

# LIFE IN 2.5 DIMENSIONS by SONIA HEDSTRAND

# LIFE IN 2.5 DIMENSIONS



# UNDERCOVER LAMENTER

From a trustworthy informant I recently heard the following: A commercial gallery in Gothenburg tried to bump up the price of a painting. To increase the buyer's interest, they called in an anonymous worker, whom they internally called a 'lamenteur', a chic lady who, during a mingle at the gallery, when the potential customer happened to be at hearing range, eloquently poured out her feelings about the artwork in question. Art has always been part of an emotional economy where art objects are loaded with intangible values through emotions. The job of the gallerist is to create mystery around the work and the artist, to attract rich people who want to buy a piece of artist's romanticism. With Bourdieu's concepts understood: cultural and social capital is exchanged for financial capital. Today, this previously obscure form of consumption has been extended to a large part of the ever-growing experience and service sector.

## **Economic**

Financial and other tangible assets

## **Cultural**

Knowledge, tastes and cultural dispositions

Forms of capital

## **Symbolic**

Qualifications, honours and reputation

## **Social**

Family, networks and relationships



# ART FORGERS & OLD MASTERS

In the year 1496, the young Michelangelo copied a Roman figurine depicting the greek God of love, Eros, asleep. Quite in line with the Romans themselves, who largely copied Greek art. When the forgery was revealed Michelangelo became famous, since only a real master can copy so skillfully. Shortly after the end of World War two, Hungarian Elmyr de Hory came to Paris as an aspiring artist, but soon noticed that noone was interested in his work because he was not a well known name. However, in the roles of Picasso, Modigliani and Matisse he became both rich and famous. The Dutchman Han van Meegeren got his revenge on the critics who in his youth called him epigone, when, after a successful career as a fake Dutch Medieval Master, he was elected the second most popular person in the country, after the prime minister. Art forger Thomas Patrick Keating considered himself to be on a mission in opposition to experts, critics and art dealers who wanted to make money at the expense of poor artists and naive collectors. Ironically, there are now fakes of his fakes for sale.



# THE ARTIST AS SECRET AGENT

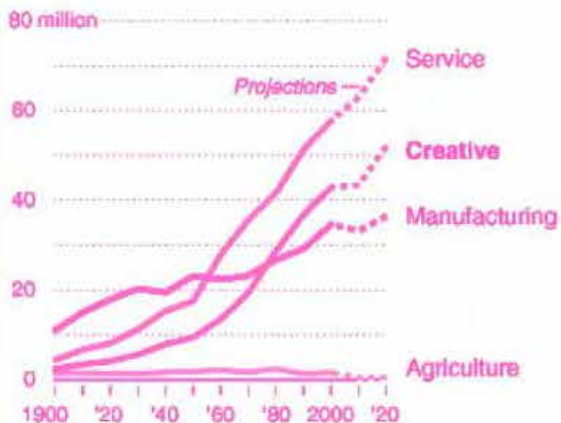
In 17th century Europe, spies were often artists. Peter Paul Rubens had lived in many countries and spoke fluent Dutch, Spanish, French, Italian and Latin, which made him an excellent spy at the English court, on behalf of the Spanish crown. Artists could travel freely and come close to power, as court painters. In the early 17th century when the Kingdom of Sweden had great influence in the European region, the Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna had a network of artist spies in, among others, the Netherlands and Denmark. Intelligence reports were sent rolled into canvases, and it was easier to hide large payments, because already at that time it was difficult to determine what is a reasonable price on an artwork.



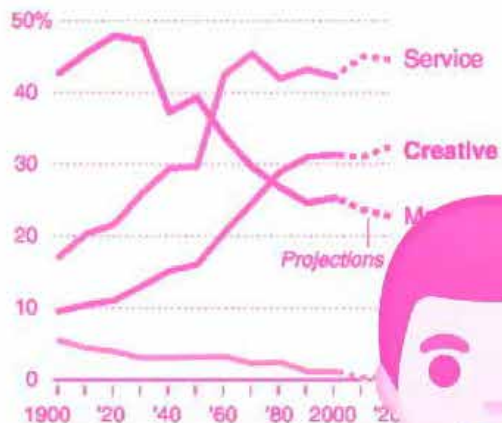
# THE ARTIST AS PARADIGM

Urban geographer Richard Florida welcomes this development and works as a consultant to help 'non-hip' cities get the same status as places like Portland or San Francisco. In his book 'The Rise of the Creative Class' (2002), Florida emphasizes the creative worker as a model for growth in the experience industry. The creative worker wants to live in gentrified areas such as Brooklyn or Södermalm, which with Florida's words score high on his 'bohemian index' (number of artists), 'gay index' and 'multicultural index'. The creative workers have taken some of their most important characteristics from artists; their job is to evoke feelings, and they passionately strive to realise themselves through their jobs. Florida also describes how this committed social class works so much that they do not have time to cook their own food or make their own coffee, and thus begin to consume such services daily, whereupon the service class grows as explosively as the creative class. With Florida's expanded concept of creativity he means designers, architects and start-up engineers, but even service workers must be creative on the job, every coffee place needs a storytelling concept.

Number of workers, by decade

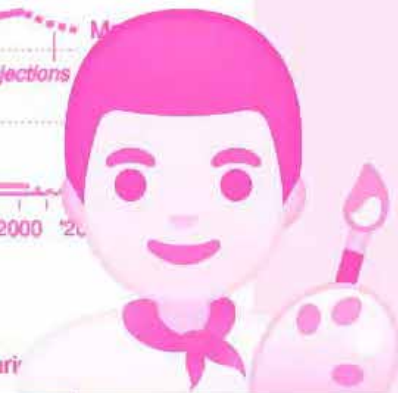


Percentage of workforce, by decade



Percentage of workforce vs. percentage of wages paid in 2006

	Creative Class	Service	Manufacturing	
Workforce	31.0%	45.7	23.1	0.3
Wages paid	49.8%	30.6	19.6	0.1



# INSTAGRAM BOYFRIEND EXPERIENCE

We have an appointment at Piazza Venezia at dawn, before tourists invade the city. Emanuele is an Italian guy just over 20, who greets me with a genuine smile and a kiss on the cheek. For two hours he will show me his favourite places in the eternal city. He guides me to the best vantage points around the Forum Romanum and the Colosseum, and have a caffè latte at a small hipster cafeteria where he knows the barista. Emanuele is not just a charming guy, he also has a good camera. The point of the guided tour is mainly to take favourable portraits of me in front of particularly picturesque views. That same evening, I upload the photos on social media and immediately hit a personal record in likes. Through the peer-review site AirBnB, Emanuele sells his private services for 85 euros per walk under the heading 'Instagram boyfriend experience', with the USP: "an Instagram boyfriend never gets tired of taking pictures of you".

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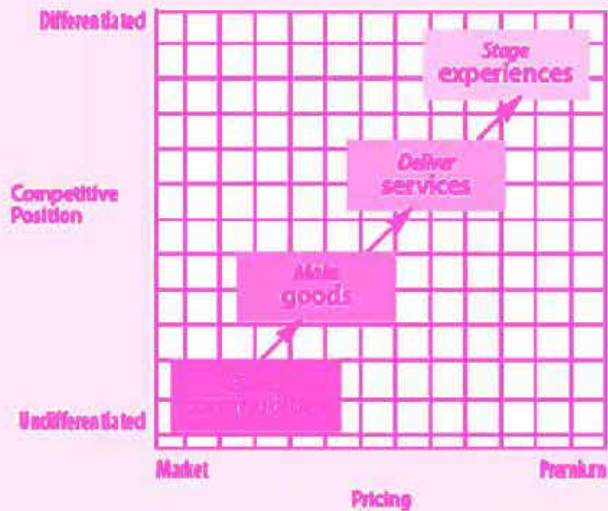


Affections	Emotions
Long-lasting	Fleeting
Deep	Superficial
Consistent with beliefs	Sometimes overpowering
Always result in action	Often fail to produce action
Involve mind, will, feelings	Feelings (often) disconnected from the mind and will

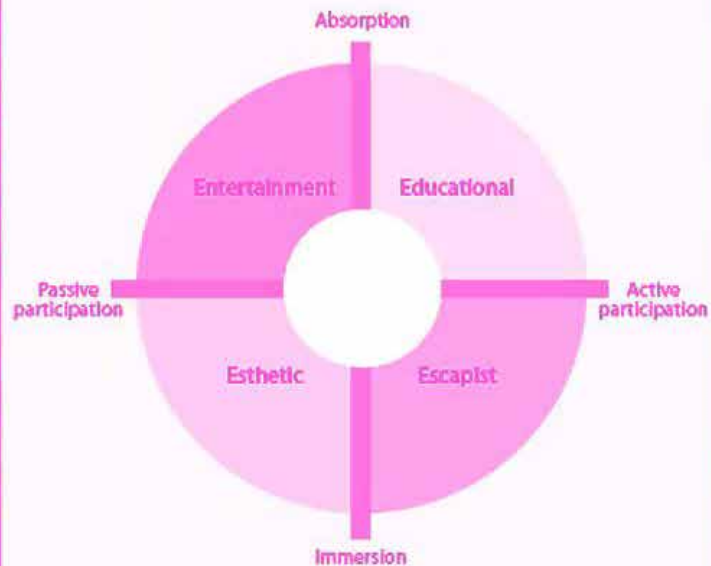
# WALKING PEOPLE

The combined emotional, performative and aesthetic work that Emanuele does belongs to an experience-based professional field that can appear to be somewhat obscure, but it is growing strongly. The other year, LA-resident Chuck McCarthy received some attention when he started working as a people-walker. For \$7, he walks and talks to customers for 30 minutes. He quickly became fully booked by people who needed company and a push to get out and exercise. After a rapid expansion, he hired several walking workers, whose personal profiles interested customers can choose from on the site [www.peoplewalker.com](http://www.peoplewalker.com).

## The Progression of Economic Value



## The Four Realms of an Experience



# PROFIT ON THE DREAM LIFE

There are of course risks in exploiting your private life for your livelihood. A Swedish lifestyle blogger recently ended up in a triple crisis when her husband suddenly wanted to separate. Not only did she lose her partner, but also her dream house and her job; to blog about the dream life with the man and the children in the house. In a radio interview she reflected on the fact that the marriage failed because she was more focused on the ideal wedding than on the man she married. The image of the perfect life came first, reality had to adapt. However, the story ended happily as she made virtue out of necessity and changed profile to blogging about her life as a single mother.



# WHAT IS A JOB?

What is actually a job nowadays? The meaning of the word 'work' has expanded greatly over the past two decades. Today, a job is basically anything that one can make money from. Like buying and selling things on eBay, YouTubing about a personal history of being bullied, showing your butt on Instagram, or, as was recently being advertised on posters around Stockholm: putting together someone else's IKEA furniture. Or performing any household-related services for anyone who has a shortage of time but all the more in the wallet. These are examples from the new 'gig-economy', a 21st century version of day labour. Several interesting philosophers, sociologists and economists have tried to explain how work has developed in post-industrial societies, and how this has led to changes in concepts of class over the past two or three decades.

# WORK



# PRECARIAT

In his book 'The Precariat - The New Dangerous Class' (2011), Guy Standing describes how large groups on the labor market live with uncertain, flexible employment, and how the precarious existence not only applies to the job, but affects the private life of the precariat, this unsafe, growing group that cuts across traditional class divisions such as working and middle class. The precariat survives on temporary jobs, jumps between different workplaces, lacks job security, cannot plan for the future, and often not even for the coming weekend. In addition, precarious workers have different forms of employment, salaries and working conditions, so it becomes difficult for them to organise or to feel solidarity with each other. Constantly stressed for their livelihood they cannot relax, have little mental energy left for leisure time, nevermind more demanding activities such as engagement in social issues, politics, or art. At the same time, the lucky little group with permanent employment, which Standing calls the salariat, often have an easier situation. They can engage in private activities such as working out or having breakfast during work hours. Hidden behind their computers, with complicated tasks that no manager has control over, they can go on social media undisturbed, as well as engage in other non-work activities during paid working time.

Elite  
Salariat  
Proficians  
"Old" Working Class  
Precariat  
Unemployed/Lumped Precariat

# COGNITARIAT

The concept of 'precariat' came from the autonomous left-wing movement of 1970s Italy; activist groups such as Potere Operaio and Autonomia Operaia. The Italian autonomous left saw the alienation produced by industrial work, as Karl Marx speaks of in his early works, as a radical opportunity. Thanks to the shared experience of alienation, the workers could unite and turn towards capital through strike and refusal to work. Thus they could create a collective subject: An independent community outside of capital, hence the word autonomy. But history went down a different path. Maurizio Lazzarato, one of the autonomists, coined the concept of 'immaterial labour' in 1996. Economic value is now produced from emotions, language, creativity and thinking. Franco Berardi sees automation of work, the entry of robots, as an answer to workers' strikes. When machines do the job, industrial workers must be educated. Berardi calls this new economy based on communication 'semiocapitalism', and the new huge information-working class the 'cognitariat'. He describes in his book 'The Soul at Work' (2007) how work has gone from being regarded as a necessary evil, selling one's time and body, to becoming a place for self-realisation. It is our affective, cognitive and aesthetic abilities that are used at work. Commercial enterprises call it 'human capital'.

