ANIMAL SOCIALITIES: HEALING AND AFFECT IN JAPANESE ANIMAL CAFÉS

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This project investigates how young people facing precarity in Japan today use "animal cafés" to meet their need for sociality. The owners, employees and customers of these businesses are all involved in actively constructing a new alternative space that offers a refuge to overstressed young people. The sociality of the animal café is based on relaxation and the performance of non-productivity, where visitors can feel connected to others in a public space without having to "work" at interacting. These businesses are an outgrowth of earlier Japanese businesses that commodify intimate relationships, such as host and hostess clubs and maid cafés, but animal cafés instead make access to the space the commodity, allowing visitors to enter and experience a sense of *iyashi* (healing) based on non-discursive, relaxing connections with animals, freeing visitors from the responsibility to maintain face in front of other people, and their lower costs make them accessible to a larger percentage of the Japanese population.

The research for this project was conducted over eighteen months between 2012 and 2014 in Tokyo, Japan. I conducted participant observation at sixteen Tokyo animal cafés, the majority of which were cat cafes, the most common café model, but also included three rabbit and two owl cafés, newer iterations. In an effort to get a complete picture of the variety of ways people engage with animal cafés, I conducted informal and semi-structured interviews with the central actors—owners, employees and customers. I interviewed thirteen café owners or managers, sixteen café employees from four different businesses, and nineteen café customers,

iv

the majority of whom I met during participant observation who agreed to meet me for an interview.

Using the animal café to explore issues of precariousness and sociality aids in the creation of a broad understanding of the experience of being a young person in Japan today. This research contributes to the scholarly literature on the experience of young workers in a neoliberalized world by examining how people in Japan respond to new challenges and how they cope by creating new spaces that meet their emotional needs and fit their lifestyles today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	IN	TRODUCTION1			
	1.1	PRECARITY, GLOBALLY AND IN JAPAN7			
	1.2	THE CHANGING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION FOR			
	YOUN	GER JAPANESE			
	1.3	YOUTH AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE NEW ECONOMY AND NEW			
	SOCIALITIES				
	1.4	THE AFFECT ECONOMY24			
	1.5	ANIMALS AND AFFECTIVE INTERACTION IN JAPAN 30			
	1.6	FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY 32			
	1.7	CHAPTER OVERVIEW37			
2.0	TI	HE HEALING SPACE: IYASHI AND THE THIRD PLACE42			
	2.1	THE DEFINITION OF IYASHI45			
	2.2	THE END OF THE BUBBLE ECONOMY AND THE "IYASHI BOOM". 50			
	2.3	THE CIRCULATION OF AFFECT IN A "THIRD PLACE" 56			
	2.4	THE CAFÉ IN JAPAN AS REFUGE FROM SOCIAL PRESSURE 63			
	2.5	CONNECTING TO SOMETHING OUTSIDE ONESELF - IYASHI			
	THRO	UGH SOCIALITY WITH ANIMALS69			

	2.6	THE IYASHI ATMOSPHERE AND VISIBLY PERFORMING NON-			
	PRO	DUCTIVITY77			
	2.7	CONCLUSION: THE GOAL OF IYASHI82			
3.0		ANIMAL CAFÉ OWNERS: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COMMUNITY			
SER	VICI	E			
	3.1	THE GROUND IN WHICH THE SEED OF THE CAT CAFÉ IS			
	PLA	NTED – BECOMING A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER 90			
	3.2	HOW OWNERS SEE THEIR CAFÉS IN THE CONTEXT OF TWENTY			
	FIRS	ST CENTURY JAPAN99			
	3.3	A BUSINESS MODEL DESIGNED TO APPEAL 104			
	3.4	THE DECISION TO STRUCTURE CAFÉS AROUND ANIMALS 114			
	3.5	UNSUCCESSFUL CAFÉS 118			
	3.6	CONCLUSION 122			
4.0		THE AGENCY OF CUSTOMERS: CARVING OUT A SPACE OF THEIR			
OW!	N				
	4.1	THE PEOPLE WHO VISIT AN ANIMAL CAFÉ 129			
	4.2	CONSTRUCTING "ANIMAL SOCIALITY" AND MAKING A			
	REFUGE				
	4.3	IYASHI AND THE FREEDOM TO BE SELFISH 151			
	4.4	CONCLUSION153			
5.0		THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP:			
CAE	TÉ AN	NIMALS AND THE TRANSMISSION OF AFFECT 156			

	5.1	CHANGING	G UNDE	RSTANDINGS	S OF	HUMAN-A	NIMAL
	INT	ERACTIONS	••••••	•••••	•••••	••••••	160
	5.2	ANIMALS 1	IN JAPAN	•••••	••••••	•••••	163
	5.3	THE HUMA	AN-ANIMAL	RELATIONSF	HIP IN THE (CAFÉ CONTEX	XT.168
	5.4	THE CIR	CULATION	OF AFFEC	T BETWE	EN ANIMAL	AND
	HU	MAN	••••••	•••••	•••••	•••••	172
	5.5	USING THI	E ANIMAL TO	O CONNECT	•••••	•••••	176
	5.6	CARE AND	EASE	•••••	•••••	•••••	179
	5.7	LIFE FOR	ANIMALS IN	THE CAFÉ	•••••	•••••	182
	5.8	ANIMALS 1	BEYOND TH	E HUMAN	•••••	•••••	190
	5.9	CONCLUSI	ON	•••••	•••••	•••••	195
6.0		HUMAN EMPL	OYEES AND	THE EXPER	RIENCE OF	AFFECT: SH	ARING
TH	E BU	RDEN WITH AN	IMAL STAFF	•••••	•••••	•••••	198
	6.1	WHO THE	CAFÉ EMPL	OYEES ARE	•••••	•••••	204
	6.2	DUTIES	AND RESP	ONSIBILITIE	S OF AN	N ANIMAL	CAFÉ
	EM	PLOYEE	••••••	•••••	•••••	•••••	210
	6.3	PRODUCIN	NG THE AFF	ECT OF IYAS	<i>HI</i> , FOR TH	E CUSTOMER	RS AND
	FOR THEMSELVES						
	6.4	SHARING 7	THE BURDE	V	•••••	•••••	225
	6.5	CONCLUSI	ON	•••••	•••••	•••••	230
7.0		CONCLUSION	••••••	•••••	•••••	•••••	233
	7.1	SHIFTING	LABOR PAT	TERNS, <i>IYASI</i>	HI AND COM	IMUNITY	238
	7.2	THE LAYE	RS OF ENGA	GEMENT WI	TH THE AN	IMAL CAFÉ	241

7.3	RESISTANCE AND REPRODUCTION	244
7.4	THE FUTURE OF HUMAN-ANIMAL SOCIALITY	247
BIBLIOGR	APHY	250

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2015, Keiko, a key informant who had become a close friend during my fieldwork, and I visited *Catacular*, a cat café in an area of Tokyo popular with young people. We came to relax and catch up on what had been happening in her life, and to reflect on my research and what I had learned about animal cafés during my years of fieldwork. As we enter the café, a space about the size of a large living room on the second floor of a commercial building, we are met by a smiling staff member in the ante-chamber, which is separated from the body of the café where cats roam freely by a pet gate. She welcomes us, asks if we had been there before, and explains the pricing plan to us. We elect to stay for an hour, which cost 1000 yen (about \$10) and includes a free drink. We are then ushered in. Leaving our bags and shoes at the entrance, we wash and sanitize our hands with alcohol, and sit on the floor at a low table near to where a favored cat was curled up asleep.

Catacular looks less like a café than like the well-maintained living room of a family that owns a lot of cats. There are a half-dozen low tables with drink menus atop them so you can sit and have a drink while still within arm's reach of the cats, but there are also bean bag chairs and a comfortable couch, and a television to one side and tinkling classical music drifting through the air. The café owner was inspired by the relaxed energy of Okinawa, Japan's subtropical prefecture, and the room is decorated with driftwood from the region, which is also used to make the tables.

The café is not crowded this day, though on weekends there is often a waiting list. Even then, the number of visitors at one time is limited to reduce the stress placed on the animals; eleven cats live in the café and no more than fourteen visitors can enjoy the café at the same time. There are numerous spaces, like high shelves or inside boxes, into which the cats can retreat when they are stressed or tired, but there are always a few cats awake and roaming around the café, willing to submit to a petting hand or to play with a waving cat toy.

Keiko and I place drink orders and spend about ten minutes wandering around the café, checking to see which cats are sleeping and which are willing to play a bit. We pet a few and take pictures before returning to our table to chat over our drinks. Over the course of our hour there, Keiko reaches out her fingers to brush along cats that wander past and snaps occasional photos of one doing something appealing. However, we spend the majority of our time quietly relaxing and commenting on what we are seeing and feeling. When Keiko has a question about a particular cat, the staff member is quick to answer and happy to talk, but does not otherwise infringe on our experience in the café. Interactions with other customers are limited to smiles or exclamations of "kawaii (cute)," minimal bonding over the shared experience of being a customer in a cat café. Conversations even between friends or couples that come to the café together are limited; it is not that they never talk to each other, but the focus of a visit is to look around and experience, rather than interact with one's colleague.

I ask Keiko to describe what she feels like when she is in a cat café and she tells me "I feel like I'm settled (*igō kochi ga ii*)." That feeling, of relaxing and letting go of the tension she carried around and allowing herself to feel comfortable among others, was what drove her to visit a cat café in the first place. When she was in her last year of college, facing the grueling Japanese job market, she became so depressed that she cut off almost all social interaction,

stopped going out, and took a leave of absence from school. Stuck inside her home, she dwelled on her concerns about her future. She decided she needed social interaction but could not face other people who would undoubtedly ask her to explain her situation. While the idea of picking back up her usual life was still scary, the cat café "was one cushion before getting out to the real world." The cat café offered Keiko a space in which she could be out socializing but also be protected from the attitudes and judgements of other people. She could be out in public, interacting and engaging with others, but feel no pressure to be any more active or productive than she wanted to be, as sheltered as if she was still at home. She told me that the way a café offers a "balance between a sense of relaxation and a sense of a different world is important. It's not our home so we can't fully relax, but we come here for something unusual, different. I want something like my home, but a sense of something different too." Animal cafés offer an experience marked by this tension between passive relaxation and active engagement with others, as visitors seek intimate connections in a public space.

The first Japanese cat café opened in Osaka in 2004, followed quickly by two cat cafés in Tokyo before the end of the year. Though the idea for the business was inspired by a Taiwanese version, the Japanese version of the cat café quickly gained in popularity, spreading throughout the country. The number of cat cafés in Japan peaked in 2008, at which point there were dozens of cafés in Tokyo alone. When the market became saturated with cat cafés, beginning in 2010, other types of animal cafés, structured around the opportunity to bond with rabbits, reptiles or owls, appeared. In addition, cat cafés have appeared in countries throughout the world, and more than a dozen are open or in the process of opening in the United States today. During a visit to Tokyo in 2011, I visited my first cat café following a conversation with a group of people in their

thirties about places they enjoyed visiting; one young woman grabbed me and said that she has heard such good things about cat cafés and she wanted to go to one with me.

Animal cafés, present throughout Japan, are in their highest concentration in big cities. They welcome a wide range of customers, from middle-schoolers to the elderly, but they are by far most popular with young people in their twenties and thirties, a group that came of age after the end of the economic boom period. These cafés exist to offer visitors a refuge from the outside world, offering a public space focused on relaxation and comfort, to combat feelings of loneliness, stress, anxiety or alienation connected to economic and social struggles they face in their everyday lives. They attract everyone from full-time employees (*shain*) to spend an hour after a long day at work before heading home to an empty apartment, to part-time workers whose offices do not allow them to develop real relationships with coworkers to make up for the lack of other positive social interaction in their lives, to people on a first date to relax and get over the awkwardness of getting to know each other. A visit averages about \$10 for an hour's stay, a not-insignificant fee that is still within financial reach of most people, and often more inexpensive than a visit to the movies or other outings. As the rate per hour decreases the longer a visitor stays, the price can be very reasonable for a devoted visitor.

This project investigates how young people use animal cafés to meet their need for sociality in precarious Japan (Allison 2013). The life state for Japanese youth who came of age since the beginning of the Japanese recession, in 1990, is one of precarity. This generation faces economic struggles caused by the deregulation of labor and the attendant increase in irregular, or precarious, employment, but, beyond that, struggles of sociality, affected by the disintegrating social ties of postwar period and increases in anxiety, uncertainty and existential distress. The creation and engagement with animal cafés is a response to the need for community connections

and the freedom to decide on an individually meaningful lifecourse. It offers an alternate kind of sociality to replace the idealized family and corporate sociality of the postwar era. However, that sociality is not just a rejection of early forms of sociality, but a sociality, influenced by issues of social precarity and current conceptualizations of care, designed to fit the lifestyles of young people today.

Animal cafés offer forms of sociality, or matrices of social interaction, built on a humananimal connection. They that are focused on relaxation, in contrast to the emphasis on
productivity elsewhere in Japanese society, and a type of self-focus, that stands in contrast to the
social expectation of continual attentiveness to the needs of others. Animal cafés function
successfully for their visitors as a response to precarity because they offer a "third place"
(Oldenburg 1989), an alternative space, separate from home and work, that is a refuge from the
stresses of constantly demonstrating appropriate, normative behavior. Within this space, visitors
enjoy a chance to receive *iyashi*, healing, an affect that carries a connotation of both physical and
mental soothing and improvement. Visitors can enter this space and let go of the stresses of their
everyday lives and claim part of this communal space for themselves. Cafés blur the line
between public and private space, emphasizing both the sense of community, as customers can
surround themselves with animals and other animal lovers, and a sense of hominess, that visitors
embrace to fill the need for a sense of intimate connection.

The sociality is structured around loose connectivity, in which visitors are surrounded and recognized by others, both human and nonhuman, but free from the stress of direct interaction if they do not wish it. Nonhuman animals play a major role in producing this sociality. Animals, particularly domesticated species like cats and rabbits that primarily populate animal cafés, are both sources of positive affects such as comfort, ease, well-being, and social

creatures, who can be called on to provide friendly face and a being to communicate with. Visitors can address their feelings of loneliness through interactions with animals without having to address the needs of their compatriot or maintain face as one would have to in front of another person. The fact that the labor provided by the animals is unpaid means that the cost of running a business of this type is comparatively inexpensive, making these businesses accessible to anyone and the emphasis on low-key socialization makes them feel less daunting than other businesses that have commodified intimate interactions in Japan.

The construction of the animal café is also a reflection of the increased commonality of the commodification of care relationships in Japan. Young Japanese are increasingly comfortable engaging in self-care by purchasing emotionally beneficial experiences rather than turning to community or family. The relationship of care that is cultivated in an animal café is not one of direct monetary-care exchange, but one in which visitors pay for time in a caring situation, allowing authentic care relationships to exist within a larger artificial construct of a care space, like a home. The commercialized nature of the encounter restricts the experience of sociality to the café, but also frees visitors from the social obligation, and associated stress, of maintaining relationships. There is no demand on visitors to maintain a relationship with the animal beyond the café.

This dissertation is an ethnographic exploration of the animal café, designed to offer insight into how living in a state of precarity is leading to the development of new forms of sociality. My focus is not just on what the experience of precarity is, but on how being part of a particular generation, marginalized within the economy by their exclusion from secure employment, is leading to action and what those actions are. The people I met during my fieldwork are not activists; they are primarily interested in leading the best life they can under

conditions of economic and social strain. This has led them to engage in activities that allow them to alleviate their sense of precariousness, even if only temporarily. The kind of sociality that they seek out is shaped by that desire. Scholars have argued that precarity forces a recognition of the fact that we live socially, "the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all" (Butler 2010, 14). I believe that, in Japan, young people recognize that better human connections (ningen kankei) are needed to combat their feelings of loneliness and alienation and are looking in new directions, other than towards potentially distant friends and family, for social support. Being faced with conditions of precarity does not automatically mean that the people living in them have no option but to become a "suffering subject" (Robbins 2013) or function focused on their position as victims. My fieldwork demonstrated that young people, from owners, to employees, to customers, are taking action to change their life conditions through their response to their economic and social needs; when they could not find the sociality that they feel they need, they constructed a space to provide it. They are able not only to find a respite from their struggles with precarity, but are able to experience *iyashi*, healing, essential to counter their sense of precarity.

