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“Days of Love and Labor”:

Remediating the Logic of Labor and Debt in Contemporary Japan

Michael Fisch

In 2012 the popular Japanese weekly magazine *Asahi Shimbun Weekly AERA* surveyed the Japanese population to determine the degree of happiness in the nation. The results, which were published in an article in June, indicated that, while the nation’s retiring postwar baby-boom generation is doing fine, all is not well for Japan’s younger generations.¹ Specifically, the numbers point to endemic degrees of unhappiness among thirty-year-old men as a result of negative work environment experiences and deteriorating economic conditions. The survey also suggests grim prospects for future happiness among the nation’s younger (twenties) generation. Finally, it ends by placing on the shoulders of the nation’s younger generation the responsibility for creating a positive work environment and removing the “cloud of unhappiness hovering over the nation.” But the advice that it offers in this context seems merely to conform to neoliberal rhetoric underscoring indi-

vidual responsibility while eliding discussion of social causes: “Don’t blame the generation.”

The following discussion turns to smartphone, or *keitai*, culture in Japan for alternative perspectives. In particular, I explore a game called Days of Love and Labor (*Ai to rōdō no hibi*), which simulates an employment experience as a space for reflection on the possibility of happiness in life. Priced appropriately for its target population of young Japanese from their late teens through their mid-twenties, at a low ¥105 (about US\$1), Days of Love and Labor is just one among thousands of keitai games available in Japan that are typically played during transitional moments of the everyday—the commute, the lunch break, and just before sleep. While most of these games are action driven and test a player’s digital dexterity, Days of Love and Labor is a concept game. Its introductory page summarizes its conceptual objective:

This is a surreal life game of thirty-one days during which you experience work through your [blue] “bear” avatar. Your job is to roll a large ball. Avoiding holes and other obstacles, you must push the ball skillfully to the prescribed place. Your wages are contingent on the color of the ball and the number of balls you successfully push. With your earnings you can buy a house and car, wife and kids. You work until retirement and then look back on your life. Your life in the game is over in thirty-one days. . . . Was it a happy life?

What is remarkable about this invitation to reflect on the happiness of life is that for most players, their simulated employment leads to unavoidable debt and loneliness.

My argument treats Days of Love and Labor as a form of serious play as it inquires into the possible appeal of the simulation of a dismal employment experience. Drawing first on an interview with the game’s developers, I explore the way in which the game’s intended historical paradigm of postwar salaryman employment intersects with current discourses concerning the changing nature of employment for youth in Japan. In particular, I problematize the manner in which the simulation of salaryman labor endorses information-economy labor in conjunction with the dominant ideal of human capital under neoliberalism. However, turning then

to examine an online discussion of the game, I show that the appeal players find in the game directly contradicts the developers' intentions and the information economy ideal of human capital. It does so, I demonstrate, by transforming the game from a vehicle of solitary reflection into a collective space of deliberation and critique of the lived logic of debt and contemporary labor in Japan. What emerges, I suggest, is a way of thinking debt as remediated through keitai culture as a collective experience.

Insofar as this is an argument about possibilities inherent in a specific keitai game, it is also to some extent a gesture toward the potential of keitai culture in general. There has been considerable academic interest in recent years in keitai in relation to youth culture in Japan. In this context, scholars have paid special attention to its role in fashioning new modes of social interaction, literary and linguistic expression, and labor.² These arguments have been helpful in demonstrating the ways in which keitai culture can work against the restrictions and representational norms associated with the institutional imperatives of Japan's postwar society. While *Days of Love and Labor* might fit comfortably into these kinds of analyses, it also pushes us to think the possibilities of keitai and smartphone culture in general as a site for new collective potential born of the particular relation between the device, youthful bodies, milieu, and movement. While the transitional status of youth renders it a demographic that is particularly vulnerable to deprivations instituted through economic reform, young people are also perceived as occupying somewhat of a privileged position in new economies by virtue of their intimate relationship to mobile communication technology. Youth are seen as inhabiting the core of an emergent potential within the economic network by virtue of their online lives, constantly texting and exchanging data. Always close to their bodies, the mobile device becomes an extension of the dynamic energy that propels youthful bodies. That across cultures the smartphone (keitai, iPhone, or BlackBerry) has become the ultimate emblem and technology of youth bespeaks this potential. My analysis of *Days of Love and Labor* tries to bring out a dimension of this potential by considering how a keitai game that simulates employment interacts thematically and materially with the transitional spaces of everyday labor in which it is played.

3D: Debt, Divorce, Demotion

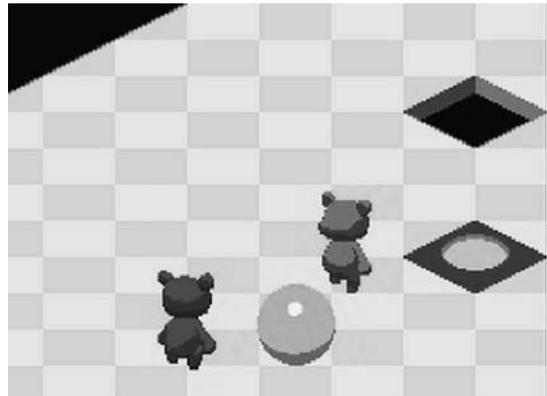
I found the game Days of Love and Labor among the various preinstalled trial games on my KDDI (AU) keitai in the spring of 2008 while commuting by train to a part-time teaching job in Tokyo. Intrigued by the title and admittedly eager for something to occupy my attention during the forty-minute commute, I purchased the full version for ¥105. Compared to some of the elaborate action-based shooter games I had played, at first Days of Love and Labor did not seem particularly complex.