# DO YOU SUFFER FROM ALIENATION?

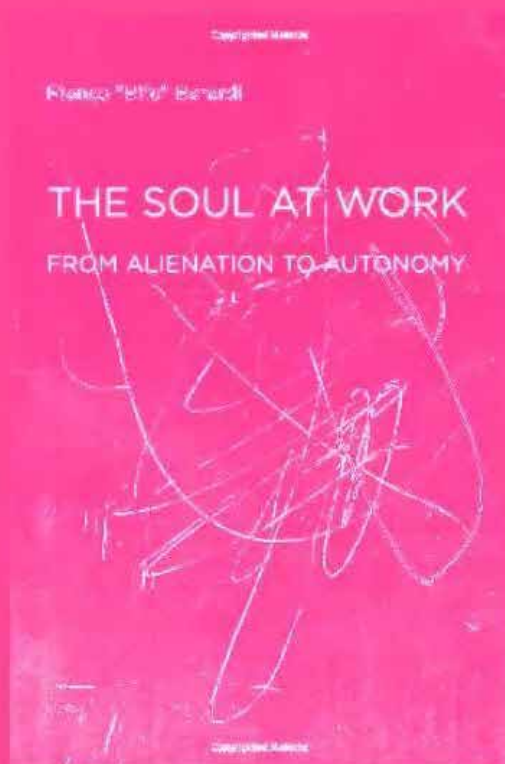


**MARX**

ECONOMIC  
AND PHILOSOPHIC  
MANUSCRIPTS  
OF 1844







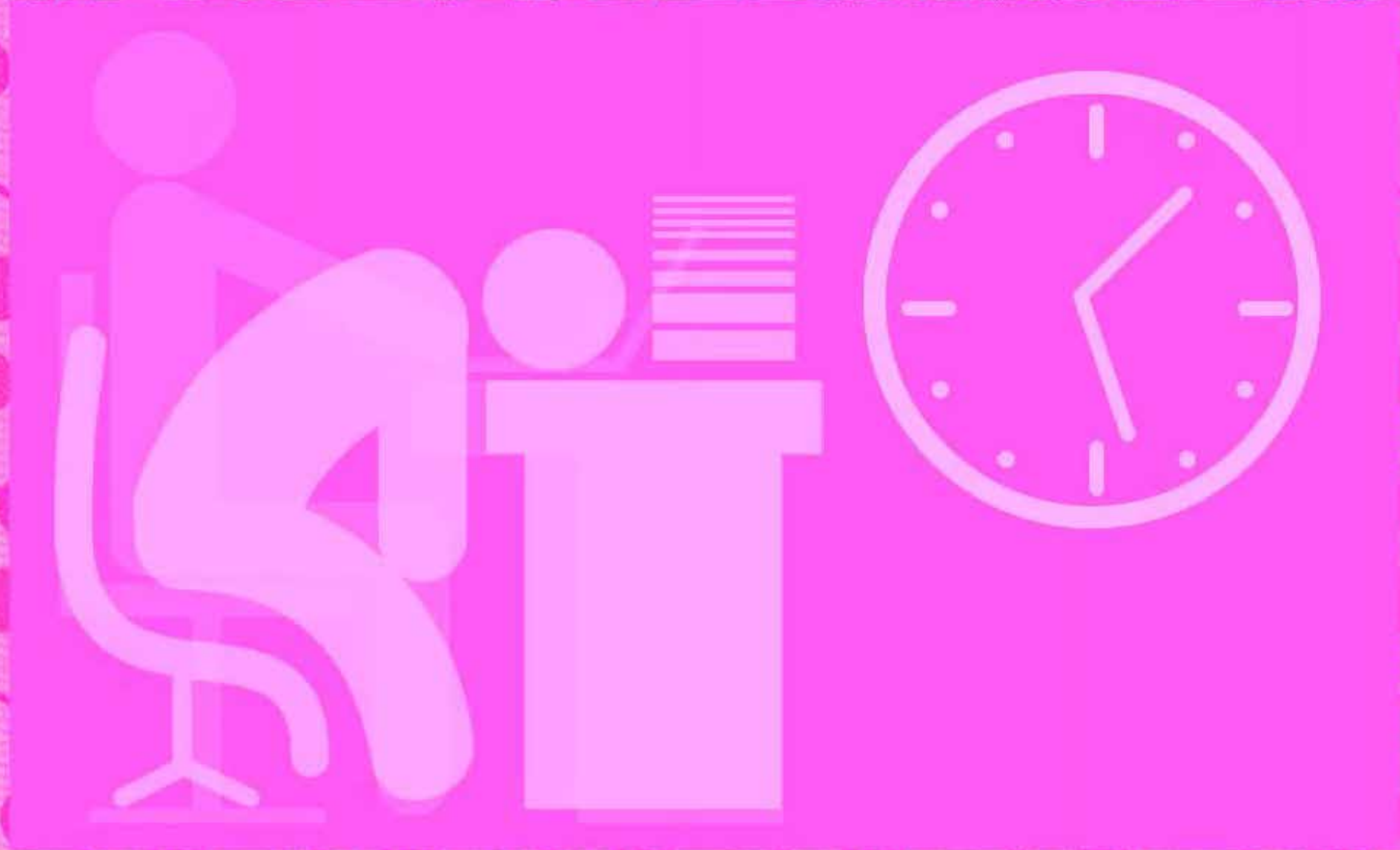
# FROM SILENCE TO CACOPHONY

By the assembly line in the factory, the noise was deafening. The industrial worker was silenced, alienated by a lack of communication with others. The info worker on the other hand is asked to communicate; small talk and mingling is this century's greatest resource. We live in an incessantly ongoing communication, a constant activation of our attention. Today's alienation comes from an overload of stimuli. According to Franco Berardi, the change that has taken place is partly due to the fact that the during modernism so obvious division between idea and execution, creativity and work, auteur and audience, has now disappeared. The boundary between production and consumption is blurred. One example is of course social media, where we work for free both by producing and consuming content. These earlier divisions are transcended in new forms of work that require commitment, communication, initiative, motivation. Workers can no longer do as they are told. It is a shift from controlling the workers to exacting their engagement.



# SINGLE AND WORKAHOLIC

Swedish sociologist Roland Paulsen describes in his book 'Arbetsamhället - Hur arbetet överlevde teknologin' (2010) (Work Society - How Work Survived Technology), how views on work have changed throughout history. Paulsen writes that, although we would only have to work a few hours a week with the developed technology we have today, we are now working more than we did thirty years ago. Work has become a purpose in itself. Marx imagined that creative work would be self-realising when it took place outside of capitalism. He had not anticipated that this need for expression could be sucked up and exploited by the same system. Our priority to realise ourselves through work has led more and more people to live as singles, and many choose not to have children. It then happens that the passionate worker can begin to feel a little lonely, without close relationships, friends or family. But this problem now has a solution, delivered by Japanese sense of service.

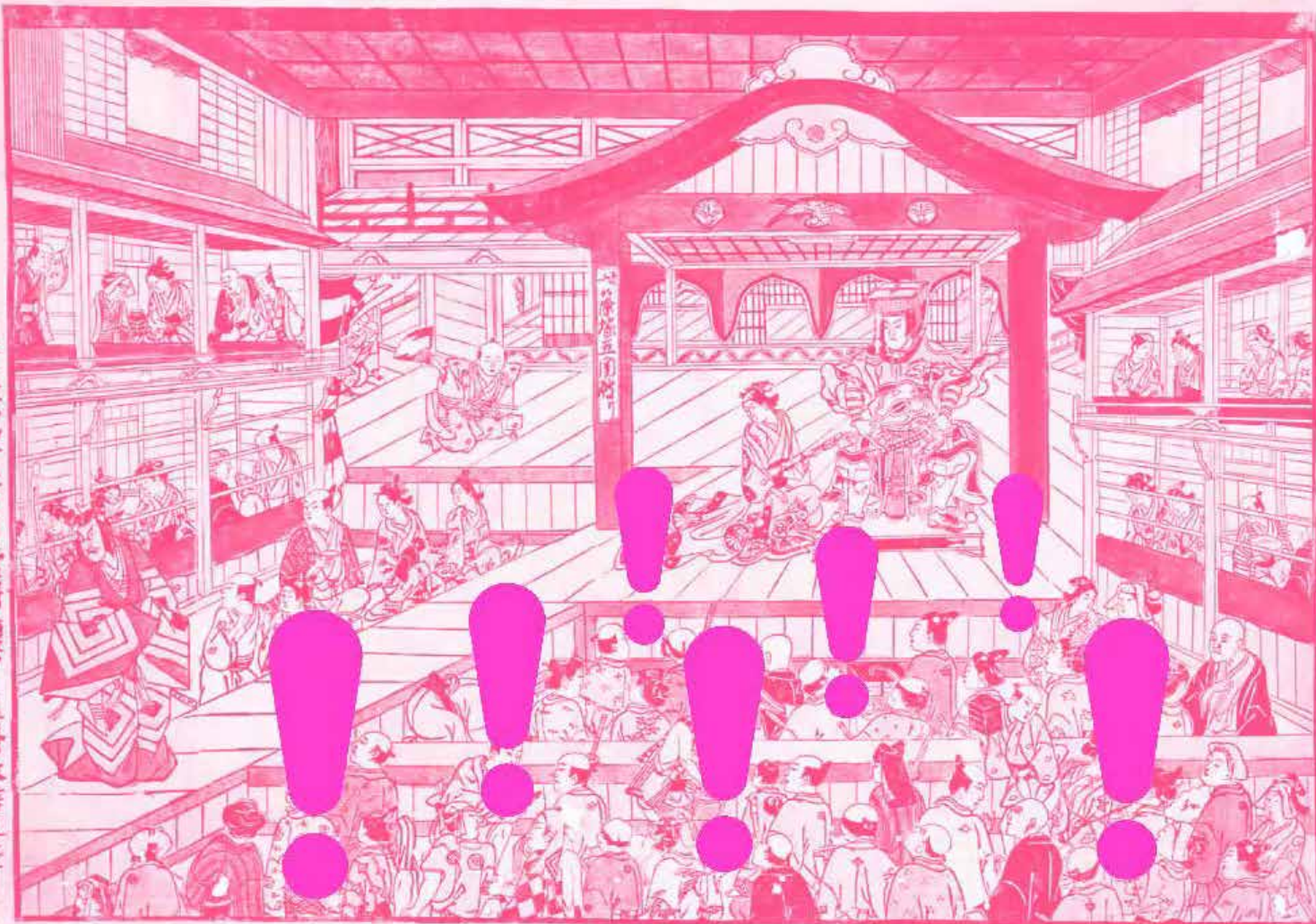


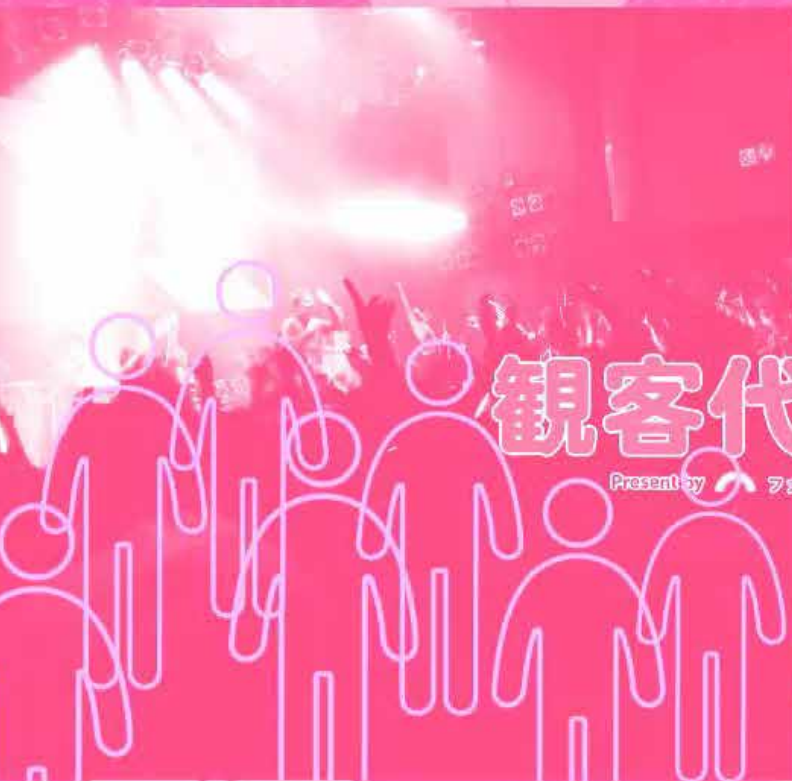
# SAKURA / RENTALS IN TOKYO

During a kabuki theatre performance in 17th century Edo (now Tokyo), men in the audience could express their appreciation with a strengthening scream just before a popular actor would enter the stage. A theatre director with a flair for PR then came up with the brilliant idea of paying a few men to sit in the audience and shout. This acting theatre audience is called 'Sakura', which means 'false customer'. Since then, extras have worked undercover in reality as concert audiences, queuing for restaurants, filling in at match-making parties and more. But in recent years, Sakura work has evolved in a more relational manner. Online companies such as 'Family romance' or 'Hagemashitai' ('We want to make you happy') offers services like rental boyfriends, rental girlfriends or rental parents. You can hire a

group of girls to sing karaoke with, someone who apologizes on behalf of your company to another company. You can hire a friend to go to Disneyland with, or a 'butler service', a man who does homework in a woman's house. The demand is there. "I want to be single and free, but still want to wake up to the sound of a woman cooking in my kitchen", as a potential speculator on a so-called contract wife in Tokyo said.