1.1 PRECARITY, GLOBALLY AND IN JAPAN

Precarity is "life without the promise of stability" in Anna Tsing's words (Tsing 2015, 2). The origin of the term can be traced to the work of Marxist autonomists from France and Italy (Hardt and Negri 2004, Lazzarato 1996) who identified a shift, beginning in the 1970s, towards precarious labor — flexible, continent, insecure work, which includes both casualized or

temporary employment and immaterial and creative labor. From the perspective of labor, "precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union" (Gill and Pratt 2008, 3). This group believed this dual meaning of precarity opened up a perspective from which to explore "the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics" (Gill and Pratt 2008, 3). Faced with the increasing prevalence of flexible or precarious labor, the concept of precarity was introduced as an economic term to help scholars conceptualize both the sense of economic instability and the new political body and political subjectivity created by post-industrial capitalism.

Social activists in post-industrial societies like Europe and the United States position precarity as a condition of post-Fordist capitalism as part of a broader discourse about the unravelling of Fordist capitalism. "The concept of precarity has emerged as a way to capture both the tenuous conditions of neoliberal labor as well as states of anxiety, desperation, unbelonging, and risk experienced by temporary and irregularly employed workers" (Millar 2014, 34). Additionally, the way that economic precariousness slips into other realms of life, leading to a broader state of disaffection, influences human life courses, has attracted scholarly attention to the broader issue of precarity, of work but also of sociality and of life. This has attracted attention to the experience of precariousness, even for those who are not precarious laborers. "Precarity once seemed the fate of the less fortunate. Now it seems that all our lives are precarious - even when, for the moment, our pockets are lined" (Tsing 2015, 2). Precarity is thus not just an important concept for conceptualizing economic reconfigurations in the face of economic changes, but also for conceptualizing social reconfiguration. It is a way to describe a new condition, within which new forms of sociality are constructed.

Ethnographers from regions that have never had the stability of a Fordist economic system have pushed scholars to explore the concept of precarity within particular cultural contexts and historical situations (Al-Mohammad 2012, Millar 2014). As Millar argues, "the way that the relationship between precarious labor and precarious life is articulated depends significantly on the specific history and experience of capitalism in a given location" (2014, 35). Additionally, as Judith Butler (2010) notes, precariousness is part of life, a condition of the fact that all lives "can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed" (Butler 2010, 25) and is not unique to modern times. Instead of defining precarity in relation to more recent political and economic processes, she defines precarity as precariousness differentially distributed by forces of power, which is not necessarily new. Even as scholars posit the creation of new class, "the precariat" (Standing 2011), arising as a consequence of their current economic marginalization, others argue that Fordism is the exception, not the rule, in global history (Neilson and Rossiter 2008) and people have always adapted in response to changing life circumstances.

So, in order to understand how precarity as a concept can be applied to the lives of my research subjects in Japan, it is necessary to consider the economic and social changes in recent history that have shaped the lives of the generation that came of age in 1990s Japan. The sense of precarity in present day Japan is connected to "the shift towards differentiation and uncertainty" (Kawano 2014, 4), that is largely rooted in the economic and labor deregulation that occurred primarily in the 1990s, as a governmental and corporate response to boost the economy. This led to a major increase in the number of irregulars workers, many of them in that position involuntarily as full-time positions became less common, and new full-time positions, offered to a new generation of college graduates, were no longer lifetime employment (*shushin koyō*, but

instead 'long-term employment' ($ch\bar{o}ki\ koy\bar{o}$) or 'regular employment' ($seiki\ koy\bar{o}$) (Fu 2012). Young people growing up in this new atmosphere find themselves unable to access the sociality of their parents' generation, structured around the 'company-as-family' ideology, and have been left feeling disoriented, not necessarily interested in experiencing the same life course as their parents had aimed for but also unsure what type of sociality they have access to instead.

Following the end of World War II and the American occupation, Japan entered a period of high economic growth beginning in the 1960s, which it managed to maintain through the 1970s and 1980s. However, globally this was a period of recession and stagflation (a portmanteau of stagnation and inflation) and the attempt to adapt to the reality that the 'embedded liberalism' of the postwar years was no longer providing sufficient global capital accumulation (Harvey 2007). Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the United States and Europe, there was a transition to "an entirely new regime of accumulation, coupled with a quite different system of political and social regulation" (Harvey 1989, 145). This new form of accumulation, flexible accumulation, "rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organization innovation" (Harvey 1989, 145).

Japan continued its high growth rate through this period, even as other nations shifted towards flexible accumulation, but the limitations of the Japanese economic system, with its high labor costs and inflexibility, caused by the provision of incomes that supported a family and secure employment, were beginning to show even during this boom period. However, it was in reaction to economic recession, which began in 1990, that led to "a transition from an economic model in which the government was central to ensuring the smooth functioning of the market to

a new model in which the self-regulating principles of the market started gaining an increasingly vital role in safeguarding economic growth" (Lukacs 2010, 6). It was during this period that the most extensive governmental and corporate reforms, mainly designed to modify existing institutions instead of replacing them (Vogel 2006), occurred.

One consequence of this was the generational difference in the effect of the economic restructuring. The labor of young people is a central part of a system of flexible accumulation, to be explored further below, but the transition in Japan led to a system where older workers were more protected than newer hires, who shouldered significantly more risk. Unlike many Western countries, Japan never had what would be considered a 'welfare state' as the state had relied on sources such as family and the corporations to provide social support (Borovoy 2012), so scholars are divided on how to describe the shift to a neoliberal state in Japan, but there has been a "shift from developmental to neoliberal forms of social and economic management. The neoliberal state adopts the principles of flexible accumulation and draws on workers who are able to adapt to mobile and precarious work conditions" (Lukacs 2015a, 387). While deregulation of the labor market started to go into effect in the 1980s with the 1985 law that allowed an increased number of business to use temps, the next deregulation, which affected twice as many jobs took place in 1996, and a 2004 labor law allowed almost no restrictions on the use of temporary, irregular workers (Driscoll 2015, 562, note 3).

1.2 THE CHANGING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION FOR YOUNGER JAPANESE

Economic deregulation has disproportionately affected younger Japanese, as these policies were implemented in regard to younger workers and new hires, while older employees have been more sheltered from the increasing risk. Moreover, younger workers are supposedly well suited to meet the demand for labor flexibility and mobility, particularly if they lack attachments such as spouses or children. In addition, the system of flexible accumulation emphasizes "flexibility, mobility, creativity, innovation, horizontal organization, and appreciate[ion] of fast-changing fashions, values that flexible accumulation and youth culture share" (Lukacs 2015a, 387). Yet, even as youth labor and culture has become central to the hopes of Japan's economic growth, a discourse has arisen that positions youth as lazy, useless, or parasitic, which further disaffects this generation from the work life and sociality of the earlier generation (Yamada 1999). This younger generation is left feeling that their options for success are being taken away and they are being blamed for their lack of access to a financially stable future. These more limited employment options have led some to push back against the social pressure to define life success through economic achievement and search for their idea of a "good life" in new realms. Others are attracted to new career opportunities in the digital or affective, immaterial labor economies of cell phone novel writing, homemade craft selling or online day trading, seeking both financial success and work they find to be meaningful. While the changing economic situation has limited options for the younger generation in some ways, it has also led them to look for financial and social fulfillment in new directions and to be willing to create new options for themselves.

In Japanese media and public discourse, there has been a broad critique of youth culture and young people's unwillingness to accept their appropriate role in society and commit to productive employment, exemplified by sociologist Yamada Masahiro's identification of Japanese youth as "parasite singles," young people lacking initiative and responsibility with no real job, living off their parents' hard earned money (Yamada 1999). However, as academics have tried to theorize the place of the "lost generation" in this new labor regime, much focus has been concentrated on youth like "freeters"—individuals who work a series of short term and part-time positions — and the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) populations that have been forced to find new niches for themselves in the changing economic context (Hayashi and McKnight 2005, Mori 2005). These scholars position them not as the cause of the economic downturn or the widening class gap, but the victims of it (Driscoll 2007, Fu 2012, Genda 2005). Most young workers are employed in service-based part-time jobs or temporary positions at Japanese companies because those are the only positions that are available. This discourse of youth refusing to meet their responsibility to Japan's economic success is part of the broader shift towards neoliberal forms of social management. It reflects the demand "for productivity and 'personal responsibility,' the claim that all have equal responsibility for their own socioeconomic circumstances" (Reitan 2012, 53).

These scholars have also made connections between the youth response to their economic situation and the consequences this has had for their lives more broadly, from their life goals to the communities they have become part of. Yūji Genda's research on freeters emphasizes the limited employment opportunities available for younger workers, but he also brings attention to the fact that, as stable employment offers less to this generation in terms of stability, safety or happiness, young workers are more willing to explore new employment opportunities (2005). The placement of these workers outside of the socially accepted career track also allows them to take an activist position against that structure. Yoshitaka Mōri focuses on how young freeters

have become a new kind of Japanese activist, trying to invent a new political movement by combining art and culture with politics (2005). Though he does not use the idea of precariousness, the community he describes would be recognizable to the Italian autonomists as the "precariat."

From the same generation that Genda and Mōri did research on, the young people I met during my research did not identify as freeters, a term they associated with people taking a more activist position against the Japanese corporate system. They saw themselves more simply as ordinary people, trying to live ordinary lives. Yet they share their generation's disenchantment with the promise of stability in exchange to sacrificing themselves for the health of their employer and the nation and their concern about what kind of lives they can build for themselves in the future. They have internalized the sense that they are responsible for their own success and that they must continually make themselves what Foucault called "entrepreneurs of the self." It is to escape from this pressure that lead people like Keiko to visit animal cafés.

Yet escape from stress related to economic concerns is not their only concern; animal café visitors also wish to engage in positive sociality, a sense of connection to others that they find lacking in their lives. Economic deregulation has had economic consequences for workers, but also has affected other realms of life, particularly in terms of sociality. During the economic boom period, employers relied on the "company-as-family" ideology which encouraged workers to invest their identity in their position as a member of a corporation as a way to ensure worker loyalty, and coworkers were encouraged to bond to each other and their company through afterhours socializing (Kondo 1990, Rohlen 1979). This meant that full-time workers' social connections were structured through their employment. Today, an increasing proportion of new hires are not brought in as full-time employees and are thus excluded from these networks. The

2014 Japanese government White Paper on Labour Force reports that 36.7% of employees are non-regular staff and employees, a more than 6% increase from ten years ago, and identified the high number of involuntary non-regular workers as a major problem for economic growth. Additionally, this younger generation is significantly more likely to be single than earlier generations, so they lack the familial connection and support that characterized the prerecessionary period. According to a 2015 Cabinet Office White paper, the average age of marriage rose to 30.8 for men and 29.2 for women, and the "lifetime" unmarried rate between 1980 and 2010 went from 2.6% to 20.1% for men, and from 4.5% to 10.6% for women. Parents are still a source of familial support, but this younger generation is more likely to live alone and without the support of spouses and children.

The sense of social precarity felt by this generation is connected to the lack of supportive relationships in their lives today, but it is also a consequence of feeling they have lost access to a sense of societal connection that the earlier generation benefited from. This connected was embodied in a number of major lifestyle ideologies that were incorporated into Japanese society during the economic boom period, including the "company-as-family ideology" and that of the "mass middle-class (*chūkan taishū shakai*)." These ideologies encouraged Japanese to think of themselves as part of the greater whole, in which loyalty and dedication would be rewarded with stability and a good future. Japan was united behind the goal of spurring wartime recovery and establishing Japan's power on the global stage. Corporations offered security and support in exchange for devotion to one's employer; the salaryman, as these lifetime-employed workers were called, sacrificed time away from work with family or friends in return for a secure place and the promise of financial success. Businessmen dedicating all their time to their companies and socializing with coworkers after work and women focusing primarily on the educational and

social needs of their children (*kyōiku mama*) (Allison 1996, Brinton 1993, Goodman 2005, Kelly 1986, Ogasawara 1998, Ogawa 2009, Rohlen 1979, White 1993, Yoshino 1992). Of course, "mass middle-class society was not so much a reality as a social construct" (Lukacs 2010, 6), supported as it was by highly flexible, primarily female laborers and a largely unrecognized working class population, but that image of Japan and the future was imprinted in the younger generation by their families and education. "The crumbling of Japan's unique industrial system in the 1990s was but the final factor in the destabilization of the ideological foundations of mass middle-class society" (Lukacs 2010, 7). But during the period when this ideology held sway, a sense of stability was invested in that construction, and the experience of precarity in Japan is a consequence of its demise.

The formation of mass middle-class society in Japan in the postwar period was focused on differentiating people by gender and generation but not by class or regional affiliation; the phenomenon of "mass" led to a leveling of consciously apprehended class distinctions and used the culture industry, discourse of the masses and actual objects of consumption to reinforce this interpretation (Ivy 1993). The successful lifestyle of a full-time corporate job, with guaranteed stability, and a stay-at-home wife who focused on raising hardworking children was never as encompassing as it appeared to be. However, the idealized sense of broad success in Japan was very successfully disseminated throughout the Japanese populace, as demonstrated by the consistent claim that Japan was a "ninety percent middle class society." As Kelly argued in his exploration of the demise of this system, "this orientation towards mainstream definitions of lifeways and life chances has had directive force not because it has been touted rhetorically by officials and media but more significantly because it has been embedded in a particular matrix of public discourse and institutional fields" (2002, 236). The stability of this period was dependent

on the interconnection of social institutions, from the family and education system to the corporation and consumer marketplace. Once this structure collapsed, Japanese workers were left facing a particular kind of precarity, based on a sense of loss for an imagined promise of incorporation into this stable system. One of my informants described it in these terms: "In Japan, there's a certain idea, I mean, people should go to a good school, go to a good university, go to good company, is a best way to have a good life. But people think it's not so easy, it's not so simple. In fact, that reality is a lot more complicated...But many young people to succeed in their life think it's still important to be in a good school, a good company. That's a problem." Work provided much more than an income; it provided a sense of social belonging and identity and the promise of a particular kind of future. In the context of that loss, it is clear why economic precariousness has had significant social effects.

The sense of social precarity that the younger generation experiences goes beyond simple statistics about changing life courses and what kind of social networks are available. The more dominant social factor is the sense that many of this generation have that they have lost access to the good life and bright future that they grew up believing would be available to them as long as they worked hard in school and behaved appropriately. Many young people today are struggling not to get ahead, but to survive, making just enough money to meet essential needs, and the issues of hopes and dreams and the future must wait. The main body of my research subjects were born during the economic boom period, and grew up under the strong influence of these mainstream definitions of a successful life, shaped by ideologies that connect sociality to group identification with the corporation or the family. Yet, when they left home, during or after the "lost decade" of the 1990s, they had to grapple with the increasing understanding that their lives in recessionary Japan were going to be different from the lives of their parents' generation. My

research subjects are socially isolated, with the majority unmarried, those who are married often have difficulty aligning their flexible work schedules so they can spend time together. They are physically distant from their parents, as many came to Tokyo from their hometowns for job opportunities, and have only casual or surface friendships. The places that they live in is less a home than a place that feels empty and lonely.

The fact that the ideology of a successful lifecourse was so connected to the space of the home means that feelings disconnected from that ideology is tied to a sense of disconnect from a home. Anne Allison described this phenomenon as the need for "a place to call home (*ibasho*)," connecting back to the idea of "my-homeism (mai homu shūgi)" from the 1980s, in which people worked to attain a particular kind of home, a site for consumption of modern amenities (like televisions, washing machines and other markers that meant the household had attained a level of economic success), but also a social and productive unit, combining sociality and consumption. Today, such a home is frequently not financially or socially possible, creating what Allison describes as the "refugeeization" of young Japanese (2012). She attributes the Japanese "affective turn to desociality" (Allison 2013, 15) to the loss of that access. Economic insecurity is one factor that has given rise to the increase in a sense of precarity, but "it is the way that insecurity or precariousness registers on the sense in the first place — as a sense of being out of place, out of sorts, disconnected (fuan, funantei, ibasho ga nai) that I take to be the sign, and symptom, of a widespread precarity in twenty-first century Japan" (Allison 2013, 14). The previous system of sociality, built around the home, was not unproblematic, as it left Japanese who did not fit into an ideal family lonely and without a sense of belonging, but the template for sociality for many is still attached to that past form. However, even as older forms of sociality framed by work and marriage are eroding (Allison 2009a, 105), it is also being mythologized,

creating a sense of the socially supportive home that may no longer exist but is appealing as a commodity to be consumed.

My fieldwork was conducted in Tokyo, Japan's political and economic capital, and my informants, like many young Tokyoites, were mostly born and raised elsewhere in Japan and moved to the city for access to higher education or job prospects. This means that they are isolated from their parents; most informants mentioned only communicating with family by email or phone once a month, and visiting once a year over the New Year holiday. Their friend networks were largely solidified during schooling with classmates, and informants often expressed difficulty finding close friends after they moved away from their hometowns. Their social lives are largely dominated by careful interactions with bosses and coworkers with whom they are not close or casual friends with whom they are uncomfortable sharing too much of their personal feelings. Their feelings of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs has not driven my informants to a radical rejection of Japanese societal structure, but to a search for a place within that structure that feels comfortable and welcoming, a new kind of home.