The game always begins in an office in which I (Blue Bear) stand before a Green Bear seated at a desk. Even with minimalist graphics, the office design conveys a kind of trendy modernist sensibility, decorated with abstract art (paw-print paintings and so on) of various sorts befitting a corporation run and managed by bears. Addressing me in the familiar form—and thus making clear where I stand in the company hierarchy—Green Bear urges me to begin working right away (fig. 1). I click “yes,” and the next screen places me on the shop floor, where the simple graphics convey the objective without need for further explanation. Nevertheless, Green Bear is there to explain that I need to push the ball to the blue circle on the checkered platform. He thanks me in advance for my efforts, using a conventional phrase for the circumstance (*kyo mo ganbatte kureta mae*) before disappearing, and I begin my work pushing the ball (fig. 2). With each successful completion of my task the shape of the platform becomes more complex and more holes appear, making my job more difficult. One day of work is one minute, and each time I succeed in pushing the ball to the designated spot I earn ¥100 (fig. 3).

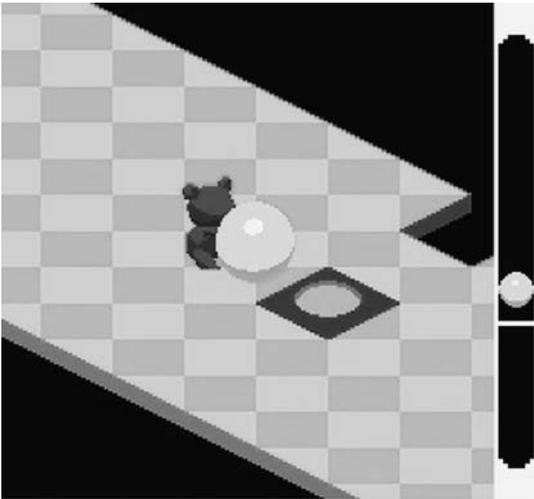
Manipulating the little bear avatar with the small toggle switch on a keitai in order to push the ball is somewhat of a challenge, and in my initial attempts I push the ball off the platform. This earns me reproach from Green Bear, who appears on the shop floor to tell me that if I cannot do the job properly I should find a different line of work. The cost for my mistake, he adds, will be deducted from my salary. Terse and informal, Green Bear clearly conveys his disappointment. After a few more attempts, I become more accustomed to the interface and manage to push the ball to the proper spot just as the time runs out and my work day is over. The next screen puts



早速だが今日から働いてもらおう。



今日もがんばってくれたまえ。



5/3 0:08 500円

Figure 1 (top left) "How about starting work right away from today?" © G-Mode. Powered by Mobile and Gamestudio

Figure 2 (top right) "Thanks for your efforts today." © G-Mode. Powered by Mobile and Gamestudio

Figure 3 (left) © G-Mode. Powered by Mobile and Gamestudio



Figure 4 "How about a drink tonight?" © G-Mode. Powered by Mobile and Gamestudio

me back in the office, where Green Bear informs me that because of my initial ineptitude, I actually owe money and will not receive wages that day. So I choose to return to work rather than shop from the "Purchase Something" list of items on the subsequent screen. This time at work I succeed in rolling one ball after another to the proper place to earn a total of ¥400 for my day of labor.

When my day is over, Green Bear asks if I want to join him for a drink (fig. 4). Feeling somewhat obliged, I comply, and the next screen provides a drink and food menu from which I can choose a beer for ¥50 or chicken on a skewer for ¥20—expensive considering my ¥400 salary. At the next round of work I am promoted to pushing a yellow ball, for which I receive ¥200 each time. But the work is considerably more challenging, as the platform shape is complex, with more holes to avoid. I end up losing the first two balls, pushing them either into a hole or off the platform. When I lose the second ball, Green Bear reproaches me. When I lose the third, he demotes me, explaining that unfortunately the work seems too much for me. Eventually, however, I manage to push a couple of balls to the correct spot for a

total day's earnings of ¥300. I decline Green Bear's offer to go drinking and instead click to begin another day of work.

