation's prolonged economic downturn, and the subversive threat it represents to Japan's conventionally hegemonic salaryman-centered corporate system. As I argued earlier, the host club phenomenon extends beyond what is new or faddish.

When I asked hosts to define themselves, the most common responses I got were: “The host himself is a commodity” (*jibun ga shōhin*) and “A host is like a self-employed entrepreneur (*kojin jigyōnushi*).” Indeed, the more I talked with hosts and learned about what they do and how they define their work, I gradually came to understand that hosts occupy a dual self—the self as a commodity *and* entrepreneurial salesman. The former is the self/body that hosts beautify and incorporate stylistic movements to appeal to potential female clients. The latter is the embodied person who maneuvers the commodity self/body as a vehicle to manipulate the customer’s affect and stimulate their desire to ‘buy’ a time and service that it provides. These two selves are inseparable and oftentimes unclear. But together they clearly define not only the stage performance that they carefully rehearse and act out in the host club but also the ambivalent nature of the neoliberal self in Japan’s affect economy.

Hosts’ dual sense of self as both an enterprise and an entrepreneur echoes Foucault’s theorization of human capital under neoliberal governmentality. Foucault describes that human capital consists of two components: “an inborn physical-genetic predisposition and the entirety of skills that has been acquired as the result of ‘investments’ in the corresponding stimuli: nutrition, education, training and also love, affection, etc.” (Lemke 2001: 199; also Gordon 1991: 44). Hosts exemplify this model and indicate that their work is not merely a mechanical labor based on a given instruction and discipline; their work builds on prior investments and the use of acquired skills, sensibilities, and aesthetics that produce affective values and yields revenues on human capital. As Colin Gordon states, the individual is “in a novel sense not just an enterprise, but the entrepreneur of himself” (Gordon 1991: 44). As a result, an individuals’ human

capital enables him/herself to become “autonomous entrepreneurs with full responsibility for their own investment decisions and endeavoring to produce surplus value” (Lemke 2001: 199).

While Foucault’s notion of human capital is helpful to understand host’s dual sense of the body/self, what counts as human capital is situated in the socio-historically specific context and hosts’ subjectivity formation is much more complex than the binary model. Since hosting is a corporate business aimed at providing affective labor for consumers, hosts have triangular relationships and attempt to seduce female clients into spending (and investing) money on them, while the club management seduces hosts into being voluntarily exploitable. In addition, to sell dreams or seduce women, hosts are expected to willingly objectify themselves and play whatever role their clients want them to (as Yoshi’s above quote demonstrates). In Chapter 2, I discussed how Japanese women’s expectations for their counterparts caught men in a triple bind as the objectified subject, who is expected to be a sensitive yet a leader, but not domineering. I also traced how affect such as romance has reached commodity status and men’s affective labor has become socio-economically valuable at the nexus of Japan’s socioeconomic transformation, postindustrial consumer culture, and state of gender relationships. Chapter 3 illustrated how host’s affective labor, which is highly calculated to look spontaneous, blurs the line between economic and emotional motives and commercial and “true” relationships. In this chapter, I focus on male hosts and explore how they cope with the complex whirl of the paradoxical signs and relations.

More specifically, this chapter examines the ways that hosts engage in class struggle through the affect economy. Some neoliberal critics have pointed out that

diversified self-expression in the neoliberal market economy undermines class-consciousness despite expanding income inequality (Brown 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 298; 301; Harvey 2005). For example, Jean and John Comaroff state, “[A]s neoliberalism conditions render ever more obscure the rooting of inequality in structures of production, as work gives way to the mechanical solidarities of ‘identity’ in constructing selfhood and social being, class comes to be understood, in both popular and scholarly discourse, as yet another personal trait or lifestyle choice” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 306). They perceive that the concept of class becomes ever more intractable and fundamental, and “captures neither the complex construction of contemporary experience nor the crises of social reproduction” (Ibid). I argue against such a view and demonstrate how hosts have a keen sense of class-distinction. Nonetheless, they do not intend to erase class markers or dismantle social inequality; rather they glorify the handful of successes and the winners of socioeconomic competition and intend themselves to scale the ladder within the existing capitalist market system.

I argue that such a paradox—being aware of social inequality and yet eagerly sustaining it—is made imaginable and practicable in the neoliberal social ethos of entrepreneurship and future-oriented profitability in Japan. I also argue that the affective speculation in the host club is an effect of the global economic shift toward less tangible ways of accumulating capital. Along with the transformation to greater flexibility in modes of production, accumulation of capital has been intensified in such industries as finance, information, and service where speculation creates greater market values (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Tsing 2000). In the speculative economy, such skills or

human capital as aesthetization, dramatization, and sensual appeal, i.e., the affective labor that creates and manipulates excitement, passion, and satisfaction, become instruments of value making and capital accumulation. In this respect the host club, I contend, is a microcosm of this global economic trend.

More succinctly, it has become an opportunity site for typically working-class Japanese young men to deploy their bodies and self-actualize a ‘luxurious’ lifestyle. In this regard, the affect economy of the hosting business provides them with the opportunity to acquire and propagate new techniques and skills for the purpose of dramatizing their marketplace (i.e., the host club) and seducing the other (i.e., their client). While seduction lies at the heart of any commercial enterprise, an attempt to mobilize consumptive labor, that is, the speculative spending consumers provide in an affect economy, creates greater surplus value because speculative value-making exceeds human labor capacity within the twenty-four-hour day (Joseph 2002: 41). Such mobilization entails what I refer to as the art of seduction, that is, a host’s creative use of aestheticized body, calculated moves, and strategic interactions to guide or affect the conduct of his clients to spend more money on him while at the same time satisfying their own fantasies and desires, as well as his ambition. I ultimately argue that the art of seduction is the pivot of such a speculative market activity as an affect economy in the host club.

The Opportunity Myth

Unlike other ‘ordinary’ ones, the host club job ads typically read, “Want self-motivated individuals. Education or career experience not required.” Club *Fantasy* also

extends its employment opportunity to pretty much anyone as long as one is a male Japanese who has a ‘decent’ and youthful look.¹⁶ In the club, a brutal monthly sales competition provokes a survival-of-the-fittest battle over a scarce resource—wealthy women—and the resulting sales solely determines hosts’ wages and rank. Due to the harsh competition nearly one-third of new hosts quit their jobs within six months of starting work. Nonetheless, the host club does not run short of hosts. *Fantasy* employs over 90 hosts ranging in age from their early 20s to 60s. For many of them, the host club represents an opportunity to achieve upward mobility despite coming from a lower social background.

Koji, a 25-year-old veteran host and ex-construction worker, is a case in point. Originally from Hokkaido, in the northernmost part of Japan, he moved to Tokyo when he was sixteen after dropping out of high school. He told me that he was a promising basketball player but he injured his knee, shutting down his future as a player. He needed a new environment to start over his life. He said he imagined Tokyo as the ideal place to have an urban city life filled with limitless opportunities and freedom; but he soon found that he had limited employment opportunities with his educational background and no work experience. While employed at a construction site, he learned about the hosting business from his female friend who told him that he would become a popular host due to his height, ‘pretty’ face, sense of humor, and likable personality. She took him to a suburban Tokyo host club, which was, as he said, a completely different world from his dirty, sweaty, and physical working environment. “Looking at the number one host there and learning that his monthly wages were over two million yen, I thought there was a

¹⁶ *Fantasy* limits its employment to Japanese citizens. The owner explained the reason was to avoid unnecessary problems such as illegal immigration and language barrier.

chance I could try myself here (*jibun wo tamesu chansu*).” Koji said, He started working at the host club at age 17. (He lied about his age, saying he was 19.) For him, hosting provided not only an employment opportunity but also a chance to “become a successful man who can afford to live in nice place, wear nice clothes, and drive a nice car.”

In contrast to Koji’s future-oriented motives, an older host I interviewed glorified his past success in the hosting business. Fifty-five year-old Mr. Minami, a number one host roughly thirty years ago, quit hosting and started his own bar with the money he earned in the club. His business, however, went bankrupt and he was forced to find another occupation. He soon found that he could do very little with his compulsory education and night work experience. Although he could have become a taxi driver or a factory worker, he said that he couldn’t imagine himself working for such low pay and rigid working hours. “Since I had tasted nectar from a flower (*amaimitsunoaji*) in the club, I couldn’t forget about it,” he said. “I just wanted that one more time before I retired.” His flower metaphor connotes easy money with a flexible work style, and idealizes the hosting job in comparison to blue-collar work. Mr. Minami, who earns the equivalent of about 2,200 dollars a month, confesses that he sometimes cannot sleep when he thinks about his advancing age. He has no family and little savings. He is not eligible for the national pension because he hasn’t paid into the system as the salaryman has. For Mr. Minami, the host club is a site where he embraces his past as a comeback opportunity.

Idealization of the hosting job is not limited to those who have working-class backgrounds. It has also extended to former white-collar salarymen with a college degree in the midst of Japan’s prolonged economic stagnation. Hide, a 33-year-old host with

college degrees from a third-tier university, used to work as a salesman for a computer company. He told me, however, that he was constantly living under the anxiety of being laid off and the pressure of working long hours. With the salaryman job, Hide said, “The future vision is bleak. Even if you are lucky to avoid getting laid off and work until retirement, you can still barely afford a house.” He decided to become a host when he saw a TV show about hosts who became overnight millionaires. “With hosting you are like the self-employed,” he explained. “The more you sell, the more you earn. It all depends upon self-motivation and effort. It’s not impossible to make over ten thousand dollars a month. I want to bet on the dream.” Ever since Japan’s economic situation started worsening in the 1990s, *Fantasy’s* Club Manager told me that increasing numbers of ex-salarymen had started working at the club. Former salarymen now comprise roughly one fourth of the hosts in *Fantasy*. Hide is not an exception but an example of those who eschew the supposedly stable salaryman-type employment to place all bets on the casino-like “opportunity” available at the host club.

Despite their different ages, these three hosts share some common characteristics with other hosts in terms of social background, attitudes, goals, and endeavors. The majority of hosts I met at *Fantasy* have a limited educational upbringing—many are high school dropouts—and have little hope of achieving socially-screened success in Japan’s highly stratified corporate-based economic system. Most arrived after working part-time jobs (as so-called *frītā*) in convenience stores and fast food restaurants, or as factory workers, construction workers, and salarymen at small-size (*chūshōkigyō*) corporations. A few hosts, who have prestigious university or college degrees, have created a special niche within the club to sell themselves as “intellectuals” (*interi* in Japanese). Hosts

generally view the host club as offering the chance to make easy money and achieve socioeconomic advancement. Dreaming of their chance at success, they fixate on their appearance, sales technique, skills of seduction and persuasion, and flair for the dramatic in order to enhance their marketability and desirability. All effort is focused on pleasing women and increasing monthly sales, culminating in the coveted ‘number one’ status—the sure path to a ‘luxurious’ future.

Several hosts I interviewed named Horie Takafumi, a former president and CEO of an Internet portal company called *Livedoor*, as their role model. Mr. Horie, who is in his mid-30s, launched his company when he was a college student and is Japan’s most celebrated, if not visionary, entrepreneur of the new Millennium. Although he was arrested for violating Japan’s stock exchange law in 2006 after a hostile takeover bid, his outspoken criticism and assertive manner in confronting Japan’s ‘old guard’ business establishment has captivated the public’s imagination and made him a symbol of what Japan’s new economy is capable of if only free market forces can be set loose. His chubby face, spiky hair and informal attire have set him apart from the septuagenarians who, until recently, have dominated Japanese business. (In a country where neckties are the norm for businessmen, he is frequently seen wearing T-shirts or unbuttoned collared shirts.) Former prime minister Koizumi, the architect of Japan’s so-called “restructuring without mercy” (*seiikinaki kaikaku*), enlisted Horie’s help in an attempt to privatize Japan’s postal system and spoke highly of Horie’s entrepreneurship that prioritized innovativeness, competitiveness, and monetary success, and challenged traditional Japanese business conventions such as respect for harmony, seniority, and consensus building. Several hosts told me that they wanted to become like Mr. Horie, and for them,

hosting is a suitable means of achieving what Horie has achieved—success, fame, and financial capital accumulated through hard work, luck, and speculative tactics.

In the host club, Japan's stock market for romance, hosts' body itself becomes an investment tool for mining what is possible. Hosts deploy their body to entice female clients into spending more money on them in direct relation to their desirability, capability, and market value. The result is quantified and evaluated by the monthly sales competition. Hosts dream of achieving "top-ranking" status and celebrity-like recognition in the club, and many fantasize about becoming business owners and eventually managing their own clubs. As such, the body itself is an integral part of an affect economy that allows hosts to fashion themselves as both commodities and entrepreneurs.

The very potentiality of the body as a vehicle, however, paradoxically enables the expansion of capitalist accumulation in the market economy (Anagnost 2004: 201). In the case of hosts, they are aware of their self-commodification and the myth of achieving wealth in the host club, and in this respect they are not trapped by any false consciousness. They rather 'voluntarily' subordinate themselves to the exploitative nature of their working conditions because they so strongly believe that if they can get lucky and meet the right woman —i.e., a wealthy woman—they too can get rich and live the life of their dreams. Such wealthy clients, called *futoi kyaku* ("fat customers"), are relatively rare. But to hosts who work excessively long hours in an attempt to make their own luck despite the fact that only a handful of hosts actually make a successful living in the hosting business the odds of hitting the jackpot are always one rich customer away. When asked what appealed to them most about hosting, many of the hosts I interviewed mentioned the casino-like nature of the job as a main reason. Indeed, many admitted to

gambling outside the club at baccarat, racetracks, Pachinko parlors, and other betting venues during their off-hours. Hosts, who are either speculative by choice or necessity, are fitting players of the affect economy, where the mode of accumulation of capital has become more intractable and imaginative in Japan's neoliberal socioeconomics.

One host I met at *Fantasy*, who asked to remain anonymous because he said his family did not approve of his occupation, admitted that he was a heavy gambler, and said that luck plays a big part in the hosting business. "There's a lot of cases where in one night you can get really rich or really broke," he said. The host recalled the time a customer walked into the club and turned a bottom-ranking host who was struggling into the number one host, spending over 100,000,000 yen on him. Three months later, the host quit because the woman had bought him everything he wanted. The host club showcases such successful stories and promotes itself as a land of opportunity for self-motivated individuals. Top hosts at *Fantasy* earn the equivalent of more than \$10,000 to \$20,000 dollars a month. In their birth months they typically rake in \$30,000 to \$50,000 by throwing a special birthday party in the club. Like celebrities, they draw attention in the club as they show off their consumption — expensive wristwatches, fashionable brand-named suits, and imported high-end European cars — that they have received from their clients as 'gifts.' Such opportunity is open to any ambitious and good-looking young male, as the host club job ads promise."

Thus for the typical working-class host, the host club represents a chance to exploit their human capital both as a commodity and a means to self-actualize their economic success. Indeed, for those who do not own means of production, commodification of physical, emotional, and sexual labor is not new in the history of

capitalism. Nonetheless, commodifying the self and at the same time pursuing a speculative style of earning in the name of entrepreneurship is, I argue, peculiar to postindustrial neoliberal capitalism. It is symptomatic of neoliberal ethics and values in Japan, where the nation's long-term social security, corporate welfare, and family-oriented way of life are gradually giving way to future-oriented profitability and individual-based entrepreneurial opportunity.

Such ethics and values entail individual self-motivation toward the futurity, which is not necessarily inherited in hosts or spontaneously provoked. It is, I argue, produced and manipulated in hierarchical tempo-spatial formation, numerical and visual reminders, and ritualistic events in the host club. In the following section, I will demonstrate how the host club space, which is presented as a fantasy world for female customers, simultaneously functions as both an opportunity site and battleground for hosts that stirs their pride, self-respect, and motivation for success and fame.