Societal changes in sociality in Japan have led to a rethinking among young people about what kind of personal connections they want in their lives. Young people of this generation have become accustomed to sharing experiences that are fun and positive with others, but keeping their struggles and hardships to themselves (Allison 2012), making it difficult to feel comfortable expressing and acting on their need for intimacy. For some, this has given rise to a desire for a space where visitors can engage in social exchange, but in a non-challenging way, where they will be welcome to focus on their own feelings, in order to help improve their mental health and allow them to address their sense of precarity. The animal café came into being from the endeavors of this generation to meet this need.

1.3 YOUTH AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE NEW ECONOMY AND NEW SOCIALITIES

Researchers have highlighted that youth have been disproportionately affected by these neoliberal transformations and thus are more likely to suffer from disaffection and lack of hope for the future. But a number of researchers have also noted that another effect of these neoliberal transformations and the increased power of globalization is a weakening of the power of the nation-state and a rise in transnational social ties and they have highlighted the role of youth at the forefront of the trend in transnational connections. Youth are deeply involved in the changes caused by globalization because of their willingness to embrace the new technologies that make international connections feasible (Cole and Durham 2008, Kriem 2009, Moore 2011) These arguments echo precarity researchers interest in the importance of young workers' involvement in the affective labor market. Youth in Japan are at the forefront of immaterial labor, which leaves them socio-economically precarious but also at the heart of new forms of capital (Allison 2009a, Lukacs 2015b, McRobbie 2016, Ross 2008).

While the loss of older forms of sociality has led to a sense of precarity caused by a loss of the promise of stability, another consequence of changing life courses has been the need to reimagine what the future might be, which has led to the potential for new, better futures. Young Japanese are asking not only how they can attain the stable life their parents' generation had, but if they want that future for themselves. There is great uncertainty in these questions, but also great potential. The response of young people in Japan in the face of precarity is focused on trying to create a new sense of the future (Lukacs 2015a). "What some lament as the end of the "good life" and socioeconomic stability, others cherish as a long-awaited opportunity to lay the foundations for a different future" (Lukacs 2015b, 173).

The responses to precarity are as varied as the youth population most affected by these economic and social changes. For some in Japan, primary importance has been placed on finding pleasure and meaning in work, in contrast to the previous form of sociality in which work was simply a duty that offered benefits in return. Lukacs studied the boom in "girly" photography as an example of the opportunities for new life projects (2015b). In other cases, a major goal is to create a new space of refuge from precarity (Millar 2014). In other cases, populations are mobilizing to offer new kinds of solidarity to replace lost community support. Muchlebach, in her book exploring morality in neoliberalism, argues "neoliberal morality [is] a realm that is not simply collapsed with or subjected to neoliberal market rationalities, but that instead continues to exist in productive tension with it" (Muchlebach 2012, 24). While precarity is connected to loss or the disappearance of certain kinds of community and support, the tension caused by these changes can also lead to new approaches to community engagement and a reevaluation of what individuals owe to each other.

My work explores a number of these perspectives through the context of the animal café, including the search for opportunities for a better life through more meaningful work and the creation of a refuge from the stress of a precarious life. Animal cafés are a place in which three groups of young people, each with different experiences of precarity, intersect. By exploring how each of these groups — the owners, the customers and the employees — connect to and experience the animal café, I offer insight into the effect of precarity on how they structure their lives. These three groups all come from essentially the same generation, though customers' and employees' ages are on average younger than owners, who would not have had the capital to open their own businesses in their 20s. My informants, as a group, came to adulthood facing a

sense of uncertainty about their future that has led them to make different choices about their life courses than their parents' generation would have.

Café owners are in a position to take advantage of the freedom offered by Japan's deregulation and shift towards flexible accumulation. This group of young people have the capital, both economic and social, to take advantage of the opportunities for entrepreneurialism which were at the forefront of Japan's new economic system. As Harvey notes, it is "mainly through the burst of new business formation, innovation, and entrepreneurialism that many of the new systems of production were put into place" (Harvey 1989, 171). Many of my informants left unfulfilling corporate work to engage in a form of entrepreneurship that they found more satisfying. They are also aware that the rise in social precarity for many people in their generation has created an opportunity for a new business model designed to fit that need. Yet, they are also invested in serving their communities, creating spaces that serve customer needs not just because it offers them an income, but because they find their lives more meaningful because they are helping their peers.

Café staff are largely irregular workers, working long hours for minimal pay, and their work is essential for the production of the positive affect of *iyashi*, healing, that is a main attraction of animal cafés. They most uniformly represent the underemployed, struggling, precarious worker that is being called upon to provide the immaterial labor that driving the post-Fordist economy. These workers are in an unusual position, however, because they do their work in conjunction with animals, who are also being called on to create the atmosphere of *iyashi*, which influences the precariousness they feel in their work. They are able to find pleasure through their engagement with nonhuman animals, which alleviates the exploitation they feel in their work.

Customers come from a broad variety of backgrounds, with different education levels and job opportunities. What they share is the need for a respite from the stress that comes from issues of social precarity in their lives—isolation, loneliness or lack of social support. They choose to spend time in animal cafés partially to find refuge from these problems in order to emotionally recharge and leave reenergized and able to once again face the challenges of their everyday lives. However, they also turn to these spaces as a way to incorporate positive social engagement into their everyday lives instead of simply suffering from the lack of other sources of positive sociality. Their demands that their emotional needs be met drives them to patronize new businesses and engage in new forms of social interaction.

The sociality of the animal café is constructed in response to the experiences of precarity of those involved with the business, this segment of this youth generation that has responded by seeking refuge. This largely is structured around a rejection of the social expectation to be productive at all times. Life in Japan today is shaped by the logic of the neoliberal state which links "a reduction in welfare services and security systems to the increasing call for personal responsibility" (Lukacs 2015a, 390). Young Japanese workers not only cannot expect support from the state or employers, but they have internalized the idea that they should be responsible for meeting their own needs for care, and should invest their own energy into building a future for themselves. Furthermore, "every experience contributes to increasing or decreasing the value of an individual's human capital" (391). With this continual expectation of self-evaluation and constant commitment to being productive, thus increasingly one's value, it becomes a reasonable response to address the stress of this by searching out experiences that are not focused on individual productivity. This is what has driven the appeal of *iyashi* experiences that remove the issue of continual evaluation. Many *iyashi* experiences—massages, onsen, aromatherapy—do

not require engagement with others, so as to avoid any social pressure that would interfere with the benefits of *iyashi*. Yet, simple relaxation does not fully counter a sense of social precarity, as young people are also struggling with the loss of community and social connection, and so animal café combine the sense of relaxation and lack of responsibility with an opportunity for socialization, with animals, that applies none of the social pressure to perform normative, productive behavior in front of other people. The type of sociality constructed in the animal café is low-key, based on minimal direct interaction, with an emphasis on letting go of responsibility to others.

1.4 THE AFFECT ECONOMY

In Japan, workers are internalizing their responsibility to care for themselves physically and emotionally so that they can continue to be productive members of society. Sociality is configured in response to what is needed for the reproduction of society. In Japan, a new form of sociality is needed to replace the corporate based system as the economy is no longer based on corporate dominance. The state has placed "increasing emphasis on the responsibility of individuals to manage their own affairs, to secure their own security with a prudential eye on the future" (Rose 2007, 4) so as to focus on influencing the population through the internalization of neoliberal values. The combination of an economic system in which young people are involved in more entrepreneurial endeavors in order to create successful jobs for themselves and a cultural system in which youth are lacking affective support has led to the rise of commercial businesses that sell affect.

While animal cafés are a relatively new business model, with the oldest cat cafés only ten years old and the majority of animal cafés of all types appearing in Japan in the last five years, they are an outgrowth of both early businesses that sold intimacy, like hostess and host clubs, and the *iyashi* boom that was a direct response to increased feeling of anxiety caused by precarity. Iyashi is a relatively new term that translates to healing, but carries the holistic connotation of healing the body, mind and soul. In Japan's history of intimacy businesses, the models are all built around different communities, and designed to meet particular needs for certain kinds of socialization. Akiko Takeyama's work on Tokyo host clubs, which proliferated in the 1990s, focused on the commodification of intimacy, romance and love as clients and hosts seek alternate lives in which they emphasize their desirable selves (2016). In this context, the sociality is that of one-on-one interactions, a commodified, pseudo-romantic personal relationship. Patrick Galbraith studies Tokyo maid cafés, a type of business where customers pay for food and drink in a café staffed by flirtatious, friendly, anime-inspired "maids." He calls these businesses "sites of alternative sociality" (2013, 105) that open up "different possibilities for living and loving outside the demand for reproductive maturity embodied in the company or family man" (121). He acknowledges the artificiality of the situation (maids are paid to spend time with the customers), but argues that the shared energy and intimate connections with maids are authentic, as well as the relationships developed with other café regulars. Value is created through the time spent with the maid, which creates real responses in the visitors.

The *iyashi* boom began in the 1990s in conjunction with the problems of precarity, influenced by economic downturn and incidents like the Kobe Earthquake and sarin gas attacks in 1995. *Iyashi* (healing) has become an important part of the public discourse in Japan as a response to the problems of stress, overwork and precarity. During its earlier iteration, businesses

and goods that identified themselves on providing *iyashi* were focused on reducing emotional anxiety and physical tension. However, with the continuing erosion of social support networks, *iyashi* businesses today, like maid and animal cafés, focus on problems caused by social disconnection, are place in which new models for sociality and intimacy are developed through the commodification of healing in a social setting like a café. The need for community, for sociality, is part of the human experience, and the interest in and demand for spaces that commodify sociality are not new in Japanese culture. But the *iyashi* boom, which is heavily tied to the particular sense of precarity that has arisen in Japan in the last twenty years, is driving a boom in businesses that are focused on redefining sociality, offering a challenge to earlier social institutions that primarily reinforced social roles.

Maid cafés and animal cafés are the two types of socially-focused business that have arisen as part of the *iyashi* boom (host clubs being a slightly earlier development), and Galbraith emphasizes that their popularity is related to the same problems of lack of connection (*tsunagari*) that people belief *iyashi* will help with; "iyashi spaces of peace and relaxation are necessitated by a modern urban environment of stress, anxiety and isolation" (Galbraith 2011). In the maid cafés Galbraith studies, the kind of healing that *iyashi* offered was in the form of communication; the sociality that came from being recognized by and connecting to a maid helped heal feelings of stress. The emphasis on *iyashi* is a deliberate contrast to the stress of life outside the café, and in maid cafés, the primary stress in the lives of customers comes from the pressure to conform to the dominant discourse of masculinity. Maid cafés offer a sociality built on an affective community that bonds outwards, through a shared relationship with other men who love the same maid.

One of the consequences of the shift towards flexible accumulation is the increased economic importance of immaterial labor. This kind of labor is at the frontier of capital accumulation in a post-Fordist economy. The importance of immaterial labor has been central to the work of Marxist autonomists conceptualization of the precariat (Gill and Pratt 2008, Hardt 1999, Hardt and Negri 2004, Lazzarato 1996). A subset of this labor is what Hardt and Negri define as affective labor, or "labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion" (2004, 108). Their definition envelops both the immaterial labor of care and the creative labor that goes into producing affective commodities which is characteristic of work in the culture industries. This approach has been criticized for overlooking the contributions of scholars on emotional labor, particularly what they have contributed to the understanding of the level of emotional investment this labor demands of workers, particularly for an aspect of their work that is unpaid and often unrecognized (Hochschild 1983, Weeks 2011). Some scholars differentiate the terms, using emotional labor to refer to care work and affective labor to refer to the more creative, culture work. Lukacs posits that the difference is the degree to which they generate the subjectification effect; "affective labor epitomizes an intensification of certain tendencies that emotional labor has pioneered in the realm of work" (Lukacs 2015a, 396).

In Japan, immaterial labor has become central to many of the new businesses that have arisen as part of the post-Fordist economy. The demand for sociality and intimacy has driven the creation of an economy of affect tailored to meet these needs. Immaterial labor is both a central part of the shift to flexible accumulation and a consequence of it. "Producing the need that it will subsequently satisfy, the immaterialization of the economy fosters a social relationality based on commodification and privatization. Citizens are now expected to purchase their relations—for

companionship, intimacy, care—as private consumers on the marketplace" (Allison 2009a, 101). The demand for affect in businesses like animal and maid cafés that commodify sociality positions the individuals working in the café to produce the sense of iyashi that attracts customers as affective laborers—the purpose of their work is to create and manipulate an affect. Affective labor is invested in the animal café in order to create a space designed to meet the need for affect that is a consequence of the economic shift towards labor forms like affective labor.

Businesses like animal cafés, which are offering alternate kinds of sociality to replace the idealized family and corporate sociality of the previous era, are at the center of the negotiation between affective needs and increased commodification of social services, as the people involved in them adjust to the current conditions of adulthood and attempt to connect in a new way to the society around them, while also taking on the responsibility of protecting themselves and meeting individual needs. This has led to a variety of new "concept" cafés, social spaces built around different types of affective interactions, such as maid and butler cafés and male and female drag cafés, which differentiate themselves from businesses that use a concept as a hook to distinguish themselves and attract business through their investment in meaningful social interactions turned into a commodity.

What is important to note is that animal cafés distinguish themselves from earlier examples of affective businesses in how they connect commodity sales and affective engagement; animal cafés commodify the space itself, the refuge that the owners have created, rather than the intimate interaction. The café owners are an outgrowth of the *iyashi* boom because they have created a space of *iyashi*, allowing visitors to access an *iyashi* experience, and it is an outgrowth of businesses like hostess clubs because visitors are paying for access to intimate social interactions, but the decision to offer time in the space in exchange for a fee

allows the visitors to engage in whatever kind of social encounter in the café that they would prefer. The question of the authenticity of the human-animal interactions that occur in the space will be explored more later, but the business model allows visitors to not feel pressured to exchange more money for a better affective experience.

Animal cafés lie at the nexus of a number of important foci for anthropological theories today. Each of the groups involved with animal cafés, owners, customers, employees and animals, have been influenced by Japan's economic changes and the attendant social consequences and they bring those influences to the kinds of experiences they have in an animal café. Animal cafés are the consequence of the shift towards an economy based on affective labor and the commodification of affect per se and they are a consequence of the rising interest in entrepreneurship. They have the potential to both support and undermine a system that is consistently shifting responsibility for care of the self from the state or corporation onto the individual. And animal cafés reflect a growing understanding by scholars and people themselves of the important role that contact with non-human animals plays in the lives of people in all societies. In the context of Japan, the popularity of animal cafés helps us understand the changing state of sociality and how and why non-human animals are offering an appealing alternative to human-based community relations. This dissertation uses the animal café to explore the different factors involved in the development, experience of and popularity of the cat café, and later forms of animal cafés but focusing in on the different actors in the café and what they bring to and take out of their experiences there in order to understand what new status quo is being created in Japan today.

1.5 ANIMALS AND AFFECTIVE INTERACTION IN JAPAN

The decision to structure the sociality of the animal café around human-animal interactions is central both to the way that these businesses distinguish themselves from other *iyashi* or affect businesses and to the appeal they have for this younger generation who have found human social expectations to be a burden. Animals are seen in Japan as being more connected to the "natural" world than humans, and more comfortable freely expressing themselves than is socially allowable for humans, which allows visitors to trust the authenticity of the animals' reaction to the visitor. They cannot cajole a visitor to spend more money in the café; the encounter that the animal and visitor have is dependent not on money, but on the relationship that they have developed in the café. Animals also do not have social expectations the way humans do and visitors interacting with animals are able to receive the benefits of social connection with another living being without the pressure that can come from the kinds of encounters they have outside the café space.

In some ways the emergence of animal cafés is a continuation of a trend towards increasing integration of animals into the everyday lives of Japanese people. As an agricultural society, animals traditionally served as working animals on farms; cats, in particular, were called upon to hunt mice that would damage the rice crop. It was not until relatively recently that animals were seen primarily as pets; Japan underwent a series of mini pet booms beginning in the 1970s and peaking in the 1980s. Today, animals are increasingly important as companions, particularly among families with children and among older couples whose children have left home. Scholars have noted that animals are increasingly being called to serve the domestic and community roles that might have previously been filled by family members (Hansen 2013). This history will be explored more fully in a later chapter. Animals offer companionship and allow

their owners to care for and be cared for by another, but they do not place social demands on people in the same way that other humans can.