Work proceeds more smoothly as the days go by, and I manage to accumulate ¥2,000. Having gained some confidence, I browse the "Purchase Something" list. Along with basic things like a car or a watch for ¥1,000 each, or a house for ¥2,000, there are also wives and children available for anywhere between ¥100 and ¥10,000. I buy a wife (a Pink Bear) for ¥200, and she tells me right away that she loves me (*aishiteru wa, anata*; fig. 5). I earn another ¥700 at work the next day, and my wife welcomes me home with a customary greeting: "Welcome home, you've worked hard today" (*oshigoto gokurō sama, anata*). I feel as if my life is becoming settled. But then she asks if we can buy a car for ¥1,000. Although I do not feel we need it or really can afford it, I do not want to disappoint her and so I agree. When I return home from work the next day, my wife informs me that while I was at work she made some purchases. I learn that I own, among other things, a television and a bicycle, but that I also owe ¥7,000 to a loan agency. Considering my salary and rate of savings, the news is somewhat distressing. Determined to pay back my loan in a timely and responsible manner, I work consecutive days without rest, each day refusing Green Bear's invitations to go drinking. When I have collected almost ¥4,000, my wife suddenly informs me that she has been lonely with me always at work and so has decided to divorce me and return to her parents' home. Soon after that, the owner of the loan agency—another Green Bear—appears at my home and takes away my television, car, bicycle, and furniture as payment on my overdue loan. I finish my life working to pay off the rest of my loans.

Did I win? "Was it a happy life?" I played countless times, improving each time but never finishing my thirty-one-day life without severe debt compounded by divorce or demotion. Without jumping ahead in my argument, it is important to point out here that from a review of a discussion of the game on an Internet site—which I will come back to later—I learned that I was not alone in this experience. Thus my dismal results in achieving happiness in my simulated days of love and labor were not simply due to a lack of skill. Rather, as I was to learn, the game is rigged to saddle the player with enormous debt no matter how it is played.



Figure 5 "I love you." © G-Mode. Powered by Mobile and Gamestudio



Figure 6 "Welcome home, you've worked hard today." © G-Mode. Powered by Mobile and Gamestudio

Naturally, all this left me with a number of questions: What kind of message, if any, was the game attempting to convey? More importantly, what brought players—myself included—to return repeatedly to a game whose outcome is both determined and dismal? Did the game simply testify to the enduring logic of the compulsion to repeat and corollary presuppositions regarding the constitution of a modern subject—meaning that perhaps I should seek psychiatric care? Opting for an alternative line of inquiry, I turned to G-Mode, the company responsible for developing and marketing *Days of Love and Labor*.

The Salaryman Employment Trope

G-Mode is just one among many new successful enterprises in Japan producing a range of games, software, and other content for Japan's main keitai carriers (NTT DoCoMo, KDDI [AU], SoftBank Mobile, and Willcom). But G-Mode is also in many ways a poster child for Japan's information

technology industry. Occupying two floors in an unremarkable, large fourteen-story gray building about ten minutes by foot from Tokyo's Shibuya Station—the putative heart of Japan's contemporary youth culture—G-Mode has consistently produced products that have received high scores in Japan's keitai game and software rankings since the company's inception in 2000. In the summer of 2010, I interviewed the G-Mode team responsible for producing *Days of Love and Labor*.³ From the entrance to the company, a young female receptionist wearing the conventional and demure office blouse and skirt led me to one of the company's small windowless conference rooms, where I was introduced to four G-Mode employees, all male, and all casually but stylishly dressed—no suits. Three of them were in their thirties, and one in his early forties. Among the four G-Mode employees present, the most active in the interview were the graphics designer and the marketing manager. We talked for just over one hour, over cans of cold green tea taken from a small refrigerator in the corner of the room.

As has often been my experience interviewing company employees in Japan during working hours and within the immediate and modular confines of the company space, the G-Mode team seemed determined to keep the conversation tightly structured. To this end, prior to our meeting they had requested that I send them an e-mail with a concise statement in Japanese of my objectives and questions. They then arrived at the meeting ready to respond to this e-mail with the aid of various documents, pamphlets, and charts. As most of this was material that is readily available from the G-Mode website, much of what they relayed in this context conformed to the company's carefully crafted public image and was thus more predictable than illuminating. Nevertheless, the interview was helpful in making clear the historical paradigm behind the game, which as we will see later, seems mostly irrelevant to players.

Days of Love and Labor, according to the G-Mode employees, was an unexpected success. Although G-Mode was unwilling to release specific data, I was told that the game had performed remarkably well since its release in 2005 and had for some time even been the company's number one downloaded game. The game, they explained, is a surreal parody of the salaryman employment paradigm from Japan's period of high economic growth (*kōdo keizai seichō*) in the 1960s. Although this is never made explicit

in either the game summary or the minimal dialogue between characters, it is meant to be conveyed in the game's satirical evocation of certain socio-economic and cultural stereotypes. Blue Bear, for example, is the stereotypical Japanese 1960s salaryman—obedient, fastidious, diligent, and working for the company, not himself—and his labor pushing the ball is intended to embody the alienation of salaryman employment. Lacking any readily intelligible meaning, the labor reduces him to a mere cog in the machine (*haguruma*) incapable of cultivating a sense of self-worth independent of his company. As such, the random reprimand or praise he receives at times from Green Bear is meant to reinforce this sense of alienation, since, without an understanding of the significance of the work, reproach or approval is ultimately meaningless. Blue Bear's wife, Pink Bear, is another stereotype. She is the salaryman's professional housewife (*sengyō shufu*)—a stereotype of a stereotype—whom the salaryman imagines either lying around doing nothing all day but watching television and eating crackers, or spending his hard-earned wages on superfluous luxuries.