Topography of Self-Motivation

Ohayogozaimasu! The familiar Japanese morning greeting reverberates inside *Fantasy* around 6:30 p.m., when the new hosts with no sales start work for the day. Although it is evening, it is the beginning of a new day for those who sleep during the daytime. The club feels radically different at this hour. With bright incandescent lighting, evening news on the radio, and the emotionless faces of hosts, the usually splendid image of the club is missing. Like the exposed aftermath of a Las Vegas lounge act, the stage is laid bare with rickety lamps, worn-out sofas, and stained walls. A few of the newer hosts can be seen sweeping the floor, wiping tables, cleaning restrooms, replacing burnt-out

light bulbs, gluing broken pieces of decoration, and setting up tables before the club officially opens its doors at 7:30 p.m. A couple dozen more hosts gradually show up. When upbeat background music is turned up and the lights turned down ten minutes before opening time, the scene abruptly changes, replaced by a pleasant tension that runs throughout the club. Hosts quickly fasten their ties and fix their appearances. Some hosts reset their hair with perm dryers in front of the mirrors built into the walls. Others check their facial expressions, like stage actors prepping for a show. They wrinkle their eyebrows and loosen their lips as they rehearse their masculine poses and facial expressions and seductive smiles. All hosts make sure their ties are straight, their collars are even, and hair is perfectly set one more time before they sit down to wait for their clients. It's nearly showtime.

Showtime, however, differs based on the actor's monthly sales. At *Fantasy*, individual hosts' sales result determines not only their hierarchy and earnings but also starting time. When the club opens at 7:30, only a third of the hosts that work at the club are present. Since business really only gets going after 9 p.m., the top-ranking hosts enjoy a later start time. New hosts like Hide, for example, have to show up for work by 6:30 p.m. and do cleaning, set-up, and telephone operation. Those who are no longer new but have less than \$2,000 in monthly sales (like Mr. Minami) must start work by 7:00. They are exempted from major cleaning, but are supposed to assist the new hosts. Those in the \$3,000 monthly bracket, including Koji, begin at 7:30. They are free from having to clean. They come to the club to get ready for the evening's business. Those whose sales are in the range of \$3,000 to \$4,000 start work at 8:00, and those lucky individuals with more than \$4,000 in sales begin at 8:30. Hosts who have accumulated more than one

million yen (\$10,000) for two consecutive months (of which 2.5 million has been gone to the club) earn managerial status and enjoy the best hours, the 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. time slot. Usually, these veteran top-ranking hosts come to the club with their clients already in tow. This highly stratified pecking order based on sales, along with photo displays of top ranking hosts hung here and there on the walls inside and outside the club, embody and visualize the club's rigid hierarchy, a similarity shared with Japan's traditionally hierarchically organized culture, especially in the workplace.

But the similarity ends there. At *Fantasy*, age, social background, and job tenure don't matter. For hosts, only sales matter. As many hosts like to say, "This is a world where only results speaks for themselves" (*kekka ga monowoiu sekai*). The results-oriented mantra extends to the placement of timecards and constantly updated sales charts as well. The time cards are located nearby the front desk and are held in a rack in descending order — the top-selling host at the top and the lowest at the bottom. It is designed as if it were a physical reminder, particularly for the lower-ranked hosts who literally need to make more physical effort in picking up their cards, not to mention improving their sales. The rack is set up conveniently for the top-ranking hosts to easily pick up their time cards placed at their eye-level, whereas the lower-ranking hosts like Mr. Minami and Hide must bend over or squat down to reach their cards. Like the photo displays, the placement is also a visual reminder to each host of his ranking each time he punches in for work. As hosts turn around to walk toward the locker room, a sales chart attached on the sidewall comes into view. Again, hosts' names appear in descending order on the chart, with the names of top-ranking hosts at the eye-level, and the names of lower-ranked located way down. Each month the chart is updated weekly for the first

three weeks and daily for the final week, showing rank, sales amount, and designated numbers.

For hosts, the backstage sales ranking system is a constant reminder that their workplace is primarily a sales contest. There is no escape from the competitive atmosphere within the club. The men's room is no exception. The narrow toilet booth, which is located at the furthest corner from the entrance, is filled with the club owner's own handwritten business lessons. Highlighted lessons in red ink are placed at the eye level of hosts who use the urinal built in the wall. Lessons, for instance, say: "Quit the job immediately if you are not self-motivated!" "Don't become a loser!" and "Take advantage of even your own girlfriend until you have your own clients and sales." The owner's lessons extend to his business philosophy that emphasizes money, success, and fame. The philosophy at chest level says: "All money is equally honorable and has no distinction in its origin." "People and money follow success." "Believe in yourself and work hard until you achieve your success." These business lessons and philosophy leaves no room for mercy, redemption, and excuses. As hosts maintain, only results after all speaks for itself in the host club.

Even if a host turns his eyes away from these lessons, an itemized penalty system is prominently displayed on the side walls in the men's toilet. If a host is late to work, for example, he is penalized 500 yen (\$5) for every ten minutes he is tardy. If he has no client on Sundays and other selected dates, a 5,000 yen (\$50) penalty fee is deducted from his hourly wages. A host who violates the club's rules will be fired and his pay for that month will be confiscated. For a host like Hide who lives in Tokyo and earns a fixed wage of only 4,000 yen a night, the fines can be fatal. Those who have little sales with

finers typically earn less than \$1,500 dollars a month. They have already cut back their meals, transportation fees, and other living costs including their rent and everyday necessities. So, these penalty fees hurt the lower ranked hosts more than the top ranking hosts, whose earnings trivialize the 'small' fees. Since there is no room for negotiation or mercy from the host club management, the only way to deal with the penalty system is either following the rules or increasing sales. Most hosts, who struggle with the latter option, have very little choice but to strictly follow the rules.

These tempo-spatial formations alone do not solely determine hosts' self-motivated attitudes as hosts often complain about how much money the club saves out of the collection of fines. Hosts are motivated by more tangible rewards, i.e., money, and the special recognition that the top-ranking hosts enjoy. The club owner, a former host, claims that he knows how host's psychology works and says, "It is important to use whip and candy wisely." This business management strategy is best illustrated at the mandatory monthly meeting scheduled at 6 p.m. on the first day of the month. Starting with the club owner's speech, the highlight of the meeting is congratulating the top-selling host with a round of applause and rewards. He receives two to three brick-like envelopes filled with bundled Japanese yen bills. The envelopes literally stand straight on the table. Meanwhile, hosts ranked below the top 20 are not even called to the meeting. These hosts are ignored as the 'remainder' (*nokori no hitotachi*). They receive their cash payments later. After one meeting, a manager jokingly tosses one of the thinnest envelopes in the air, saying, "Look, it's so light it flies in the air like a piece of crap paper!" The host tries to catch it but doesn't, showing his embarrassment. The whole ritual separates a handful of winners from a horde of also-rans and revels in the disparity: the victorious

individuals are treated with respect and recognition while the rest are treated as worthless individuals who deserve humiliation.

The bifurcated distinction based on results-oriented competition, as well as the other forms of club management, provokes and heightens hosts' self-motivation, desire for success, passion for work, and avoidance of humiliation. The backstage arrangement of the host club thus works to self-motivate and maintain the status quo via a constant renewal and aiming for higher goals. A number one host I interviewed, Keisuke, confidently said to me, "I've been trying to never be satisfied with the present state and always aim at higher goals so as to keep myself highly motivated." Regardless of rank, most hosts I interviewed seemed charged with optimism. "Once I have become a host, I aim to become a number one host!" said another host. Despite the fact that most hosts fail to sustain a living hosting, the club's opportunity myth feeds a self-perpetuating cycle of competition and self-sacrifice among a seemingly inexhaustible supply of new recruits, who collectively generate a surplus profit for the host club. It is laissez-faire capitalism in its purest form.

The club's management strategy, legitimized by the opportunity myth, also encourages hosts to defer their satisfaction and ignore the club's harsh working conditions. Hide, a lower ranking host who makes less than \$2,000 a month including tips—two-thirds the salary of his previous job—describes his self-sacrifice as follows:

It is now a time [for me] to persevere for the time when a chance turns in my favor. Everyone has a chance. You just never know when you will have one. So, what I can do now is to do my best so as to make my own luck or self-actualize my chances (*chansu wo mononi suru*).

Hide regards his current struggles as an investment for his future. For that reason, he does not intend to withdraw or challenge the club's competitive sales ranking system because it would ruin his own chances at success, he said. Thus, chance plays a key role in hosts' class struggles by highlighting an imagined bright future within the hyper-competitive and top-down hierarchical social and club system. Their ethos means voluntarily motivating themselves within and sustaining the exploitative nature of the system.

Therefore, the host club is not merely a physical space that externally determines the actors' competitive behaviors and attitudes. It is also an affective space that evokes and arouses certain feelings, emotions, and imaginations among the actors, including the hosts, the club owner, and the manager. Within that space, the host club embodies ethos, logics, and motivations that those actors shape through their physical and affective interactions. In particular *Fantasy* is, as I showed, physically, affectively, and imaginatively formed as a competitive yet hopeful site, where individual dreams have a chance to be realized. Though each individual dream is slightly different, the similarly revolves around making money and becoming a success or winner in the eyes of peers. The dream is, as I will demonstrate in the following section, closely related to their identity formation that traverses along Japan's neoliberal market logic and situation in which socioeconomic restructuring and market logic functions.

Self-Narrated Entrepreneurs

Compared to Japan's dominant salaryman model and corporate system, hosts are pioneers in the neoliberal market economy. Though they admit their subordinated social

status in comparison to the salaryman, who in many ways embodies the notion of modernity itself in the context of globalizing neoliberalism, they don't feel inferior to them, either. Many hosts that I spoke with pity the salaryman, and devalue the unreasonable working hours, fixed salary, narrow responsibility, and lack of individuality attached to the salaryman ethic. In contrast, they highlight the freedom and potential they say they find in the hosting business: a flexible work style, pay based on performance, entrepreneurship, acquisition of people and business skills, and individual-based, results-oriented competition. Countering the built-in limitations posed by Japan's salaryman-centric economy, hosts take advantage of their freedom to succeed—or fail—in the club and actively construct themselves as self-employed entrepreneurs by narrating themselves as such and engaging in non-conventional work ethics.

Daisuke, a top-10 host at *Fantasy* and a former bar owner, juxtaposed hosts' experiences against that of the stereotypical salaryman image:

Salarymen in the subway train all look so worn out, don't they?
Their unhappiness must come from the routine, working all day long every day under someone else. [In contrast] hosts are blessed with flexibility and freedom. Hosts are more like self-employed entrepreneurs or professional entertainers who simply rent the host club space to do their own business.

The flip side of the glamorous money-making opportunity and creative freedom in the club is a highly competitive and ruthless monthly sales battle. The competition and sales ranking system creates a handful of winners while the less fortunate are collectively labeled as failures and blamed for their lack of creativity and effort. Lower ranking hosts typically make less than \$2,000 a month, including tips, which is barely enough to survive on in Tokyo. In such cases, while they must continually invest in their appearance

and stay up-to-date with the latest fashions and carry the latest cell phones, they usually cut back on other necessities. They eat obentō “boxed meals” purchased at convenience stores only once a day or at the club when a client orders food. They spend no money on their daytime clothes, wearing only suits and pajamas. Most mid-and lower-level hosts I interviewed share studio-style apartments with other hosts or friends and own little furniture and sometimes no television.

Despite the hardship they encounter, their strong desire for success and upward mobility results in hosts’ subjecting themselves to often desperate working conditions. Many of the hosts at *Fantasy* work near incessantly, staying up into the wee hours chain-smoking, binge drinking, and entertaining women so that they will make more orders and increase their monthly sales. They also provide intensified affective labor in hopes of landing wealthy clients and developing a relationship with them. Many hosts I interviewed admitted that they never took days off for fear of possibly missing their chance to meet such clients. They often worked 265 days a year. And even when they do secure a wealthy client, they devote long hours in and out of the club to maintain the relationship. In order to increase their sales, they tend to consume dangerous amounts of alcohol. A number of hosts have told me that they have suffered or have been suffering from health problems such as liver trouble, gastric ulcers, and chronic depression caused by an unbalanced diet, excessive smoking and drinking, an irregular lifestyle, and psychological stress. Nonetheless, such health problems are considered self-management or personal matters.

Some might think that hosts’ self-narrated entrepreneurial identity is entirely false. But the host club technically treats hosts as self-employed, i.e., contract, workers

for tax purposes so as to be exempt themselves from paying pensions, health insurance, and other benefits. This arrangement effectively kills two birds with one stone: on the one hand, it allows the club to optimize its profit with little employee expenses. On the other hand, it provides the necessary imprimatur for hosts' self-entrepreneurial and self-actualizing narration. Thus, hosting is a locus and activity whereby hosts potentially fashion their body/self as both commodities and entrepreneurs to acquire versatile business skills and accumulate human capital. The very potentiality of the body allows the host to dream of climbing the social ladder within the capitalist market system, while 'voluntarily' subjecting himself to exploitative working conditions and the expansion of capitalist accumulation. As such, hosts, who attempt to seduce women into the affect economy, are also seduced into the economy with a devotion that is reciprocated with minimal institutional intervention.

Why don't hosts challenge or withdraw from the exploitative, profit-seeking capitalist system? In essence, challenging the system risks obstructing their own chances at obtaining the glory and success they dream of. Withdrawal also jeopardizes their legitimacy as socially appropriate male citizens in Japan. Many hosts stress the importance of having a workplace (*shokuba*) to maintain their autonomy. When talking about the host club, they typically refer to it as *mise* (translated as "store" or "shop" in English), as if to connote or legitimize their work-ownership. Ryu, a veteran host who quit hosting after more than 10 years but later came back to work at *Fantasy*, explains: "Men who don't have or belong to a workplace and financially depend upon women are called 'pimps' (*himo*), gigolos (*jigoro*), sex workers (*sekkusu wākā*), or social losers (*shakaiteki haisha*). Hosts are professional entertainers and entrepreneurial men who

have their own workplace and make their own living.” Ryu differentiates himself and other hosts from those socially stigmatized men, and insists that they have validated themselves as legitimate male citizens. Noting that it is not an issue for a woman to financially depend upon a man in Japan, Ryu says that the practice doesn’t apply to men because men are traditionally expected to be self-sufficient. This gender norm underlies the nagging insecurity felt by many hosts, who fear losing their social legitimacy by leaving the club.

However, if loss of social status were the only downside of losing their workplace, hosts might not care so much since they typically prioritize their material standing rather than their social reputation. Ryu shares a story about former top-ranking host, Akira, who quit hosting in exchange for an apartment and ownership of a bar a client provided for him. His client, who had fallen in love with him, did whatever it took to please him, including lavishing expensive gifts and catapulting him to the top ranking in the club. She sought to monopolize his attention and begged him to quit hosting. Once he did, she became increasingly demanding and no longer attempted to please him. She at last broke up with him and Akira lost everything, including his apartment, bar, and financial support, and retreated back to the club. Explaining why the power dynamics had changed, Ryu said, “Once he quits the job, a host becomes an ordinary man. Women won’t pay for men who they can meet easily every day. He needs a stage, i.e., the host club, where he can be like a star.”