This precariat of actors functions because inhabitants of big cities do not have the mental or emotional ability to take in all the people they meet. In order to handle a chaos of impressions, we must reduce other people to two-dimensionality. Human relations have become thin. Nobody asks deeper questions to Sakura workers. As hired relatives at a wedding, it is enough that they follow a simple script. To learn more about where the emotional capitalism is going, I traveled to Tokyo to interview Sakura workers. After a bit of research, I meet Mr. Ichinokawa, the head of the rental-family company 'Hagemashi-tai. He says he does not want to hire professional actors or too beautiful people. Like secret agents, his Sakura workers should be able to pass unnoticed, not be a threat to customers or their acquaintances with excessive beauty. They should fit in, fill their function and be easy to forget. In a city like Tokyo of over thirteen million inhabitants, the risk to meet again by chance is minimal.





# MailOnline

Daily Mail

Friday, Oct 23rd 2015

## Dating site had 2.7 million members... and only one of them was a woman: Bosses behind online scam are arrested in Japan

- Eight executives are said to have made millions running several fake sites
- Allegedly paid male employees to pose as lonely women looking for love
- The men were charged large sums to continue talking with the "cute girls"
- But when the men suggested meeting, the women would inevitably refuse
- Scam is a growing problem in Japan, where it is known by as *sukura*

By JOHN HALL FOR MAILONLINE

## McDonald's admits 1,000 people paid to join queue for Quarter Pounder debut in Osaka

• BUSINESS DEC. 26, 2008 - 09:21AM JST (7:00)

Recommend 158



"Customers" queue outside the Midotsuji-Suomachi branch of McDonald's in Osaka on Tuesday.

OSAKA — Around 1,000 people were paid to join the queue outside the Midotsuji-Suomachi branch of McDonald's for the release of their Quarter Pounder burger in the Kansai area on Tuesday, it was learned on Thursday.

The company has admitted to the fact that around 1,000 people who lined up on Tuesday were compensated, but claims they only made a request for consumer feedback to one of their marketing companies. There are suspicions however that the people were employed to help promote the new product, serving a role known as "sakura" in Japanese.

It is estimated that as many as 2,000 people were lining up outside the McDonald's store at its peak on Tuesday, and that around 15,000 people in total visited the store during the day, setting a new record for daily sales for one of their stores. But it was learned on Thursday that about 1,000 of the people queuing outside were paid an hourly wage of 1,000 yen and also had their purchase paid for. These people were hired by a human resources company at the request of a marketing company commissioned by McDonald's Japan.

A McDonald's Japan spokesman said: "We wanted to know how the service and product quality were on the first day. We didn't know 1,000 people had been sent to the store."

News reports

# PERFORMATIVE LABOUR

Megumi works daytime in an office, but in the evenings she goes to her extra job as Kabakyara, companion lady at a nightclub, where she is paid to drink and flirt with men. She says she goes to work with the attitude that she is going to a party. “I play different characters in my office job and in my hostess job. I adapt my personality to the customer,” says Megumi. If an employer demands that the worker performs a certain kind of personality, she can always get an extra job to live out another side of herself. It can be a method of coping with a fragmented, precarious life. All types of needs can be channeled into wage labour. ”I think it’s fun, it’s like cosplay,” says Megumi. The French director and leader of the ‘Situationist International’ Guy Debord describes the spectacle character and alienation of the late capi-

talist system in his book 'Society of the Spectacle' (1967). But already eleven years earlier, American sociologist Erving Goffman published a book that has become epochal in the realm of performative theory. 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1956) is an analysis of social interaction within the American bourgeoisie in the 1950s, in theatre terms. Using a 'dramaturgical perspective' Goffman describes how the actor, in order to make an impression on his audience, must have the right look, perform his role correctly, and have an appropriate set design. "The self is a dramatic effect, a product of the scenes that are being played," says Goffman, and describes how a socialised self is expected to be cohesive and logical. As humans, our mood change constantly, but as a character one must be consistent in order to be credible. The social game that Goffman studied went on in his subjects spare time. Today, to a greater extent, it takes place during work life. One PR agency defines a company's 'Image' as follows: "What your customers think you are, how they perceive what you are sending out". In the book 'The Disneyization of Society' (2004), sociologist Alan Bryman writes about how Disney was the first company to launch hyper-consumption. How customers are called guests, cast: employ-

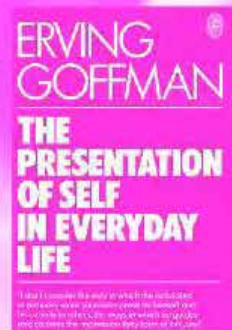
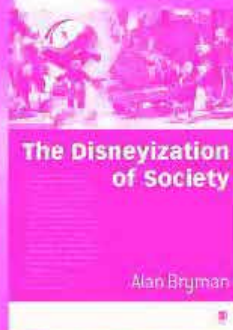
ees, public spaces: onstage, employment interviews: casting, jobs: roles, supervisors: leading roles, uniforms: costumes. This use of language and thinking has become increasingly common today in a large number of service companies. But Disney was also first to force all their workers to laugh and smile constantly. Their instructions for new employees read: "Remember to always smile! Your biggest asset is your smile!" The Tokyo summer can reach forty degrees Celsius. In the humidity and heat, Disneyland workers entertain in thick padded masks, dressed up as Goofy or Mickey Mouse. There is always an ambulance parked outside, ready to drive laughing 'performers' who have fainted with heat stroke to the hospital. At McDonalds in Japan, the customer can order a smile with their burger, it is on the menu, priced zero yen. For some time now, the Swedish convenience store chain Pressbyrå has had a campaign: 'Buy a coffee and get a fun story for free'. In the past, the low-paid service workers only needed to pour the coffee and take the money. Now they have to be fun too. Free bonus for the customer, no extra pay for the performative worker.

## EVERYDAY TERM

customer  
employee  
frontline employee  
public areas  
restricted areas  
hiring for a job  
job  
foreman  
uniform  
job interview  
crowd  
designer

## DISNEY SPEAK

guest  
cast member  
host / hostess  
onstage  
backstage  
casting  
role  
lead  
costume  
audition  
audience  
imagineer



# DO YOU SUFFER FROM ALIENATION?



# EMOTIONAL LABOUR

After the Second World War, the Japanese labor market developed rapidly from the 1950s rural economy, through industrialisation in the 1960s and high tech of the 1980s to today's experience-based economy. Mazayuki Okahara is a professor of emotional sociology at Keio University in Tokyo. He talks about how mass education in the 1970s resulted in an abundance of highly educated workers. Nice exams and high grades were no longer enough, communication skills, charm and appearance became decisive competitive advantages for getting the job. A

Japanese company prefers to hire a nice worker with the right personality that can fit into the workplace and spread a good atmosphere around them, than one that is the best at what they should do. This, in combination with a historical predilection for services that make life more comfortable, has resulted in a service culture described by Professor Okahara thus: "You should not have to ask the flight attendant for a glass of water, she should have understood that you are thirsty before you have said anything". The smiles and nice reception is now something we consume, from the yoga teacher, the waitress, the masseur, the receptionist. In the flight industry, the forced service smile has a long history. The concept of 'PanAm-smile' arose after Pan American Airlines, in the second half of the twentieth century, urged their flight attendants to constantly smile at their customers. The difference between the service smile and the spontaneous one is that the former only happens with the mouth, compared to the latter when the eyes are also included.

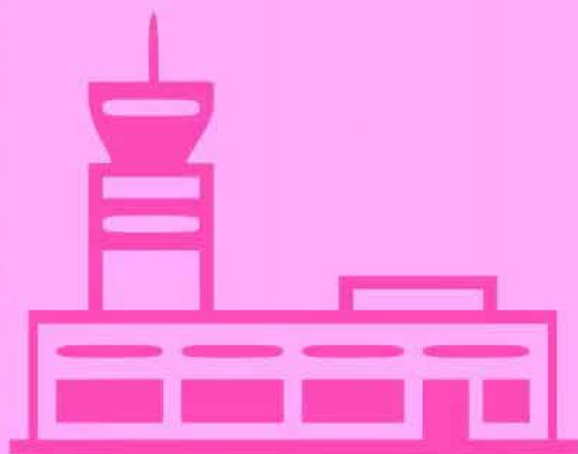




# SURFACE & DEEP ACTING

Sociologist Arlie Russel Hochschild coined the concept of 'emotional labour' already in 1983 when she published her book 'The Managed Heart - Commercialization of Human Feeling'. In her research on the working conditions for flight attendants, she describes how they work with their emotions on several levels; by having to deal with passengers suffering from fear of flying, or with aggressive behaviour, suppressing their own feelings of discomfort in front of drunk male passengers who make approaches at them, at the same time as communicating safety, pleasantness and attractive femininity. Arlie Russel Hochschild distinguishes between surface acting, which is superficial and

means that the worker does not actually feel the emotion she is trying to convey, as in the fake smile, and deep acting, when the worker actually feels the emotion required for the work. In the first category are traditionally waitresses and other service personnel. In the latter persons who, for example, work as nannies, nurses, day care staff and teachers. The in-depth acting is what all employers aspire to today. They try to access the worker's commitment by linking them emotionally to the company and getting them to identify with the company's goals, so that they really feel that the success of the firm is important to their selves. The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard writes about simulacra, pictures of pictures of pictures without referents. He writes: "Pretending leaves reality intact. Simulation, on the other hand, is to imagine something so that one believes in it, which threaten the division between true and false, fiction and reality". If pretending stands for the surface acting; the fake smile, then simulation stands for the deep acting; the imposed feeling actually felt.