Salaryman is a broad term incorporating normative notions of gender, class, and race. In recent decades, its currency as an employment paradigm has gone through significant fluctuations. In the simplest sense, the term *salaryman* refers to a Japanese white-collar, middle-class male with a university degree who is employed in a company large enough to guarantee job security and a regular salary. In transitioning from student to full-time, salaried employee, he is thought of as becoming a responsible adult member of society, or *shakai jin*. Although the term *salaryman* has been in use since the early part of the twentieth century, in the early postwar decades it came to embody an ideal and requisite step for achieving the “new middle-class” status with a full-time housewife and children placed in supplemental education programs (cram schools) to ensure their advance to the best universities.⁴ Much about this ideal was based on the association of the salaryman with a system of lifetime employment, even though only a minority of large companies was actually able to offer such security.⁵ The salaryman ideal articulated in many ways an implicit social contract, stating that if a man devoted himself to the company, sacrificing independence and family time, then he would in exchange gain social status along with financial peace of mind for his family in the present and future. It was thus a commitment

to the corporate structure and an expression of belief in the overarching institutional system of the developmental state with its highly systemized education process. The second half of the 1950s and 1960s marked the high point in the social currency of the salaryman ideal, and although the ideal held strong appeal until the late 1980s, it did not maintain the same kind of hegemonic position during this time that it had in the early postwar era. While the collapse of the economy in the 1990s and ensuing trend of corporate restructuring (*risutora*), which hit middle-aged white-collar workers particularly hard, presented an unprecedented challenge to the salaryman model that it has not succeeded in overcoming, the model remains part of the collective cultural experience.⁶

The success of Days of Love and Labor as a parody of the salaryman ideal rests on the assumption of general familiarity with this ideal. Accordingly, the G-Mode team explained that they expect young players to find pleasure in the game's "black humor" (*buraku yūmoa*) representation of the cultural values of the 1960s. In this context, the game amounts to a tacit rejection of those values, which is something I will say more about later. At the same time, Days of Love and Labor takes advantage of recent nostalgia for the early postwar period, which builds on the perceived stability of the time amid the precariousness of the present.⁷ The simulation of Days of Love and Labor is intended to supplement this nostalgia by providing young Japanese with a chance to experience the sensibility of that time. As the G-Mode team described it, the game is about enjoying the "feeling of being troubled at times by the hardship of life, or being scolded or praised by a superior at work." Similarly, it is about experiencing "the sense of obligation that accompanies being invited to go drinking each day by your superior, and a sense of belonging to an organization in which one can only imagine oneself as a cog in the wheel [*haguruma*]." The numerous honorific banalities and other conventional workplace and domestic phrases composing the game's central dialogue, such as "Thank you for your work today" or "Welcome home, you've worked hard today," are important aspects of this effort to create the historical complexion of the simulated experience. Operating in an affective register, they are intended to engender a sense of restricted and highly structured social relations.

Importantly, G-Mode never intended Days of Love and Labor as a vehi-

cle for social critique. It was meant rather as pure entertainment. To ensure this, G-Mode made a conscious effort to eliminate any complexity from the game experience, since they thought it would interfere with a player's ability to exploit the "unfocused feeling" (*bonyari shita kanji*) that imbues the transitional moments of the everyday and makes them conducive to flights of fantasy. In what follows, however, I argue that despite these intentions, the simulation of salaryman labor in *Days of Love and Labor* is in fact an instantiation of serious play that corroborates in the cultivation of a dominant neoliberal ethos among Japanese youth. Specifically, the game works in this context as an instrument of human capital, providing an experience that endorses a particular regime of value in the current landscape of labor.

The New Information Economy Ideal

As a number of contributors to this issue have pointed out, the notion of human capital is at the core of neoliberalism. Human capital is the concept through which neoliberalism articulates one of its most profound differences from Marxian economic theory by insisting that labor cannot be generalized under a single rubric of human labor power but must be treated differently in terms of the subjective experience of each worker. The notion of human capital is thus particularly important since for the laboring population it is in many ways the most direct point of interface between neoliberalism as political economic theory and neoliberalism as lived experience. According to basic neoliberal theory, human capital is composed of two components: an individual's inborn physical attributes, and the set of skills plus knowledge that the individual acquires during his or her lifetime. These two factors combine to determine an individual's value in a competitive marketplace. Importantly, whereas the former component is determined, the latter is open to development. The underlying imperative of human capital is that an individual must constantly develop skills in order to maintain value in the labor market. Consequently, human capital specifies an open-ended process rather than set value. Experience is the vehicle of that process.

In providing an experience through simulation, *Days of Love and Labor* becomes part of an overall process of human capital development. What is more, in providing an experience of the salaryman ideal as a bygone system

of employment, the game performs a tacit valorization of a postindustrial information economy in a manner that endorses an underlying rhetoric of neoliberalism. This became clear in the interview when the G-Mode employees explained, contrary to my expectations, that the game was marketed to young women rather than men under the belief that young men would find the game "too real" (*namanamashii*). Young men, G-Mode reasoned, still work in large companies like banks and trading firms where employment conditions have not changed all that much since the 1960s. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that none of the four G-Mode employees were able to clarify why young women would want to play a game in which the central character is a salaryman and female characters seem to have no positive qualities. Moreover, are there really no salaried female (or salary-women) employees doing tedious jobs in large companies?