Ryu’s comment indicates that the speculative and competitive environment is prerequisite for the recognition of the host’s body/self as desirable and the creation of surplus value vis-à-vis taking advantage of women’s affect—desire for the scarce

product, feelings of jealousy, passion, and excitement. Without the environment of the host club, hosts know that their human capital is not recognized as such, or worse, they are stigmatized as mere sex workers. This vulnerability often shadows the host. They usually do not talk to outsiders about the unseemly aspects of their sexual labor in the hosting business. Nonetheless, I argue that hosts' nuanced distinction and justification ironically illuminates their vulnerable entrepreneurship and ambivalent social positionality, which is closely intertwined with, yet intentionally distinguished from, stigmatized sex workers.

Once they open up about themselves, hosts unexceptionally agree to an extent that having sex is unavoidable to maintaining a relationship with their rich clients and for stabilizing their monthly sales. Nonetheless they differentiate themselves from male sex workers or prostitutes. Yoshi, who describes himself as a "pillow host" (*makura hosuto*, meaning a host who sleeps with his clients), for example, denies that he is a sex worker. For him, sex workers have nothing to sell but sex and therefore have no alternatives. In contrast, he argues that hosts provide professional entertainment and hospitality, and make their own decisions whether to have sex based on their rules and criteria. Yoshi sets his bar at the sales amount of one million yen a month: once a client reaches that level he will have sex with her at her request. He justifies this as a sound business investment. As per any other justification, hosts' rationale may be asserted retrospectively in their narratives. (Sex with women who in the end didn't pay off wouldn't likely be narrated.) Both are, nonetheless, strategies for hosts who eagerly deny that they are sex workers and who wish to maintain their autonomous self-identity. On this point, Mr. Minami, a veteran host in his 50s, comments:

Hosts try to justify what they do. Otherwise, they can do nothing because of guilt and shame. They say various things, but more or less all hosts do the same thing: please women romantically and sexually to earn money. They just want to put *the self* aside, outside the realm of socially stigmatized views on selling the body, i.e., sex, for money.

In sum, hosts' self-narrated identity as entrepreneurs indicates that, as Nancy Abelmann states, "class—and social mobility—is not a thing to be catalogued and charted but is, rather, a project that happens partly through narrative" (Abelmann 2003: 20; also see Somers 1997: 87). Class difference is not simply projected onto people or inscribed into their bodies; rather it is fashioned, narrated, and negotiated within specific contexts of power relations. In the case of hosts, they self-narrate as entrepreneurial subjects, who are self-employed, in contrast with the salarymen, who are employed by someone else. In similar fashion, hosts defend themselves as self-sufficient male citizens by separating themselves from socially shamed, fully commodified sex workers. In either narrative, self-autonomy is keyed on hosts' entrepreneurship: hosts work for themselves, not for others, and they commodify themselves rather than being commodified by the other. Thus, self-autonomy is the pivot for the host to craft his professional identity and entrepreneurial status by strategically referring to neoliberal values and the ethics of marketization of labor, calculative choice, and the cultivating of a self-enterprising ethos (Hoffman 2006: 552). As Judith Butler (1990) theorizes about gender identity, various classification practices such as lifestyle choice, value judgment, and narrativized subjectivity are not mere expressions of essentially inherited class identity. The signification practice is rather an effect of the discursive practices that individuals strategically and performatively constitute in specific socio-historical contexts.

Hosts are not, however, free agents. Their signification practice —maintaining their “autonomous” male identity and “desirable” entrepreneurial status— is also a constant negotiation process encumbered with gendered social norms and class-marked behavioral ethics. Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, “the social agents ... are producers not only of classifiable acts but also of acts of classification which are themselves classified” (Bourdieu 1984: 467; also see Ferguson 1999: 94). As such, class struggle is not all about cultural politics in narratives, lifestyles, and discursive practices, but also the lived experience itself that consists of a series of discrepant pursuits and limits on status mobility. As Bourdieu argues, status is not entirely determined by economic factors, but it both opens and shuts off certain access to economic opportunity, jobs, education, and other forms of social resources (Bourdieu 1984: x). Hosts, who have scant social, economic, and cultural capital, and have few other employment opportunities, ‘choose’ (or are guided to choose) the hosting business in an attempt to enhance their human capital.

The choice opens up an alternative way of earning a living, but also closes off social security, working regulations, and recognition as “normal” male citizens. As a result, hosts’ entrepreneurial subjects are always already gendered and class-marked. Thus, despite their self-narrated autonomy and entrepreneurship, hosts paradoxically conjure exploitative working conditions, stigmatized sex work, and illusory “dreams” of an unstable, speculative economy.

Nevertheless, hosts situation does not necessarily mean that they are duped by the exploitative capitalist market system. Even though they are aware of the duplicity, they oftentimes cannot afford to leave as Akira’s case demonstrates. Caught in a dilemma —

being aware of exploitation and yet perpetuating it — hosts tirelessly justify their conduct and lifestyle. As such, hosts' decision to become entrepreneurs is much more complex than a mere unequal relationship between the state and the individual or between the owners of capital and labor. Their subjectivity is performatively constituted as part of multi-layered negotiation processes in which they cope with their own ambition, clients' desires, club management, social norms, and socio-economic trends in Japan and the global economy. Within this web of choice, hosts make their own decisions to optimize their lives rather than transcend the existing capitalist system.

It is easy to criticize the objectified reality of exploitation that hosts encounter. But such criticism overlooks social actors (who are complexly situated in the socioeconomic web) and unintentionally risks projecting the critic's moral judgment and political agenda. From this vantage point, I contend that understanding the complexity of subjectivity formation is urgently needed, particularly in light of neoliberal capitalism, where the individual (like the host) is encouraged to become the enterprise and entrepreneur of oneself.

Speculative Accumulation of Capital

As for hosts' subjectivity formation, I discussed how hosts commodify themselves and attempt to enhance their human capital —the enterprise and the entrepreneur of the self— above. Yoritomo, a popular and charismatic number one host on Japan's media circuit, perhaps best represents this dual sense of the self and the commodification process. In his best-selling book, *Anata wa Nanbāwan ni nareru: "Mouhitori no Jibun" no Tsukurikata* (You can Become a Number One: The Way of

Creating “Another Self”), Yoritomo asserts that market principle compels hosts to make money by satisfying the customer’s needs and stresses that the creation of ‘another self’ to meet the customer’s needs is a “prior investment” for the host (Yoritomo 2003: 62; 99). Yoritomo’s host name is his ‘another self.’ Based on his account, he learned that women fantasize a “my prince” type of character who is gentle, kind, and almost obtainable, but not quite, as if he were someone in their dreams. In order to become such a prince, he has let his hair grow long and practiced stylizing his body movements. For example, he practiced gently and carefully scooping a woman’s hand like a prince in a fairy tale. He says he repeatedly practices his walk, posture, and affective pauses in front a mirror until they look ‘natural’ and become part of himself (Yoritomo 2003: 101-105). Like Reiji, the former host who became a club owner, Yoritomo is known only by his pseudo first name, which is a reference to Minamoto Yoritomo, a famous 13th century shogun who first established Japan’s samurai government after centuries of aristocratic rule. Although Yoritomo is an unusual case, it is common among hosts to use their pseudo names in the club and attempt to camouflage their personal information. For many of their clients, hosts perform fantasy roles that are better served by anonymity.

While hosting itself does not formally require any special skills or knowledge, for many hosts with an ambition to succeed it demands devoted effort and study. “Looking at hosts from a distance, wearing nice suits, driving expensive cars, and showing off good-looking chicks, I thought it was cool. But, I found it was actually not so easy once I became a host,” said Yoshi, a 24-year old ex-number one host from Osaka I interviewed who had moved to Tokyo to specifically work at *Fantasy*. Yoshi stresses every aspect of his physical appearance, sculpting his body at a nearby health club, and like other young

hosts, he occasionally goes to a nail salon and gets full service treatment. “Women are detail oriented,” he says. “They care about these things.” Indeed, his well-cared for hands are prominently displayed during his carefully constructed body movements such as when he lights a cigarette and grabs an ashtray, gives hand gestures, or simply rests his hand on the table. “Dramatization of trivial things is critical since hosting is, after all, a job to sell dreams,” Yoshi says, echoing the dazzling image of the club during business hours that is a product of space dramatization incorporating music, light, and a lively atmosphere.

Yoshi says he calibrates his body movements to appeal to middle-aged wealthy women and please them to increase his sales. Like many other hosts, he says he sets his hair back casually and acts calmly so as to project himself as a mature, sincere, and reliable man. During his spare time he reads women’s magazines and watches TV dramas aimed at middle-aged women so as to better understand how they think and also find ideas about how to please them more effectively. “Women care how a man says things rather than what he says,” Yoshi said. Although too embarrassed to say and do in his everyday life, Yoshi told me that as a host he will look into his client’s eyes and utter lines like, “You are so beautiful to me,” or look up at the stars in the sky and poetically rhapsodize, “It must be predetermined that you and I are together tonight while there are billions of men and women on the earth like these stars in the sky.”

Yoshi admits that he has struggled with sexual matters, however. He says that he has had to overcome an imprinted disgust about ‘old’ women’s sexuality—the image that old women’s genitalia are ugly, dirty, and smelly. Yoshi says that early in his hosting career he couldn’t bring himself to kiss a wealthy client in her 50s, but finally convinced

himself it was his job to have sex with her and a necessary investment in order to become a top host. (After they had sex, the woman doubled her spending on Yoshi and quickly made him a number one host.) As I will explain further regarding the kind of service hosts aim to provide, the emotional management and affective labor of hosts like Yoshi intentionally capitalize on client's desire for praise, romantic yearnings, erotic aspirations to entice them into spending more money for their own satisfaction, and for their host's sales promotion. This interaction, I argue, shapes and fuels an affect economy in the host club.

“Women,” Yoshi says, “have a weakness for something extraordinary. So, hosts create an atmosphere of extraordinariness, where women are entranced enough not to think twice about what they are doing [spending money in the host club].” Female clients I interviewed at *Fantasy* reinforced his comment, emphasizing that it is worth paying for pleasant moments whereby they can escape from their day-to-day stress, retrieve energy for the next day, and enjoy themselves with romantic reverie. Some profess that they pay because they want their hosts to allow them to dream, whether their dreams are romantic fantasy, princess-like treatment, or rich V.I.P.-like cossetting. They said that there were moments when they were overwhelmed by a sense of an endless chain of routines or felt a void in indistinctive everydayness. Their comments affirm Yoshi's view too: hosting is a job to sell dreams. As such, on one level, women pursue something that they miss in their everyday life—i.e., extraordinariness— at the host club, and hosts provide it in exchange for money. At this juncture, hosts' affective labor —beautified body, stylized movements, acquired skills, and affective attentiveness — is employed to dramatize the scene and generate market value since there are customers who are willing to pay for

such affect. Their body in turn becomes a site and vehicle of accumulating human capital— capital that is for wide use in the neoliberal service-based economy.

Capital accumulation based on sensual speculation is no longer a ghettoralized economic activity in our global economy. In the era of neoliberal mass consumption, David Harvey warns of the accelerated commodification of every aspect of human lives including sexuality (Harvey 2005: 165). Other scholars also have highlighted the intensified commercialization of ‘intimate’ labor, which would include work done by maids, nannies and nurses, as well as labor entailed in contract marriages and baby adoptions (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Eng 2006). Not only the kinds of commodities but also the ways of value making have changed. In their article “Millennial Capitalism,” Jean and John Comaroff argue that since the world economy shifted from a production-based to a consumer-oriented economy, the *fons et origo* of wealth has been superseded by “less tangible ways of generating values: by control over such things as the provisions of service, the means of communication, and above all, the flow of finance capital” including the state sponsored casino economy and the so-called occult capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 295). Anna Tsing (2000) calls these ways of capital accumulation “speculator accumulation” and notes:

Spectacular accumulation occurs when investors speculate on a product that may or may not exist. Investors are looking for the appearance of success. They cannot afford to find out if the product is solid; by then their chances for profit will be gone (Tsing 2000: 141).

Likewise, potential buyers make purchase decisions based on the product’s appearance, whether it looks attractive and will become successful, and grow in sales. To an extent,

aesthetization and dramatization become instruments of value making and capital accumulation in speculation, whether it be in financial investments, wagers and bets, or the affect economy.

Japan's economy is no exception. As I discussed earlier, the government has attempted to revitalize the nation's lifeless economy by expanding financial investment opportunities, information technology (IT) development, and service-based industries to make profit in less tangible ways. In particular, the expansion of the so-called "service for lives" (*seikatsu sabisu*), an idea closely linked with improving the quality of people's everyday lives has come to be viewed as an untapped reservoir of wealth by the government. Intimate and social lives themselves have increasingly become subject to the same kind of creative destruction that demands a constant reappraisal of voids and needs, as well as potential products and services to feed them. The commodification of hitherto public assets and the 'intimate' private sphere, Harvey asserts, is a feature of the neoliberal project and is spreading globally (Harvey 2005: 106). I would add that the commodification accompanies the growth in affective labor that speculates on the need for such services.

Having argued that an affect economy is a form of speculative economics in national and global contexts, however, I do not mean that all business activities are like that or that every one is now a commodity. Neither do I argue that such an economic trend is a direct import from the West and a product of neoliberal globalization. Indeed, the concept of self-commodification is peculiar to hosts and other people who make a living in some facet of the entertainment business or other person-to-person line of work. Nonetheless, affective labor is ubiquitous and has the potential for economic value if

someone is willing to pay for it. On this point, the host club and hosts are not just a fleeting phenomenon. I argue that they are a constitutive element of Japan's affect economy—an economy rooted in the nation's postindustrial consumerism that intersected with neoliberal globalization—and therefore quite durable.

One of the characteristics that the postindustrial consumer culture in Japan has encouraged is, as I argued in Chapter 2, the performative self, that is, a person who plays with signs and performs multiple modes of selves that, like a change of clothes, depends upon time, place, and given opportunity. Asano Tomohiko, a leading sociologist who studies identity formation among Japanese youth, contends that in the last fifteen years social relationships have increasingly become situation-oriented because of diversified lifestyles and self-expression in the consumer culture, advancement of communication technology, and the flux of the labor market (Asano 2005: 84). As a result, the self is inevitably expected to acquire skills that enable performance in multiple modes so that he/she can smoothly adjust to the rapidly changing social situations and fluid human relationships (Ibid). In this respect, hosts' multiple modes of self-fashioning—having a dual sense of the self and performing a variety of selves and characters for their clients—are not an exceptional case in today's Japanese society. In other words, 'selling' a mode of the self or a part of the body technically becomes feasible.

"Dating" for money, notoriously known in Japan as "*enjo kōsai*" (compensated dating), exemplifies this self-commodification. Young Japanese women, mostly 'ordinary' high school girls, sell their dirty underwear, date, and sometimes have sexual encounters with mostly middle-aged men. They commodify their sexuality to satisfy Japanese men's erotic fantasy for sexually immature, innocent, and 'pure' girls in

exchange for money that is typically used to buy designer bags, fashion accessories, and clothing. These teenage girls, who were born and raised in the era of Japan's sign economy and have developed flexible, multiple modes of selfhood in order to adjust to rapidly changing social situations, are less reluctant than previous generations to commodify their sexuality as a merely detachable body part or an exterior (Miyadai 1994; Ueno 2003). Compensated dating is quite significant not only because it challenges sexual constraints and myths projected on young women but also because it allows ordinary girls to use their body and sexuality as a means to gain monetary return. In essence, they become neoliberal subjects who use their body as an object and a vehicle to invest in their economic activities. Thus, their habits reflect how neoliberal reforms have become pervasive in Japan to the extent where affective (including sexual) labor is more common and of ubiquitous economic value.