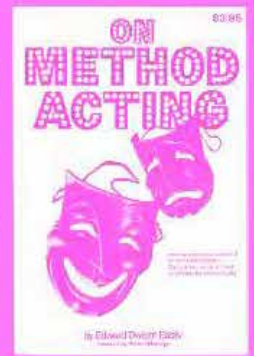


# LOVE LABOUR OF A RENTAL MOM

Before rental mother Hiromi Kawada steps into the role of the day, she puts on her wig and reads her script, a paper with information about who she should be, based on the customer's needs. Like an actor working according to the method acting

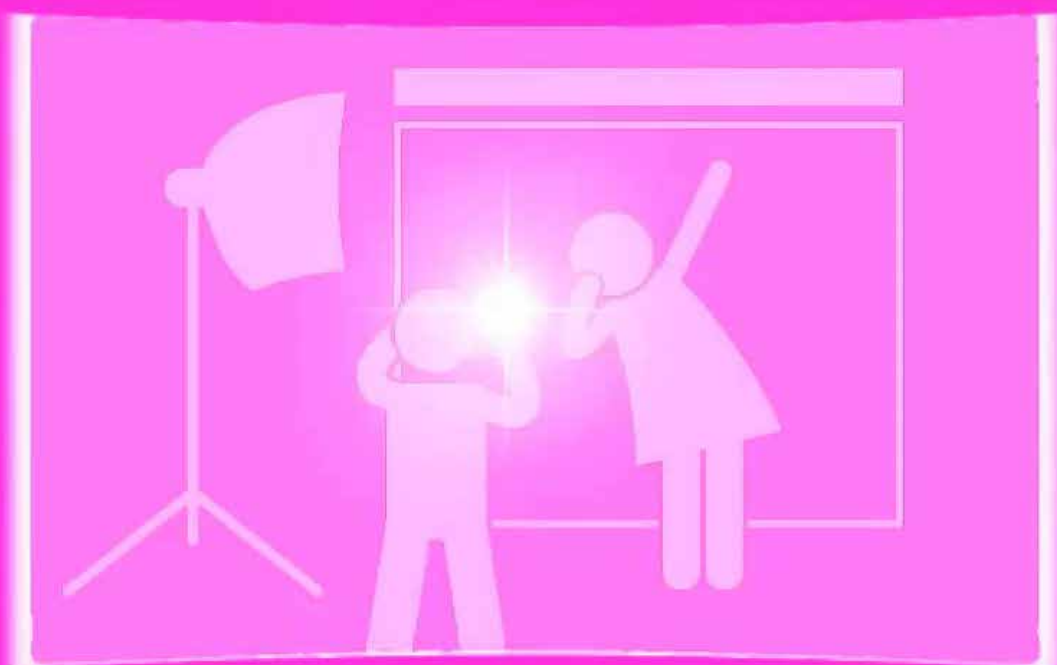
tradition, originating from the Russian theatre practitioner Stanislavsky's methods of achieving realism, she searches within herself to pick up authentic feelings she can use in her performance. A common job is to be presented as a mother to the customer's new partner. Mrs. Kawada says many of her 'children' keep in touch afterwards, asking for advice on existential issues, and they send emails several years later to thank her for her efforts, with pictures of their children. "Sometimes I scold them," she says, "if I see that they are moving towards a bad direction in life". So she continues to work as a 'mother' even without getting paid. She says she wants to help people in need. Mrs. Kawada's boss, Mr Ichinokawa, tells me how he, as a hired uncle at a wedding, began to cry from affection on the 'niece's' big day. Then he has done a good job, he feels what he should be feeling.





# AESTHETIC LABOUR

The precarious workers must not only perform and feel the right emotions, but they must also work, as actors have always done, with their appearance. Emanuele could not work as an instagram boyfriend if he wasn't good-looking and had a picture with a cute smile on his AirBnB profile. A young photographer who posts bedroom pictures of himself on his professional Instagram account. In recent decades, the aesthetic work that women have previously had to perform in professions such as waitress, secretary, boutique staff etc, is now also increasingly demanded of male workers. Feminist filmhistorian Laura Mulvey's analysis of 'to-be-looked-at-ness', a quality that was constructed in the classic female Hollywood star, today applies to almost everyone. Being looked at is part of the job in many professions today.



**LAURA MULVEY**  

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**VISUAL PLEASURE AND  
NARRATIVE CINEMA**

*to-be-looked-at-ness*



# THE PHOTO- GRAPHING WORKER

While fewer young people are applying to art schools, more and more people do aesthetic tasks as part of their daily job. Emanuele has not attended any photographic education or art school. There is no need to, the basic tenets of photography, that focus should be on the eyes of the person being portrayed, that short focal depth separates an object from the background etcetera, is general knowledge today. In the digital childhood of the 1990s, an unemployed youth could get a free course in image processing from the employment office, which quickly resulted in a well-paid job at a fresh IT company. Retouch work for advertising was a lucrative extra job for artists and aspiring photographers. That is no longer the case. When everyone can photograph and photoshop in cell phone apps, the image ma-

nager becomes the proletariat of the creative economy. Even further down the chain are the lumpen proletariat of images, the low-paid outsourced workers in low-wage countries like the Philippines, clearing our facebook feeds from nipples, dick picks, decapitations and suicide livestreams.

In 1977, in her well known book 'On Photography', Susan Sontag described how the then most work-disciplined people; Japanese and Americans, were the ones who photographed most diligently during their holidays. Her analysis was that industrial society fostered workers so that the absence of the fixed structure of the workplace during their vacation produced anxiety. Photographing became a surrogate for work, an activity that makes one feel productive. Today, our photographing has become part of the 'work for work' that we must continuously carry out to keep up-to-date on the labour market, on the dating market's apps and sites, and on the friend market that social media is. The boundaries between these different areas of life have been erased. Work seeping in everywhere, we have forgotten what leisure feels like. More and more (often unpaid) work hours are spent editing our own presentation. Since everyone else is also absorbed by their various precarious freelance jobs, it is easy to feel alone when you finally get a holiday, so you start Instagramming frantically to feel included in the community online.



Susan Sontag  
On Photography



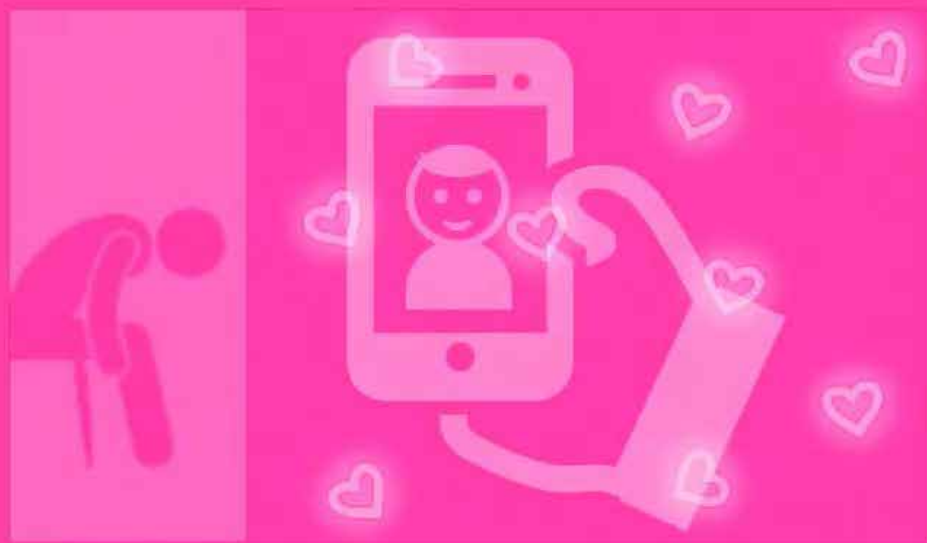
# THE RIGHT TO POSE

Routine likes quickly pile up when I post Emanuele's stylish photos of me in Rome on social media. Comments such as "sooo nice pictures of you" are accompanied by heart emojis. Humans are obsessed with images of humans. Especially with the staged, most beautiful version of themselves. The enormous anger that hidden cameras awaken is explained by Susan Sontag as "it deprives people of the right to pose as their ideal self". Instagram boyfriend Emanuele was, of course, just a pose. The only closer contact the customer gets is to hold his hand, in a staged social media trope meant to look spontaneous, called 'follow me'; the picture is taken from the 'boyfriend's' point of view and we see his arm stretched into the picture towards the woman. The purpose is to fake for digital friends that the customer has a holiday flirt in romantic Rome. The follow me-pose is also used by travel companies to attract male customers, to make them feel that if they buy that trip to Thailand they not only get the paradise beach in the picture but also a lovely smiling woman in the bargain. It does not matter that he understands that it is not for real. The important thing is the feeling the customer gets.



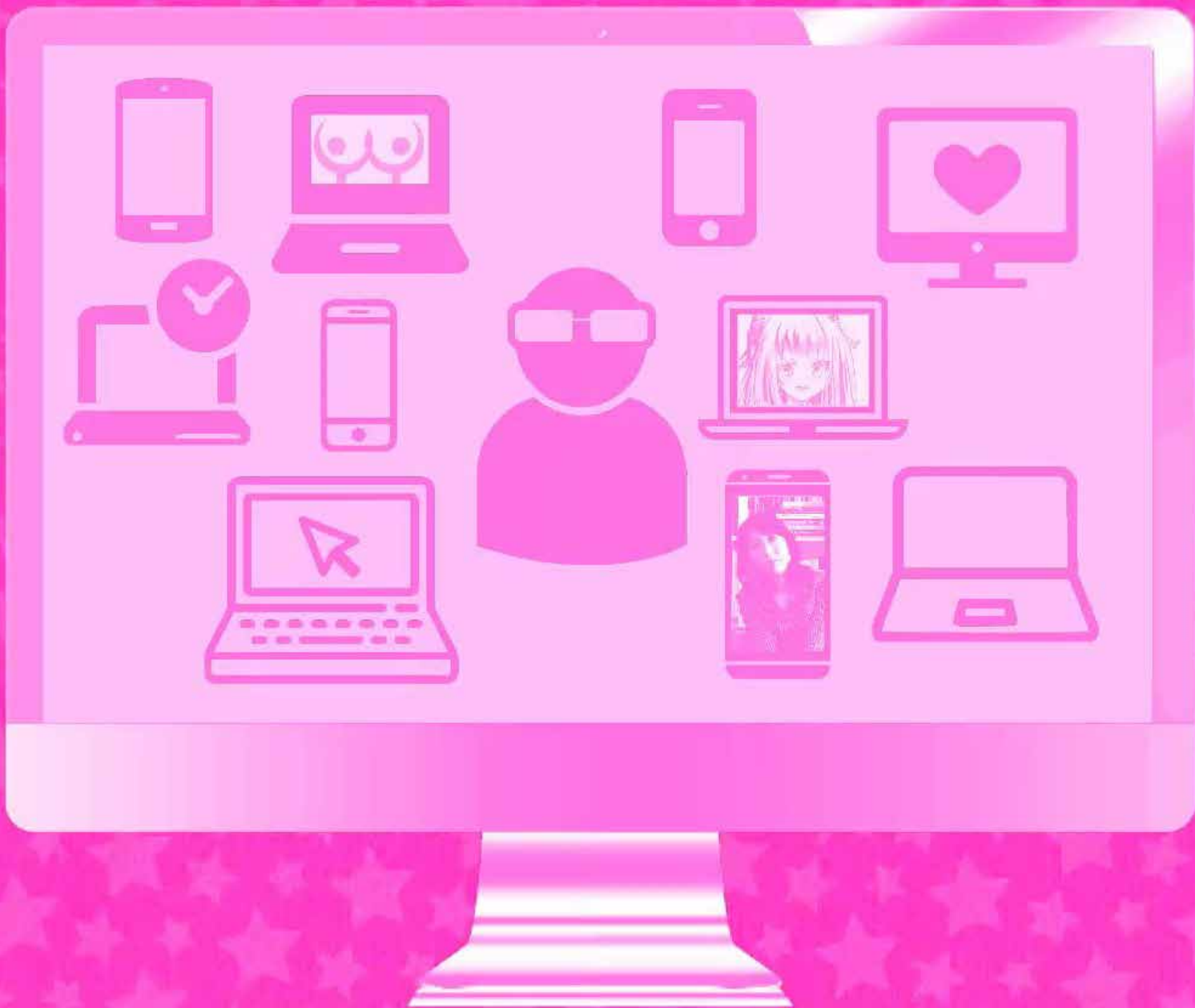
# INFATUATION IN IMAGE SOCIETY

Everyone who has experienced infatuation knows it is dangerous. The erotic obsession with the desired object threatens the order of the entire life for the infatuated. They do not sleep or eat, arrive late for work, miss the train, lose control. Especially unanswered yearning from a distance resembles a drug. It is only the desired one who is seen in color, the rest of the world goes in grayscale. The victim of passion risks the pain of being rejected, becoming mad with jealousy, ending up in a depression. Such risks can not be afforded by the precarious information worker of today. A dip in performance can lead to an inability to support oneself in an insecure working situation that requires constant presence and top achievement. At the same time, the desire for the intoxicating happiness that comes with love, is possibly even stronger today than in earlier generations. Desire is triggered by a constant flow of sex appeal poured through all media channels, as a lubricant for consumption. We crave the feeling of infatuation, but without the risk it entails. This need is now met synthetically according to the law of supply and demand.



# THE OTAKU'S 2 DIMENSIONS

In the 1990s, young Japanese guys who suffered from a lack of social ability began to play dating-computer games. The driving force behind this development is the Japanese tech nerd, the so called otaku. He is mostly interested in living all his waking hours immersed into computer games, animation series and manga, and has minimal contact with other living people, except when he meets his otaku friends to discuss games, and the two-dimensional girls in them, whose bodies have bizarre proportions. Toko Tanaka, a researcher in popular culture at Otsuma University in Tokyo, describes the otaku as a person who is not interested in bodily desires, but is excited by the distance to the idol or the digital character he admires. The otaku can not, or does not want to, distinguish between fiction and reality. His opposite is called "reaju" (from reality), a person who is content to live in three-dimensional reality and have physical relations with other people. Previously, the popular reaju guys had all the success and status with the girls, but when the internet became hot, the nerds took revenge.