G-Mode's concern that men might find the game "too real" is also another way of saying that they were worried the game would make young men feel bad about their jobs. More specifically, they meant that the game would make young men who were not, as they were, employed in an information-economy-related profession feel superannuated, since, as they described, with Japan's shift circa 1970 from a modern industrial society to a postindustrial information economy, people in Japan began thinking of employment as a means to self-fulfillment. In other words, *Days of Love and Labor* is not simply a parody of the salaryman paradigm. It is an experience of that form of employment that performs as an endorsement for information-economy labor as the ideal form of self-satisfying employment. *Days of Love and Labor* thus valorizes network labor in a manner that embodies what Eran Fisher calls the "digital discourse."⁸

Fisher's argument reiterates to some extent a common critique of recent valorizations of the network society as facilitating self-satisfying modes of employment in opposition to the individual alienation produced under centralized Fordist schemas of labor. But the notion of a "digital discourse" also calls attention to the way in which capitalism and its critique collude in the production of a technological determinist rhetoric that naturalizes historical schemas of capitalist production as idealized topologies of social organization. In other words, network or digital discourse idealizes a flattened, decentralized social structure in correspondence with the supposed non-

hierarchical topology of the information network, which ultimately endorses the implementation of principal tenets of neoliberal political theory—the decentralization and privatization of public services, the withdrawal of the state from the social sphere, flexible employment structures, and so on. By historicizing the rhetorical structure of these arguments, Fisher shows that the difference between the social critique of capitalism under Fordism (which advocated centralized schemas of collective representation) and the critique under post-Fordism (which champions decentralized schemas of representation) ends up being a “trade-off between social emancipation and personal emancipation.”⁹ That is to say, on the one hand, the social critique of capitalism under Fordism focused on issues of class exploitation at the expense of the individual, thus exacerbating feelings of individual alienation. On the other hand, valorization of “network work” in critiques of capitalism under post-Fordism attends to the alienation of the individual under Fordism. But in so doing it atomizes the labor force, undermining the possibility of social critique deriving from collective representation. Atomization of labor in this latter mode of critique, it is important to add, substantiates the distinction between different forms of work that neoliberal theory effects with the notion “human capital.”

With its parody of the 1960s salaryman employment paradigm in mobile keitai play, *Days of Love and Labor* not only conveys the digital discourse but also performs its logic. That is to say, while the thematic register of the game conveys the notion of 1960s salaryman labor as individually alienating, on an experiential register the keitai itself becomes a stand-in for the *possibility* of personal emancipation via post-Fordist “network work.” I emphasize the word *possibility* here, since we have to imagine the typical player situated in one of the transitional moments of the everyday—the commute, the lunch break, or the time at home before bed. Such transitional moments are hardly exemplary scenes of post-Fordist network labor. Rather, the association they invoke is with conventional Fordist industrial modernity. For the player situated in such mundane space-times of industrial modernity, *Days of Love and Labor* becomes a fetishized instantiation of network digital labor, suggesting that somewhere in the city there is someone whose employment involves translating the physical and mental hardship of routine labor into a playful digital form. What is more, as a space-time long

associated with the alienating effects of the urban crowd, the commute (and even to some extent the office) no doubt amplifies the sense of alienation meant to be communicated through the game's simulation.

"Too Real"

As an implicit idealization of a post-Fordist/postsalaryman employment paradigm, Days of Love and Labor conforms to a common narrative of transformation that insists that significant social changes must also always be about radical historical transitions.¹⁰ Producing a kind of historical thesis, the narrative of transformation underlies assertions of an inherent difference between premodern and modern, or modern and postmodern, practices and forms. In juxtaposing the valorization of post-Fordist labor with critiques of Fordist labor, Fisher reminds us to think of transformations in terms of overlapping and incomplete passages from one mode of social organization to another rather than as absolute shifts. That Days of Love and Labor actually asks us to do something similar becomes clear from an online discussion of the game. This online discussion, as I will show below, suggests that the game's appeal rests in its evocation of contemporary employment as instantiating a logic of labor that transcends the specificity of salaryman versus network work framed as Fordist or post-Fordist paradigms. In other words, G-Mode was not wrong in anticipating that the simulation of life and labor in Days of Love and Labor would feel exceedingly real for players. What they misunderstood was how this "too real" simulation would be received and what kind of reflection it would generate. Whereas G-Mode anticipated that it would collapse the fantasy sustaining the game's simulated employment experience, the online discussion of Days of Love and Labor underscores the realness of the simulation as an essential part of its appeal. Importantly, its "realness," as we will see, derives from the way in which it captures the logic of contemporary employment, making no distinction between salaryman and other forms of employment but rather specifying all labor as participating in an unfair game that inevitably ends in severe debt. But Days of Love and Labor does more. It remediates this encounter with debt, transforming it from an alienating experience and provocation for solitary reflection on the (un)happiness of life under capitalism into a

medium of collective reflection that bespeaks the ultimately social nature of debt. The keitai operates in this context as a crucial component of this equation and difference between the representation and simulation of the collective. On one level, its connectivity taps into and transforms the conflicting desire for interaction and solitude that characterizes the sense of alienation produced within the transitional spaces of the everyday. On another level, it creates a collective space of remediation for the alienating and isolating experience of debt.