Both in Japan and throughout the global economy, the body as an arena to generate one's own market value has expanded beyond the existing female commodification of body to include males who are also coveted for their youth, and this has created vast new market niches, exploited especially on the Internet. While compensated dating is an illegal and underground activity,¹⁷ the host club business is legitimized as an entertainment and amusement trade and has created employment opportunities for young working-class men. At the same time, such a non-normative job—particularly men's sex-related work—has also created tension in Japan. The editor of the influential monthly magazine *Seiron*, for example has harshly criticized hosts for manipulating female customers into spending, writing that they are nothing more than

¹⁷ Due to widespread compensated dating, the Regulation to Prevent Prostitution and Pornography of Minors was established in 1999.

“lowlifes who prey on women” (*Seiron* 2000). Hosts themselves acknowledge that their social status lies somewhere between new business opportunity and social stigma. Yoshi, a former number one host in Osaka, admits that hosts are looked down upon by Japanese society. but is confident that they lie higher up Japan’s pyramid-shaped hierarchy:

If we take a look at the flow of money that is directed toward something valuable and desirable in society, hosts’ social position reverses. In Japan, salarymen provide financial support to their wives and family and spend money on their hostesses, and those women spend the money on their hosts. See, the money doesn’t flow back to the salarymen, meaning they are the least desirable in society.

Yoshi’s comments based on the consumption or speculative model reflect national and global economic trends and challenges conservative criticism in Japan. While hosting is not entirely accepted as a legitimate occupation in Japanese society, it thus mirrors not only socio-historical change in the formation of identity and human capital within Japan but also the global economics of speculative accumulation of capital. At the nexus of these local, national, and global socio-economic practices, commodifying the self has become possible for hosts, who otherwise have few other resources to option their futures. To ‘invest’ in their own bodies and commodify the body/self becomes a means to enhance their market value and achieve of upward mobility through an affect economy where affective labor is in high demand (Hardt and Negri 2004: 108).

The Art of Seduction

Among other speculative economic activities, something significant about an affect economy in the host club is that the products are affect and human relationships.

The direct and durable interaction between hosts and their clients, who have their own desires, ends, and tactics, complicates the process of market exchange and interpersonal power dynamics. In particular, their interactions and relationships depend upon monetary and affective exchanges whereby both sides attempt to achieve such metonymical self-satisfaction —satisfying the other to satisfy oneself— wherein hosts please their clients in exchange for the monetary reward and clients financially please their hosts to obtain better service and fulfill their romantic fantasy or other desire. In addition, their economic activity that is inflated by the reciprocated affective labor profits the host club business, i.e., the club owner.

Despite the mutuality that exists among the actors, the exchange and the relation is asymmetric. As club management is designed to exploit hosts' affective labor, the host's governing technology —calculated conducts to govern— tends to undermine women's financial power. Ryu, a veteran host, says, "Hosting is, after all, quintessentially a business to make money by getting women to fall in love with and spend money on their hosts even though hosts often describe hosting as an occupation that sells women dreams. Therefore, hosts enable them to dream, particularly romantic dreams, in order to extract monetary return." Governing such a relationship is called "pseudo romance" (*gijiren'ai*) among hosts. It is pseudo because hosts explain that they do not 'genuinely' have strong feelings for their clients (although it happens sometimes), but pretend as if they were in love with them; some women believe in or try to believe in such love as if it were real and some others are confused about whether it is real or commercial. In either case, hosts I have interviewed stress that they are able to take advantage of 'women's psychology' so long as they cling to any perceived love. Women who do tend to do

anything for the men they love, i.e., spend money, and they are usually fulfilled with their own self-absorbed devotion.

Ryu explains that an experienced host can take advantage of women's psychology and seduce his clients to financially please him and self-satisfy themselves.

At first, a host obeys his customer in order to be liked, however, he will gradually, yet steadily try to shift the power relation once he is assured that she has fallen in love with him. He has to do so in a way the customer does not recognize. A capable host can do so and make his customer willingly provide whatever he wants—money, cars, expensive watches, you name it.

His assessment is supported by female customers such as Nakamura Usagi, a famous writer and host club patron, who reportedly spent 15 million yen (roughly 150,000 US dollars) in 2001 at her favorite host clubs. In an interview with the Japan Times, Nakamura said:

With the host, it starts off with you being the one governing the relationship but before you know it, he's the one in control. You just don't know when it shifts. The thing is, *if you fall for him, you lose*, because you want to listen to him so he thinks better of you. ... I think that although many customers may feel like an *odaijin* (lord) while they're in the club, they are really more like a servant of the host (Japan Times 2003; emphasis added).

The reader might wonder if the women's "falling for" stories in the previous chapter are crafted by the pseudo romance. I would say so. For example, Hikaru, whom the widow Sachiko had spent more than 600,000 US dollars on at the time of my interview in 2005, confided that the relationship was a pseudo one for him. Although he said he pretended as if he were in love with her because that is what she dreams of, he admitted that he is not sexually attracted to her. Instead, Sachiko is one of his most

important clients who has been instrumental in helping him realize his top-ranking status and therefore he does have feelings of appreciation and compassion toward her; but, it is nothing more than that, he said. Hikaru describes his feelings in this way:

I sometimes feel bad about what I am doing and sympathetic about her devotion to me. But, once a host becomes sympathetic, it becomes a dead end. It's hard, but important to remember that it's just a job. Instead I sincerely try to do my best to serve for her and provide what pleases her. I receive money in return for the hard work.

Similarly, Daisuke, who supposedly approached Fumi and confessed his love to her, told me that Fumi was his most important client at the moment and he liked her as a client and person, but not as a woman. He said that it is his business style to engender an intimate relationship, including sexual interaction, so as to justify asking the client for financial support as a boyfriend. Thus, both Hikaru and Daisuke manipulate women's affect and are successful in guiding them to believe in their love and in turn spend money on their hosts. While the amounts women spend and the forms of affect they desire may vary, the host's affective labor has the potential to maneuver their clients into visiting them in the club frequently and participating in the speculative sales competition for their hosts.

Nonetheless, such business tactics entail hosts' seduction skills and unflagging efforts to please women so as to obscure the line that exists between their commercial and noncommercial interaction. This is because, as hosts say, once a woman's fantasy is clearly defined as a target of the host's economic motives (even though most clients can sense it), they start to think twice about spending money for that end. Only when they persuade themselves that the spending is meaningful on their own terms will women

continue to “use” money for that effect, said Ryu. “Coercive measures never work. You can’t force a woman to make a visit unless you let her want to see you.” Subtleness and ambivalence are thus fundamental for host’s governance over their clients in the affect economy. Hosts’ domination does not mean that they solely seize or possess power, however; their domination in the relationship rather depends upon their willingness to provide affective labor and subtly guide the conduct of the client in a way that that clients can ‘freely’ think, choose, and act. As such, the speculative effect of the affective labor is actualized only when the host’s art of seduction is in harmony with the client’s. Although I didn’t mean to, I have to admit that my own experience as a client exploited Shin’s affective labor since I never revisited him to pay for the labor. Indeed, if we believe all labor involves building human relationships and caring for the other in economic terms, any kind of work and volunteer activity is potentially a form of exploitation. The inherent ambivalence of affective labor, through which one can exploit, and also be exploited by, the other, is an effect of the art of seduction.

Seduction never works unilaterally. It requires interactive feedback. It is most effective in cooperative interaction, i.e., mutual seduction. In his book *Seduction*, Jean Baudrillard states, “The law of seduction takes the form of an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends. And cannot end since the dividing line that defines the victory of the one and the defeat of the other, is illegible” (Baudrillard 1979: 22). Michel Foucault stresses that this indeterminacy and ambivalence is an effective form of power. As I pointed out in his definition of neoliberal governmentality in Chapter 2, the art of government is neither forceful nor one-way. It entails an understanding of the other and then subtly leading,

directing, and guiding the “free” conduct of the other(s) with calculation, manipulation, and artifice (Dean 1991: 10-11; Gordon 1991: 18). Following his definition, I call hosts’ governing technology the *art of seduction* that involves creative use of an aestheticized body, calculated moves, and strategic interactions to produce affect and maneuver the conducts of their clients for both the clients’ and the hosts’ ends.

While I draw from Foucault’s notion of the art of government, I differentiate the art of seduction methodologically from his text-centered analysis of political rationalities (Foucault 1981: 226 in Lemke 2002: 54-55; Gordon 1991: 3). By the art of seduction, I intend to analyze how seduction takes place to lead social actors into (inter)actions and what kinds of effects it has on interpersonal power dynamics rather than presuming the body as a site of historical inscription and the political rationality as a template of individual conducts (Lemke 2002: 54-55; also see Butler 1990: 129).

Hosts use such non-language centered seduction tactics as seating position and body moves to evoke romantic imagination and atmosphere not only to please women but also to increase their sales. They also use what is called “mirroring image” (*mirāimēji*) or “mirroring” [movements] (*mirāringu*) as a seduction strategy. Hosts intentionally yet ‘naturally’ synchronize their bodily movements, e.g., timing of their laughs, tone of voice, pace of drinking, conversational topics, and some gestures, with those of their clients. By affecting that such synchrony exists between them, they intend to persuade their clients that they are alike—are of the same “feather”—and would make a good match. Thus, a series of such moves that is fabricated with affective labor performatively creates a feeling of compatibility, intimacy, and comfort. The entire process is part of a

calculated seduction that plotted to set the client's mind for economic activities in the name of love.

Hosts also strategize their actions to evoke and capitalize on women's competitiveness to further their spending. Daisuke says that women's spending patterns, for example, often depend upon how well a host moves from one table to another and performs and is perceived as a popular host. If a host remains with a client all the time, Daisuke analyzes, the client will tend to spend less because there is no perceived competitor. The client becomes assured that he is all 'hers.' But, if he leaves her alone with the other helper hosts for a while, she then starts to wonder whose table he is visiting and if he has another client. To bring him back, she figures that she will need to order a new bottle of liquor. If she is naïve enough not to understand how it works, his helper hosts will suggest it to her. "Hosting is," as Daisuke explains, "a popularity business, and the more popularity you generate, the more desirable you become and create competition among your clients. As a result, clients voluntarily compete over one another for your attention and increase their spending without being asked." Daisuke's analysis suggests that a host's (performed) popularity invokes a woman's desire for him and fuels competitiveness for his attention. The competitive situation motivates passionate clients to speculate in the popular host. Such women's overt competitiveness and aggressive spending might risk their womanhood because, as I discussed in Chapter 2, ideal femininity revolves around "unselfish" victory and lovability under the terms of Japan's neoliberal reformation. Their fighting spirit is then reconfigured as an embodiment of their self-devotion to their men. In such a way, women's "masculine" display of aggressiveness, financial capability, and selfishness is converted into an expression of

ideal femininity. This interaction destabilizes the social assumption that gendered behavioral patterns are biological, but also reinforces the host's view that "women's psychology" is exploitable.

Along with calculated body moves and carefully enacted popularity, hosts employ suggestive speech in order to govern their clients'. Like many other hosts, Yoshi indirectly asks his clients to visit him in the club because he says he needs to avoid putting himself in the position of being beholden or subordinated to his them. He instead will ask over the phone: "How have you been doing? I have missed you since you haven't shown your face recently. Are you all right? Can you just show your face and relieve my worry?" When he is desperate to increase his sales, he might ask, "You are the only person I can ask. My sales for this month are a bit short. Can you help me out?" Yoshi explains that both ways create space for the client to make her own decision about her visit and spending. If she blames him for her excessive spending, he says he can reply with something to the effect of, "I have never asked you or forced to do so. It's your own decision." In this way, hosts make their clients responsible for their own choice and its consequences. Hosts' subtle ways of asking serves another function: appealing to "women's mind or psychology" (*onnagokoro*). Yoshi explains, "Women want to be thought of special and therefore, providing attentiveness and showing my weakness convinces them that they are special to me and in turn they are pleased even though they end up spending money." While I will discuss women's perspectives in the following chapter, Foucault's theory of how power in neoliberal governmentality works is based on the idea that it is not exercised against the interests of the governed, but rather feeds their

interests and allows the governed to ‘empower’ or ‘responsibilize’ themselves as much as force them to make ‘free’ decisions on their actions (Lemke 2002: 53).

The art of seduction is expressed in a common metaphor that hosts share to explain the kind of service hosts aim to provide: “*kayui tokoro ni pin-pointo de tega todoku sabisu*,”—literally, service that scratches the precise point where the customer feels itchy [on her back]. To paraphrase host Koji, itchiness is a sense that one cannot exactly articulate to someone else; so, if a host can locate the exact spot and scratch it well, a woman will become enamored with someone who can so precisely please her. But if done wrong, a host will end up annoying the client losing her. This common metaphor highlights key characteristics of seduction as a governing technology: It requires acquired skills and aptitude, i.e., human capital, to detect the ways of appealing to the seducee; it takes pleasure as a lure to seduce women into serving for the seducer’s interests; the seducer’s intentional avoidance of verbal articulation lets her ‘freely’ make decisions and be responsible for their consequences; and the art of seduction allows the seducer to indirectly govern relationships and indulge them with the states of dominance. Indeed, there is no guarantee that such a governing technology is always fruitful since discrete interactions and relationships last only as long as both sides are able to satisfy one another enough to carry on the exchanges. Nonetheless, the art of seduction is, I argue, an essence of the affect economy, an economy that capitalizes on human feelings, emotions, desires, and romantic fantasies to optimize the monetary and affective exchanges.

While seduction is oftentimes associated with sexual temptation, the affect economy is not the only domain where the art of seduction becomes a governing technology. The scheme—the use of allusive utterances and gestures to capitalize on

another's affect and entice him/her into acting for the one's ends— is increasingly utilized in a wide range of business, social, and political maneuvers, including but not limiting to interpersonal negotiation, advertisement, marketing, and political campaigns (Haug 1986; Reiji 2001). This is because, as Gilles Deleuze argues, it introduces the notion of “societies of control” whereby social governance has shifted or been shifting to a controlling model, away from the discipline and punishment that Foucault theorized in the context of the 18th and 19th century Europe (Deleuze 1992: 4). Among other scholars, Nikolas Rose also argues that in advanced liberal or neoliberal societies, public authorities seek to govern society at a distance by means of persuasion, education, and seduction rather than coercion, repression, or intervention (Rose 1996: 50). “To govern humans is,” Rose states, “not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and to *utilize it for one's own objectives* (Rose 1999: 4; emphasis added). Thus, the art of seduction is more or less a vehicle for governing-at-a-distance and enables neoliberal governance in societies of control.

Such a form of governance —acknowledging individual capacity and using it for collective or institutional objectives— is observed in the socio-economic governance of new millennium Japan as well. Not long ago, the Koizumi administration called upon “*yume to kibou wo moteru shakai*” (a society that enables individuals to have dreams and hopes) for the nation's economic revitalization, which later became Japanese government policy. The 1999 Economic Council report, for example, stressed that individual capacities, particularly *chie* (knowledge), *keiken* (experience), and *kansei* (sensitivity), are the key sources of corporate profit in the new global economy. The report claims that the global economic shift from standardized mass production to diverse knowledge

production has undermined traditional Japanese values such as *nintai* (perseverance) and *kyōchōsei* (group harmony). The ideal stance, the report states, is “to create a socio-economy where individuals can seek dreams and actively make them come true” (Keizai Shingikai 1999). As such, the Japanese government employs the art of seduction — uses dreams and hopes as baits to persuade individuals to ‘emancipate’ themselves from conventional values and acquire the new ethics— to govern human capital at a distance.