# WELCOME HOME, MASTER

Towards the end of the 1990s, the otaku did not feel quite satisfied with two-dimensional life. He felt a need to meet the 'kawaii' (perfectly cute) girl-characters from computer games in physical reality. The Meido café culture (from the English word maid) originated in Akihabara, Tokyo's technology and gaming district. On premises like @homecafé teenage girls in short-skirted sexy versions of the French maid's black-and-white uniform with a tiny lace apron greet their customers with the standard phrase "Welcome home, Master". In this way, men who had not had the social ability to interact with what they call 3D-

women can buy themselves non-threatening girl-femininity, and a submissiveness they have never experienced in physical reality. For teenage girls who need money for clothes, makeup and expensive café visits in a consumption society such as Tokyo, where there is hardly any activity that does not cost money, a job opportunity arises. In addition to serving tea, cake or simple dishes, the girls perform small services, such as a short song, a dance or a game round. Everything is listed on the menu with prices carefully stated. Regular customers have membership cards at different levels, from bronze up to platinum, depending on how many visits they have paid to the establishment over the years. In a precarious society where individuals move, change jobs, freelance, lose contact with family, and work too much to have time for close friendships or love relationships, the meido-café can be the only context in which the man has continuous everyday contact with a real person who asks: "How are you?", a question that has become a scarce commodity today.





# MOE - A SPECIAL FEELING

At the meido cafés in Tokyo, a mood is being sold. It is called 'moe' and denotes a specific sentiment of tenderness, admiration, affection and delight in a 2D character from manga, animé or computer games. Socializing in the company of a physical version of their favourite character is important for the geek-man. The truly satisfying moe feeling is when he suspects a match between the character the waitress is playing and her genuine unfeigned young self. In the satisfaction of being able to discover this harmony himself, the feeling of moe arises. This fusion of 2D and 3D is the unique 2.5 dimension that more and more Japanese find enjoyable.

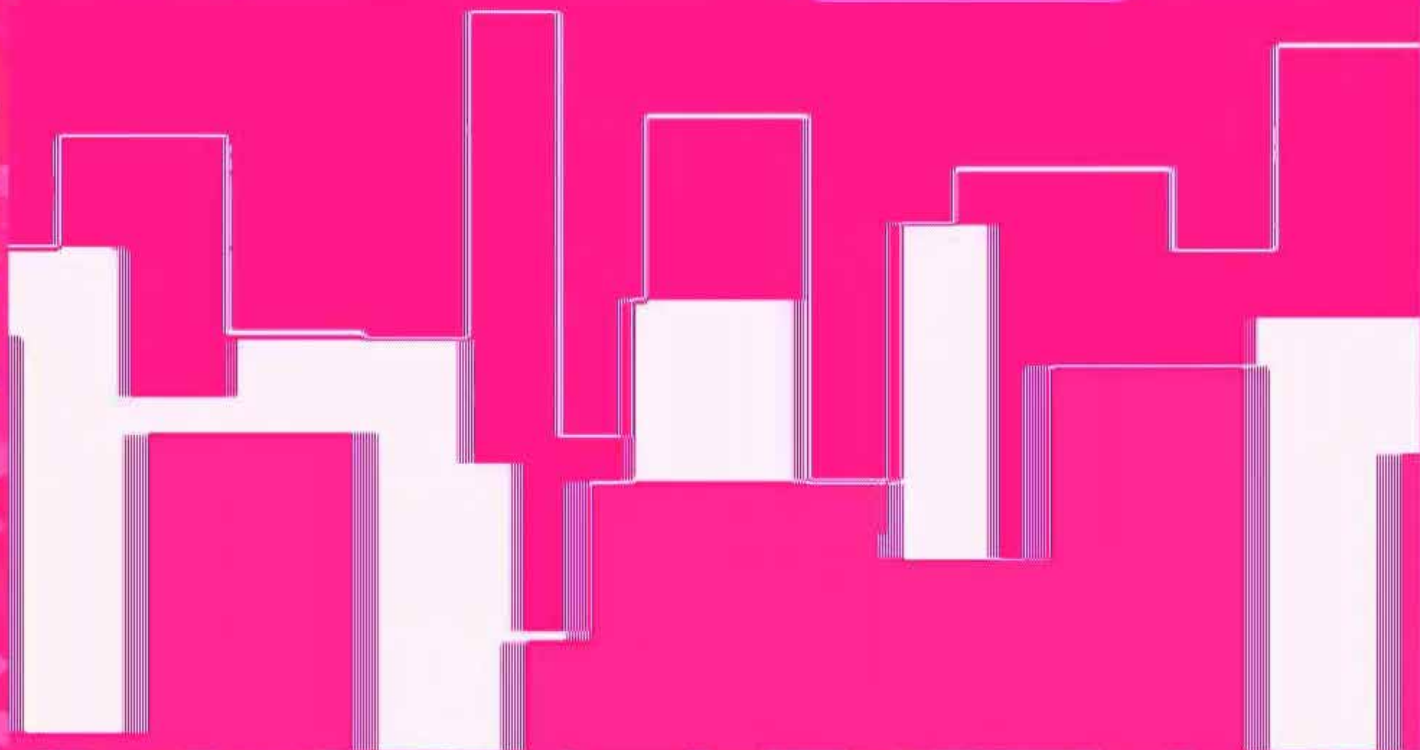
moe

kawaii



# 2.5D & HYPERREALITY

2.5 dimensions is a Japanese concept that originally describes this specific cultural phenomenon linked to computer game culture. It is about translations of two-dimensional image culture such as computer games, manga and anim  into the physical three-dimensional world. In addition to the meido-caf , there are musicals based on manga, or cosplay, when people dress up as their favorite characters from a game. Young people who are part of this culture hang out more through social media than in physical reality. Despite the specific origin of the 2.5D concept, it becomes interesting for a broader analysis of today's representation society. In an expanded sense, there is a lot in the experience economy that occurs between the sign and the signified. More of our experiences is going on between what was formerly called reality and the representation to which we are now increasingly devoting much of our waking time. This situation is close to what, in the 1980's, French philosopher and provocateur Jean Baudrillard called hyper-reality; the territory and the map of it has become one, there is no longer any difference between reality and representation.



# ETERNAL TEENAGE CRUSH

Synthetic distance love works through letting small fragments of information about the admired character give space for projection. The infatuated creates their own image of the perfect object of their passion, like children who fall in love with pop stars on posters. In fact, one of Japan's most popular singers, Hatsune Miku, is a vocaloid, a computer program that performs live on concert venues, as an animé hologram in front of thousands of fans, with a band behind her consisting of real human musicians. Infatuation was previously expected to turn into a more realistic, deeper love, where the other is seen as what the film industry terms 'a rounded character', thus complex, three-dimensional. Today, the distance that is embedded in mediated communication can easily prevent this deepening of feeling,

maintaining an ever-present imaginary 'crush phase'. Today dating games are so common in Japan that, according to a recent study, thirty percent of adult women and sixteen percent of men said they are in love with a digital character. Other recent statistics claim that thirty percent of Japanese people aged 30 to 40 have never had sex with another person. Pornography, silicon vaginas, rubber tits etcetera thrive on the Japanese market. Each year, approximately seven thousand expensive sex dolls are sold, life-sized, with perfect skin, big eyes, mouths half-open, bizarre oversized breasts on otherwise slim bodies that can be bent in different positions. Recently, a similar doll, the American sex robot 'Harmony' received media attention, thanks to it's moving face, containing a communicative AI. Imagination and empathy are not the same thing. The ability to fantasise and immerse in fiction happens from one's own perspective, while empathy is the ability to understand the other person's situation. The latter is not needed in consumption. Dependence on images turns into an adolescence that never ends. Dating-computer games and digital boyfriends and girlfriends become the fast food of love, an inexpensive, simple and easy-to-eat alternative, stripped of the dangers of emotional loss. The love of pictures, the obsession with a two-dimensional image, is a powerful daydream where we become archetypes, princes and princesses with duckface living in reverie.





# COMFORTABLE IN FICTION

Kimura Masaki is the CEO of 'Tokyo Talent', a company that rents out real guys as boyfriends per hour. He says that a so-called rental-kareshi's job is to sense the wants of the woman who is his customer. The job is thus to show consideration and adapt to a woman's needs, a quality many women find lacking in men. A rental boyfriend should be ordinary, but good-looking and kind. The services usually consist of going for a walk in a park with the girl for a few hours, going for a coffee together, maybe shopping, holding hands for a while. But above all, the woman can talk about her feelings. Thus, the service is not dissimilar to a therapy session. The women need someone who listens and understands them, "someone who is their type," explains Kimura, adding: "For some customers, real guys are not their type. They feel more comfortable closer to fiction".

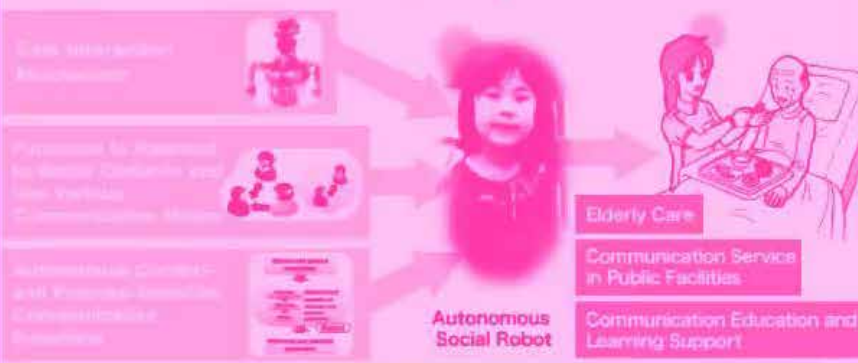


# DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

The question of love with obstacles between humans and artificial intelligence is dealt with in a variety of Japanese films, games, manga and animé. 'The Time of Eve' is a short animé series about a café where robots and humans can hang out on equal terms, without anyone knowing who belongs to which category. In the series, the humanoid robots work as servants, accessible to all manner of household services, including sexual. But law decrees they must have a ring of light hanging above their heads as they conduct their errands to make it clear who is a robot. At a secret cafe called 'The Time of Eve' they shut off their class marker and can be themselves. Conflicts follow when robots and humans fall in love with each other without knowing who is what. The series raises thoughts about how we already treat service personnel as robots by requiring that they should always be happy and perfect, but it also concretises questions about love, infatuation and attraction. Are these emotions that we can only feel for other humans? Many Japanese are currently experiencing the opposite. Our emotional life is increasingly triggered by simulated stimuli.



## Society in which Humans and Robots Live Together via Enhanced Interaction



# SOCIETY IS A WEDDING

Sociologist Erwing Goffman describes how in social interaction we try to appear better than we are, we project an idealized self. Social encounters are like ceremonies, where we play our roles according to a ritual. "Society is in fact a wedding," the sociologist exclaims. The wedding is the ultimate participatory art experience, like the tea ceremony. I accompany sakura mother Hiromi Kawada when she is hired to act as friend of the family at a wedding in Sanrio Puroland, Hello Kitty's own 'Disneyland'. The wedding is performed on a stage, the guests are audience and Kitty and her husband are presiding officials at marriage. The speech act "I do" as an answer to the priest's traditional question: "Do you take NN as your lawful wife / husband?" has become simulacra, a performance with hired guests in an arti-

ficial place. In Japan, it is common for wedding couples to undergo two ceremonies; one traditional in a Shinto jinja, and one Western version of a wedding with the white dress, rice thrown, a priest asking his question in a church. But the priest is not a real priest, he is just a random white western man who works extra as 'priest'. Nor is the church a holy room, but just an ordinary building that looks like the idea of church. The event has nothing to do with Christian religion, it is the experience of a western wedding one wants, an image taken from films and the media. Much of the concentration is on photographing. A wedding without photo documentation is unthinkable. Lately, it has also become commonplace that women in Japan do not want to be housewives, but continue to work and live as singles. Yet they still want to experience their dream wedding. A Japanese company therefore offers the whole package of wedding planning, dress, church, cake, flowers, rice thrown, photographing etcetera. But the bride goes through the ceremony alone. Men in a similar situation are offered the opportunity to marry their favorite animé character in a VR experience, where a kiss on a pair of silicone lips is included.





# SAVE THE SHOW

While undivided positivity has escalated on social media (remember that there was a thumb down in the beginning?) a lot is spoken about how especially inhabitants of big cities have become rude to each other in public space. Impoliteness has become an everyday experience in the street, on public transport, car queues and, not the least, in cycling lanes where full-fledged aggression rules. It has become more important to perform a perfect character in images than in physical reality. Our behavior in two and a half dimensions is something we get paid for, or that benefits our personal brand. Nowadays, people use the chance to be unpleasant when they are not at work or in a situation where they can profit from it, as a means to express their frustration at the forced performativity of paid relationships. Cashiers, receptionists, waitresses, baristas, air hostesses and call center employees become therapists who, with forced smiles, have to endure channeled anger from customers.