The Real Game

Just what exactly constitutes the appeal of Days of Love and Labor is precisely the question that develops in a discussion of the game on *Ni channeru* (*2channel*), a Japanese Internet forum that earned a reputation in the late 1990s as a subculture site but has since attracted a more general audience.¹¹ Postings on *Ni channeru* are time stamped but also almost always anonymous, with the site supposedly not logging participants' Internet protocol addresses. Thus, participants in a discussion identify and respond to one another by referring to the numerical order of the postings. It is worth noting that the name field for each posting, which is typically not filled, has become a way of accentuating the anonymity of exchanges on the site. For example, in some discussions the name field reads "Mr. Nameless" or "Please Type Name Here." In the discussion of Days of Love and Labor, the name field reads "Mr. Number Withheld@Application in Use" (*hitsuu-chi san@apuri kidō chū*), suggesting that contributors are posting from their keitai and possibly in the midst of playing the game.

A discussion concerning the allure of Days of Love and Labor arises when poster #62 suggests that the game's designers should expand the game by adding different kinds of employment and life experiences. The posting is long but worth citing in full, as it is referenced repeatedly in the ensuing debate.

Along with rolling the ball they should make it more realistic by adding jobs like civil engineering, guard, painter, driver, plumber, interior designer, gas and electric technician, [mixing and matching the pieces

to] make it a bit more comical. Also things like wooden chopsticks or container manufacturing or building maintenance [window cleaning]. And they could expand various forms of real wage labor to make it more interesting, anything from part time at a convenience store to a regular employee, manager, owner, even stock owner, or other kind of side job, *freeta* [part-time] factory worker. Anyhow, since the principle is for it to be the everyman, the work shouldn't be too flashy. They could also add tasks like school, exams, CV preparation. And if they had something like an elite course for working in a big company it would also be good. . . . That might involve fictitious business trips, illicit business, graft, embezzlement, tax evasion, placement of retiring high-ranking government officials in top private sector positions [*amakudari*], etc. . . . there are all kinds of new elements that might be added. How about being fired, restructured and looking for work, job interviews. That'd be interesting. Aside from buying expensive things there should be poor items too, like a hat or clothing [picked up from the street], a cardboard box for 0 yen instead of your house. In other words, if they changed it like that putting in the surreal, I'd want to play it on something like PlayStation. Bill collecting, black market, or regular loans would also be interesting.

#62 takes a rather literal approach to the game. In order to be more "realistic" (*genjitsu teki*), #62 argues, Days of Love and Labor needs to simulate a more faithful representation of the complexity and variation of different forms of labor, luck, and class in Japanese society. Enumerating various kinds of employment, professions, and conditions that might be added to the game, #62 ultimately realizes that the game would exceed the threshold of the keitai medium and thus proposes shifting it to PlayStation. In other words, #62 wants a richer simulation of reality that is in many ways incommensurable not only with the game but also with the underlying logic of the keitai experience. In contrast to simulation games played in front of a computer or a television, which endeavor to immerse the player in hermetic, high-definition, virtual worlds that demand intense concentration, Days of Love and Labor's underlying mobility presumes a player in a state of semidistraction, attuned simultaneously to the small handheld screen and shifting surroundings. As the G-Mode team explained, the game tries to tap

into the “unfocused feeling” that characterizes the mental state of players in the transitional moments of the everyday (the commute, the lunch break, and before sleep). Whereas high-definition computer or television games endeavor to shut out the outside world—the space of the game—Days of Love and Labor enfold the surrounding environment in its simulation. Consequently, its minimal (incomplete) graphics draw supplemental force from the lived environment of the everyday labor of life and love in order to realize a simulation of the everyday experience of life and labor. I will come back to this point below.

#62’s misunderstanding of the specificity of keitai play aside, it is important to point out that #62 conveys no sense of Days of Love and Labor as the depiction of the 1960s salaryman employment paradigm. He or she also makes no distinction between industrial and postindustrial or material and immaterial forms of labor. Physical labor, professional vocations, management, finance, company restructuring, business trips, and even governmental graft all merge in #62’s perception of the unfairness of life for the contemporary “everyman” (*futsū no hito*). Importantly, what subsequent postings reject is #62’s literal understanding of simulation rather than the notion of life as an unfair game.