Nikolas Rose’s account *Powers of Freedom* responds to such individual-centered economic policies as Japan’s and asserts that there is no longer a conflict between self-interest and patriotic duty: “It now appears that one can best fulfill one’s obligations to one’s nation by most effectively pursuing the enhancement of the economic well-being of oneself” (Rose 1999: 45). This is because, he argues, individual capacities for self-realization are obtained only through individual activity, including work in neoliberal societies (Ibid). Jaques Donzelot, the author of “Pleasure in Work,” similarly points out that work is no longer something assigned to individuals, but rather regarded as a productive activity or a site whereby they deploy their personal skills, enhance their capacities, and fulfill their potentialities (Donzelot 1996: 252). In this model, individuals become the center of and responsible for the project of the self and accumulation of human capital, and like consumption, hobbies, and self-help therapy, work itself becomes a means and process of self-realization and fulfillment.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the affect economy is an episteme and a constitutive element of the global, as well as Japan’s national, economy that has shifted from the

production-centered to speculative consumption-oriented economy, e.g., finance, information technology, and other related service industries. In the speculative economy, future-oriented profitability becomes imaginable and such skills and human capital as aesthetization, dramatization, and sensual appeal become instruments, i.e., human capital, of value making and capital accumulation. By focusing on neoliberal subjects like male hosts, I demonstrated how they attempt to commodify their body/self in order to not only sell their labor but also gain a means to produce surplus value in the speculative affect economy. For young men like hosts, who are usually hemmed in by their working-class backgrounds, self-investment to enhance their human capital and acquire seduction skills to entice their clients into speculating on them allows them the opportunity to self-actualize their upward mobility within Japan's capitalist market economy.

Tracing host's intersubjective relationships, I also illuminated the multiple layers of the art of seduction in the case of Japan's host club. Hosts seduce their clients to spend more money on them, but they are also seduced into working hard and enduring the fierce sales competition system in the host club. Their hard work feeds their own ambition, clients' satisfaction, and the club's profit (and by extension Japan's economy). Thus, I argued the art of seduction is the means and process, i.e., the governing technology, in the affect economy as a whole. By the art of seduction, I refer to the indirect governance, through which the governor/seducer let the governed/seducee 'voluntarily' act out for the both ends, rendering the dividing line of the victory and defeat or the seducer and seducee illegible. As such, it makes social actors responsible for their own conduct despite the fact that they are socially situated in gender and class terms and their choice and freedom is subjected to existing social norms and inequality. Nonetheless, in this hermeneutic

world of the affect economy, the norms and inequalities are simply decentralized as part of strategic games in which individuals are supposed to ‘freely’ exercise power in a variety of intersubjective settings. The affect economy is by no means top-down governance by the state or the capitalist; the art of seduction both enables and disables social actors to get ahead in the world and perpetuates social inequality in the name of individual responsibility. In this respect, social institutions, corporations, and the government are also in the same boat that is constructed by the art of seduction. As Bruno Latour points out, “the ‘macro-actor’ is not different in kind from the ‘micro-actor,’ but is merely one who has a longer and more reliable ‘chain of command’—that is to say, assembled into longer and more dispersed networks of persons, things and techniques” (Latour cited in Rose 1999: 5). In the same manner, the macro- and micro-actor alike attempt to overcome their vulnerability or take advantage of the other through the art of seduction within the postindustrial capitalist system and by doing so perpetuate the enigmatic system itself.

While I have focused mainly on the affect economy in Japan’s host club, the art of seduction as a governing technology is not peculiar to this tempo-spatially specific setting. Seduction has been the pivot of any commercial enterprise in the modern capitalist system. In advanced or neoliberal societies, as Deleuze argued, social governance entails control rather than discipline and punishment (Rose 1999; Deleuze 1992). To reinforce this view, Rose argues, “To govern is to act upon action. ... Hence, when it comes to governing human beings, to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed” (Rose 1999: 4). In such a mode of social governance, I argue that the art of seduction is an effective way of acting upon the others’ conducts. I also note that it acts

as a pivot in the intangible ways of seeking profit in today's global capitalism. At the nexus of societal and market seduction, consumers are no exception. They are also turned into, and also 'voluntarily' become, social actors who engage in the seductive market economy, where they self-fashion their desirable selves and also contribute their consumptive labor. I will discuss this aspect further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THE GENDER POLITICS OF PASSIVITY: TRANSGRESSING NORMS AND SELF-FASHIONING ‘DESIRABLE’ WOMEN

I visit the host club to recuperate the “womanness” within myself and recover my self-identity. Romantic excitement inspires women to attain total beauty. (Megumi, a 31 year-old mother and part-time worker)

Before I became a host, I thought women who got married and became mothers were no longer “women”. I now think women are eternally “women” and are genuinely interested in men. (Anonymous male host)

Feminist scholars have long argued that gender and sexuality are not merely a reflection of biological attributes of sex differences, but socio-cultural constructs (e.g., Butler 1990, Foucault 1990, Ortner 1974, Rubin 1985, Scott 1986). In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler, for example, provocatively asserts that gender is not a cause but an effect of a discursively constituted sex binary system. Therefore, femininity and masculinity are not an expression of gender identity, but performatively embodied in repetitive speech and body acts (Butler 1990: 140). These scholars have shed light on the importance of thinking about gender and sexuality as encompassing maneuvers, i.e., constitutive elements of social relations — ideology, political economy, individual practices (Scott 1986: 1067). They have, however, tended to focus on conceptual and representational impacts on the body, and overlook bodiliness and its transformative effect on social practices and relationships. A good example is the Foucauldian model of sexuality that focuses on governing rationalities and technologies and reduces the body to a site where knowledge is inscribed (Foucault 1979). This kind of poststructuralist approach, Thomas Csordas (1994) warns, carries “the dual dangers of dissipating the

force of using the body as a methodological starting point, and of objectifying bodies as things devoid of intentionality and intersubjectivity” (4).

The two quotations at the beginning of the chapter vividly underscore these theories, which are put to the test every day in Japan’s host clubs. A glittering consumer space, the host club is where mostly well-heeled Japanese women pay often exorbitant sums of money to have male “hosts” indulge their romantic (and sexual) fantasies. It is also a space where gender identities, romantic desires, and sexual relations are performed and negotiated in relation to existing social contexts and norms. In the interaction between female clients and their male hosts, feminine attractiveness, as well as women’s desirable selves *and* bodies, is constantly put through a process of (re)construction. In this respect, commodified romance in the host club provides a window into understanding the intersection of the encompassing maneuvers without neglecting individual conducts and intersubjective negotiations. In particular, the body is not merely an objectified entity in the affect economy at the club. It is rather a central locus for the creation and recognition of women’s desirable selves and for optimizing their affective exchange with hosts.

Bodily sentience and sensibility is particularly important to understand selfhood at the nexus of postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal globalization. Among many other scholars, Comaroff and Comaroff (2005), for example, assert that consumption is now the moving spirit of millennial capitalism and has become a “hallmark of modernity” (295; Hardt and Negti 2004; Harvey 2005; Miller 1995: 7). In the postindustrial cultural environment, where pleasure, playfulness, and diversity are emphasized, the body is a central locus of subjectivity formation (Turner 1996: 2;

Shilling 1993; Giddens 1991: 7). The body is, as Anthony Giddens, argues, no longer simply a given physical entity; it is a vehicle to cope with external situations and a source of feeling pleasure, self-fulfillment, and well-being (Giddens 1991: 58; 99; also Rose 1990: 110). Thus, given the emphasis on individual needs and desires in contemporary consumer culture, the body is closely intertwined with the project of the self.

The self/body project is further intensified as a work under neoliberal governance where the fabric of self-making is emphasized (Rose 1990). In his 1990 book, *Governing the Soul*, Nikolas Rose implores that modern citizens, primarily defined as consumers rather than producers, are urged to make their lives meaningful by “selecting our personal lifestyle from those offered to us in advertising, soap operas, and films, to make sense of our existence by exercising our freedom to choose in a market” (Rose 1990: 102). The effort to maximize ‘quality of life’ is, Rose argues, a new image of the productive subject and hence of work itself, and as such the individual is “not to be emancipating *from* work, ... but to be fulfilled *in* work (Ibid emphasis original). As such, Rose emphasizes that under neoliberal governance the content and meanings of work might be reformed, yet work itself becomes an element of self-fulfillment and self-actualization in the project of the self (Rose 1990: 103). The case of female clients, as well as male hosts, in Japan’s host club exemplifies this project of self by illustrating that both production and consumption are loci for this project—a project of self-fashioning a desirable self via the capitalist market economy. In short, production and consumption alike become a work.

In this context, where postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal governance intersect at the project of the body/self, the individual is encouraged to preserve or accumulate their human capital. Their capital is then evaluated by the results of one’s

investment in the enterprise and success of the entrepreneurship, whether such capital is accumulated through production or consumption. So while Foucault's methodology that tends to objectify bodies and overlook their intersubjective aspects is problematic, his description of the neoliberal subject and human capital—an enterprise and an entrepreneur of oneself—is useful to understand the selfhood that is constituted through consumption in neoliberal capitalism (Gordon 1991: 44). The individual consumer as both an enterprise *and* entrepreneur is vividly demonstrated in the host club sphere, where clients like Megumi, the 31-year-old housewife quoted above, often goes to the host club because she says she would rather spend money there than at an aesthetic salon or clothing boutique so that she can internally “recuperate” her feminine attractiveness and recover her self-identity. Here, her body/self becomes a project she *projects* as an entrepreneur. The host club is one of the sites where she “chooses” to work on her project. As such, neoliberal governance is conducted via her entrepreneurial ‘freedom’ to undertake the enterprise of herself, but not through any overt disciplinary and oppressive forces.

Colin Gordon contends that the idea of one's life as an enterprise implies that there is a “sense in which one remains always continuously employed in (at least) that one enterprise, and that it is a part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital” (Gordon 1991: 44). In the host club, both male hosts and female customers beautify their appearance and attempt to satisfy their own goals and desires. While hosts have a tangible goal — making fast cash and achieving upward mobility, female clients, as Megumi typifies, aim at less tangible gains such as recognition of their individuality,

flattery from hosts, and extraordinary experience. Their goals reflect Japan's social evaluation system: men's criteria largely lie in occupational success, whereas women's lie in desirable appearance, personality and romantic/marital achievement (Ogura 2003; Sakai 2003). Their different goals and positionalities as producers and consumers in the market of the affect economy reflects such gendered valuation. Thus, the neoliberal subject is governed through entrepreneurial 'freedom' to preserve or accumulate their human capital. Nevertheless, what counts as human capital is inseparable from socio-historical context, and is, I argue, inevitably gendered.

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how hosts' subjectivity formation revolves around their class struggle, even though they are socially classified in gender and class terms. In the quest to accumulate human capital for their social advancement, I demonstrated how hosts subject themselves to desperate working conditions, yet their subjection paradoxically fuels their desire for entrepreneurial success. In this chapter, I focus on female clients and illustrate the ways in which they engage in gender politics through such a consumptive activity as hostclubbing. Here, I do not intend to reduce men to class and women to gender. I treat both class and gender as social identity categories that are not founded on ontological reality, but rather performatively constituted through a variety of social practices (Butler 1990; McLintock 1995: 9; Kondo 1997). I also contend that these categories do not exist independently. They closely intertwine and complexly configure, as well as are configured by, the social actors in relational and context-specific ways. In the case of male hosts and female clients, who are situated within Japan's gender and class stratification, both make class and gender matter

respectively because they are socially subordinated in those terms and actively negotiate from their positionalities.

Feminist scholars have argued that neoliberal governance marginalizes or silences women in the name of rebuilding national strength in the global economy (e.g., Kingfisher 2002; Song 2006). While they successfully shed light on the gender inequality and male dominance that underlies neoliberal governmentality, such a theorization unintentionally neglects subtle forms of cultural politics— politics that women attempt to negotiate from within the patriarchal social system. Criticizing existing feminist scholarship, particularly progressive liberal feminism, Saba Mahmood problematizes their scholarly approach that imposes a “teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power—a teleology that makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of being and action that are not necessarily uncapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms” (Mahmood 2005: 9). In other words, non-progressive or non-liberal activities are overlooked or dismissed as the driving force behind social transformation.

A good example of this scholarly assumption is the existing feminist scholarship in the field of Japan Studies. It tends to focus on young single women, who have disposable income and remain in a liminal time and space, i.e., a premarital status (e.g., Kelsky 2001; Kinsella 1995; Ogasawara 1998; Robertson 1998). While feminist work in Japan Studies has highlighted these women, its scope has not extended to include married women. I argue there is a tacit assumption that once women get married, they inevitably confirm and reproduce Japan’s marriage and family system. I will note that passivity and

docility does not necessarily reproduce the status quo, but it can function as a guise to ‘safely’ subvert social norms and systems from within.

By looking at materiality in the project of the body/self and intersubjective relationships in the affect economy, in this chapter I intend to complicate gender politics at the intersection of postindustrial consumerism and neoliberal governance in contemporary Japan. In particular, I aim to demonstrate how romance has become an ambivalent vehicle for both single and married women. Through romance, women oppose and escape from the male-centered marriage/family system and sexual double standards, but also reinforce market-centered values and aesthetics of the body/self. I focus on married women, who tend to be presumed as conformist and are bypassed in most feminist scholarship, in order to rethink the progressive feminist assumption in and outside of Japan Studies.

Romance as an All-Purpose Means

Megumi is a housewife and a mother of three sons who lives and works part-time as a secretary in her husband’s construction business in Kinshi-chō, a salaryman “bed town” suburb northeast of Tokyo. When I first met her, in the summer of 2004, she had been visiting *Fantasy* once a week for about three months, trying hard, she told me, to recover her “lost” feminine attractiveness and self-identity. I met her through Koji, who at the time was her host and my interlocutor, and interviewed her at a small upscale bar in Kabuki-chō before her “date” at *Fantasy*. Megumi says that once married, women in Japan are not treated as individual women. Since her marriage with her high school boyfriend more than ten years ago, which she insisted was based on love, Megumi's

husband has recently begun to show less interest in her. Her neighbors, she says, call her the wife of Mr. So-and-so or the mother of So-and-so, and she feels as if she has lost her self-identity. “In the host club,” Megumi confides, “hosts call me by my first name and treat me as an individual woman. They pay attention to what I’m wearing, my hairstyle, my cosmetics, and give me timely feedback. These comments help motivate me to make an effort to become more beautiful because there’s someone who’s always caring about me.” Megumi adds, “Re-recognizing my female attractiveness boosts my self-confidence in many ways.”

On the night I interviewed her, Megumi was wearing a dark gray mini skirt and a white frilled blouse, her plump body unsteady atop a pair of black high-heeled pumps. According to Megumi, she had spent more than two hours preparing for the evening, trying on several outfits in order to select the best fit that was neither too sexy nor too conservative, and primping in front of her full-length mirror. She meticulously embellished her face with cosmetics and set her naturally curly hair straight. She said to me, “The time I spend caring for myself — entirely myself — is something I miss in my day-to-day life.” She admits that she had neglected her appearance and feminine bearing for a long time. “I always took care of my children first and then my husband, and it was the last thing to care about myself,” she explained. In contrast to her day-to-day routine, she said, “It is a pleasing experience for a woman to have a young attractive man who looks into [her] eyes and says, ‘You are so beautiful tonight,’ even if she knows it is only a performance or a lie. Women pay for it because they want to be allowed to dream (*yume wo misasete hoshii*).” Megumi said that it was romantic excitement and the near constant flattery about her appearance that influenced her to focus on her beauty and

repeatedly visit *Fantasy*. For that reason, she chooses host clubbing instead of spending money at an aesthetic salon or on shopping.