# COVETED AUTHENTICITY

On web sites [invisibleboyfriend.com](http://invisibleboyfriend.com) and [invisiblegirlfriend.com](http://invisiblegirlfriend.com) you can construct your own boyfriend or girlfriend for your own needs, make up the story of how you met, and so on. The company attracts customers with the pitch: “What is a digital boyfriend? A digital version of a real boyfriend but without the luggage”. For a sum of twenty-five dollars a month, you get two hundred text messages, and the site prides itself on offering an ‘authentic experience’; since “conversations are powered by real creative writers. No bots”. The word ‘genuine’ is a selling point for more and more constructed emotional services today. Already in the mid-1980s, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild described how a radio advertising for an American airline went: ‘PSA - our smiles are not just painted on’. Unlike the fake Pan American Airlines smile, PSA’s hostesses offered real smiles. Most employers in service and retail today cast workers by personality and looks to suit the company profile. But bosses also often want to control their sellers’ appearances and behaviour in detail. Employers wants to exploit the worker’s personality, but as soon as it is exploited, it is no longer so genuine.



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# REAL FRIENDS FOR RENT

Downstairs in Shinjuku, in a small room without windows, Yoshi Kawada runs a bar. Over a few square metres he spends six nights a week with his customers. Around the curved counter is space for eight people. He does not advertise, but has his regulars who drop in around midnight. They drink and chat, hang out and sing karaoke together, as a crossing between nightclub and house party. The only topic that is forbidden is the customer's job. "I hope this is a place where people can escape from reality," says Yoshi. Reality in Japan, as in many other post-industrial economies, nowadays largely consists of work. Yoshi stays until the last customer leaves in the morning. "What I do is emotional labour," he says. I am good at sensing people's feelings, and I adapt to their needs". He makes no difference between private friends and customers, who pay quite a lot per hour to socialise with him. "I have the same character on the job as privately," he explains. "If I'm tired one day, I'll show it". He describes his job as "being like a friend". Airbnb reviews of Italian instagram boyfriend Emanuele said the same thing; "It was like hanging out with a good old friend," writes the signature Lorenzo.



# FEELING UNREAL

We live with a happiness imperative that shouts: "Enjoy! Treat yourself!" Consumers must produce pleasure for the experience economy to function. But happiness does not always want to come when called. The Japanese term 'muen shakai' denotes the pain of social loneliness, an absence of affiliation and context in a relationless, alienated society. In a survey from 2006, fifteen percent of the Japanese population say that they have no social relations at all. Franco Berardi calls the production order of today 'the factory of unhappiness'. The soul of the worker becomes increasingly poorer, the more wealth they pro-

duce. Arlie Russell Hochschild describes how flight attendants, when coming off their shifts, find it difficult to stop smiling. They have to work on getting into a 'private' emotional state, they are alienated in relation to their emotional life. According to Berardi, alienation in modern industrial society was reifying, objectifying, while in the semio-capitalist society, it creates a feeling of unrealness. The submission of the soul to labour gives rise to a loss of real contact with others, and with oneself. A fragmented, precarious life excludes the steadiness required to experience reality, to feel grounded and connected. One point of going to the theatre or seeing a film used to be to come out afterwards and meet reality. "Phew, it was just fiction". Today we rarely step out of fiction, we just automatically move to the next episode, and the spectacle on social media continues around the clock. 'Agent's illness' is the condition officials in the intelligence service suffer when they has difficulties to let go of their undercover character, and want to continue living their acted life.





# VOLUNTARY SELF- EXPLOITATION

Today we do emotional and performative gig jobs voluntarily. The bartender friend Yoshi and the Instagram boyfriend Emanuele are their own employers, as well as a lot of other entrepreneurs, who rent themselves out online as experience producers, under headings like "cook with a real Italian" etcetera. They choose to exploit their feelings, their private lives and their personalities for money. Yoshi says: "I have to have fun for the customers to have fun". Consumption and production of a paid relationship can be easy to start but difficult to get out of. As with people living in prostitution, it is not just about the money. Experience workers themselves can become dependent on the affinity and affirmation they receive through their profession. Like the character in the movie 'The Matrix' who is well aware that the juicy steak he is eating is made up by zeros and ones, but still chooses to stay in the digital world and enjoy it.



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# DISNEYLAND <3 VENICE

In 'The Stepford Wives', Ira Levin's 1972 novel, a woman who is newly moved to a residential area discovers that the perfect neighbouring housewives are robots, manufactured by the local men's association whose president is a former Disney engineer. The word 'imagineering' is registered as a trademark by Disney. It is a combination of imaginary and engineering. Disney was also the first company to launch 'hyper consumption', the integration of various types of consumption of goods, services, food, through an experience on one location. In Tokyo's Disneyland Sea, several sceneries from the fictitious cartoons are represented. And then there is a tiny Venice, where Japanese tourists go on tours in gondolas to take photographs, just as they do in 'real' Italian Venice, which is increasingly turned into a kind of Disneyland too, the few remaining residents working in the tourist industry, performing as Venetians, gondoliers or waiters. Perhaps it does not matter much which of the two Venices the tourists are visiting, since all of them are looking to consume Venice as a sign. All tourist cities, which are rapidly increasing in numbers, perform as themselves.



# POTEMKIN VILLAGES

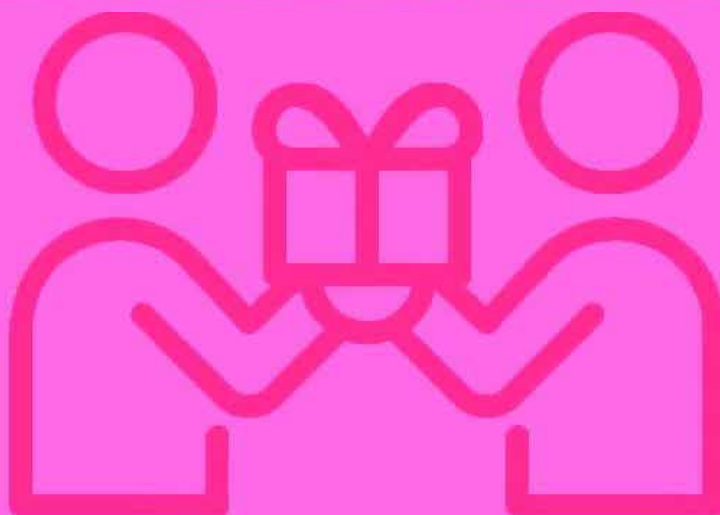
According to the myth, when Russian Empress Catherine II came to Crimea in 1787, the local prince Grigory Potemkin got stressed out. He wanted the Empress to see how quickly he had caused the newly conquered region to flourish. When the reality was that the area was in great poverty, Prince Potemkin let artists paint coulisses alongside the path that the Empress was riding in her carriage. This well-known story is today considered to be a fiction. But it is a useful picture of the spectacle that is constantly going on. When foreign representatives visit North Korea, similar performativity is presented at state level, and residents inside the ring-wall of medieval town Visby have diplomas visibly in their windows, which they received from the municipality for the work of keeping their doorways and facades picturesque with flowering roses, and the cobbled streets free of weeds for the tourist season.



# INDEPENDENCE FOR SALE

Three decades ago or so, I might have met the Instagram boyfriend Emanuele by chance in the street, and he could have offered to show me around Rome for free. The flirt might have been 'for real'. But now more and more of human interaction goes through financial transactions. On a superficial level it is of course comfortable to leave Emanuele without the feeling that I owe him anything. A man who spends several hours guiding an unknown woman around a city would, in the old system, expect something in return. Now I have bought my independence. Phew, nice. Swedish website [hyrenpensionär.net](http://hyrenpensionär.net), rent a retiree,

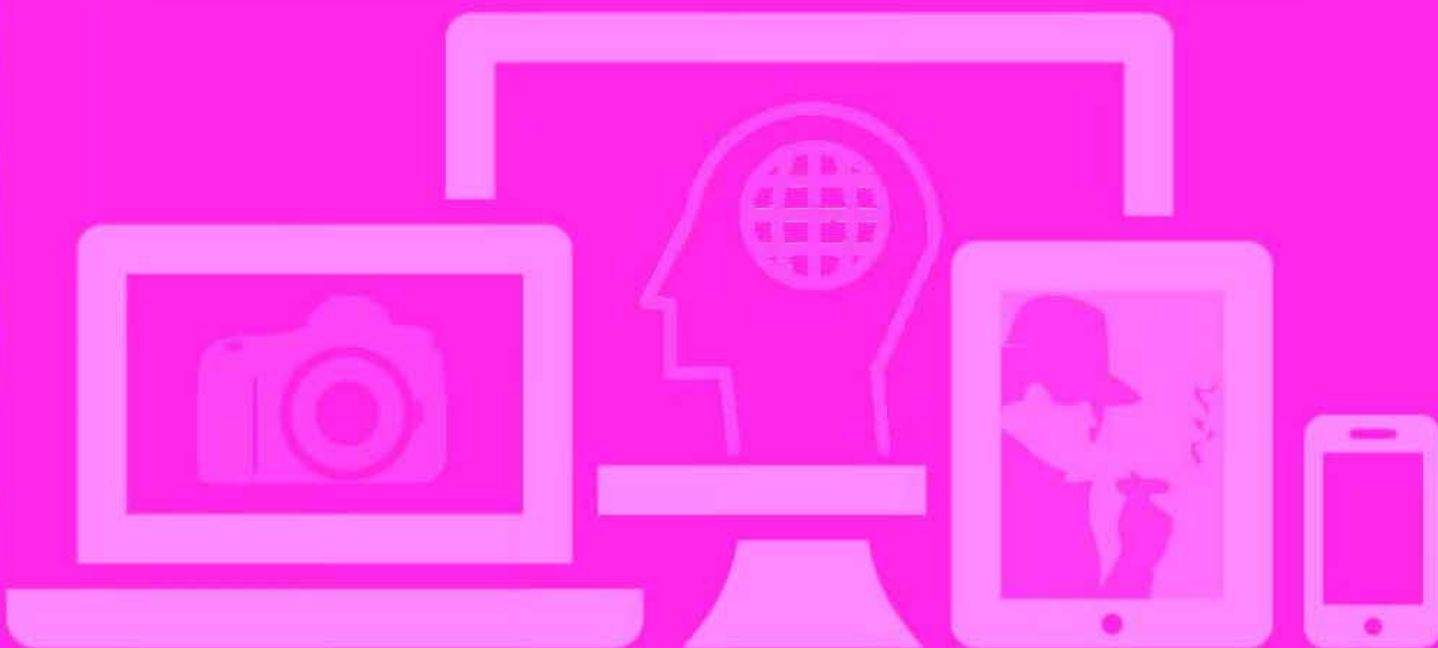
tempts potential customers with more time for the important things in life, when a paid grandmother or grandfather helps with 'life's puzzle'. But in a more far-reaching perspective, these emotional services create problems. Sociologist Arlie Russel Hochschild thinks that financial transactions for what was once done for free, smashes close and deep relationships. In her book 'The Outsourced Self: What Happens When We Pay Others to Live Our Lives for Us', she compares her grandmother's world in a village where everyone helped each other with the harvest, to a society with surrogate mothers and other extreme and ever more-intimate services, that destroy the network of gift economy and dependence on each other. This not only used to be necessary for survival, but also created deep and long relationships. The fact that this becomes a problem is also shown by research that has found rich people to have less empathy, and to experience greater loneliness than poor people, who have had to practice mutual aid in order to survive.





# WHAT IS LEFT FOR ART?

What then is the artist's role in a society that is so engaged in the production of easy-to-digest pictures, representation, performativity, stories and emotions? Today, an economy of digital reproduction of images and experiences appear as a crisis for artistic creation, in a similar but even more profound way than the invention of photography became a crisis for painting. How should an artist handle this situation? Romanticism, a historical period of revival for artistic creation, and an upturn for emotional life, arose as a reaction to the rational enlightenment ideal and emerging mass production in the late 18th and the early 19th century. Today, the whole society, economy and politics have become sentimental and emotionally driven. One conclusion is that the artist, as a reaction, must become rational and use her knowledge to analyze the feelings and images that the rest of society produces.