Responses to #62’s suggestions are overwhelmingly negative, with participants in the thread insisting that #62 completely misunderstands the game. “You have no idea what this game is about,” declares another poster, #64. “It is not about employment variation,” claims yet another poster, #73, before elaborating:

What #62 doesn’t understand is that the interesting element of this game is that it takes a totally different vector from game quality [*gēmu sei*]. So, not only would adding variation to the kinds of work not increase its appeal, it would ruin something that is already perfect and just make it a conventional simulated life game. At the end of the day, to work in life is to sell your time piecemeal in order to buy a bit of happiness with the minuscule amount of remuneration that you get. Whether that amounts to a life of emptiness or happiness depends on the [game] user. What the game is trying to do the best that it can is to symbolize life. That’s the overall message that emerges.

The particularity and appeal of Days of Love and Labor, according to #73, rests in the experience it produces of a simulation that exceeds the imitative quality of simulation by capturing the essence of what it means to labor. This essence is distilled in the game's simple message that life amounts to a tedious and alienating struggle for wages with little promise for more than anything but momentary glimpses of happiness. Subsequent postings echo this view while elaborating on the interpretation, some suggesting that the obvious Sisyphian allusion conveyed through Blue Bear's repetitive labor of rolling a ball is the perfect encapsulation of the "severity and irrationality" of life.

For these players, then, the allure of Days of Love and Labor derives from its leveling of distinctions among forms of labor and its abstraction of the simple and singular logic that to labor for wages in life is to endure the unfairness of the capitalist system. This moves in direct contrast to contemporary rhetoric of self-fulfillment through employment, which stresses the irreducibility of different forms of labor in ways that resonate with the concept of human capital and neoliberal strategies. Insofar as the nature of the game's allure would seem to provide the condition of possibility for collective representation, one would be hard pressed to identify it as a potential return to a Marxist theory of labor, as it lacks an underlying concern with class and the corollary premise of historical dialectic. At the same time, this lack, or failure to invoke a theoretical framework, can be seen as a positive aspect if we recall from Fisher's argument earlier that the imposition of a collectivizing theory of labor energizes neoliberal rhetoric. In Japan, it is worth noting, the experience with that theory ended in a particularly bad way in the 1960s, fueling violent ideological standoffs between different leftist student groups. In the final section below, I want to suggest that while Days of Love and Labor avoids conforming to a particular theoretical frame, it provides a different avenue for collective reflection. This avenue rests on the specificity and generalizability of debt, remediated via keitai, as the underlying experience of love and labor under capitalism.

Collective Transitions

If the simulation of an employment situation is the explicit premise of Days of Love and Labor, labor as the path toward unmanageable debt is the real

experience it provides. No matter how skillful the player and no matter how much the player labors, the game leaves the player with unmanageable debt. Debt is the essential experience conveyed by the game and the overwhelming force against which players try to manage their labor and desires, albeit without success. Take the following exchange, for example:

83: No matter how happy you can be (traveling, lottery, cake every day, owning all the furniture, buying jewels, buying a mansion, buying stock in IT) I'm not sure it's all worth going into debt.

84: #83, that's life!

94: [commenting on #83] Diligently working away, finishing your life without buying anything at all and just saving your money, it's the same as not buying anything, it's the same as doing nothing with your life and letting it slip away.

95: #94, that's life!

96: What can I say, that kind of thing happens in life.

This raises the question—which is the fundamental question behind this argument—what is the appeal of a simulation of debt as the unavoidable consequence of labor under capitalism? I want to suggest here that *Days of Love and Labor* asks us to think debt as a potential medium of collective reflection. In contrast to Karl Marx's attempt to transform labor into a unifying social experience through a theory of labor, which, it should be recalled, relied on the science of thermodynamics for both its logic and rhetorical currency,¹² debt constitutes a lived logic that produces individual stories of hardship that carry general resonance. In simulating life as an unfair game leading to debt, individual stories of hardship are exactly what the invocation to reflect in *Days of Love and Labor* produces:

32: A simple life of looking every day for simple happiness. To see what a life with just love was like, on the first day I went into debt to buy a wife for ¥10,000. Then every day the debt collector came around. And just when I thought I'd paid it all back, divorce. . . . That was my thirty-one days. A simple life of looking every day for simple happiness
○|└¹³

128: In the end it was just a hard life. Every day being chased by the loan collector and having things taken away. I wish I could have at least saved my wife and kids, I'm sorry . . .

154: Not used to the work, I kept making mistakes and getting reprimanded by my superior day after day. Finally, just when I got promoted, I learned that my wife had taken out a loan. For the sake of my wife, I put my spirit into my work. But I ended up getting demoted for consecutive misses. Then the loan collector barged in at my home and took all the things I'd bought when I was single, my car, bicycle, cell phone. Finally, I figured out the work, and as I worked to pay back my loan, I neared retirement. Just as I thought I'd paid back my loan, I discovered a new loan. Approaching retirement. Nothing but an absolutely bitter life. Zero points.