However, for younger, less economically stable Japanese people, pet ownership may not be feasible for a number of reasons. These may be economic, such as the inability to afford pet costs or the fact that a small apartment may not allow pets. Pet ownership can also be problematic if their owner works long hours and is unable to invest time in pet care. Owning a pet can also be an emotional burden that one may feel unable to invest energy in. For young workers feeling the strain of precarity, interactions with animals can be a balm but may also be a burden that they are unable to handle. The possibility for interaction with animals in a café setting means that visitors can enjoy the benefits of interactions with companion species without the responsibility for their long-term care.

Many younger Japanese turn to animal cafés to enjoy the benefits of animal companionship without the responsibility of full-time care of another being, in exchange for a reasonable fee. Animals living in cafés are called upon to provide companionship, without actually acting as companions. Visitors expect companionship from café animals in the same way they would from pets. Yet the way they engage with the animals in a commodified space creates a boundary around the human-animal interaction and allows visitors to benefit from the interaction on their own terms, free to leave when they have received the affective encounter they desired. This fits in with the broader trend of this generation taking responsibility to meet their own needs; interactions with animals in a commoditized setting allows them to maximize the affect they receive in return for their investment.

1.6 FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

I conducted preliminary research in Tokyo, Japan in the summer of 2011 and then conducted my primary fieldwork over the course of 18 months between October of 2012 and March of 2014 in Tokyo, Japan. There are cat and other types of animal cafés throughout Japan today (as well as appearing in countries around the world), but the center of the cat café boom, and the place with the highest concentration of animal cafés at their peak, was in Tokyo, which led to my decision to conduct my field research there. The goal of my research was to understand the perspectives and experiences of all the people who interact with animal cafés, which I broke into three groups—business owners, employees and customers. I designed my approach to gathering data from each group differently, as their numbers and presence in cafés differed, but the general structure of how I gathered data from them, through semi-structured interviews, was largely the same for all three groups.

I focused my fieldwork on five cafés, a cat café and a rabbit café located in the same area in Tokyo, and three cat cafés each located near major train stations, two of which were owned by the same businessman. I chose these locations because each of them were well-established businesses, with all the cat cafés having been established before, or at the beginning of, the cat café boom, and the rabbit café having been established among the earliest rabbit cafés in the early 2010s. In addition, they also catered to different clientele, drawing different customers based on their locations, business design or the types of animals present in the business. These factors allowed me the opportunity to study the variety of types of animal cafés and the breadth of customers that they catered to. However, I also visited and spent time at a wide range of Tokyo animal cafés, totaling seven cat cafés, three rabbit cafés, two bird and owl cafés and a general animal café. I visited each of the cafés I was primarily focused on once or twice a month,

visiting one or two animal cafés each week. Most of the cafés had space for ten to fifteen customers at a time, and had roughly one employee working for every five customers. The set-up of the businesses is designed to encourage movement around the room and allow opportunities for social interaction and visiting these cafés gave me the opportunity to meet and talk with the people in the animal cafés.

My goal during my visits to animal cafés was both to conduct participant observation and to search out potential informants. To conduct participant observation, I would visit the café as a normal customer, pay to enter the café, and spend on average two to three hours observing customers, employees and owners, and talking with them if they seemed open to social interaction. The average amount of time that an animal café customer would spend in a café was one to one and a half hours¹ and a three-hour stay would allow me the opportunity to observe at least two cycles of customers entering, interacting in the café, and leaving again. As I was interested in the experiences of all the individuals involved with animal cafés, I spent significant time observing and talking with café employees and owners, as well as customers. Employees spend as much time chatting with customers, encouraging the animals to play with, or otherwise engaging with customers and encouraging a social atmosphere as they do cleaning and preparing drinks or food. They were willing to chat with me whenever there were few customers and they had more free time. Participant observation also gave me the opportunity to observe how customers interact with the space of the café, and with employees, other customers, their companions and the animals in the café. When customers seemed open to socializing with others, I would talk with them as well. Talking with customers in the café gave me the opportunity to introduce myself and my research and reach out to potential interview subjects. If a customer, or

¹ This average is derived from estimates made by a number of different business owners.

pair of customers, seemed welcoming and interested in conversation, I would explain who I was and offer my business card. The majority of my interview subjects were individuals I first met in cafés who contacted me later to participate in a more formal interview.

In order to conduct participant observation inside these businesses, it was first necessary to introduce myself to the business owner and receive his or her permission to do research in their place of business. All of the business owners I spoke were largely open to my research goals and allowed me to use their businesses for my research to different extents. Owners were almost always willing to be interviewed and to allow me to do participant observation in their cafés, and a number allowed me to interview staff members on the premises as well, of significant importance because employees, while happy to talk casually with me about themselves, were less willing to take their free time and meet with me outside of the café. Once I had established a rapport with business owners, I was able to interact more freely with employees and customers in their businesses, and received opportunities to interview any employees who were interested in speaking with me.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with informants, using a list of pre-prepared questions as a starting point to the interview but focusing on and moving in the direction that interview subjects wanted to go, causing the interview lengths to differ significantly from subject to subject. All interviews with business owners and employees (with one exception) were conducted in the cafés where the informants worked, in private parts of the space, often an empty office space, where informants would not be overheard by their coworkers or other customers. The other interviews I conducted, with café visitors and one employee, took place in quiet cafés or the informant's home, depending on where they felt most comfortable meeting. With the majority of customers, I met with them once casually, to allow them to ask me questions about

myself and my research and develop rapport, and then again to conduct the more formal interview. All semi-structured interviews were recorded, and I took notes while conducting the interviews. These were both necessary to ensure clarity of understanding as I am not a native speaker of Japanese. I also found that informants often expected me to be taking notes and would occasionally take my notebook to correct my spelling, or draw something to illustrate what they were telling me about, such as a timeline. Instead of being a barrier to a connection with my informants, my research tools helped informants understand me as a researcher and become more comfortable discussing ideas in a way they would not with a friend.

During my eighteen months of fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve animal café owners or managers, fifteen current and one former animal café employee and sixteen animal café customers. I also spoke informally with dozens of animal café customers while they were visiting the cafés, as well as had numerous conversations with young Japanese workers or individuals with experience with animals or *iyashi* businesses in Japan, in order to expand my understanding of the role of animal cafés in the broader Japanese society today. While I had both female and male informants, as a young woman, other young women were slightly more likely to feel comfortable contacting me to participate in an interview and this led to my customer informant sample consisting of twelve women and five men. Furthermore, animal café employees are almost uniformly female and that entire sample group is female. Business owners were slightly more likely to be male, though managers were often female, and every business owner or manager I approached for an interview agreed to allow me to interview them, so that sample group is a more even mix of genders, with seven women and six men.

Animal cafés are located throughout Tokyo, with a neighborhood usually having only one or two within walking distance of the local train station. The majority of animal cafés are

located in proximity to a major train junction, such as the Shinjuku or Ikebukuro train stations where they are more likely to attract businesspeople who work in the nearby area or who transit through it daily. They were also often located in areas that were popular with young Japanese or areas where young Japanese were likely to be out socializing. I was based centrally in Tokyo so that I would be able to visit cafés throughout the city and learn about each of the areas that they were based in.

During my time in Tokyo, in addition to time spent doing participant observation at animal cafés and interviewing informants, I spent time at the University of Tokyo, which I was affiliated with, developing relationships with local scholars who could give me insight into the social lives of young Japanese workers and conducting archival research using their extensive library system. I also reached out to a number of young Japanese people through a language-exchange website, developing my first close relationships with Japanese people who continue to give me insight into the work life of young Japanese today. I also attended *nomikai* (drinking get-togethers in which large groups gathered to meet new people through friends), cherry blossom viewing parties, group karaoke outings and other social events commonly used as networking opportunities for Japanese workers in order to gain insight into how young Japanese workers interact socially. These experiences helped enrich my understanding of the day to day social experiences of my target group and helped put the experiences of my informants into a broader context.

The sampling method that I developed in the field changed in reaction to the situation that I discovered once I was there. Going into the field, I suspected that animal cafés would offer a source of community to customers and regular visitors would have developed relationships with other customers, and I believed snowball sampling would be the best way to make

connections with potential informants. Part of my learning process was discovering that, while customers would often recognize other regulars from seeing them in the cafés, they generally did not develop personal relationships with them outside of the café. I altered my sample approach to fit the situation as I found it. This shifted the information I got somewhat, primarily in that I did not have the rapport created by having been recommended to an informant, but those I did speak to gave me a wide range of perspectives. This influenced my research project, as I focused more deeply on experience of sociality as it was confined to the space of the café.

As a woman, it was easier for female informants to feel comfortable with me, and my sample group of café customers has a higher percentage of female informants than male. This is not meant to indicate that women customers greatly outnumber men but a reflection of who was willing to speak with a woman, and, while I did develop relationships with some men who could share their experiences in animal cafés with me, my analysis reflects that there are aspects of the male experience with animal cafés that was not shared with me because of my gender.

1.7 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This dissertation is structured around the different experiences of precarity had by the different groups that engage with the café—the owners, customers, employees, and animals themselves. It uses this structure to create a complete picture of the role that the animal café plays in the lives of the generation that came of age after the Japanese recession, and in the face of the deregulation that happened in response. Each chapter investigates how affect circulates in the space of the café, between and among each of these actors, to explore how they create monetary

and affective value through their participation in this exchange, focusing in on a different actor's experience in each chapter.

The first chapter is an overview of what the animal café space is, how it has developed from earlier intimacy and *iyashi* businesses, and what particular kind of space it has become. It introduces two important theoretical concepts that shape how the business model of animal cafés is constructed—that of *iyashi*, the product that they advertise themselves as selling, and that of 'third place,' which is how the café is positioned in Japanese society, as an alternative space to home and work. It is in the 'third place' of the café that iyashi is created, disseminated and consumed, and this structure influences how the sociality of the animal café fits more broadly into the lives of participants. The chapter begins with an exploration of the concept of *iyashi*, an affect that has become central to the attraction of businesses like animal cafés. It introduces the history behind the idea of *iyashi* and the *iyashi* boom, and how it relates to the increased sense of precarity in Japanese society. It is the demand for iyashi that has driven Japanese people to approach their own emotional needs as a problem to be dealt with, and it is the commodification of *iyashi* that has created an economy of affect in Japan. Visitors paying for *iyashi* experiences are reshaping the understanding of how affect can be circulated, by moving affective support into the public, and commodity, arena. It then moves on to a discussion of how businesses that exist to provide sociality, and, in particular, the sociality built on iyashi of the animal café, have evolved in Japanese society.

The second chapter centers on the owners of Japanese animal cafés and how their own experiences in a post-Fordist Japan have led them to abandon the corporate world and search for meaningful work, which has led them to open businesses that commodify what they see as a socially-necessary affective experience. These, primarily male, owners are driven by self-serving

interests — to make money and be successful without being beholden to any corporation or employer — and thus are not opening non-profit businesses. Additionally, they are able to break open new markets because of the success they have had under a system they are turning their backs on, a reality that they do not acknowledge. At the same time, they are sincerely driven by the need to serve their community, choosing a business model that demands significant time and investment, as caring for live animals is an unending job, because they believe it is something that people in Japan need and they want to offer them succor. The first cat cafés were developed by owners who recognized the struggles of their customers because they had shared the same sources of stress and wanted to create the kind of space they would have wanted. Animal cafés are a way to bring together communities of animal lovers who might not otherwise be able to find each other, and the owners themselves are part of that community. The chapter explores how these motivations lead to the creation of the animal café in its current form and how their choices in café design reflect the affective experience they are trying to offer.

The third chapter focuses on the role that the animal café plays in the lives of the overstressed workers who patronize them, and the way customers use these businesses to construct a place that meets their need for a new kind of sociality, what I call animal sociality. The animal café taps into both the current need for positive affective experiences and the nostalgia for a 'good place (*ii basho*)' (Allison 2013), offering customers both an opportunity to connect with other living things and the chance to take refuge from outside stresses, where they are not required to attune themselves to the wishes of others and can instead focus on their own emotional needs. Visitors are not just engaging in non-productive activity, they are performing it in a public space as a way to connect to others. This chapter delves into who animal café visitors are and what it is about the animal café experience that is well suited to their needs and why.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the role that animals play in the animal café and how their social role in Japan has altered over time in response to human demands. It also explores how affect can be circulated in a café space between humans and animals and how to conceptualize the work that animals do to create affect. It is a deeper exploration of the economic considerations in the functioning of the animal café and how animal labor is utilized to serve customer needs. It delves the role that animals play in human society and the benefits that come from a relationship with a companion animal and how that compares and contrasts with an animal that is engaged with during an economic transaction. It also contrasts the demands of socialization with humans to the benefits of socialization with non-human animals and the consequences this has for young Japanese.

The fifth chapter focuses on the labor of the human employees who struggle with the same sense of precarity that faces animal customers, as in fact many of them are customers on their days off, and work to find pleasure in their work, experiencing *iyashi* even as they are instrumental in creating it for others. The human employees share the emotional burden of producing authentic affect for consumer by working in conjunction with animals, and transferring the stress of emotional production onto animal workers. These workers do not have the social or economic capital to redefine their work situations the way café owners do. However, investing in creating a "good life" for themselves is still a priority for them, and they focus instead of making their work situation as meaningful as possible.

The conclusion of the dissertation looks back on the many complexities present in the structure of animal café and the role in plays in the lives of young Japanese today. Despite all the different motivations and goals of the different groups explored in earlier chapters, they have created a place offered a cohesive experience that is filling an important niche in Japan. The

conclusion also returns to the question of how neoliberalism is expressed in daily life in Japan, and explores how these businesses function as both a space for customers for focus on their own needs outside of their jobs and as a space that allows customers to re-energize and leave ready to continue to meet the high-level demands of the Japanese workplace.

2.0 THE HEALING SPACE: IYASHI AND THE THIRD PLACE

To explore and elucidate what role the animal café plays in the lives of the individuals who engage with them and in Japanese society more generally, as I do in the chapters that follow this one, it is necessary to first begin by exploring the history of the animal café and, most specifically, the business trends and models that influenced the development of the animal café. This leads to an understanding of what the café space is, as a model both similar to its antecedents and as a unique space in and of itself. The animal café is a space of social interaction based on a shared engagement in relaxation with animals and other animal lovers. It brings visitors together to join in unproductive behavior, in fact to perform nonproductivity, as a way to "heal" from the stress caused by the pressure to be productive, normative members of society outside the café walls. This chapter draws together two central theoretical concepts—that of iyashi, the affect that customers come to the animal café to experience, and that of the "third place," a concept that encapsulates what kind of space the animal café is—in order to situate the experience of animal café visitors. The feeling of iyashi, by definition one that emphasizes soothing and relaxation, is brought into a public, community space of a café to allow young Japanese to engage in type of sociality that is exclusive to this space. The specifics of what that sociality is and how it is produced and consumed by young Japanese is the focus of the rest of this dissertation.

For animal café visitors, the animal café is attractive because it is a space that offers a variety of positive feelings—comfort, rejuvenation, energization and relaxation. They can drop by a cat or rabbit café when they have time or become regulars who spend an hour at their favorite café on their way home from work many times a week. The positive feeling, which Keiko describes as a balance of relaxation and outwards connection, is identified by animal café owners, employees and customers as *iyashi*. *Iyashi*, a word that is defined as healing or soothing, is appealing not just because it describes a positive or enjoyable feeling but for its deeper connotations of release from the tensions and stress of life in Japan today that cause emotional wounds. The animal café is structured, both in terms of physical design and management, around creating a space that is appealing to their main demographic—overstressed young men and women in their twenties and thirties, particularly those coping with social anxiety, isolation, or loneliness. Café customers visit in order to *iyasarete iru* (be healed, in the passive verb form of iyashi) by spending time relaxing and socializing with animals and with other animal lovers, and leave ready to face the challenges of the outside world again. The animal café is classified, by the media and larger social discourse, as an *iyashi* business. In order to understand what my informants mean by that, it is necessary to explore what the word means to them, and to situate the interest within the historical and cultural context in which it evolved.

What makes animal cafés distinctive is not just that they offer *iyashi*, but that they do so in the context of the café space, a space separate from the realms of home and work oriented towards community and social engagement, which Oldenburg termed a "third place" (1989). Experiencing *iyashi* is understood in Japan to be about passivity, offering relaxation through an embrace of non-productive activities. The academic literature on cafés has established that they are separate from the economically productive space of the workplace and the socially

reproductive space of the home; they offer visitors access to a non-productive space focused instead of social interaction (Linnet 2015, Oldenburg 1989). Situating the *iyashi* experience in the animal café not only furthers the sense of relaxation and enjoyment, experienced together with other customers, but allows visitors to perform, publically, non-productivity.