# RENT AN ART AUDIENCE

It is becoming increasingly difficult to get an audience to come to art exhibitions. There are too many other image media competing for attention, and people do not have the energy, they are too overworked by our work-oriented society, demanding constant attention and flexibility. Even the media can no longer be bothered to write or talk about contemporary art; it's too complicated. In the past, at least the artist's friends and acquaintances felt they had to show up at one's exhibition openings out of courtesy, so that one would come to their vernissages later. Now it is enough to write "in spirit" on the facebook event, and you have done your duty. Post exhibition depression is a well-known phenomenon among artists. After the opening, the overworked artist collapses, exhausted by having emptied out her soul. But perhaps this condition would not exist if we had a real audience for our work? The temptation is strong to rent an art audience... Some interesting people who engage, take the time to try to understand. It is not only free entry we need to draw audiences to art galleries and museums. Perhaps today, spectators must be paid for their emotional labour.







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5

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# EPILOGUE

In spring 2018, New Yorker Magazine ran a feature about rental-family workers in Japan. Family Romance, the featured company, took its name from a case study by Sigmund Freud published in 1909, on the subject of children's development, when they realise that their real parents are not perfect, it sometimes results in fantasies of being a changeling, whose real parents are much more good, successful, prosperous. Like in the sagas, when a bullied child turns out to be the lost offspring of a king. When Mr Ichinokawa read the article in The New Yorker, he became suspicious to hear customers speak up so openly about renting relatives. He contacted the magazine, who did some additional research and found out that the customers interviewed in the article were actually employees of Family Romance. They were fake customers for a real story on fake customers.



# INTERVIEWS



# MASAYUKI OKAHARA

PROF. OF EMOTIONAL SOCIOLOGY, KEIO UNIVERSITY

- Can you tell us about performance in the service business?

- As Japanese, I'm good at adjusting to the situation. Whether it's at a cashier at McDonald's, or at an expensive restaurant, you just adjust yourself to the situation. The same person can do different jobs. I think we are taught to behave in a certain way, in a certain situation. We are trained to do so. So if you are going to a place, then you build emotions that fits that place. This is based on research in emotional sociology and emotional labour, carried out by an American sociologist, Hochschild. According to her results, the behaviour of these Delta cabin attendants would be, in the standards of Japanese airlines like JAL and ANA, very close to disqualified. The Japanese cabin attendants do show much respect to us and it does seem like they really prioritize the guests, and that's the service. If you want a cup of water, you have to ask for one. But on a Japanese airline, the cabin attendants assume, that you'd want a cup of water, so they serve it before you have to ask. That's Japanese service. Japanese service business is becoming like that.

- So now... Before the customer says anything, you imagine what they'd want and give that service?

- Yes, that's the way even at McDonald's. McDonald's in Europe, they don't even manage to serve the same shaped hamburgers. But in Japan, all hamburgers look perfectly the same. The European services at cashiers are different too. It's not that everyone has a nice smile, that's definitely not the case. In Japan it's almost surreal, that employees always have great smiles, even if they aren't smiling inside. I'm impressed by their skills to show positive emotions just on the surface. I believe sociologists haven't considered this behaviour as something positive, but that opinion has been based on American or European research. So if these American and European sociologists, who founded emotional sociology, were in Japan, things would have been very different. In Japan it's normal to do so, but in other societies it's rare.

- On the majority of the flights in and out of Japan, there is always a Japanese stewardess. Otherwise Japanese passengers aren't receiving the service that they expect. So this extraordinary Japanese service, exchanging emotions, has that always existed? Or when did it become like that?

- I think for white collar jobs, it's very recent. Well, it's a post war phenomenon. Of course, the businesses using emotions, for example at host/hostess clubs, prostitution, in the kabuki world, those have existed since a long time ago, as one of the traditions, including for actors, all have existed for a long time. But when it comes to other industries, the normalization of this emotional business in Japan, happened after the war. It grew rapidly after World War II. The reason for that is, that all social classification gradually collapsed. Some people became more free, they then could choose jobs that were different from their parents. That was a modernization, very similar to the one of Europe. Back then, the measures of how well you read and write, language skills, calculation skills, or how well you make things, usually were tools to promote yourself. So your value, or your work skills, should have been presented well, showing how much you were capable of. But in Japan, along with all these skills to be presented, the characters and the emotions were built into the presentation of a person. So let's say a person isn't a good writer or a reader, but can bring a good vibe to the office, then that person is hired. It might sound extreme. So all these qualifications you have, including college degrees or certifications, in Japan, suddenly everyone had gotten these, so it was difficult to differentiate all job seekers. That was the case. It was quite obvious that your professional skills, like in a meritocracy, wasn't enough. You had to add something else, a symbolic value. That symbolic value would be, say communication skills. Keeping the conversation pleasing, or hospitable. That includes emotional labour. So selling yourself in that package, has become a common thing in Japan.

- You think the sakura business has evolved based in that?

- Yes. Those who are very good at what they do but are hated by everyone, don't survive in the offices. If they continue to achieve goals, in Europe, they would never be fired. But in Japan, even if you keep on making achievements, you get pushed away if you don't socialise. Everyone wishes you to quit. But a person who isn't as good at their job, as long as they manage to think about others a lot, and get along with others, could be valued more in the office.



# HIROMI KAWADA

RENTAL-MOTHER & RENTAL-GRANDMOTHER

- I work as rental-mother or a rental-grandmother. I like this job. This is a wig, if I take it off I look younger.
- So you are not grey-haired in reality. Do you want to be secretive, that's why you are wearing it?
- It depends on the person who orders the job. Someone who wants a mother has to order from Ichinokawa-san. Then he tells us, this time you, this time you.
- And do they explain what you have to do?
- Of course. In a specific document with instructions. I have to tear the document after I have read it.
- So in this case the girlfriend wants to meet with his mother. But why doesn't he want her to meet his real mother?
- I don't know, after the job I will ask him.
- Isn't he afraid that his girlfriend will find out in the future?
- It depends on the situation. Later, some people tell the truth.
- But if the girlfriend says: "We should meet your mother again!" Then he has to call you again? Does that happen?
- Yes, yes. In the case that he and the mother has a very bad connection. Maybe they don't talk to each other. Maybe they have cut the connection. But most of them tell the truth after 2-3 years. When they understand each other better. Some of them, after several years, send me e-mails: "I have a baby now" and "Thank you, mum!". They are happy and send pictures. Then I'm so proud to see that. The day after tomorrow, I will be a mother again.
- And where will you meet with the couple?
- Ueno. Today I'm going to read the instructions and think...
- Think about how to put on the act for this case..?
- Yes. For his happiness, for his future, what should I do. Sometimes they call me afterwards to ask for advice. It's a secret, but they do. It's not the job, but.
- But then you don't get paid for that, you just help them for free. So it actually becomes like a real relationship?
- Yes. I see them as my children.
- You have so many children now after 5 years of working as sakura.
- Yes, and grandchildren.

A portrait of Ryuchi Ichinokawa, a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is a solid dark color. The entire image is framed by a pink border with a repeating pattern of stylized leaves or petals.

# RYUCHI ICHINOKAWA

CEO HAGEMASHI-TAI, RENTAL FAMILY COMPANY

- What kind of rental family or substitute member can you rent?

- Basically, let's say you want to rent parents, there is always a target. Some want to introduce the rental parents as real ones to their girlfriend. This person on the phone now wanted the rental parents to go to their work place, and be introduced as their real parents to their colleagues. So we need to ask the client what they have already told their target. For example, tall or short, fat or slim, bald or not bald... There are many categories, but we ask the requests, and do research on all our staff. When the matching staff is available on the right day and place, they can be rented out. Our availabilities are: father, mother, husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, supervisor and coworker as well.

- There are also weddings... Apologies and funerals as well?

- We've rented out maximum of 43 or 44 staff for the same wedding! The bride was the client. The bride's father, mother, relatives, friends, co-workers... They were all our staff. The groom's side didn't hire anyone.

- Do you have another story you can tell?

- Well... Last year there was a funeral in Hokkaido, and the client asked us to bring people to attend it. The funeral was for a lady around 70 or 80 years old, so the client wanted staff around that age. This place was about 100 km from Sapporo. So I prepared staff to attend, then arranged the hotel. The client probably wanted to make it look like the deceased had many friends. At the end there were about 50 attendees to the funeral, but only 4 real relatives.

- A while ago, when we were using models, sometimes the bride was, well, "normal" looking, but the rented friend could be beautiful. That really shouldn't have happened. If that beautiful friend is on the bride's side, then the groom could well have a crush on that beautiful rented friend. That's really a faux pas. So we stopped completely using models. The most difficult thing about it is, when it comes to friends, there are tall and short ones, fat and skinny ones, pretty ones and not so cute ones, that, we think, is a regular group of girls. That's the kind of image we base our pick of girls on.

- Do you have regular customers?

- Yes. Most of our regulars are men in their 60's. They want to go to karaoke, drinking or shopping with girls.

A portrait of Masaki Kimura, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt. The portrait is set against a background of a repeating pattern of red and orange circles with black lines, all within a white rectangular frame.

# MASAKI KIMURA

CEO TOKYO TALENT, RENTAL-BOYFRIEND COMPANY

- Our rental boyfriend service rents out male talents, to act as the client's boyfriend. The price is by the hour. There are different ranks for the talents. The rates are between 4,000 to 6,000 yen per hour. That's how it goes.

- What does a rental boyfriend do?

- Hm, it's hard to explain verbally. The rental boyfriend acts as the ideal boyfriend, his behaviour and what he says. We offer these women what they want. That's our service.

- Who are your clients?

- Agewise, we have a wide range, from early 20's to over 60. But the main age group is in their 30's and 40's, I tend to notice.

- What are they looking for in the service?

- Perhaps for those who don't have boyfriends, or are married, but there is no love with the husband, they could use a man that they could fancy and they could depend on. Because the rental boyfriend is definitely going to be kind to them. It is kind of a virtual reality. Heart throbbing moments, or the comfort that you get from being with someone, are what our clients are looking for.

- You said earlier that the customers are attracted to 2.5-D. Why is that?

- Well, the service we are offering, is communication with a real human being. I think that's an example of a 2.5-D experience. Recently, as the influence of internet is growing, we are receiving so much information. Japan is the kingdom of animé and games. Because we are receiving so much information of the ideal lover, and the ideal relationship, we just start building up the images in our heads. When we compare those images to real people, we realize that there are rarely anyone who matches our perfect image of a lover. For that reason, the animé and manga worlds move our hearts more, so we prefer them over real world. So the service of our company brings that fantasy into real life, in which the person of opposite sex behaves in a way you want. So it's very similar to 2-D fantasy, in other words you don't get disappointed. So compared to a real life relationship, although you do get charged per hour, it's bringing you the perfect lover, and I think the customers are really enjoying that. Because we are overloaded with information, our ideals become 2.5-D. That's why people want to use our services, to bring their ideal boyfriend character to life.

A portrait of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored patterned sweater, looking directly at the camera with a surprised expression. The image is framed by a pink border with a repeating pattern of small red flowers and green leaves.

# ANJU YAJIMA

RENTAL-GIRLFRIEND & FORMER SAKURA

- Here, you can register as a rental girlfriend, and on our website, clients can look at profiles of the talents, including myself. They can choose the one they like and order her. Then the girl and the client start contacting via email, to go on a date.

- Could you tell us about your former job as sakura, or substitute attendance?

- When I was a student an acquaintance introduced me to it. I used to attend matchmaking parties, when there weren't enough girls, because you should always have the same number of men and women. They used to call me in to fill the spots. I used to go to drinking parties, and pretend to be one of the guests.

- Do you feel like you are pretending to be someone you are not?

- No. I used to feel that way, that I have to act, but I realised that acting is based on a character that you already have in you, so basically it's emphasising a part of you. I'm not really creating a new character.

- Are you doing this job just for the money?

- No. In the beginning, I used to think that I can earn a lot. But not now, I think more about how to interact with the client, how to listen to their problems, that are worrisome to me. I do hope that this is a safe place for the clients to share their problems. Some of them have never been in a relationship. Some have made big mistakes that they still regret. While others just simply don't want relationships. There are different types. But in cases, I teach them how a relationship should carry through, or what makes a girl happy.



# SEIKO KITAYAMA

HOSTESS, ART TEACHER & PERFORMANCE ARTIST

- How do I put it... For work I have to act out to be someone, who is not really me. I use my feelings. I pretend to be someone I'm not. It's not that difficult. The guests, even if they are coming for business, enjoy the feeling of exclusivity, when the girl tells something just to them. The girls also like the guests telling them secretive stories. This kind of interaction keeps the relationship. Well, it could be difficult, if the guest is short-tempered, I do pretend to be someone else. But that depends. It's really fifty-fifty.

- About being 2.5D. How do you feel about that connection?