But like Cinderella, the spell that follows Megumi's date with her host fades at dawn's light. Back home by 5 a.m., the curfew that her husband has set, she begins to cook breakfast and prepare *obentō* boxed lunches for her family trying to catch up on her lost sleep. Waking up, she says she feels tired, worn, and haggard. Her daily routine of cleaning, laundry, and grocery shopping starts anew. At the supermarket, she buys discounted items to save money and works part time at the construction office in order to earn extra yen for use at the host club, where she typically spends about 20,000 (roughly \$200 USD). In spite of her routine, she insisted, "In my mind, I feel full of positive energy that makes my life more joyful and meaningful." She added that her husband and children, as well as her friends, have noticed a change in her appearance and attitude and have given her positive comments. According to her, the romantic experience does not end upon her exiting the extraordinary host club space but has a reverberant, performative effect on her self-confidence.

Individual desires, which are rooted in one's social environment and derived from everyday life, are as different from person to person as are the means to satisfy them. Hosts describe women's diverse desires as, "If there are ten women there are ten distinctive colors (*junin toiro*, literally translated, 'ten people for ten colors')." While middle-class women like Megumi can spend no more than about \$1,000 a month at host clubs, enjoying a modest taste of romantic stimulation, upper-class women who can afford greater sums play a far more elaborate game of romance. Not only the magnitude of the disposable income but also the intensity of desire for special attention affects

women's spending in the affect economy at the host club. Nonetheless, Megumi's host club experience shares some common characteristics with other female clients. Like Megumi, women in the host club are not passive recipients but active participants who optimize their spending to chance romance, or at the very least, the opportunity to sample the extraordinary and re-fashion their lives.

Consumption at *Fantasy* is neither simply coded communication nor mere expression of needs, wants, and desires. It is a practice of making lifestyle choices, reflexively creating the self, achieving well-being, and signifying social distinction (Bourdieu 1984; Ngai 2003: 475). In particular, while both male hosts and female clients like Megumi beautify their appearances and try to appeal to one another, what they signify and attempt to achieve are different, and manifest gendered social expectations: the occupationally 'successful' man and the 'desirable' woman (Sakai 2003; Ogura 2003). As such, hosts and female customers manifest this gendered ideal. Hosts aim to achieve occupational success, whereas women endeavor to (re)assure their feminine attractiveness through romantic excitement. As Megumi indicates, a woman's self-affirmation and their self-project embeds in Japan's broader context of marriage and family system.

Japan's marriage and family system has historically desexualized married women, particularly mothers, and bestowed a respectful caretaking role instead (Allison 1994; Borovoy 2005: 114; Robertson 1991; Ryang 2006: 95). As such, women's respect is gained at the expense of their sexuality, womanhood, and individuality. To a large degree, the desexualized image of married women and mothers is not necessarily ontological reality based on their bodily or sexual decay but rather an ideological effect.

Japanese feminist scholars have revealed that a romantic love ideology, which emerged in early 20th century Japan, has shaped the nation's modern marriage/family system and controlled female sexuality (Ryang 2006; Ueno 1994; Uno 1991). Called “*romanchikku rabu ideorogi*” in Japanese, a direct import from English, the ideology conjoins romantic love, marriage, and reproductive sex as the “ideal sequence” of a woman's life, creating the ideal middle-class mother as the modern citizen (Ogura 2003: 23). In this definition romantic love means a courtship, extramarital romance not included. While men have long enjoyed the privilege to pursue extramarital sex (as Japan's well-developed sex industry demonstrates), the sexual double standard attempts to channel women's sexuality into reproduction and enclose them within a de facto un-eroticized marriage (Allison 1994; 1996; Borovoy 2005; Ogura 2003; Robertson 1997). Popular feminist writer Sakai Junko asserts that Japanese women skip womanhood, transiting directly from girlhood to motherhood (Sakai 2003: 138). Correspondingly, patriarchal social assumptions separate the sexually sealed one from the unsealed one for reproductive purposes through the ritual of marriage. As such, these assumptions, in tandem with the marriage system, ideologically divide female sexuality into either sexual innocence in girlhood or reproductive sexuality in motherhood. This narrowly defined sexuality based on a reproductive model discriminates against homosexual activities as deviant (McLelland 2000), and pities the unmarried woman as unfulfilled (Sakai 2003).

While romantic love ideology is still pervasive in Japan, an increasing number of Japanese women now avoid the confines of the marriage and family system for *jibun no jinsei*, “a life of one's own.” Such attitudes of Japanese women are evidenced by the recent trends toward late marriage, declining birthrates, and increasing divorce rates in

Japan. Starting in the 1980s, however, during the period of Japan's bubble economy, increasing numbers of young single women were hired in newly developing financial, service, and leisure industries. With their newfound disposable incomes, Japanese women have been able to diversify their lifestyles and pursue greater self-fulfillment, including romantic and sexual satisfaction (Kelsky 2001; Ogura 2003; Sakai 2003; Ueno 2004). Naturally, the media has picked up on this trend. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, in Japanese media and advertising, the individual rather than the nuclear family has become the iconic unit of consumption and heterosexual romance, rather than marriage *per se*, is promoted as an ideal avenue for expressing womanhood.

This shift in emphasis occurred in the early 1990s, coinciding with Japan's so-called *ren'ai būmu* (romance boom). The *ren'ai būmu* relentlessly promotes romance as a means of beautifying everyday life and cultivating *aisareru* ("desirable" and "lovable") women through self-expression involving fashion, hairstyle, body care, communication skill, and the overall presentation of the self. Not only the unmarried, but married women like Megumi are to seek romance too — and to seek it outside marriage if their husbands cannot oblige (Kameyama 2004). Latent in this discourse, moreover, is the incitement to married women to pursue the same goals, even when they exceed the spousal relationship. Particularly during the 1990s, Japan witnessed greater numbers of married women who yearned for extramarital relationships. Movies like *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995) and *Shitsurakuen (Paradise Lost)* (1997), for example, became box office hits in Japan and the original novels also became best-sellers. Women's (and men's) fantasy of having an adulterous affair came to be known as the "Paradise Lost Phenomenon" (*shitsurakuen genshō*) (Ryang 2006: 96). The phenomenon further stoked

the market economy of romance-related entertainment such as home dramas, movies, novels, and soft-core pornography.

Ogata Sakurako, a freelance reporter and editor for the fashion magazine *MORE*, for instance, contends that women's extramarital affairs have become "trendy" (Ogata 2001: 222). Based on a nationwide questionnaire of married women taken in 1998, Ogata found that 47.1% of female respondents fantasized having an extramarital romance and 29.4% actually claimed to have had extramarital sex (Ogata 2001: 218). Following this trend, the term "*kongai ren'ai*, (extramarital romance or extramarital love) is now commonly used in Japan's mass media. It is, however, conceptually differentiated from the conventional meanings and forms of mainly men's *furin* (illicit love) and *uwaki* (affairs), both of which carry moral connotations. Men's illicit affairs are generally associated with more sexually driven desires, where women's extramarital romance is largely conceived as a means for women to maintain their youth, beauty, and attractiveness (Umesaki 2004). Due to its dissociation from sex, I argue that such re-conceptualization has helped make "extramarital romance" socially permissible, even when it includes sexual contact.

In this socio-historical frame, where Japanese women's changing attitudes have converged with the romance boom, I argue that heterosexual romance has become a market technology to lure both single and married women to pursue new ways of fashioning selves and lifestyles (Takeyama 2005). At the same time, married and unmarried women, particularly in their 30s and 40s, are also caught in a dilemma whereby family-oriented conventional ethics and individual-based postindustrial and neoliberal values are constantly competing for their loyalty (Ueno 2004; Kameyama

2004). While social and market trends have underlined emergent changes, individual women, who are socially situated, still struggle with negotiating and reconciling such mixed messages. Thus, the practice of self-fashioning desirable women is deeply woven into the fabric of Japan's changing, yet pervasive gender norms and inequality.

A popular term, *make inu*, translated directly as “loser dog,” for example, has recently come to describe women in Japan over the age of 30 who have yet to be married but still stubbornly cling to office jobs with no future for promotion. Indeed, the implication is that no matter how successful these women may be in their professional careers, because they have miserably failed to achieve their most important “mission” as a woman—being “chosen” by men to marry and procreate—they will always be a loser in Japan (Sakai 2003). Sakai Junko, author of the best selling book, *Make Inu no Toboe* (The Barking of the Loser Dogs), points out the double standard that exempts men from such valuation because social evaluation criteria for men lie in occupational achievement, whereas women's lie in success in romance, marriage, and childrearing (Sakai 2003: 174). As a result of Japan's social rating system, while women in their 30s and 40s today have been raised to be equal to or better than men in education and jobs on the one hand, they are still held to the model image of the housewife as the feminine ideal (Ueno and Nobuta 2004: also Saito and Sakai 2006: 47). For them, heterosexual romance grants a pardon for their singledom as a smokescreen for courtship (Sakai 2003).

Married women are not entirely exempt from this dilemma, either. As leading feminist and sociologist Ueno Chizuko chronicles, married women in their 30s and 40s came of age during Japan's bubble economy and experienced diversified postindustrial consumer cultures, where they actively pursued greater self-fulfillment, including

romantic and sexual satisfaction (Kelsky 2001; Ogura 2003; Sakai 2003; Ueno 2004). They cannot easily give up such ‘freedom’ in exchange for their marriage and childrearing. At the same time, they must cope with a sexual double standard in order to maintain their freedom within Japan’s male-dominated society, where sexually active women are stigmatized as “promiscuous” (*inran*). For them, romance becomes a sugar-coated passport to a socially permissible level of romantic and sexual excitement for maintenance of their youth, beauty, and attractiveness as part of self-fashioning, as well as the socially idealized womanhood (Kameyama 2004).

As such, romance plays an all-purpose means for both single and married women to buffer their schizophrenic situations and to pursue new ways of outfitting their selves and lifestyles. But at the same time, it further leads women toward becoming a “superwoman” who succeeds at all cost in career, family, and romance simultaneously. Sakai Junko, the feminist writer, insists that increasing numbers of women pursue success in their careers, childrearing, and care of the self (Saito and Sakai 2006: 47). Reinforcing Sakai’s view, Kameyama Sanae, who wrote a book entitled, *Otto to wa Dekinai Koto* (Things I Cannot Do With My Husband) based on her interview research, also describes how the ideal among middle-aged women typically involves juggling family, career, romance and/or hobbies to achieve their self-fulfillment (Kameyama 2004: 24). This ‘superwoman’ model motivates women to achieve the ideal in order to feel a sense of self-growth, personal achievement, and empowerment; at the same time, it intimidates them and creates a void (Kameyama 2004: 24). Sakai Junko admits that she is satisfied with her career as a popular writer but cannot deny that she also feels an emptiness as a

single woman (Saito and Sakai 2006: 47). She claims that every woman potentially has a sense of ‘lack’ (*ketsuraku kan*) due to the unobtainable ‘superwoman’ ideal (Ibid).

This unachievable ideal and existential void becomes the bait that Japanese marketing and advertising firms exploit and hosts take advantage of to cater to women’s affect, including fantasy, desire, self-fulfillment, and a sense of healing (Miura 2005: 114). Yoritomo, the host who has published popular books about hosting and appeared on numerous Japanese variety shows, contends that women’s *kūkyo kan* (void) and *ketsuraku kan* (lack) have become a limitless business opportunity since every woman has both in their everyday life (Yoritomo 2003: 158). This business transaction shapes and fuels the affect economy that capitalizes on women’s affect to entice them into spending money for themselves and also on their hosts.

Pursuit of the “Super Woman”

Fumi, a single and self-employed sales woman in her mid-40s, is a case example of a woman who attempts to fulfill what she says she is missing in her life through host clubbing. Fumi is originally from Japan’s northern Tohoku region and has never married. She launched her own lingerie business in Tokyo about ten years ago and constantly worked until a friend of hers took her to *Fantasy* after her 37th birthday party. Fumi told me that she realized how much she had devoted herself to her career and neglected caring about herself. She often wore no cosmetics and usually simply bound her hair in a knot as her daily hairstyle. She described herself as looking like an *obasan* (a derogatory term for a middle aged woman). “Before it becomes too late,” Fumi said, “I want to enjoy my private life too. I want to get back my thin body. I want to enjoy romance. All of these

give me the energy and motivation to work hard.” She now has lightly permed brown hair and wears cosmetics and displays a manicure. She also dresses up when she visits the host club.

However, she is not interested in actually getting married because she told me that marriage requires too much commitment. It is also technically impossible to commit herself to maintaining a serious relationship due to her busy work schedule. So, for Fumi, host clubbing is a convenient way to enjoy what she feels she is lacking in her life, i.e., care of the self and romance, at her convenience (in exchange for money). Fumi said, “Hosts are like buddies to have fun with and like boyfriends to date with. Unlike typical friends, they are always there [in the club] for you whenever you feel seeing them. Such convenience is valuable for me because my career comes first.”

While Fumi’s response is fairly dry, she believes that her host, Daisuke, likes her as a woman and tries to reciprocate his feelings and express his ‘love’. Daisuke, for example, often visits her office and decorates it up nicely for her. When Fumi invited him to go to a fireworks display one summer night, Daisuke spent 100,000 yen on a yukata set so that his would match Fumi’s. On that night, Fumi stopped by *Fantasy* with Daisuke and ordered a 600,000-yen (\$6,000) bottle of whiskey to show her appreciation. By spending lavishly on him, Fumi helps Daisuke maintain his top ranking at the club. During my interview, however, Daisuke told me that even though he likes Fumi as a person, he pretends as if he were in love with her because she is such a good client who can afford expensive bottles of liquor and help boost his sales. He admitted that he doesn’t have a “genuine” feeling of love for her. Fumi also confessed to me that she actually likes another host, a friend of Daisuke’s, who her girlfriend has designated. To

avoid conflict and attain what she wants, however, Fumi maintains the relationship with Daisuke. Fumi's example demonstrates that some women in the host club do not necessarily seek a "real" romance but enjoy the touch of it to complete themselves in what they feel is a vital aspect of womanhood. In this vein, romance is a means for them to care about themselves and elaborate their lifestyles.

Yuki, a 46-year-old married woman, also pursues the 'superwoman' ideal. Yuki is a stay-at-home wife of a company owner and mother of three children, living in a newly built three-story mansion with a rooftop swimming pool in Shinjuku, Tokyo. But in the host club, she tells hosts that she is a single woman and adoptive mother of a baby son, and presents herself as a company owner. On average, Yuki spends roughly \$10,000 a month at *Fantasy*, she said. On the night that I first met her, in the fall of 2004, her 34-year-old top-ranking host, Ken, invited me over to sit at her table. (Ken's helper host, whom I interviewed, thought Yuki would be a good informant and arranged the introduction.) Her table was covered with expensive bottles of wine and liquor, including Remy Martin Louis XIII, an aged cognac costing more than \$3,000. Dressed in a Chanel open-black dress and wearing a diamond-encrusted wristwatch, ring, necklace, and earring combo, Yuki looked like a model from a Japanese fashion magazine. Her carefully applied mascara emphasized her large eyes and gave contrast to her pointed nose and thin lips. Only her husky voice and the thin wrinkles under her nose betrayed her actual age.

When I met with Yuki later at a nearby coffee shop, she said that she resisted being just a housewife who is solely devoted to her family, but instead wanted to remain in a perpetual state of romance and maintain her seductive power for as long as possible.

Yuki told me that her attitude and look was modeled after Matsuda Seiko and Kuroki Hitomi, celebrities now in their mid-40s. (Kuroki is the actress who played the adulterous woman in the film *Paradise Lost*). Matsuda and Kuroki, known in the tabloids for their numerous romantic digressions, maintain a kind of youthful mien that Japanese women idealize as the epitome of female attractiveness. Their attractiveness is heightened by the fact that both are mothers and also career women (as a singer and an actress respectively). For Yuki, who is satisfied with her husband's financial affluence and family life, maintaining her (body/self) beauty and seductive appeal is an enterprise that she undertakes through an affect economy in the host club. "In my youth," she said, "without any effort men approached me to please me — buying me gifts and treating me at fancy restaurants. But today, I have to perform as an attractive woman in order to exercise such feminine power." As part of that performance, Yuki enacts multiples selves — career woman, adoptive mother, and attractive woman — reflecting the idealized superwoman in contemporary Japan.