The animal café model is an adaptation of two earlier trends, the explosion of interest in goods, businesses and places that offer relaxing, healing experiences known in Japan as the "iyashi" boom and the longer tradition of selling positive emotional interactions as part of the affect economy in Japan. The emphasis on iyashi in animal cafés, built upon low-key human-animal interaction, is one way the cafés meet the demand for emotional succor and freedom from the social pressure to be productive and successful that visitors encounter daily. The decision to structure the business model on that of a café, and drawing on the tradition of affect business such as hostess and host clubs and maid cafés, both draws on visitors' familiarity with the concept of paying for affective encounters and emphasizes the social aspect of this kind of public relaxation. The animal café brings these trends together to create a public, communal space in which iyashi is consumed through the shared engagement in non-productive relaxation as a response to social pressures in other realms of life.

The goal of this chapter is to explore how this explosion of interest in businesses where customers pay for the opportunity to be around animals and other animal lovers resulted from the commodification of sociality and people's desire for emotional connection. I will focus on the café as a commoditized space to experience *iyashi*, exploring how the animal café works as a business and as a refuge, bringing together a community engaging in this experience publically and together. The animal café is not the first business to employ the concept of *iyashi* to attract customers, but understanding what *iyashi* means in that specific context and more broadly in

Japanese culture aids understanding of what draws visitors to these cafés. This chapter will begin by exploring this, and then turn to an exploration of the term "third place" and the role of such places in Japanese society. In order to develop the understanding of how affect can be disseminated in a commercial space, I offer an introduction to the literature on "third places" and café culture, while also elaborating on how animal cafés are distinctive in their structure as both a public and a private space. I will also place the animal café within the historical context of Japanese businesses that commodify affective encounters. I will also specify what an animal café is, how the business model functions and offer an introduction to the individuals who visit them.

2.1 THE DEFINITION OF IYASHI

Iyashi, which translates most directly to "healing," carries the connotation of both physical and mental mending. The meaning and usage of the term is flexible and has been used in many contexts in Japan since it came to popular attention twenty years ago, and the type of healing offered through iyashi is dependent on the sources of stress that drives customers to seek out healing. The idea of iyashi emphasizes soothing and relaxation over excitement or thrills, but with an important component of emotional connection. According to one of my informants, an iyashi experience is fun, but it is fun (tanoshimi) without stimulus, thrills (shigeki). A person looking for iyashi is more likely to be attracted to quieter, soothing, fun experiences like animal cafés or walking in nature, instead of going to Disneyland or a dance club. Japanese individuals seeking out iyashi are attempting both to disconnect from their daily routine, which is a major source of stress, and to connect to something outside themselves. For some, this may mean being connected to more abstract feelings such as nature or salvation, while for others who feel isolated

from their fellows, it may be about connecting to other people or other creatures. With this definition, one can see how a spiritual retreat, a visit to the gardens of Kamakura or a trip to a maid café can all be considered *iyashi* experiences.

The term was coined by the Japanese anthropologist Noriyuki Ueda in his ethnography on a Sri Lankan village entitled "Suri Ranka no Akuma barai - ime-ji to iyashi no cosumoroji-(Image, Healing and Cosmology in Sri Lanka)," published in 1990. The first major use of the word in the popular media was by a newspaper editor who referred to Ueda's work in an article that explored iyashi's dual meaning as both heart and body healing. The flexibility inherent in the loose definition of the word has meant that it is both difficult to classify the concept and easy to apply it to a variety of different situations. Iyashi has been embraced by a variety of academic disciplines, including medicine, psychology and religious studies, each in slightly different ways, and its meaning has evolved over the twenty-five years it has been in common usage among the Japanese public. This chapter cannot cover all the ways the word iyashi has been used over the last twenty-five years, but will focus on giving a definition and history of the word that connects the concept to the meaning it has for the people in animal cafés.

The feeling of *iyashi* is an affect, more than it is an emotion. Affect, as defined by Hardt and Negri, is "a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking" (2004, 108), rather than just a mental state. The idea of affect in recent scholarship, largely based on reinterpretations of older philosophical work by Spinoza as interpreted by Deleuze (Massumi 1995) and Silvan Tomkins (Demos 1995, Tomkins 2008), remains somewhat contested, particularly in terms of how affect is created, experienced and disseminated, and in terms of its use as an analytical term, often in terms of labor (Ahmed 2004, Berlant 2011, Brennan 2004, Clough and Halley 2007, Cvetkovich 2003, Hardt 1999, Mazzarella 2009, Muehlebach 2012,

Sedgwick 2003, Stewart 2007). For the purposes of this ethnography, affects can best be understood as "intensity," as defined by Brian Massumi (1995), who places emphasis on the bodily experience of an affect, as opposed to an emotion which is constrained and qualified by semiotic recognition. Affect is also something that affects one in a precognitive way; it is not discursive but lies in bodily experience. The affect of *iyashi* brings together feelings of pleasure and intimacy and a release of tension. It was best described by one of my informants as the way she "just goes 'ahhhhhh'" when she walks into an animal café, as the knot in her chest lets go. Additionally, affects are precognitive and non-linguistic. Affective interactions lie in the realm of nonverbal responses, the way a smile invites a smile or a yawn invites a yawn. The animal in an animal café does not offer healing through friendly conversation but through affective connection.

Affects are often difficult to explicate as doing so involves expressing a multiplicity of feelings, and my informants often had difficulty putting into words exactly what *iyashi* means to them. However, there was universal clarity that it was a positive feeling that was primarily about relaxation, "feeling better" and letting go of the stress that accumulates from many aspects of their daily lives, while also encompassing a sense of sociality and outward connection. *Iyashi* is not just relaxing and letting go of individual stresses, but also about actively finding a connection to something outside oneself. In the Japanese discourse, as the idea of *iyashi* has become more popular, there has been criticism of individuals who seek *iyashi* as lazy or passive, but in my fieldwork, I found that seeking out *iyashi* was often an active process, searching for a feeling that they found lacking in their lives.

The common context of *iyashi* is that people's problems, expressed often in physical tension and pain but often with underlying emotional causes, need to be addressed holistically,

helping people improve both their physical and mental condition. For many *iyashi* experiences, this is often done by connecting an individual to nature or spirituality, and separating themselves from the sources of stress in their lives. Reading a book that helps you come to terms with an issue you are concerned with leads your body to relax and tension to melt away (Roquet 2009). A chi (*ki*) therapist will manipulate a client's energy field, a technique designed to fix physical pains, but that physical pain is often caused by problems in that person's everyday life and visitors work with their therapist to identify how to address those social and emotional issues.

If a business or a product was branded *iyashi* in the 1990s, this primarily means that it was a product that would offer to help improve one's sense of physical and emotional well-being while soothing away tensions caused by the stresses of daily life in Japan. *Iyashi* goods are often about reconnecting to the natural world, though that connection to nature is "largely an artificial human construct" (Yumiyama 1995, 276), as contrasted with the cultural world, imagined as constructed, urban, and constrained by cultural rules of behavior. A footbath designed to mimic standing at a waterfall is not actually going to create an authentic connection to nature, but the human construction of the experience does not necessarily undermine the goal to connect to something larger than oneself.

In fieldwork interviews, in response to my question about the appeal or benefit of the animal café, visitors commonly told me that the opportunity to receive *iyashi* is what draws them to cafés. But for them, the experience of *iyashi* is not just about solo relaxation but about sharing in the affective collectivity of animals and animal lovers. They may not be engaging in active social interaction with other people in the café; in fact, part of the appeal of the *iyashi* experience is the focus on relaxation instead of social interaction, which carries social responsibility. Being with others instead of being socially isolated is an important part of what *iyashi* has become for

animal café customers, but the social connection being with animals keeps the experience in the realm of affective, and non-verbal, interaction. Keiko describes that sociality of being with animals in a café as "sharing some feeling with living things." Though she did not want to have to talk with people "because talking was a very exhausting thing for me," she still wanted to have social interaction, and she felt that enjoying *iyashi* in the animal café perfectly fit her needs.

Today, *iyashi* is often used as something of a catch-phrase, a hip concept that will attract the eye of consumers. A Japanese anthropologist I met during my fieldwork told me that he believed *iyashi* is like the small "i" that appears in the names of Apple products (the iPod, iMac, etc.). An ad campaign in 2015 designed to draw travelers to Kamakura to see the hydrangeas blooming, a flower for which the area is known, showed a wave of multi-colored blooms and the slogan "Iyashi, in full bloom" (*Iyashi, mankai*). In Japan, the term *iyashi* is used to evoke positive feelings, and mark any experience as one that will make one feel good. The sense of feeling good is closely aligned with a sense of stress reduction and restoring mental balance, but the way the term is used casually to describe how one feels after eating an amazing meal with a friend or after a day hiking in nature is both broader and vaguer than how it has been traditionally used by scholars. Yet despite the increasing ubiquity of the term, and thus the weakening of it as a meaningful term, when my informants spoke of enjoying *iyashi* in the animal café, they were identifying an experience that was important to them, not just something they engaged in because it is fashionable.

2.2 THE END OF THE BUBBLE ECONOMY AND THE "IYASHI BOOM"

Why has *iyashi* become such an important idea in Japan over the last twenty years? The term *iyashi* first came into common parlance during the "*iyashi* boom," which began in 1995. In 1999, the word was named one of the top ten buzzwords of the year at the 16th *Ryukogo Taisho* (Buzzword Awards) by the Jiyukokuminsha publishing house². The boom period was characterized largely by Japanese people seeking out *iyashi*, or experiences that would allow them to feel *iyasarete iru* (healed), through an embrace of alternative medicines or therapies or semi-religious experiences that drew on New Age-type ideas like energy. Over the course of the last two decades the term has shifted away from spiritual security and wellbeing and towards psychological balance and health (Matsui 2009, Roquet 2015). The timeline of the boom in interest in *iyashi* is correlated with Japan's Lost Decade, as the period, beginning with the economic crash in 1990, following the end of the bubble economy is known, and the rise of economic and social precariousness, as Japanese society attempted to restructure in response to the crash and depression.

The *iyashi* boom is a consequence of many factors, including media discourse and corporate interests, but I wish to place particular emphasis on two factors—consumer demand and a changing understanding of care. As discussed in the introduction, the experience of precarity has created an increased need for positive experiences to combat rising feelings of disaffection and alienation among Japanese people, particularly younger people. This demographic in particular has been especially affected by economic precarity. This rising need is

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²U-Can Shingo Ryukogo Taisho. "16th Ryukogo Taisho (Buzzword Awards)". singo.jiyu.co.jp. http://singo.jiyu.co.jp/nendo/1999.html (retrieved Aug. 5 2016).

coupled with a shift, in Japan and globally, towards self-care, transferring responsibility from the state (or in Japan, more commonly the corporation) onto the individual (Kitanaka 2015, Rose 2007, Tronto 2013). This atmosphere and context has nurtured the *iyashi* boom, which was driven not just by customer interest in positive affect, but also by the willingness of customers to search out and individually pay for the emotional care that they needed.

Economic and social precarity, and the attendant increases in negative affects of isolation and loneliness, disaffection, and alienation, has its roots in an extensive array of economic and social factors that were more fully elaborated in the introduction to this dissertation. The flexibilization of labor in the 1990s led to drastic increase in the numbers of precariously employed youth. This demographic is disconnected from the social welfare of the Japanese corporation. The generation that came of age during the "lost decade" of the 1990s became known as the "lost generation." The lifetime guaranteed employment system was replaced by a system based on temporary and dispatched (*haken*) workers and Japan's service economy increasingly was powered by temporary youth labor. Increasing numbers of Japanese youth were excluded from the social support network of the company that supported their parents' generation. And the generation that entered the job market in the 1990s and after has matured in a world full of increasingly distant relationships, uncertain employment futures, and increasing disaffection.

In conjunction with the increasing sense of economic precarity, there were two major events in 1995: The Kobe Earthquake, which struck on January 17, 1995, and the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system on March 20, 1995. The Kobe Earthquake led the Japanese people to doubt the very ground under their feet, and the sarin gas attacks demonstrated that places that people passed through everyday were no longer safe. What exacerbated the issue was

the fact that, as a consequence of the economic downturn and the increased social isolation of younger workers, many people had no place to turn to receive the emotional support that would ameliorate this sense of fear. Thus, the growing unease of precariously employed workers coincided with events that sharply undermined individuals' faith in a stable and secure future. The period following these events, which had rattled individuals' sense of security and stability, already undermined by the increasingly precarious job market, led to the "*iyashi* boom" —a period characterized by rapid increase in mass media discussions of *iyashi*, new businesses that offered customers the chance for an *iyashi* experience, and a proliferation of "*iyashi* goods" that offered customers the ability to bring healing and calm into their homes and lives.

The term *iyashi* was coined during this post-bubble period, picked up by the mass media, and became the buzzword when describing the need that disaffected Japanese were seeking to meet. The term gained traction in the media over the first half of the 1990s, going from two uses of the word in 1990 in the three major Japanese newspapers—the Mainichi Shinbun, the Yomiuri Shinbun and the Asahi Shinbun—to 32 references to *iyashi* in the last six months of 1994 (Ueda 1997). Following the sarin gas attacks and the earthquake of 1995 and the connected rise in feelings of precarity, the word entered common parlance, used in marketing campaigns, media coverage and common discourse.

Many scholars who have written on *iyashi* have sought to tie the *iyashi* boom to ongoing shifts in Japanese society, making it clear that the idea did not appear out of thin air. If the Kobe Earthquake and sarin gas attacks were catalysts, it is important to understand the super-saturated solution in which they had their effect. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva, in her work on the relationship of the healing boom to *Naikan*, one of Japan's New Religions, states that the earthquake likely contributed to the rise and spread of the healing boom from "the fields of medicine and clinical

psychology... into literature, art and commercial enterprise" (Ozawa-de Silva 2006, 169). The idea of *iyashi* had existed primarily in academia but the uncertainty and apprehension created by the disasters of 1995 led to broader public interest in ways that might offer people some relief from their negative feelings.

Tatsuya Yumiyama, a religious studies scholar, argued that the *iyashi* boom was caused by the oil shock, which both undermined Japanese faith in economic progress and opened up new lifestyle possibilities. This in turn led to the collapse of the bubble economy, and the spread of New Age thought, as identified in Shirley MacLaine's book on the topic (1995, 279). Yumiyama's investigation of why *iyashi* was so popular in the 1990s explored the three levels upon which individuals could engage with the idea of *iyashi*—the individual, the interpersonal and the social. The idea of emotional and physical healing is appealing on a personal level because *iyashi* activities purport to eliminate the disconnect, and the resulting stresses, between the mind and the body, which may be the cause of stress. On an interpersonal level, focusing on *iyashi* pushes back against the dissolution of human relationships and offers reconciliation; on the social level, it emphasizes the importance of a proper relationship between society and nature, and the achievement of harmony (Yumiyama 1995, 279-281).

The way the term *iyashi* is used in common parlance developed out of the academic perspectives of religious studies and of clinical psychology. Ozawa-de Silva saw the spread from medicine and psychology, drawing on Ueda's work to argue that *iyashi* is an extension of medicine with a focus on relatedness. She says, paraphrasing Ueda, "what is unique in healing is that there is no healing by oneself: instead, healing is always 'healing each other', through which people recover their sense of relatedness" (Ueda in Ozawa-de Silva 2006, 170). Yumiyama argues that the idea of healing is a transition from a longstanding religious idea of salvation. The

practices and ideas of healing date to the late 1970s, and Yumiyama connects interest in *iyashi* with the global oil shock of that period, but the concept did not become broadly known until the New Age movements in the 1990s. New Age movements encouraged healing done at a holistic level, which fit in well with Yumiyama's idea that the types of stress illnesses and youth issues that are facing Japan are a consequence of a rift between one's awareness and one's body, between understanding and sensation (1995). He sees this new approach as necessary because classical medicine is not well suited to treating the type of lifestyle diseases that are so dominant today; we are in need of 'lifestyle healing.'