- Hm, well, I don't know, it's not real for sure, and it's not just about being 2.5D, but I think everyone is living in 2.5D. For example, the salarymen, their suits look 2.5D, almost like cosplay. But who are we, to assume that salarymen's suits are cosplays? It's interesting. Maybe it's only in Japan, but I feel like you have to wear some kind of armour, to day-work every day. Men and women, a housewife as a housewife, salaryman as salaryman. They want to take off their armours for a bit, and that's why they come to our place. So they are looking for someone, who aren't in their family and still can listen to their stories. That's basically who our regular guests are. It's easier to share problems with someone you don't know. If you have a sensitive issue, and you share it with someone you know, the rumour could spread, and you could also hurt someone you tell your issue to, they might not want to hear anything from you. To someone you only meet once and never again, I don't meet half of my guests more than once, so these kind of guests, usually tell me very sensitive stories. One guest, after 15 minutes, told me that he had murdered someone. I didn't believe him at first, but then I asked him for details. He said, when he had been a boss, head been very forceful to his workers, and one of them attempted suicide. So he labeled himself as a murderer to live with regret, that was what I heard, after 15 minutes. I'm sure he wanted to ease himself of a burden, by talking to someone, who he would never meet again.



# MEGUMI KAWATA

HOSTESS & FORMER SAKURA



- Could you tell us about your experience working as a sakura online?

- Well, I was a decoy on the chat. The company I worked for had this apartment in a building. There were about 20 people in the apartment, all sitting in front of computers, at long tables, video chatting online. They were fake buying...

- So you were a decoy on the video chat?

- So there is this system called "Video Two Shot", and as soon as the chat starts, there is a fee being charged. Everyone in there were decoys. There were real women and men dressed up as women. We were surrounded by walls sitting in front of computers in a row, pretending to be in separate rooms, with different backgrounds, using curtains and colors.

- Do you get negative comments for working these 'mizu shobai' (night jobs)?

- Some people already knew. Well, actually, I enjoyed changing my characters between day and night. I pretended to be quiet and gloomy during the day, so people had a hard time imagining me in my party mood at night.

- Is that interesting to you?

- Yeah, it was interesting. During the day I was wearing glasses, had my hair fixed with a pin, and in the night I had more make up on and wore flashy clothes. Isn't that funny?

- Did you really have to be that uptight at work?

- I didn't have to. But I really enjoyed manipulating the characters. It was like cosplay.



# LINN ERIKSSON

COSPLAY LEGEND

- You see something drawn, and then you want to see how it looks like in reality. How would this character be if it was standing in front of me. You always want to make it more realistic, or take it out of the twodimensional. There are different styles within cosplay, where you either go for a more "cartoony" style, where you really try to make it look exactly like the reference image, or you try to make a more realistic interpretation of these quite unrealistically drawn images. This is two different approaches that can both have very good result, depending also on reference material. And now a lot of things are also taken from computer games, and games are also becoming much more realistic. Today you can see rather exactly in the graphics of the games which textures they are using etc. Then the challenge is, like a treasure hunt, to find these materials in reality and recreate it.

- Nerd culture has become more and more mainstream. Everyone who is here (at Comicon, fair for "pop culture" / gaming in Stockholm) today probably doesn't classify themselves primarily as nerds. It's internet culture. Before I started with cosplay, I was very shy, unsure of myself, I didn't care much about how I looked etc. What I feel is nice with cosplay is that there are very few rules. You can do it however you want. You can use any means available to look how you want. And everyone knows that it's all fake. You never have to pretend not to be fake. Like today, I am wearing a costume with fake muscles. It is part of it, you can be exaggerated, it's ok. We do it tongue-in-cheek. People mold a front with silicon tits for example. Cosplay and drag has a lot in common, it's actually not a big difference I would say. I do some female characters, but mostly I do male characters. Very little of it is how I actually look in reality. But also when you do female characters, you make an effort to be hyperfeminine, in a way that you are not really. Many times it can become more fake when you portray a female character than a male, and that makes you think a little about how you present yourself in daily life too. You realize how much is actually fake.

A portrait of a young man with dark hair, wearing a light-colored denim shirt, looking directly at the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a sign that reads "2018年11月17日". The entire image is framed by a decorative border with a repeating pattern of colorful fish and circles.

# YOSHIMUNE KAWADA

SNACK-BAR OWNER & FORMER HOST

- So you're working at this bar. Guests are coming in, you prepare snacks, make drinks for them and have some drinks yourself. Then you talk to them. What do you talk about? About their problems?
- Sometimes that, and singing karaoke. Just talking about what's up, just some casual talk. Nothing important. I don't talk about anything serious. Everyone just comes for drinks and singing. We rarely talk about work. I don't even know what kind of work they do, nor what they really do in general. It's really a 1-on-1 relationship with each guest. So yeah... it's like talking to a friend.
- So this bartender job...is this bartending?
- Well, it's more like a snack bar.
- OK....so snack bar. What's important to make it successful?
- It's simple. Working bit by bit, step by step. Focusing on the guest one by one. That's all I do. I make sure both the guests and I have fun.
- The guests come mostly by word of mouth?
- Yes, this place spreads only by word of mouth. It's all about how to make the guests bring other guests, and make them want to come again. I don't want to put an ad somewhere and say "we are open" or such.
- Do you distinguish your different characters between guests?
- Definitely. It's like the saying "Be all things to all men". I have to be aware that everyone is different. That's the skill and the experience. Although it's only been a little over 4 years, I have gained there. I observe people carefully and decide what I can talk about with each person. That's definitely something I'm now capable of.
- Is this different from when you were working at the boys bar?
- Yes, it's completely different. This is much easier than the previous job was...
- Did you feel more forced there?
- Yeah. Here I don't feel forced to do anything, I just do things I'm comfortable doing. It might just be because it's my own place.
- Could it have something to do with not having to deal only with women?
- I do have quite a lot of male guests too. 60% female and 40% male... So about half. Sometimes there are only men in the bar.
- What is mizu shobai (the water trade) for you?

- Well, it's definitely something that suits me. It's fun. Well, alcohol drains in water. Perhaps that's why it's called 'water trade'. Usually bar business is a part of this entertainment, That's why, I think.
- Do you think a job that requires you to drink suits you?
- Yeah. But it's tough work though. I have to drink everyday, even on a day I don't want to, so it's tough. I have to enjoy it otherwise the guests can't. That's something I try to think every day.
- Do you think this place is surreal?
- This is like a place for a escape.
- You mean for hobbies?
- No, perhaps an escape from work...
- Is that why people come here?
- Maybe like a shelter. I think so. It's definitely a place to relax. Yeah, at least that's what I'm aiming for. I think this place needs to be that.
- Do you think your job is emotional labour?
- Of course, that's really all I have to do.



# TOKO TANAKA

PHD IN POPULAR CULTURE AT OTSUMA UNIVERSITY

- What is moe?

- It's difficult to define what "moe" means. For example, with the voice actors or the casts in anim , some people are attracted to the characters and others like more the relationship between the character and the actual actor. The attraction to the actors is simple - you like someone who plays a certain role. But let's say an actor tweets something about their private life, and when you see the connection between them and the character they play, it's like seeing the hidden side, and you love it. How should I put this together... It's a pleasure finding out about someone by yourself. Also when that assumption you make of someone, happens to be true. The characters in manga and anim  are very two-dimensional. They look like they have depth but they really don't. Manga and anim  fans are... Well, into this existence without any physical depth, putting thoughts and ideas in it. They are also connecting many pieces of images and stories, to build a three-dimensional image of the character. To convert something 2-D into 3-D, they reflect their own conclusion and analysis, based on the pieces of the fictional character, such as performances or quotes. Once that 3-D image fits their ideal character, then they feel "moe". Well, I'm not sure if I can call it intellectual, perhaps it's an intellectual game. You don't really feel the moe towards cute clothes, but it happens when your perception of the character and the character's fashion match.

- It's about "moe"... I think this is the keyword, because people do not say "moe" to hosts or hostesses. The thing with "moe" is; if it matches perfectly with your interpretation of somebody's appearance and relation between two people. So it's like: "that's it!", that kind of feeling. And then you feel happy. So these kind of things are very "otaku" (nerd), and it's necessary for their pleasure. Maid caf  people are also otaku, and they feel moe there.

- But is it a bit like to be 'at home' in something, or?

- Yes, comfortable.

- Why do you think otaku culture or 2.5-D culture are important to the society?

- Why 2.5 and manga and anime are important to the society... Well, why people are into those things... How do I answer that... Before I tell you my opinion, I want to mention this one phrase said often in the otaku world: "2D does

not betray a promise”. For example, in a regular relationship, sometimes you’re cheated on, or you’re not confident about yourself, sometimes you fight. We do have to face these issues in relationships and connections with many people in the real world. But the characters in the 2-D world, they don’t hurt you. Of course, sometimes the character you really like dies, or that sort of thing can happen. But with that two-dimensional character that you adore, regardless of whether they are of the same or the opposite sex, the relationship with you is kept eternally. The character does not age, well, they could die, but when they die, it means they could be with you forever. In other words, it’s a special relationship you have with them outside of the real world, until you stop liking that character. The fact that the relationship is eternal, is probably why people are attracted to characters. Even the dead characters can come back to life, in fan fiction. Sometimes set in a parallel world setting, so the character is in a story where they never die, in manga or novels. The qualities of these fan-made mangas and novels, made by Japanese fans are very high. I think the fact that you can make a story yourself, is another reason why people like it.

# RADIO



# ONLINE DISPLAY



**EXHIBITIONS**



together, and some cynicism about it - "We're just illusion makers." (Qu





# GALLERI SYSTER

LULEÅ 180929-181013

Julia Tamariz  
and her research on pop culture



The author of *Pop Culture and the American Mind*, Julia Tamariz is a professor of English and the director of the Center for the Study of the American Mind at the University of California, San Diego. She is also the author of *Pop Culture and the American Mind*, a book that explores the relationship between pop culture and the American mind. She is currently working on a new book, *Pop Culture and the American Mind*.



# GALLERI LARS PALM

SANDVIKEN 181103-181118





# VERKSTAD KONSTHALL

NORRKÖPING 200228-200328



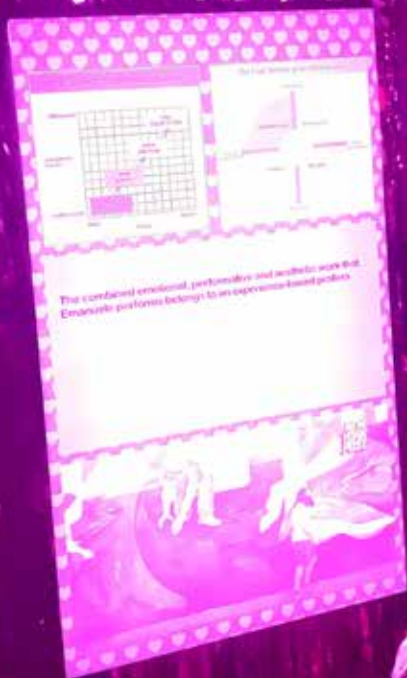
# GALLERI 54

GÖTEBORG 200905-200927



# INSTRUCTIONS TO SAKURA AUDIENCE

Norrköping 200229: There will be information in the exhibition that there are hired audience, but no one will know who is sakura and who is there to experience art out of genuine interest. That is, you will be completely undercover. You must not tell anyone that you are there as a sakura, but pretend that you are just very interested in the piece. You will also not know who else at the opening are sakura. Your job is to look through the whole video installation (it is almost 2 hours long), engage with the work, discuss with others, mingle and try to 'be yourself' so that you as far as possible can pass as 'real' art audience. You do not have to dress in any special way if you do not want to, or you can dress as you think a person who is interested in art dresses, to fit in. For four hours of work, 14-18, you receive SEK 500 in salary, which is an average hourly wage for a service worker today. Vernissage wine is complimentary! <3



# thanks - arigato!

Hiroko Tsuchimoto (research, conversations, interpreter)

Yuta Sakane (translation)

Jon Utterström (translation)

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Masayuki Okahara (Professor of Emotional Sociology at Keio University)

Ryuichi Ichinokawa, (Head of Sakura / Rent Family Company Hagemashi-tai)

Masaki Kimura (Head of Rental Boyfriend Company Tokyo Talent)

Anju Yajima (pseudonym) rental-girlfriend)

Seiko Kitayama (hostess and performance artist)

Megumi Kawata (hostess and former sakura)

Hiromi Kawada (sakura / rental-mother)

Linn Eriksson (swedish cosplay pioneer)

Yoshimune Kawada (former host and owner of Bar Gray)

Toko Tanaka (Ph.D. and researcher in popular culture at Otsuma University)

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