For women like Fumi, Yuki, and Megumi, the personalized service hosts provide allows them the opportunity to experience what they are 'missing' and be who they want to be in exchange for money. In this respect they do not necessarily expect authenticity in romance. Fumi's case exemplifies that a female client believes in a host's love even if it is a false love for the host. By the same token, she enjoys her romantic experience without 'genuine' feelings toward her host. Megumi also indicates that romance is imaginative and romantic excitement has a performative effect on her self-confidence. Thus, romance in the host club is not entirely a "state of mind" but a means and process

of performatively evoking something extraordinary and pleasant for another purpose such as self-fulfillment. Yuki frankly but insightfully insists:

There is no genuine love in a host club. Through my own and my friend's experiences, I am convinced that hosts simply believe in rich women as their Bodhisattva savior (*bosatsu*) for their financial 'salvation.' Most women in the club don't seriously love hosts. They merely *fall for themselves* — their beautiful and attractive selves, under the spell of romance.

Yuki explains that bodily excitement she gains through romantic experience is all about performance. To intensify her romantic excitement, she pretends as if she loves Ken, although she actually doesn't care about her romantic partner all that much. (She says that she just picked a top-ranking host in the club who happened to be Ken.) For her, romance is a conduit of mutual seduction to (re)assure her beauty and attractiveness. "If you perform as a man's favorite 'girl'," Yuki said, "he treats you better." She dresses up, gazes at men, and pretends to be a weak woman so as to appeal to men. In her relationship with Ken, she quit smoking when she learned that Ken doesn't like a woman who smokes. She also orders expensive bottles of whiskey and wine to increase his monthly sales even though she doesn't drink alcohol at all. In return, she savors the seductive masculinity Ken displays wearing his Armani suits, and the chivalrous attention he lavishes on her. He takes her to high-end hotel lounges and fancy restaurants to elevate the romantic atmosphere and enjoyment. In his cell phone text messages to Yuki, he expresses how much he loves her. Such mutual seduction, Yuki says, helps strengthen her seductive aura and also beautifies her daily life.

As Yuki and Megumi suggest, a female client's self-identity as a "woman" — an *attractive* woman — is less an attribute of biological sex or substantial entity than a

constant striving to maintain self-confidence and achieve self-fulfillment. Thus, gender identity is performatively constituted in, and also constitutes, the realm of culturally idealized womanhood — youth, beauty, and attractiveness, where heterosexual romance plays the starring role for both married and single women.

Particularly, married women's pursuit of self-identities as "women" via extramarital romance is, I argue, not just a signification practice but also a negotiation process with their gender ideal, romantic desires, familial obligations, and social ethics. For example, Megumi and Yuki both play the role of wife and mother in order to justify their nightlife activities. "The host club doesn't have a good reputation, but it is not a sex industry," Megumi explained. Her husband assumes that nothing seriously sexual or intimate would happen within the club and permits her to go as long as she follows a 5 a.m. curfew and the rule that she is forbidden to have any affairs. So far, Megumi says she has complied with her husband's restrictions and is able to finish her house chores without letting her hostclubbing intervene. In addition, Megumi argues that she has contributed to raising the children and managing the family finances to build their new house, and is therefore now entitled to enjoy herself with money she has saved. Similarly, Yuki plays the role of a "good" mother, devoting herself to her children's education, well-being, and life in general. "My husband is so impressed with my devotion to childrearing that he has no clue that I have a relationship with a host," Yuki says. Even though he knows that she visits a host club, she suspects that he thinks her 'bad' girlfriend has tempted her to go along with her. Furthermore, Yuki cleverly justifies her hostclubbing as not only for herself but also for her husband, saying, "I keep house and maintain my beauty to please my husband. Husbands in Japan want their wives to be

attractive so that they can show off and gain credit for that. They just don't want their wives to have affairs. So, I simply keep it hidden." In their own minds, Megumi and Yuki justify their conduct and minimize their sense of guilt. They also take advantage of their perceived docility as mothers to court their romantic excitement outside marriage.

While they actively engage in extramarital romance, both Megumi and Yuki do not intend to destroy their family. In order to "protect" their family life, they choose the host club and hosts instead of seeking romance somewhere else with "ordinary" men. They unanimously stress that hosts are "professionals," convinced that "since hosting is their profession, hosts won't mess with their client's family lives," Megumi said. Nevertheless, Megumi does not deny the potential exists for sexual relations with Koji, and says that if she succumbs she will simply keep the matter secret. In essence, Megumi makes ethical judgments and strategically pursues her extramarital romance within the scope of her spouse's understanding and social tolerance, while taking advantage of his misperception and Japanese society's inherent secrecy surrounding extramarital relationships. In Yuki's case, she admits that she has had sexual relations with Ken, but she denies that it is sinful because she has never traveled or stayed overnight with him like an ordinary couple. In other words, she has never selfishly neglected her family and therefore her behavior is excusable. Her explanation doesn't make sense to onlookers like me. Nonetheless, such nuanced ethical distinctions refers to the social expectation of the ideal mother, who prioritizes the family over herself, simultaneously reinforcing the gender norm in her narration and destabilizing it in her deeds. Hence, the performative ambivalence is a way for her to reconcile her desires, conjugal trust, and social expectations.

Hostclubbing for married women like Yuki and Megumi therefore is not merely about the phantasmal experience of liminal tempo-spatiality that helps sustain existing social structures and functions. Neither is it a practice of passively inscribing social norms and expectations onto their bodies. It is a negotiation process, in which individual intentionality, strategic performance, and intersubjective negotiations are played out in sometimes coherent and, at other times, contradictory ways. In the negotiation process, these married women contest Japanese social norms surrounding gender and sexuality such as extramarital relations (as a male prerogative) and desexualized womanhood in marriage.

Keeping their extramarital affairs secret, housewives like Megumi and Yuki might not appear to challenge the male prerogative. However, a closer look provides a more nuanced picture. Megumi and Yuki are actually armed with the gendered assumption that allows them to safely violate the sexual double standard. For example, both keep house and perform as “good” wives/mothers to disguise their extramarital romance from their husbands. They also take advantage of the societal rule of secrecy. In so doing, they justify their activities, and secretly, yet boldly, *act out* violation that in turn helps undermine the double standard. Such nonverbal, yet bodily acts of contestation are not an isolated incident in the host club but a symptomatic marker of rapidly changing erotic life in contemporary Japan. This nonverbal, but bodily claim manifests the recent Paradise Lost phenomena, within which extramarital affairs have become ‘trendy.’

The host club is one market niche where married women pursue extramarital romance in exchange for money. Through romance, housewives like Megumi and Yuki attempt to prolong their “womanhood” and maintain their attractiveness. Since

womanhood in Japan is conceptualized as a mere transition period from sexually sealed girlhood to desexualized motherhood (Allison 1994; Robertson 1998), their attempt potentially undermines the discriminatory compartmentalization of female sexuality in Japan based on age and maternal status. In addition, they might gain seductive feminine power to further manipulate men and by extension, male-centered social norms.

In the same way, however, female seductiveness also depends for its acknowledgement on the male gaze in heterosexual romance. Consequently, married women voluntarily posit their physical attractiveness as an important disposition and objectify their bodies for an extended period. Thus, neither de-sexualization in motherhood nor re-sexualization in romance leads them to a self-identity or social practice autonomous from male-centered heterosexual logic. As Judith Butler asserts, the transcendental model is culturally unimaginable and politically impracticable (Butler 1990: 30). This is because the patriarchal heterosexual system hinges upon both Japan's family institution and romance economy on the one hand and crisscrosses gender, sexuality, and self-identity on other. In this sense, I argue that the institutionalized family system and capitalized romantic fantasy are two sides of the same coin because fantasy is rooted in and derived from always and already male-centered social contexts and practices.

The Gendered Logic of Romantic Love

The affect economy in the host club, nonetheless, complicates individual experiences of romance, which are visceral, sensual, sentimental, and imaginative. Experiences are neither transparent nor coherent. They are oftentimes contradictory and

ambivalent. In particular, the affect economy, which is founded on a speculative accumulation of capital, blurs the discreteness of money, labor, and romantic love in the project of the self. Some female clients at *Fantasy* enjoy the “taste” of romance; others eagerly seek romance and experience the paradox: they selflessly devote themselves financially to their hosts as an ‘investment’ to satisfy their sense of self-fulfillment. The resultant paradox echoes the gendered logic of the ideal woman as a chosen or ‘beloved’ one as discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, it is important to carefully scrutinize further the interplay among money, love, and labor to understand the gendered logic of romantic love and subjectivity formation in contemporary Japan.

At the intersection of postindustrial consumer culture, particularly within the so-called ‘romance boom’ and neoliberal values of individuality, competitiveness, and entrepreneurship, as I discussed earlier consumption has become a work of the self. In the speculative affect economy, consumption also has become a form of labor that creates greater surplus value. Even performatively presented popularity and desirability, for example, creates competition among female clients and boosts the market value of hosts’ services. Miranda Joseph asserts that the labor of the consumer, i.e., the consumptive labor, consists of non-organized and non-disciplinary forms of consumption activities, e.g., ‘free’ choice and the purchase of commodities to satisfy their personal needs. Unlike productive wage labor, such consumptive labor contributes “the greater share of surplus value, an unlimited share since it is based on signification and not on human labor capacity within the twenty-four-hour day” (Joseph 2002: 43; 41). In the affect economy at the host club, women’s consumptive activities are closely intertwined with their desirable selfhood. In this way, Joseph also argues, “consumptive labor is produced and

exploited through active subjection in the expression of needs, desires, self, [and] identity” and therefore is not necessarily external to or oppositional to capitalist production (Ibid: 43). The women’s consumptive labor in the host club may very well be the elaboration of Japan’s affect economy, which has the gendered division of labor.

In Chapter 4, I argued that despite the apparent inversion of gender roles evidenced by hosts’ symbolic subordination and eagerness to please women, over time gender relations at *Fantasy* underscore gender power dynamics through the art of seduction. So far in this chapter, I discussed how Japan’s gendered social evaluation system idealizes the ‘desirable’ woman and the ‘successful’ man—ideals on display in the host club. Women’s self-identity in *Fantasy* is illuminated by the notion of the ‘desirable’ (super)woman, whereas hosts’ masculine self-identity is crafted through the concept of the occupationally ‘successful’ man. Consequently, romance becomes a means for both sides to satisfy their sense of self-fulfillment and self-affirmation. For the host, romantically pleasing women for monetary return puts them in an apparently embarrassing and subordinated position, whereas for the client, their eager romance seeking ‘voluntarily’ subordinates themselves to the hierarchical gender order.

Akemi, a woman in her early 40s, exemplifies an extreme case of a female customer enabling her host. She divorced her husband, an ex-host, after falling in love with a younger host, and became a sex worker in order to financially support him. She spent more than 100 million yen (nearly \$1,000,000) on him over eight years and helped elevate him to the top echelon among hosts at his club. I met her through her current host, who worked at *Fantasy*, and interviewed her.

Akemi told me that her first host club visit occurred almost 20 years ago, when she was working as a hostess in Shinjuku. She and her designated host both succumbed to a case of love at first sight and soon got married. Akemi became a housewife, but she said that she quickly became bored. Before long Akemi began sneaking out of their Tokyo apartment to visit a nearby host club and met her new host, Seiya. She got divorced and became a hostess again to afford going to the club. At this point, Akemi told me that she had the same feelings with Seiya that she did for her ex-husband and wanted to get married. She felt an overwhelming devotion to him. So when Seiya approached her and said, “You are the only person I can honestly tell that I am in trouble achieving my sales goal this month,” Akemi couldn’t help spending more money to save him. When she learned that his dream was to open his own host club, she decided to become a sex worker in order to increase her monthly spending in the club. “I believed that I could hasten the process whereby both his and my dreams — opening a new club and getting married — would come true,” Akemi explained. From her perspective, her “choice” to support him and achieve her own goals were aligned with her notions of love. “For me love means that I would *do* anything for the one [I love].”

Nevertheless, she said the choice she made based on her notion of love was fated to accompany hardship. She told me that she wanted to help Seiya elevate his sales ranking and secure more of his personal attention, and so attempted to spend more money than anybody else in the club. “It was my rival spirit against his other clients and my feelings toward him that motivated myself to find better paying sex work,” Akemi said. She started off working in a “pinku saron” (pink salon, where female sex workers perform hand or oral sex and take in \$25 to \$35 per client). She graduated to prostitution

at a “sopurando” (soap land, where female sex workers have sex and earn \$85 to \$110 per client) and eventually pressured herself to take on more customers. Akemi reflexively explained that the more she earned, the more she spent on Seiya and the more she desired to monopolize him. “My spending went through the roof,” she said. “One month I earned \$5,000 and spent \$3,000 on him. The next month I made \$10,000 and spent \$8,000.” She also regularly bought him expensive bottles of hard liquor, several \$5,000 Versace suits, and a specially ordered \$20,000 Frank Miller wrist watch on his birthday.

Thus, she had a double shift of labor work: her sex work to earn the money and her consumptive labor to spend the money on her host in the host club. Her speculative consumption helps Seiya create surplus value on his commodified body/self, and increase the club’s profit. Her seemingly selfless devotion, however, paradoxically fulfills her. “It was painful to take on more customers, but it was *ai no kurushimi* (pain for love)” Akemi said. “Seiya’s smiling face and special attention toward me made it all worthwhile, and the harder things got, the more love I felt for him and the more strength I sensed within myself.” Here, labor, money, and love are all intertwined in her project of the desirable self. The labor and money she provides Seiya signifies both her love to him and her strength to herself. Akemi admits that Seiya has never *told* her what to do. As she stated earlier, his indirect speech and body acts such as embodied in his troubled confession and ‘special’ treatment, as well as her desire to get married to him, prompted her to ‘choose’ to *do* anything for the one she loves. For Akemi, the “princess-like” treatment (*ohimesama atsukai*) that she felt she got in the club satisfied her self-worth. Akemi recalled the time when Seiya and she were walking together on the street, and he unexpectedly picked her up off the ground as if he were a prince in order to ‘protect’ her

from a puddle in her way. In retrospect, she admits that her experience with Seiya was both painful and pleasurable, hollow and self-fulfilling at the same time. Her ambiguous and contradictory feelings are reflected in her simultaneously active and passive role in her consumptive labor. On the one hand, Akemi said, “I was proud of my achievement making him number one and also enjoyed being treated like a V.I.P. in the club.” On the other hand, her active role inverted to passive one when it came to her romantic pleasure. “I enjoyed the sense of superiority of being the chosen one (*erabareta hito*) by the number one host [as his ‘princess’],” Akemi said.

Her active/passive status in the affect economy, I argue, echoes the gendered ideal, the ‘superwoman’ model. Akemi’s financial power, quantified and visualized in numerical forms such as Seiya’s rank and monthly sales, helped her to enjoy a sense of achievement. The feeling was reinforced by her being treated like a V.I.P. Her labor in the host club—the consumptive labor or love’s labor—is recognized by herself and the others in the club as if it were a career achievement. But at the same time, her monetary power over the one she loves undermines her desirability as a woman. As a result, she emphasizes her passivity by highlighting that she was wanted and chosen by a man who is regarded as occupationally successful, i.e., the ideal one. These two are inseparable in the affect economy because without her consumptive labor, she wouldn’t be treated as she wanted to be. At the same time, the man, who chooses her, has to be the ideal one. Otherwise, the legitimacy of her desirability is undermined. Thus, Akemi puts her passivity forward in a way that helps maintain her feminine attractiveness by overshadowing her aggressive economic activities that masculinizes her in relation to her male host.