A third perspective, presented in Tanabe and Susumu's 2002 book on iyashi and connectedness (tsunagari), related the popularity of iyashi to the expansion of new forms of therapy from the West to the East as a response to the rising need for social support during this period (Tanabe and Susumu 2002). One consequence of these social problems is the sharp increase in the rate of suicide and increases in both rates of depression and societal public awareness of the issue since the 1990s. Yet, as Junko Kitanaka explored in her book Depression in Japan, Japanese psychiatrists have traditionally avoided talk therapy because of their framing of depression as a biological illness rather than caused by psychological or emotional concerns (2012). The rise in "overwork suicides," and the gendering of depression as an issue among working males, has led to state interventions in the workplace and public work to redefine depression in Japan over the last twenty years, but the idea of therapy to work through problems, anxieties or other issues is still uncommon in Japan. Therapy is controversial in Japan, with many Japanese seeing therapy as only an option for the seriously mentally ill; individuals who are stressed and isolated would not search out a therapist. Going to a therapist does not feel like an option, yet people still find they need to address their stress; going for an *iyashi* experience

has become a therapeutic exercise without necessarily being identified as such. *Iyashi*, as it spread into the mainstream, offered ways for individuals to seek out, without stigma, therapeutic goods and experiences.

What seems clear is that the rising desire for emotional healing, which correlated strongly with an increasing sense of precarity, and catalyzed by certain shocking events, led to the *iyashi* boom. *Iyashi* is a response to the increased issues of social and emotional precarity that have their roots in longer term changes in societal structure in Japan. The *iyashi* boom is also reflects the larger shift, in Japan and elsewhere, towards "affective economies."

The proliferation of *iyashi* businesses and goods is part of a trend towards the marketization of affects in a post-Fordist economy. As Ann Anagnost states in the introduction of her edited volume on new economic uncertainty in East Asia, "the concept of "affective economies" provides a frame for tracking transformations of value that take place in the realm of affective production" (Anagnost 2013, 18). One of these transformations is a shift in responsibility for the emotional care and support of workers from the state to the individual, from the public sector to the private, leading to individuals turning to the marketplace to meet affective needs. Already precariously employed workers are forced to assume the risk and responsibility for their own emotional care, as employers no longer offer stability and security in exchange for labor. This has led to a surge in new community-based movements and business models centered around meeting this need for emotional care through "affective labor", a type of labor "focused on the creation and manipulation of affects" (Hardt 1999).

There are a huge variety of items and businesses that identify themselves as offering *iyashi*, with the common thread being emotional and physical wellness through connection to something outside ourselves. Businesses like power-spot tours, chi (*ki*) manipulation therapies,

iyashi massage schools, and aromatherapists were established or greatly expanded existing practices, and promised to ease feelings of stress and unhappiness, bringing the mind and body into harmony and offering mental and physical improvement and healing, through meditation or connection with an external power. The marketplace jumped in on the trend, offering a huge variety of "*iyashi* goods," from home spa tools like foot soakers to scented oils and candles to *iyashi*-themed books and music, all goods that are focused on offering soothing and relaxation. From this list, it is clear that whether or not something will be effective as *iyashi* and help a particular individual is dependent on the cause of their stress and how it is expressed in their life. For some, *iyashi* is something to be reached through a semi-religious practice, while for others it is a type of alternative therapy, which allows them to talk out their problems to a trained professional without the stigma of needing to "get help." And for others, it is simply about finding a way to unwind alone at home after a hard day at work.

2.3 THE CIRCULATION OF AFFECT IN A "THIRD PLACE"

As the meaning of *iyashi* shifted from spiritual to psychological healing in the 2000s, more businesses appeared in which *iyashi* is an important part of their appeal. Their focus was less on addressing physical ailments with emotional soothing, and more on directly addressing the problems and stresses caused by social disconnection and loneliness. These *iyashi* businesses marketed sociality, emphasizing human interrelatedness and community connection rather than spiritual connection. *Iyashi* was needed to address the stresses of interpersonal tensions, and these businesses combined soothing and comforting with positive social interactions. These businesses often take the form of cafés, where minimal attention is given to the food and drink,

and employees' main responsibility is to provide a positive affective experience to visitors. An early example of this type of business is the maid café, which first appeared in the late 1990s but became more prominent in the 2000s. Maid cafés were followed several years later by butler cafés, built along similar lines but with male employees who make the young female customers feel like princesses.

As *iyashi* has moved into the realm of the public and social, no longer an experience to be enjoyed privately, it is increasingly positioned in the form of a café, which emphasizes the shared and communal, and visible, nature of the *iyashi* experience. The animal café is an extension of the *iyashi* boom, but it is also an extension of the café tradition and businesses that have commodified intimacy in Japan in the context of 'third places' or 'alternative spaces' like cafés. As I have introduced the academic literature on the concept of *iyashi*, I turn now to explore the literature on café spaces, before delving more deeply into the specifics of the sociality constructed in the animal café, which brings together these two trends in a unique way.

The idea of alternative space, and the café as a particular kind of alternative space, is one that has attracted academic attention as scholars explore the particular kinds of interactions, community relations and sociality that are constructed in that type of space. While many types of spaces can be defined as 'alternative,' and their social role varies wildly, broadly "alternative spaces define themselves against the other, more dominant forms of space which we feel is under the control of the powerful and where we feel that we must conform to mainstream norms" (Cassegard 2016, 32). The visitors attracted to animal cafés come because they recognize it as a space free from the demands of superiors, family members or even general cultural expectations of behavior, where there are no norms of productivity that visitors are required to conform to. Much of the realization of the animal café as an alternative space is dependent on what kinds of

actions are performed in the space, but the way the space is designed—as a blend of public and private space, with both community and home-like elements—plays a role in establishing the appropriate atmosphere.

Cafés and coffee shops have been at the center of the work of many social theorists, who often focus on their ability to foment new linguistic exchanges, new types of conversations or encourage new kinds of thinking and sociality, both historically and today (Cowan 2005, Ellis 2004, Hattox 1985, Jacob 1935, Laurier 2008, Linnet 2015, Pendergrast 1999, Tjora and Scambler 2013). There is a recognition of the fact that spaces such as coffee houses (and pubs, bars and other community places), which Ray Oldenburg (1989) christened "third places," distinct from home and work, allow or even foster community building and interaction in a way that is unique to those spaces. There has been particular interest in alternative spaces and how they allow the foment of ideas that challenge mainstream society (Bhabha 1994, Cassegard 2016, Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1996). And their historical place in cultivating political resistance movements in Europe and the West (Mass-Observation 1970, Rittner, Haine, and Jackson 2013, Simon 2009) though similar research on Japan is relatively limited (White 2012).

What does it mean for an animal café to be an alternative space? Cassegard sees alternative spaces as alternative in relation to state and capital, separate from the power relations of mainstream spaces, governed by different norms. "Alternative spaces define themselves against the other, more dominant forms of space which we feel is under the control of the powerful and where we feel that we must conform to mainstream norms" (Cassegard 2016, 32). Cassegard's work draws heavily on Lefebvre and focuses on counter-spaces, which are sites with the primary purpose of challenging and questioning the mainstream. He also describes a type of alternative space which he calls "free space," which shelter alternative thinking behind approved

functions, such as bookstores and cafés. These spaces, more adaptable than counter-spaces focused on revolutionary actions and thinking, "adapt to the needs of different people—both those who are mainly interested in finding a sanctuary from mainstream norms or 'recovering' from negative experiences in mainstream society and those who are ready to engage in struggle to challenge the mainstream norms and change them" (36). This description encapsulates how the animal café functions as a space away from mainstream norms for behavior—constant attentiveness to the needs of others, putting on a good "face" at all times—all of which are part of the maintenance of a certain kind of appropriate public behavior.

"Third places" are attracting particular attention because of the academic recognition of their role in maintaining a successful and functioning civilization. Oldenburg, who coined the term, argues that spaces like the café, coffee shop, bar or other space designed to relive one of the productive focus of work but more communally focused than the home is an essential part of a successful civilization, acting as the third leg of the stool upon which society rests (1989). The aim of Oldenburg's 1989 book, The Great Good Place, was to criticize modern American culture and how its lack of third places, abundant in Europe in the form of British pubs, French cafés and German beer gardens, among others, was dooming Americans to the negative social consequences of a deficient informal public life. The American communities he studied lacked spaces where they could engage with others other than the realms of home and work. The informal public life created in these third places reduces stress and encourages social cohesion; the lack of it "puts a formal burden upon the individual to overcome the social isolation that threatens" (Oldenburg 1989, 11), but more than that, "without such places, the urban area fails to nourish the kinds of relationships and diversity of human contact that are the essence of the city" (xv). He identifies why the informal public life was so essential to the health and vibrancy of a society and defines "third place" as the core setting of this life, and states that "the third place is a generic designation for a variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gathering of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (16).

Oldenburg describes society as a tripod, with home, work, and the third place, all necessary to support a vital life, with the third place defined in opposition to the qualities of the other two places. The home was a place of haven, while the workplace was about reducing an individual to their single, productive role. Third places, by comparison, were places of relaxation, sociality, and community—an antidote to stress, loneliness and alienation. For Oldenburg, the prominence of third place varies in different cultural settings and historical eras, but is generally decreasing in modern society. In the United States in particular, they are often prohibited or inaccessible as people move to suburban settings and lose access to communal social space. The numerous rewards offered by time spent in a third place—novelty, perspective, spiritual tonic and friendship—are necessary to combat feelings of stress and isolation. This is both positive for the individual and for the society more generally. It is necessary for a society to have spaces in which individuals can free themselves from the constraints of their everyday lives; the third space acts as a release valve for psychological stress. The third place serves "the functions of unifying and integrating community and society" (77). It can be a place of community organization against political oppression or media misinformation, or it can reinforce normative behavior. Without such places, individuals are likely to have no outlet for their psychological urges to "bust loose" (81).

Scholars have also drawn attention to the fact that cafés, as alternative spaces separate from more mainstream activities, are at the center of the construction of new thinking and ideas. Habermas called the café a space for the public use of reason (1989), and many others have

traced the role of the café or coffee shops as a bastion for independent political movements (Ellis 2004, Rittner, Haine, and Jackson 2013). More recent scholars have used Oldenburg's work to more deeply explore the role of cafés in encouraging social cohesion. Where the home is a place for deeply intimate interactions with family and the workplace is a place for social interactions focused on shared productivity, the café is a place where strangers can experience a sense of intimacy without the power relations that characterize both the workplace and the family. Additionally, people can be with others without feeling pressured to interact with them. The sociality of a café, based on loose connections with non-intimates who are nevertheless familiar through the shared use of space, is based on what has been called "familiarity bonds (Scambler and Tjora 2012) or "communal awareness" (Tjora and Scambler 2013). These types of bonds have positive effects on visitors, even if they are not forming deep emotional relationships with the people they meet in these contexts; being with others helps combat both feelings of loneliness and a sense of being isolated from one's community.

Cafés as sources of low-key, non-demanding sociality has been explored in other contexts than Japan. Linnet, who does research on Danish cafés explored as third places, uses the term co-presence to describe the positive affect that comes from being around others, even without direct social engagement. His work is on the Danish concept of *hygge*, coziness, an idea that aligns closely with the Japanese concept of *iyashi*. Aksel Tjora, who has edited a volume on the role of cafés in society, argues that there needs to be greater recognition of different kind of community and the communal atmosphere of the café creates a sense of community that is situational and place-based, but often subtle. The presence of a sense of 'communal awareness' means that people in a café are experiencing a sense of community and that using cafés in solitude "does not...undermine these places as social" (2013, 103-126). In the space of the

animal café, the sense of *iyashi* that relates to connecting to someone outside oneself, the part of the word that relates to social connectedness, comes from "living with" the other living beings in the animal café, even if direct communication is not achieved. A number of my informants noted the enjoyment they receive from seeing, touching, and cuddling animals, particularly in contrast to the difficulties and stresses they feel when trying to talk with people. Saori, a rabbit café regular, told me that finds a person's meaning difficult to comprehend, as she has to think about what they are not saying or are expressing nonverbally; she feels it is necessary to instead spending time just being with the animals in the animal café and putting that burden aside.

All animal cafés, including those focused primarily on relaxation, offer this sense of copresence, making all animal cafés social places. This makes them attractive also to people who want to get to know another person better; the relaxed atmosphere and variety of available activities in an animal café can reduce social anxiety. They are very popular places for dating, particularly early in the relationship as the couple tries to get to know each other. Visitors know that focus can always be turned toward the animals or other activities in the café if social interaction becomes awkward. The animals may act as intermediaries between two individuals who have difficulty with social interaction. The animals may also just function as a shared topic of conversation and make it easier for individuals just getting to know each other to find a shared interest to discuss. One café owner told me that her café was also popular with couples going on 'compensated or assisted dates (*enjo kōsai*),' where young women agree to go on dates with older men for pay. The atmosphere of the café offered safety to women who were out with men they didn't know, but it also offered intimacy and an atmosphere that was more relaxed and appealing to the couple getting to know each other than a normal café would be.

The case that café scholars have made is that these spaces make possible new kinds of social engagement by the very fact of their position outside the systems of power relations that shape human interaction elsewhere. Scholars have noted their important role historically in fostering resistance activities or intellectual movements. Today, they are recognized for their important social role in encouraging social connection and community formation. Relevant to my research on animal cafés, it is also important to recognize that cafés foster new forms of sociality, particularly one's built around familiarity with strangers who offer a sense of community, simply through their presence in a shared space.

2.4 THE CAFÉ IN JAPAN AS REFUGE FROM SOCIAL PRESSURE

The scholarship on cafés as a broad concept has clear relevance to how animal cafés are positioned in society, but it is also important to position them in terms of the specifics of the use of space in Japan and the history of café culture in this social context. Cafés perform multiple functions in Japanese society. They are commercial spaces but generally affordable, allowing visitors to experience consumer-oriented lifestyles on a minimal budget. As third places, they also make affordable meeting places, as a visit to another person's home is less common and can be expensive with travel costs and the expectation to bring a gift. The construction of the café space is contrasted with the spaces of home and work and understanding these other realms offers insight into what a café can offer.

There is a generational difference in Japan in regards to the strength of the informal public space, another example of the way that the generation that came of age following the end of the economic bubble period is lacking the social support structures that benefited and still

benefit the older generation. Older workers and those lucky few with full-time salaryman positions socialize regularly after work at bars, yet according to my informants, young people in their 20s and 30s drink significantly less than their parents' generation. There are also numerous community organizations that are aimed at retirees, offering communal third spaces to the older generation who presumably have more free time. During the New Year holiday, I joined a community group in their annual neighborhood patrol, reenacting an ancient tradition of traversing their area during the holiday period to check for fires and thieves. This was clearly an important organization for maintaining a sense of local community in the metropolis of Tokyo, yet no one in the group was under the age of 50. There is a long tradition of strong third spaces in Japanese bars, coffee shops and tea houses, but the main clientele of these types of businesses tend to be older, often primarily older women who, as housewives or retirees, have the free time and extra money to patronize these businesses. A new type of space is necessary to attract and appeal to younger people.

To explore the history of the café in Japanese culture, I draw on Merry White's book *Coffee Life in Japan*, an in-depth exploration of the history of coffee culture and the current role of the café in Japan. She agrees that cafés in Japan function as a "third space," contrasted to the spaces of home and work, but she argues that, in Japan, home and work are both places of weighty responsibility, where pressure to perform, productively at work and in terms of effective childrearing at home, drives individuals to seek out spaces without that weight (2012). These spaces are then, for White, not characterized by their friendly socialization, but their relaxed freedom. "In contemporary Japan, where being alone in daily life is rare and perhaps problematic, and where casual meetings do not come easily, the café can offer the time and space for either society or legitimate solitude hard to find elsewhere. In Japan it is...a place to be

publicly private, a social services center, a classroom for taste and consumption, the playroom, or a site of revolutionary creativity" (White 2012, 27). She see cafés in Japan as just as essential to society as Oldenburg's coffee shops, but she places more emphasis on their malleability in recent times; they can be "sociable or places of solitude in public...the cafés' contemporary functions seem to have diversified, emphasizing its solatial power, its use as a retreat from the urban melee" (White 2012, 26).

White also sets the café apart from other types of third spaces in Japanese society, marked by how remarkably free they are from the expectations that define behavior in places like bars or bathhouses. Japanese cultural understanding of space is shaped by its dense urban life and close proximity of others at all times; one is constantly aware of what the people around one are doing and the appropriate response is to pretend to be unaware of it. This then puts pressure on individuals to be aware of their potential intrusion on others and on guard to meet all social rules. "The café is said to provide solace from stress and protection from too much engagement, comfortable connection and just enough society (what one customer called "borrowed community") to palliate loneliness" (White 2012, 149). Furthermore, cafés are places without social demands, unlike places like bars and other social, often drinking-focused, establishments. White sees cafés as essential not just because they are third places but because it is only when, in the café, "freed of the responsibilities contained in his or her primary roles, the customer is offered an escape from social constraints and definitions of the person" (154). Daily life for many Japanese is a constant series of stresses as individuals must continually remain aware of those around them and what is the appropriate action to take in each situation. True relaxation is possible only when one is freed from the responsibility to put up a good face for others. "The Japanese café provides relief for many from the social intensity of their regular days. You can

stop paying attention. This is where home and work (or school) are not relevant – neither the home's emotional density nor the purposeful schedules and duties of work – where, in fact, it is fine to do nothing, alone" (White 2012, 128). A principal focus on socialization in Japan would put pressure on participants to keep up appearances and so the cafés that White researches focus not on socialization and community, the third place's major role in Oldenburg's research, but on relaxation and solitude. White does recognize that there is a social component to time in a public space like a café, but "the café in Japan does not represent an antidote to the social ills of the modern city – it is not the corrective to anonymity, as some have turned the café in America" (White 2012, 20). For Japanese, there is great value placed on having access to a place to be alone.