The remarkable pathos players exhibit in recounting their struggle to navigate the demands of life and labor with the necessity for love within a rigged system bespeaks the "realness" of the game's simulated experience. One indeed feels sorry for these individuals who worked so diligently and as responsible adults only to finish their thirty-one days alone, unable to save their family, and fighting off loan sharks. It is here that the appeal of the game resides—in collective reflection that takes the form of sharing accounts of the hardships, alienation, and isolation experienced in the simulated and sincere struggle to make ends meet only to end up with unmanageable debt. In other words, *Days of Love and Labor* becomes an engaging simulation when it transcends its intended parameters of individual play and solitary reflection on the (un)happiness of life to remediate the isolation and alienating experience of debt as a collective experience. Naturally, it is only through the means of the keitai that such remediation can take place. That is, if *Days of Love and Labor* asks us to think debt as a potential medium of collectivity, it can do so only if we think it in conjunction with the keitai as a device that interrupts and transforms the conflicting desire for alienation and contact that is part of the transitional space of the everyday into interaction without proximity.

Remediations

In sum, what then is the appeal behind *Days of Love and Labor*? In this article, I have tried to show that, on the one hand, the game resonates with players not as a defunct historical paradigm of salaryman employment but rather as a distillation of the logic of contemporary labor under capitalism, whereby to work is to participate in an unfair game that ends with unmanageable debt, alienation, and loneliness. In this respect, the game is significant for the way in which it rejects current tropes promoting the cultivation of human capital as a correlate with the discovery of individual self-worth through employment. Insofar as such tropes may empower the younger generation to seek individual self-worth instead of simply surrendering to the rhetoric of sacrifice for nation and corporation, they are also problematic for the manner in which they intersect with and substantiate a neoliberal idiom that undermines political possibilities of collective representation. In rejecting the notion of employment as a medium of individual realization and emphasizing instead a generalizable logic of exploitation at work in all work, *Days of Love and Labor* gestures to the possibility for broad social solidarity in ways that seem at first to hark back to older formulations of collective representation. The game, I tried to show, however, breaks away from this trajectory by foregrounding the lived experience of debt as the unifying experience. Debt proves highly instrumental in this sense as an organizing force behind a collective logic that becomes part of the underlying appeal of the game.

Of course, one could argue that the online discussion is simply more interesting than the game itself. The point, I argue, is that the online discussion asks us to consider that *Days of Love and Labor* is not only about the logic of labor and corollary debt but rather about the way in which this logic and its effects are mediated by the transitional space-times of everyday labor (the commute, the lunch break, and just before sleep) and remediated in keitai culture. The keitai, I suggest, enfolds the intensities, solitude, and conflicting desires that saturate these transitional space-times, generating a unique kind of simulation and impulse for connectivity. Such an assemblage of circumstances transform the evocation to solitary reflection spurred by the isolating simulation of debt into a force of collective deliberation in the

form of sarcastic commiseration. While making for amusing reading, the online forum urges us to think against the rhetoric of life financial management as a matter of individual responsibility and to recognize the always already collective nature of debt.

In remediating debt as a collective deliberation articulated in commiseration, Days of Love and Labor finally recalls the Occupy Wall Street movement, which in part drew its captivating appeal from endless personal accounts of struggles among the ninety-nine percent to get by in an unfair system. Similar to Days of Love and Labor, what Occupy Wall Street reminds us is that if new circuits of digital capital accumulation and finance driven by economic deregulation have created a historically unprecedented condition of social inequity, they have created at the same time channels of remediation. The underlying question, however, remains the same—"Was it a happy life?"

Notes

All translations from Japanese to English in this article are my own.

1. "Shiawase na rokujūdai onna fushiawase na sanjūdai otoko" ("Happy Women in Their Sixties and Unhappy Men in Their Thirties."), *Asahi Shimbun Weekly AERA*, June 11, 2012, 10–15.
2. See, for example, Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda, eds., *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Gabriella Lukács, "Dreamwork: Cell Phone Novelists, Labor, and Politics in Contemporary Japan," *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2013): 44–64.
3. Interview with G-Mode employees, Tokyo, Japan, September 6, 2010.
4. Much has been written regarding the salaryman as the new middle class in the early postwar era. See, for example, Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan's New Middle Class: The Salary Man and His Family in a Tokyo Suburb* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).
5. Sandra Buckley points out that lifetime employment was reserved for core workers in a minority set of large companies. See Buckley, "Altered States: The Body Politics of 'Being-Woman,'" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For an excellent summary of the impact of Japan's long recession on the ideological and emotional currency of the salaryman ideal, see Romit Dasgupta, "Emotional Spaces and Places of Salaryman Anxiety in Tokyo Sonata," *Japanese Studies* 31, no. 3 (2011): 373–86.
6. Dasgupta, "Emotional Spaces," 377.

7. Jordan Sand, "Showa Nostalgia," *Weekend Australian Financial Review*, April 5–9, 2007, 1–5.
8. Eran Fisher, *Media and New Capitalism in the Digital Age: The Spirit of Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
9. *Ibid.*, 11.
10. Mei Zhan, "Civet Cats, Fried Grasshoppers, and David Beckham's Pajamas: Unruly Bodies after SARS," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 1 (2005): 31–42.
11. *Ni channeru (2channel)*, www.logsoku.com/r/appli/1115218839/ (accessed February 15, 2013).
12. See Rabinbach's discussion of the thermodynamic principle in Marx's labor theory: Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
13. The symbol here is a common 2Channel Jis Shift symbol to convey the notion of a person pounding his or her head on the ground in disappointment, dejection. It is often intended as a facetious display of despair.