In doing so, Akemi buttresses the idealized image of desirable women in romantic discourses. As I brought up in Chapter 2, in the popular Japanese discourse on romantic love, the idea that an “ordinary” woman can instantly become a princess by fate, i.e., by simply encountering her ‘fated partner’ (*unmei no hito*), is the quintessential Japanese Cinderella story, which hosts exploit. Indeed, the fantasy of Cinderella is so potent that it mystifies the plot: In the host club space, the entire scenario —becoming a ‘chosen’ woman as a desirable and seductive one—is already embedded. It only requires money to enact the scenario, within which she plays a role of the heroine with the prince played by the host.

Nakamura Usagi, an expert on Japan’s sex industry and a host club patron, argues that women’s self-devotion in romance is a social issue. In *Ai to Shihonshugi* (Love and Capitalism), a popular novel based on her own host club experiences, Ryo, a male host and protagonist, asks: “Why do women believe love is something requiring self-sacrifice for others, particularly for the men whom they love? Whose value is that?” (2002: 102-3). Nakamura suggests that it lies in how Japanese society evaluates women based largely on the success of the men in their lives. Female customers such as Nakamura Usagi, a well-known writer and host club patron, typify this. In an interview with *The Japan Times*, Nakamura describes the connection between female clients’ devotion to their hosts and hosts’ success in monthly sales competitions. Despite her popularity and success as a writer, Nakamura says:

I always live with anxiety about my position in the world [because] I cannot numerically express my value as a woman, or what I do professionally ... I was projecting myself onto my host [in the sales competition game]. And when he was moving upward it made me feel as if my own value was rising as well (*Japan Times* 2003).

Nakamura deftly captures how male-centered social structures confer a subsidiary status on the value of women and their work. Within such structures women are encouraged to devote themselves to men and live vicariously through projecting themselves onto their men.

Akemi, who has committed herself to her host and vicariously experienced a sense of achievement, continued her financial largesse, paying all that she could to secure her own sense of victory as the “chosen” woman. When Seiya opened his own host club and broke up with her, she finally realized that his love was, after all, a pseudo-love. Because she spent all of her income on him and has no savings, she still lives in a tiny one-room studio apartment in Shinjuku and works in the sex industry. Despite these drawbacks, Akemi doesn’t regret her relationship with her host or the money she spent. “Although I spent so much money on him, he never asked me to do so. I voluntarily did it. I did it in order to satisfy mainly myself” she admitted. Akemi hasn’t given up believing in romance, either. For the next round of the “game,” she says, “I think it is important to seduce a man instead of you becoming infatuated with him, because the one who falls in love loses.” Akemi’s lesson does not challenge the gendered logic of romantic love — the desirable women as ‘chosen’ and love as selfless devotion. Reducing the gendered logic of *aisareru* (desirable or lovable) women to a merely strategic issue, she depoliticizes gender difference and inequality to a personal issue.

To be sure, not only Seiya’s manipulation but also Akemi’s complex situation — her personality, past experiences, unmarried status, and individual desires — has cumulatively impacted on her “choice.” But as Akemi’s experience also illustrates,

female clients' choice is largely embedded in Japan's socio-economic and gender system, which caters to desire primarily by unlocking their tremendous spending power in the guise of promoting their ideal image of the 'chosen' woman. In this respect, women's choice is mostly predetermined. Women's financial power and their craving for desirability and lovability subsume them to the gendered logic of romantic love and the social evaluation system, that is, *aisareru* women are idealized and highly valued.

The gendered logic of romantic love rationalizes women's devotion to men. As Akemi's case shows, a woman's selfless (but not unselfish) devotion in romantic love is not relinquishing the self but actually reassuring the sense of self. It is also an investment for a future high return: elevating herself as an ideal woman and vicariously attaining higher social status through their men's potential success. Such an investment, however, unintentionally reinforces male-centered social structures that relegate women to a dependent position. Knowing this, clever women like Yuki might deploy their seductive power and make the best possible use of it. Nonetheless, I argue that women voluntarily subordinate themselves to the passive position within the gendered romantic love and self-affirmation modality — idealization of the 'chosen' and 'beloved' woman.

Chapter Conclusion

The host club is a consumer space, where women in Japan can escape from social constraints and seek an alternative life of their own. The social constraints are, however, different from one woman to another in the age where competing discourses on what an ideal woman is or should be is constantly transmitted through marketing, advertising, and other forms of media. In this postindustrial consumer age with its emphasis on neoliberal

individuality and entrepreneurship, subversive acts are rather sporadic than teleological. At *Fantasy*, female clients (who have disposable income yet lack stable social status), fantasize self-fulfillment through romantic experience. I argued that these desired selves are inevitably gendered because their fantasy and desires root in Japan's existing social expectations and valuation system based on gender differences.

In this chapter, I focused on female clients', particularly married women's, self-identity and demonstrated how romance has become the pivot of identity formation and its double-edged nature: women employ it to refine the self and explore their own romantic (and sexual) pleasure, while simultaneously (re)producing culturally idealized womanhood — youth, beauty, attractiveness, and passivity. In addition, the married women I introduced in this chapter pursue their extramarital romance by way of playing the role of the respectful mother figure and exhibiting desirable female passivity. It is, however, problematic to assume that female passivity merely reproduces Japan's gender and sexual status quo. This is because the equation of submissiveness to lack of human agency overlooks non-organized or non-verbal subversive acts. As I demonstrated, female clients in *Fantasy* arm themselves with socially defined norms and assumptions in order to covertly challenge such double standards as extramarital romance as a male entitlement and the image of the desexualized mother figure in the family system. Thus, individual conducts are not merely “inscribed” and “governed.” They are also constitutive elements of collective effects on social transformations of existing systems and norms. The new social currency, “extramarital romance,” itself is an example of how much women's subversive pursuits have gradually become socially permissible, transforming Japan's gender and sexual norms.

From the vantage of subversive aspects of individual enactments, I highlight the importance of the nuanced contextual difference between the “norms” that individual actors employ as a guise and the norms that they subvert under the guise. Thus, social norms that consist of multiple layers need to be contextualized. Non-verbal, yet bodily displays should be also taken into account as a form of subversive enactment. Otherwise, as feminist literary critic Gayatri Spivak (1988) argues, subalterns, whose voices are muted, would be dismissed as those who cannot *and* do not speak to authority despite their secretly, yet boldly acted out subversion. In this respect, women’s agency lies in, as feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood argues, the “capability for action,” which is socio-historically shaped and conditioned (Mahmood 2001: 210). Following Mahmood’s notion of agency, I also argue that agency is not only embodied in vocally contesting authority or intentionally organizing collective movements. Agency is, rather, an effect of a variety of ambivalent conducts. Thus, I warn that focusing on verbal articulation and dismissing actual enactments risks reifying existing power relations of heteronormative patriarchy.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

One late evening in the summer of 2005 as I neared the completion of my field research on host clubs, I saw soap bubbles floating in the air. I had just met with Yuki, a female host club client and interlocutor, to have coffee and talk at a Shinjuku family restaurant. As we both ascended the stairs to the restaurant, I caught Yuki, who was wearing a vivid yellow shirt and a pair of white pants, against a background of children playing late at night, blowing bubbles that dissolved in the darkness around her body. It was a surreal, yet prescient moment. It turned out that this was to be a night when my research conviction was shaken.

“Everything is a performance and a lie. It’s just like a bubble,” said Yuki that night. After many conversations, formal and informal interviews, and extended time spent with her over a three-month period, Yuki confided that all she ever did with her husband, children, host, friends, neighbors, and children’s schoolteachers was merely bubble-like performance and lying. Once I realized that I wasn’t an exception to her duplicity and that she was likewise performing for me, I felt as if her trustworthiness, our relationship, and the legitimacy of my research itself had crumbled. Although I had theoretically studied about performativity, the postmodern condition, and the problematic western tradition of rationality, I realized that knowing something and actually being involved in it were two different things. I started to ask myself: Have I just collected a bunch of lies? Is this research no more than shoveling, breaking, or playing with bubbles? What does it mean to study transitory and shifting subjectivity, relationships, and the world itself?

I gradually came to understand that this project was about the fluidity and incoherency between trustworthiness and distrust, instrumentality and emotionality, and reality and fantasy in a Tokyo host club and by extension Japan's affect economy. The affect economy, as I defined in the Introduction, is a service-based industry and business enterprise that takes a form characterized by highly personalized interaction that optimizes the exchange of money for affective labor. Such an economy is, I argued, rapidly developing at the intersection of Japan's postindustrial consumerism and neoliberal reformation. In this economy, personal care, intimate life, and human relationships have increasingly become commercialized. This trend is not unique to Japan but is now a typical feature of neoliberal globalization. While some scholars have theorized the interplay that exists between the shift to postindustrial consumerism and the increase of affective labor, microanalyses of subjectivity formation, the interrelationship between service provider and recipient, and the cultural politics that the interaction results in and impacts upon have yet to be undertaken. I have situated the host club scene as a unique portal into the social processes of formation of neoliberal subjects, the reconfiguration of gender power dynamics, and class struggle in Japan's affect economy.

In order to historicize how affect that is not originally produced as a commodity has reached commodity status, I explore how the postindustrial capitalist system, gender relationships, and subjectivity formation have enabled the commodification of affect such as romance in Chapter 2. Overall, I demonstrated how the sign economy in postindustrial consumer culture has fragmented gender, class, and national identity and also the body, romantic feelings, and social relationships. Alongside this socioeconomic fragmentation, the body has become a neoliberal site where individuals cultivate the self of the socially

valued. I also illustrated that changing gender relationships influenced by Japan's romance boom of the 1990s paradoxically idealizes women's subjectivity — women as competent and competitive individuals *and* unselfish and lovable women. Romance has thus become a means and a process of making the ideal woman. At this socio-historical juncture of postindustrial consumerism and neoliberal subjectivity formation, affect such as romance has become commodifiable. Like identity in the postmodern condition, affect has been increasingly scripted through messages and imageries and performatively constituted. As a result, affective labor has economic value when it meets market demand. The romance boom has created the demand and the host club has become a site where host's affective labor fosters a romantic atmosphere and a feeling of intimacy in exchange for money.

While the commodification of affect might be viewed as part of the normal economic activity of production and consumption, I argue that the participants, who are socially situated in gender and class terms, *strategize* their acts and therefore complicate this simplistic view. In the host club, young men of working-class background and women with money and status engage in a cooperative interaction that spawns romantic relationships and optimizes their self-motivated monetary and affective exchanges. Hosts offer their affective labor in the hopes of making high incomes and self-actualizing their chances for upward mobility, whereas their customers are on the receiving end of hosts' attentiveness and provide their consumptive labor as a token of their lovability and as a display of ideal femininity, i.e., self-devoting, desirable women. Throughout this project, I illuminated how social differences and inequalities such as gender and class were

discursively embedded in their desires, interpretations, and Japan's social environment. As such, the interactivity in the host club shapes a form of cultural politics.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I raised the question: How and why do hosts and their clients, who are cognizant of social inequality and gender as a social construct respectively, perpetuate class and gender hierarchies rather than challenge them? I argue that the paradox —awareness of social inequality and the reproduction of it— is emblematic at the junction of the postindustrial sign economy and neoliberalism. As I argue in Chapter 2, class and gender identities are increasingly signified by the sign of differences rather than determined by social strata and sex differences. The sign economy enables class and gender performativity within the postindustrial information-based economy. In addition, the neoliberal global economy increasingly emphasizes the kind of speculative accumulation of capital that attracts young working-class men in Japan. The myth of opportunity in the host club in turn seduces youth with limited employment potential into taking a chance and voluntarily subjecting themselves to *laissez-faire* competition and exploitative working conditions. From this perspective, host's ambition and the results-oriented neoliberal economy go hand in hand, reproducing social inequalities. On the other, the performativity of ideal femininity not only deconstructs essentialized gender identity and the patriarchal family system but also invites individual women to engage in the enterprise of the self and cultivate desirable selves, i.e., neoliberal subjects. In this regard, both hosts and their clients are products and producers of the interrelation between Japan's postindustrial sign economy and neoliberal globalization.

Another question I raised in this dissertation was: How do people and social institutions like the host, their clients, and the host club establishment (who have different

motives and goals) cooperatively interact and satisfy one another on non-functionalistic terms? In order to unravel this question, I have theorized *the art of seduction* based on Michel Foucault's notion of the art of government and Michel Hardt's term of affective labor. The art of seduction is a form of governing technology. It consists of highly calculated, yet suggestive speech and body acts that capitalize on the other's affect and entice him/her into 'voluntarily' serving for the other's favor and ends. The art of seduction is about subtle governance of the other's conduct in an asymmetric, yet reciprocal way: understanding the seducee's fantasies, desires, and goals, and providing the right affective labor to produce a feeling of satisfaction, well-being, and intimacy so as to guide the seducee to 'freely' think of and devote to the seducer. For example, hosts provide their affective labor, through which they feed women's romantic fantasy and create an aura of intimacy, in order to seduce them to spend more money. Similarly, female clients make an effort to financially please their hosts in order to be thought of better and as special. In such an unintentionally coordinated way, both sides seduce one another to achieve self-satisfaction. As I addressed above, this mutual seduction constitutes a component of the multilayered affect economy: transaction between the host and clients, the host club management, and the affect economy in Japan, writ on a global scale.

The art of seduction has the potential to undermine the fixity of social knowledge, norms, and ethics through strategic use of ambivalence and manipulative inversion of tacit knowledge to artfully produce and manipulate affect. Nonetheless, the potential is, I argue, enabled by and only within the postindustrial capitalist system. I argued how the postindustrial society emerged in the 1970s to "overcome" the limit and loss that

industrial modernization created. Since then, the postindustrial information-based economy has played a role to debunk essentialized identity politics and challenge the status quo for the ‘freedom’ of individual consuming subjects in the 1980s. The consumer culture, as I argued, has paved the road to neoliberal reformation and commercialization of affect that further imbricates the body and the self *per se* into the logic of flexible and speculative accumulation of capital. Thus, postindustrial capitalism itself has been safeguarded against self-demolition and in turn perpetuated due to its malleability. I argue that the art of seduction recently has been promoted as a dream machine, through which everyone has the potential to become an agentive seducer and keep dreaming of constantly renewed goals, in Japan’s affect economy.

Having said that, however, I do not intend to generalize that everyone and everything evolves around the logic of seduction. Neither do I mean that all activities are now within the realm of the affect economy. What I wanted to highlight here is the general trend of a conceptual and economic shift toward the econo-emotive activities at the convergence of postindustrial consumer culture and neoliberal reformation, a shift pointing toward further intensification of the service-based economy. I suggest that it is worth critically examining the affect economy to foreground the postindustrial capitalist system without losing the micro-analysis of subjectivity formation, social relations, and power dynamics. Because of its malleable and enigmatic nature, it is difficult to pin down and define what is problematic about the affect economy. As I attempted to reveal the complexity of hosts’ ‘voluntary’ subordination to exploitative working conditions, for example, I contest that the exploitation itself needs to be redefined not only in a Marxist sense but also in econo-emotive terms. This econo-emotive motive is, I argue, the key to

unraveling the rapidly globalizing information-based consumerism and neoliberalism. The motive affords individual social actors and institutions alike the opportunity of capitalizing on one another's affect to realize their dreams, while simultaneously underscoring gender subordination, social inequality, and the exploitative nature of the affect economy in Japan.

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