White's work is grounded in both recent ethnography in Japan and historical research, and many of her conclusions about the role of cafés in Japanese culture more heavily reflect the experiences of the older generation of workers. Young people are looking for spaces that can be claimed for them, built not around alcohol or work relationships, but around *iyashi* and similar relaxed sociality. They are also looking for a replacement for the socially supportive home that the apartments they live in certainly does not provide. Anne Allison has written a number of articles on the increased need for a "place to call home (*ibasho*)" (2009a, 2012) that is a consequence of social precariousness for this younger generation. What is happening in Japan is a trend towards creating new kinds of private space, as traditional private spaces and their attendant purposes as sources of emotional support, places like home and family, are changing or being lost. In some cases, home is being made into public, income-producing space (Tronto 2013). For the young people who visit animal cafés, many of whom live alone far from their parents who had been their primary source of social support until they came to Tokyo, their

apartments are simply places that they live alone, or with a significant other who likely also works long hours and may not be present enough to meet social and emotional needs.

Additionally, they are being pressed on the other side by the stresses of their work situations. Many café visitors are part-time or contract workers in low-level office jobs or the service industry. Those that are office workers have the lowest rank in the office and must be constantly attentive to the needs and demands of both their bosses and the full-time employees who outrank them in the office. Service workers are likely to be drained by a day performing emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), anticipating the needs of their customers and keeping them happy. Economic precarity is a concern even for more stable, regular workers, particularly for the younger generation without guaranteed long-term employment. The pressure to keep superiors happy means that many people in this generation must maintain a vigilant focus on the people they work with. These visitors come to the animal café looking for a place they can just be themselves, and not need to watch their behavior.

In a recent paper, Kitanaka connects the increasing interest in depression treatment at the state and corporate level, expressed through biopolitical laws instituting mental "stress checks," with care of the self and therapeutic spaces (2015). The new ways that Japanese people are attempting to carve out new boundaries of privacy for themselves is strongly connected to biopolitical reconfiguring of the relationship between care, the self and responsibility. The need to be knowledgeable about one's self—to be watching for health problems, mental or physical, that might interfere with one's productivity—was created by the broader societal push to see oneself in a psychiatrized way, noting warning signs of depression or emotional imbalance. This in turn leads people to participate in the construction of spaces to meet their needs, with their needs, to be productive, defined via the discourse created by the society at large. As

demonstrated by the regime of Rework, which is part medical treatment for depression and part occupational therapy, the forces of power are pushing responsibility for self-care onto the individual. "At leading institutions of Rework, patients are urged to manage their depression by closely keeping track of their biorhythms and affective changes" (Kitanaka 2015, S257). The biopolitical argument is that workers should be aware of their own mental states and taking active steps to improve their mental health, often through communication and social interaction – in order to not diminish their productivity and put pressure on coworkers because they cannot pull their fair share. "Rework thus seeks to instill in patients a new technology of self-governance as a way of enhancing their human capital" (S257).

What Kitanaka argues is the outcome of this shifting attitude to mental health, which had, before the passage of new labor safety laws aimed at combatting depression caused by work stress, been a private issue not discussed with others, has created a need for new spaces where workers can address their psychological issues. She sees psychological space as essential for a private sense of self, and the emerging state and corporate surveillance is driving a "rebirth of secrets," as workers try to "carve out new boundaries of privacy" (S253). I argue that the workers who visit animal cafés are trying to create that kind of privacy in these public spaces. And there is added attraction in the presence of animals, as they can be confidants while also never putting secrets at risk.

Animal cafés are public spaces, but they are presented as a space apart, hidden away from the rest of the world, as is demonstrated by the fact that animal cafés may be somewhat difficult to find. While the majority of cafés are based near major train station hubs like Ikebukuro or Shinjuku, they are often hidden away on the higher floors, often in spaces that look like converted apartments. The majority of customers have looked up directions on the internet

before even leaving their homes, though there are often standing advertising boards by the ground floor entrance covered in pictures of the café's animals and a list of the prices in order to draw in the occasional passerby. Some customers search out animal cafés that are near locations they can easily reach; others read websites that introduce and rank different types of animal cafés and customers can learn about ones that might appeal to them. This means that instead of an animal café being placed among the everyday spaces a visitor might encounter, visitors seek out and claim the spaces that appeal to them.

2.5 CONNECTING TO SOMETHING OUTSIDE ONESELF – *IYASHI* THROUGH SOCIALITY WITH ANIMALS

This moment in Japan is thus one in which there is increased demand for *iyashi* in response to issues of precarity and a demand for new kinds of alternative spaces, aimed in particular at a younger generation struggling with depression, disaffection or anxiety; these two trends come together with the introduction of the animal café. This section will briefly introduce the history and structure of the animal café and explore the animal cafés role as business structured around *iyashi*, sociality, and animals. Animal cafés make social interaction a focus, but with animals instead of with people, which prioritizes the positive affective experience of personal contact through touch and care. The animals make an animal café visit a social engagement, while still allowing it to be a largely passive, relaxed one.

The first cat café in Japan opened in the fall of 2004, in Osaka. Within five years, animal cafés had proliferated throughout Japan. In 2008 and 2009, the Japanese mass media, both print and television, ran numerous pieces on the "cat café boom," noting the scores of cat cafés

opening across Japan, though most densely clustered in major cities like Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. Especially notable was the fact that the businesses were primarily owned by independent entrepreneurs who opened their own individual cafés, rather than being part of franchises or corporate investments. During the cat café peak, there were dozens of cat cafés in Tokyo alone, and while the numbers have declined somewhat from 2009, today there are still roughly forty established cat cafés in Tokyo. They offer a variety of types of animal interaction, capitalizing on the interest in human-animal engagement while offering novel experiences. The first rabbit cafés appeared at the end of the 2000s, and the first owl café opened in 2012. Today, in Japan, there are reptile cafés or zoo cafés, which do not limit themselves to a single species, and there are businesses that call themselves animal cafés even though their business model is not built around the presence of animals. So, while a restaurant with a llama cage out front or a bar with a row of snakes in tanks above the drinks may identify itself as an animal café, this research focuses on those businesses that are built around a business model of allowing customers to pay for the opportunity to interact with and socialize with animals.

Animal cafés, while also an *iyashi* business, are a distinct evolution from earlier such businesses by their emphasis not on solo relaxation but on being around others. By offering an opportunity for sociality with animals, they strip the social interaction of the anxiety that interaction with humans can carry, creating an encounter that offers connection without tension. Visitors can focus only on what they want out of the social encounter and do not have to think about the needs and concerns of the other. All animal cafés share an intrinsic social component. This does not mean that all customers come to hang out and chat with friends or people they've just met, though many do, but even solo visitors can engage in affective connection to those around them. Those others may not be human, but they help reduce feelings of isolation and

disconnection. This is what leads to the variety of interactions in cat cafés that I observed during my fieldwork – a person chattering away with a close friend, next to an awkward first date, next to a pair of friends each ignoring the other and focusing on a nearby cat, next to a person wrapped in a blanket, reading manga with a cat sleeping curled up next to her. The animal café offers a variety of *iyashi* experiences, different for each customer who enters, but always about inhabiting a world with others, but separate from the day-to-day social stresses of the outside world.

The animal café is structured around the opportunity for intimacy with animals, an experience that offers both the relaxation of cozying up with a companion animal and the excitement of interacting with an unfamiliar animal. Animal cafés are generally open from late morning until around ten in the evening. As the animals live full-time in the café space and cats are thus available to customers for the full time that the café is open, the Ministry of the Environment has attempted to limit the functioning hours of Japanese cat cafés, passing an ordinance in 2012 requiring cafés to close at 8 pm. However, the law was petitioned by cat café owners who argued successfully that evening hours do not increase cat stress.³ Indeed, there are often separate rooms where cats sleep at night and can go to take a break from interacting with people. This limits the number of hours for which they are available. As a result, most cafés are open until 10pm, with many workers who leave work around 8pm stopping by before they head home. Cats live in the café space, which is filled with toys for them to play with and spaces they can climb to that humans can reach. Rabbit cafés are structured differently, with the animals spending the majority of their time in cages lining the room. An individual rabbit is allowed out

³ Cat cafés in Japan to be allowed to open until 10 p.m.; The Japan Times, April 27, 2016. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/04/27/national/cat-cafés-in-japan-to-be-allowed-to-open-until-10-p-m/#.V9bxOzsddE5, Accessed 09/12/16

to hop around the room and into customers' laps, but customers are also allowed to open the cages and pet and feed the rabbits who are not currently on the floor. Rabbits who have been out for a period are not allowed to be touched for a period after they have been returned to their cages so as to allow them to rest and recuperate from the activity. The bird cafés tend to function more like normal cafés, where customers pay for what they order as they watch the birds in cages or around the room, but they have the additional opportunity to pay to hold a few birds for a few minutes in a separate "bird room."

Visitors to animal cafés have a variety of options for enjoyment open to them, allowing customers to relax and enjoy the café in the way that is most comfortable for them. Visitors are welcome to try to interact with the animals or chat with the employees, but they are equally welcome to relax with a book, watch television if there is one, or sit in a chair and watch the goings on in the café. This is a major part of the appeal of the animal café, as I learned from my informants; there is no prescribed behavior and visitors are allowed the complete freedom to selfishly spend their time however they want, as long as they are not upsetting or hurting the animals. The atmosphere of the café is designed to make visitors feel welcome and comfortable, offering them a place away from the troubles of their everyday lives. This relaxed feel can be somewhat intimidating to first time visitors; as visitors are free to do anything, many feel unsure what exactly they should do. Employees are often helpful at this point, striking up a conversation with a hesitant customer, telling them what one particular animal likes and generally acting as a bridge between the visitor and the animal.

For the first part of their visit to an animal café, customers usually find a seat and look over the drink menu, looking around the room and finding their bearings. Customers whose main goal is to relax may spend their visit in that one place, but most customers, upon placing a drink

order, will move into the center of the room, approaching the animals they find appealing. The animals in these cafés are often overstimulated and not actively seeking out human contact and it can be a challenge for customers to gain the attention of an animal. Regular visitors have had time to develop relationships with the animals and can sit and have an animal come to them, but first-time or occasional visitors may not be able to have much physical contact with animals. This means that regular customers' increasing claim to the café as "their" place is demonstrated by the ease with which they interact with animals and it is common to see regular customers relaxing in their favorite spot with a cat or two curled up against them, something they would never do with an unknown visitor.

Animal cafés tend to be fairly quiet spaces, with relatively limited social interaction between customers. This does not mean that animal cafés are not social places, but while visitors are free to chat, with each other or with the café staff, the relaxing atmosphere tends to put a damper on energetic conversation. Social interactions between customers who do not come to the animal café together are rare. When an animal does something appealing or funny, the close-by visitors may smile at each other and comment, "Isn't it cute? (kawaii desu nee)" but people are unlikely to have a more personal conversation with an unknown person in an animal café. Even friends who come to a café together may enter together but spend their time moving around the room separately from each other, stopping and sharing their thoughts and experiences with each other sporadically. Employees will chat with customers, but the conversations with casual visitors tend to be short and often aimed at helping the visitor connect with an animal. Once that has been accomplished, they move on. They are more likely to have longer conversations with regular visitors, because the visitors have had time to develop friendships with the employees they see often.

While some time at an animal café is spent going up to the animals and petting them or taking pictures, customers also spend time relaxing in a chair or on a bench, quietly playing on their cell phones and not interacting with the person they came with. Customers who come to an animal café alone are equally as welcome as customers who come in pairs or small groups. This is somewhat unusual for a social activity in Japan as events like dining out are very rarely done alone. A number of café visitors I spoke to told me that they had been interested in going for a while, but they were hesitant to go alone initially. Yet, I frequently observed those visitors who come with a companion chatting together while they had a drink, then splitting up and going their own way through the café, and then coming together again to share the photos they took while moving about the room. Sometimes one customer will explore the café while the other stays relaxing in a chair. When I asked some of these customers about what they were doing in the café, I was often told that their companion wanted to visit an animal café and they just accompanying them because they did not want to come alone.

Unlike many other types of third places, or even most cafés, in Japan, visiting alone in completely acceptable. Going to the movies, a restaurant, or other kinds of public outings are almost uniformly done with a companion. Engaging in these kinds of activities alone is occasionally used as a marketing gimmick, as in the case of solo karaoke bars, which have booths with only room for one person, but this only highlights how uncommon this is. Women are even more constrained than men, who do patronize bars or casual restaurants alone on their way home from work; women are expected to have a companion for all social excursions. The fact that visitors do come to the animal café alone highlights its position as an alternative space. It also highlights the fact that visitors are not alone in the animal café; their companion is the animal there for their consumption.

Some animal cafés focus more directly on socialization and bringing people together, creating opportunities for visitors to break through their shyness and interact with others. One particular café, Ikeneko, has regular icebreaking events that encourage visitors to come and be social and make new friends in the space with the animals. They have done overnight events for the New Year, with everyone going to pray at a nearby shrine at 5am on January 1st, and games like "Werewolf," where one player is a werewolf and must try to infect the other players while they try and figure out who the werewolf is. The participants in these events are usually regular visitors to the café who are interested in developing a closer relationship with the people they often see in the café. A number of other businesses run occasional video game nights – Monster Hunter is very popular – as these games are played on individual game systems but players must battle against other individuals playing on their game system. These game nights bring together people who are looking for someone to play their game with. While customers often have difficulty reaching out for interactions with strangers, some cafés create situations to encourage people to do so, and this in turn draws customers who are looking for that kind of café experience. The structure of the space in these types of animal cafés also situates them as social spaces. In Ikeneko, the room has chairs and couches along the walls, but they all face towards the center of the café, and the café has a heated mat in the center of the room, to attract the cats to lay where customers can see and interact with them. This is contrasted with cafés like Kitty Home, described above, where the furniture is arranged to create private spaces where customers can sit out of direct sight of each other.

The configuration of this business based on a café model increases the emphasis on social interaction and connection, rather than on individual isolation. Just as the idea of *iyashi* encompasses both intimacy and sociality, privacy and public interaction, cafés blur the line

between public and private space. Additionally, cafés' position as a space of social connection and interaction reinforces the social aspect of the *iyashi* experience and makes them an ideal model around which to structure the newest form of the *iyashi* business. Visitors come to the café primed for social interaction and stress free relaxation, which is realized in the connection with animals.

The way that people engage with animals in the café setting is different from any other kind of social, *iyashi* business because of the experience of human-animal interaction. Where human to human interaction is characterized by verbal communication, speaking about one's problems and being heard, human-animal interaction is characterized by non-verbal communication, often through touch. The animals that dominate animal cafés can be touched, petted and stroked, leading to the creation of the affective response through bodily connection. Visitors to an animal café do not have to maintain physical separation as they would with the employees in any other kind of *iyashi* business, which necessarily limits the sense of connection and intimacy they can have with that person. Through touch, visitors can feel connected, familiar, and intimate with the animals, further deepening their affective bond. As was said at the beginning of this chapter, *iyashi* is an affect, and thus a type of healing that is sensory, and draws on models of communication beyond the verbal. Animal cafés connect more directly to that conception than other businesses that commodify that intimate, social relationship in Japan by creating the opportunity for the physical connection not found elsewhere.

Structuring the *iyashi* experience around sociality with animals affects how the sense of sociality in a café develops. Where Scambler and Tjora's "familiarity bonds" (2012) come from consistent interaction with other café regulars, animals offer an instant sense of familiarity to animal café visitors, both because of the nostalgic associations with family pets that many

visitors have, and because of the lack of social barriers to familiarity that human interactions have. This makes it possible for even casual visitors to take advantage of the *iyashi* experience that animal cafés have to offer, as visitors can feel welcomed and comfortable in an animal café very quickly and do not have to become regular visitors, with the financial and time outlays that requires, in order to feel the benefits. There are advantages to being a regular, and having deeper relationships with the animals, staff and other regular customers, but even a first-time guest can enjoy the benefits. Through their access to animals, and the opportunity to watch, photograph and maybe pet them if they choose, all visitors receive the benefits of personal, intimate contact without any of the negatives that animal café visitors have come to associate with social interaction with people, i.e. the need to be thinking about their needs or wishes, the stress of trying to read their mood, and, particularly for lower ranking workers, the concern that misreading someone will have negative consequences for one's economic or social position. In this way animal cafés stand in contrast to previous Japanese business models built around alternative sociality, like maid cafés, because customers are not focused on actively engaging socially but on passively being around other social creatures and being able to meet social needs through that.

2.6 THE *IYASHI* ATMOSPHERE AND VISIBLY PERFORMING NON-PRODUCTIVITY

Through the provision of the opportunity to experience *iyashi* in a public, communal space, the non-productive relaxation that characterizes the *iyashi* experience of the animal café becomes a shared performance. The animal café elicits a sense of *iyashi* through the very design of the

space, which brings together all the people in the animal café to experience the *iyashi* atmosphere together. *Iyashi* is about healing, comfort and relaxation in a non-productive context; the choice to visitors to experience *iyashi* in a café space means that part of the appeal of the animal café is the opportunity to perform that non-productivity in front of others.

A key source of *iyashi* is the café's atmosphere, which uses elements in the interior design, decoration, and food and drink options to emphasize coziness, comfort and repose. This atmosphere primes visitors to connect more strongly to the sense of *iyashi*. "Once cultivated, a mood helps to steer future perceptual orientations, priming the brain to favor sensory cues reinforcing already established feelings" (Roquet 2015, 3). The design of the animal café focuses on elements, such as couches and cushions rather than tables and chairs, in order to prime a sense of home, which in turn elicits a sense of comfort, familiarity and intimate connection. The physical space of the café is often open, with animals moving freely around the space, orienting visitors towards the animals and each other, rather than isolating each person at their own table. Even the type of animal, most commonly soft, pettable animals like rabbits and cats, emphasize the cozy, relaxed sense of the space. This atmosphere is the first layer of the experience of *iyashi* that the animal café provides.

The first way this is experienced by visitors is through the décor and design elements they see when they enter the café. Many cafés have couches and cushions on the floor. Many cafés are decorated in bright, pastel colors, from the walls to the furniture to the pictures that decorate the walls. There is a strong emphasis on cute (*kawaii*) in most animal cafés, a word that is understood in Japan as eliciting protective instincts. It has been theorized that Japan's cute culture stems from an epidemic of alienation (Kinsella 1994). One reason spending time with animals is healing, according to many of my informants, is because animals are cute and seeing

that makes them feel good. Cuteness elicits a sense of protective caring, which helps them feel connected to the animal. One rabbit café, Usa-chan, decorates the café with children's picture books, both on shelves for customers to peruse but also lining the walls as decoration. Both the cat café Catacular and Ikeneko are decorated with bean bag chairs, while another cat café, Tabby's, is filled with low couches in pink slipcovers. Many of the design elements reflect the animal theme, with pillows shaped like fluffy cat heads, and animal designs on the plates and cups that food is served on.

This theme is continued in the food and drink service. The drink and food service tends to be very minimal as these offerings are not the main draw of the animal café; in fact, in certain areas of Tokyo, food service around animals is illegal so the only drinks available are from a vending machine in the café. But when food and drinks are available, the menu tends to be simple and often sweet, such as pasta dishes, puddings, or cakes. The drinks are never very complicated, usually soft drinks, teas, or simple coffee drinks. However, some effort is put into presenting these offerings in an appealing way. In addition to being served on attractively designed tableware, the food and drink itself may be designed in a way that emphasizes the cute, animal aspect of the café. Catacular offers drinks like hot chocolate or lattes with a pattern of a cat's paw sprinkled out in cocoa or cinnamon on top of the drink. One owl café sells pudding with owl eyes and a beak made out of molding chocolate on top so it appears an owl is looking up out of the bowl. At Usa-chan, food is accompanied by a drawing of a bunny made out of chocolate syrup.

The other side of the *iyashi* experience is about connecting to something outside oneself, and many cafés assist visitors to do that by encouraging them to feel they are connecting to the "natural" world of the animal, distinct from the culturally-bounded world they spend most of

their time in. The distinction between nature and culture has been critiqued as a false construction, but that does not undermine the fact that the visitors coming to the café experience this opportunity to connect with animals as an opportunity to blur the lines in their lives between city life and the "natural world." Animal cafés are designed to bring humans into contact with animals by moving them to a shared level with the animals living in the café. Customers are brought low to the ground, often sit on cushions on the ground at low tables so animals are able to come right up to, or onto, them. If there are tables or chairs, they are often kept low so visitors can reach out and pet an animal that walks past them. Some cafés only have chairs or benches along the walls so that visitors are placed looking into the open space of the café where the animals are. Cat cafés often have climbing toys in these central areas to encourage the animals to play or relax where visitors can see them. Visiting an animal café is about visiting a place where you can see and be with animals. It is not unusual for customers to spend their time in the café reading and relaxing instead of actively trying to interact with the animals, but this set up makes it possible for any customer to feel that they are with animals, even as they are doing something else.

Two different animal cafés illustrate the range of differences in construction: Catacular, which I introduced above in my description of a visit with my informant Keiko, is one of the more comfortably appointed cat cafés I visited in Tokyo. The café is one open room, with a pet barrier separating a small sales area and register from the cat area. There are foot-high tables and chairs or bean bag cushions spaced around the room for customers, boxes, bowls and ledges for animals to explore or sit on everywhere around the room, and a central tower which generally has numerous cats sitting on it or exploring. The room is carpeted and kept immaculately clean by employees using pet hair rollers whenever they have a free moment. There are shelves along

one wall, the higher of which are used by the cats to move away from people occasionally, and the lower of which hold books and manga that customers are free to read. Customers in this café usually sit initially at one of the tables and they drink their complimentary drink at that table, but they spend the majority of their time moving around the room, photographing or playing with the cats scattered throughout the room. The space is cozy enough that customers feel comfortable just relaxing on the cushions, watching television or reading, but the animals are energetic and playful enough that customers can spend their time getting close to them.

Kitty Home café is another café that emphasizes comfort, but to a far greater extent than Catacular. This cat café is filled with goods designed to make it a relaxation getaway, such as board games, sofas and futons, and even an electric massage chair. The cats that live there share the space with the relaxing visitors, but they, and their toys, do not dominate the space. Instead, on entering, a visitor's eye is often drawn first to the towering bookcases full of manga available to read. This café draws customers looking for a place of solace and comfort and the presence of cats helps encourage that atmosphere; the cats are not meant to be the main focus of customers.

This particular construction of the *iyashi* atmosphere, with an emphasis on home and care, leads to an experience for visitors in which they are able to be in public, but do not have to communicate. They can behave in a way more akin to how they behave at home, reading a book of a *manga* (Japanese comic book) or even take a nap. The more comfortable with the café a visitor is, the more casual their behavior in the café tends to be; while new or infrequent visitors are more likely to sit at a table, regulars often curl up on the floor, and wrap blankets around themselves. More than just a sense of home, however, animal cafés create an atmosphere that encourages a particular kind of relaxation that is usually limited to a home, one that is about complete non-productivity. Animal cafes often have *manga* available to read, but not serious

literature, as if to encourage reading that is only for fun. The softness of the couches and the cushions on the floor encourage visitors not just to sit, but to lounge. Visitors do not think of other café visitors as houseguests, for whom they would have to be entertaining and invested in their comfort, but simply as other people relaxing, as they are, in a way they are usually more comfortable relaxing at home.

Thus, the animal café brings together people who do not just want to relax, but want to relax in a way that is seen and shared with each other. As I have said already, *iyashi* is not just about disconnection from stresses, but outwards connection as well, and animal cafés are effective as bringing these two parts together as the people in them find refuge from sources of stress and share that positive affect with others. Part of the healing effect comes from the awareness that the visitor is not alone in facing these kinds of struggles; his or her peers are facing similar challenges and find the animal café soothing for the same reasons. The animals move through this shared space, furthering the affective experience and drawing another type of connections between visitors, who may not have much direct contact with each other but are connected by their shared care of the animals. The kind of communication that happens through the shared engagement with the affective atmosphere of the animal café may be non-verbal, but that does not necessarily hinder a social connection, and, in fact, may further one that is unburdened by the expectations of human interaction.

2.7 CONCLUSION: THE GOAL OF IYASHI

I have explored what led to a demand for *iyashi* and how it is created in the café space, but that leaves the question of the goal of healing, of *iyashi*? Yumiyama argues that "healing addresses

the problem of meaninglessness in a direct and concrete way so that the individual actually feels the significance of life, whereas salvation addresses the same problem from a more intellectual standpoint" (Yumiyama 1995, 272). The need for healing overrode the need for salvation when meaninglessness on a personal, daily level reached the heights it has risen to in Japan over the last twenty years. But how does one define meaninglessness, and what is the goal of making it possible for individuals to address the meaninglessness of their lives with temporary fixes of iyashi? Iyashi, by its very definition as healing, implies the existence of a problem that needs to be addressed. By tracing the meaning of *iyashi*, it is clear that this problem has become more and more concrete, moving from a sense of lack of religious connection towards a more defined sense of lack of sociality and emotional connection with others, and the academic literature on Japan has made a clear connection of this social problem to particular socio-economic conditions in Japanese society today. Like hostess clubs and other intimacy businesses before it, studying the animal café can tell us more about the culture of the Japan that it evolved in than just that people in Japan enjoy positive affective experiences. The demand for iyashi is tied to a broader societal concern with disaffection, alienation and a general sense of social precarity.

Iyashi seems like a solution to the problems caused by Japan's long-term recession and the changes in its social structure that have led to issues of precarity. But do iyashi businesses help solve these problems? Are they challenging this structural shift, reflecting the Japanese public's demands for social healing, or are they simply providing healing in such a way that shifts responsibility for emotional care onto individual Japanese workers so they remain productive enough to maintain the established system? What are the goals of the people who are building these businesses and the employees who provide the labor that creates the *iyashi* atmosphere? These are the questions I turn my attention to next.

3.0 ANIMAL CAFÉ OWNERS: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Kaori opened one of Tokyo's first cat cafés in March of 2007. Her father's dentistry office had provided the family with an income, but when she was forced by her father's ill health to find a new source of income to support her family, she had converted his office space into a small café where people could come to relax with a drink while surrounded by cats. She did not have a plan or goal for the future of her business; she wanted to do something that she enjoyed and could have fun with, and she liked cats and thought other people would enjoy spending time with them too. Running the business was about having fun, as she did have savings to fall back on, and having something to do while she decided her next step after her father had to shut down his business. Six months into her new venture, the media interest in cat cafés led reporters of all stripes – from magazines to television and radio – to her business and that, she laughingly told me, is when it got scary. Having opened her business without much thought to it long-term profitability, thinking only of her interest in cats and of helping her father, she was delightfully surprised at her sudden success. A business that she had not expected to last much more than year became an established part of the cat café boom. Even with this success, Kaori continued to see her café simply as a fun way to make some money.

It was on March 11, 2011, four years after she first opened her business, that her understanding of her café and what she was doing as a business owner underwent a drastic

change. On that day, she watched the television coverage of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami with shock (*shōgeki*) and began to wonder if what she was doing with her café made any sense. As she told me, "I thought about whether or not running a business like this was doing any good...Is it okay to play with cats and drink tea and laugh, when people in the east are suffering and dying? I thought about that. I thought about closing my shop. Really. Because I did not have to do it in order to eat." Her café was still closed the following day for inspection but over the course of the day, her regulars began to arrive. A lot of them. She realized she could not close her business because, "Everyone lives alone, in Tokyo. Everyone's becoming anxious (*fuan*). Even more so, with the earthquake. Everyone's becoming afraid. Not moving about, watching television, it's like they're becoming depressed (*utsu*). I heard people say that they wanted to talk to someone and even though their relatives aren't nearby, they can come here. Here, it's okay not to watch television. It's okay to be with a cat, and drink tea, and chat with people. And I realized that this sort of place is an important one, in Tokyo."

Kaori's realization of the importance of animal cafés in Japan provides an insight into Tokyo's boom in animal cafés. That her original motivation was entrepreneurial and a way to make money (and she, in fact, had family savings as a buffer if the business was not a success) in no way detracts from the fact that animal cafés meet an important social need for Japanese customers – a need that has arisen because of the very same economic adversity that drove the owners' own actions. And the success of the businesses further reinforces this interpretation. As customers patronized these businesses, animal cafés were first a fad, then a booming business model and, today, a relatively common and accepted sight on the streets of the urban centers of Japan.

Considering the motivations of the young Japanese entrepreneurs, of a similar age and background to their customers, who first created and ran Japan's cat and other animal cafés, provides insight into the way that the state of precarity in Japan affects those with the resources to capitalize on the increased opportunities for entrepreneurship. The challenges and issues of life and sociality in Japan today are not limited to those in the "precariat," a term applied to a class of people whose life condition is defined by their sense of precariousness. The decisions of people, even those like café owners who have access to stable work and successful futures, are affected by the social and economic considerations that are a consequence of life in a "precarious Japan," to use Anne Allison's term (2013). These business owners have had relative success in Japan's shift towards a more flexible labor regime, as they have the resources and connections to leave behind work in Japan's high-stress, decreased-stability corporate world and take advantage of the opportunities to explore new avenues for marketization brought by Japan's neoliberal discourse.

Faced with similar issues of precarity as their peers, these business owners have the ability to reorient themselves in innovative ways and succeed in a challenging economy. At the same time, animal café owners, largely in their 30s and early 40s, come from the same generation that has been hardest hit by the shift towards economic flexibility and the attendant high-risk situation that leaves many young Japanese workers in. Even as they are driven by their own entrepreneurial interests, they recognize themselves as performing a service for their fellow Japanese and creating a community for people just like themselves, facing a precarity of sociality, and they place value in the service they see themselves as providing. The marketization of sociality is a consequence of neoliberal social shifts yet the entrepreneurs behind it expressed a primary interest in offering an experience that serves the community, instead of just exploiting

customer need. Their goal is not just to find a way to achieve financial success, but to make their work meaningful, and they have found meaning through the offer of social support to their peers. During my interviews with café owners, they were clear that they do not see themselves as performing community service, they see themselves as entrepreneurs and businesspeople, yet they consistently expressed concern for the social welfare of their fellow citizens and cited these concerns as a major factor in their motivations for opening these sorts of businesses. They are not just interested in making money off the emotional needs of their visitors; they are invested in creating a place that can help them deal with these life stresses.

The issue of meaningful work has become increasingly important to the younger generation, forced into new realms of economic endeavor by changing labor patterns, struggling to make sense of what kind of career they actually want. Yoshitaka Mōri, who does research on the *freeter* phenomenon, argues that there is a population of young people who engage in more insecure labor because of the freedom it offers, in contrast to the corporate system that keeps workers in "golden handcuffs" (2005), though more recent scholarship does note that what was once a lifestyle choice has become an economic necessity for many (Allison 2009a). As I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, while this generation may feel unmoored and betrayed by the loss of the corporate stability of their parents' generation that does not necessarily mean that they want the work lives that their parents had. They are more open to work that may not be stable as long as it is meaningful. Gabriella Lukacs argues in her forthcoming book that "workers' search for meaningful work drives innovations in capitalist accumulation" and that the digital economy evolved as a consequence of that search, a connection she explores through analysis of new Internet career paths in Japan that promise workers new careers that will lead to a good life (Forthcoming Manuscript). This search is also

driving the entrepreneurs who have opened Japan's animal cafés; they are willing and even eager to explore new business opportunities because they believe they will allow them to do worthwhile work.

The dual motivations of these business owners, and the contradictions and convergences between those aims, is the focus of this chapter. For café owners, they help make a "good life" for themselves by integrating their entrepreneurial drives and interest in serving their community. These are the considerations that the conceivers/originators of Japan's cat cafés brought to bear on their decisions to become the owners of a service business. This chapter explores how the current economic situation, and the related effects on labor relations, affected business owners' considerations about their own economic success and stability, what led them to conceptualize the exact business model that was developed, and how they conceive of the role they play in society and in the lives of their customers. I explore what makes the work they do meaningful to them and how they have incorporated those motivations into the design of the cafés.

This study of café owners' motivations will help clarify why animal cafés emerged in this particular moment in Japanese history and what they offer to participants that is different from what is offered by other types of businesses that commoditize sociality, such as host and hostess club and maid cafés. As discussed in the previous chapter, despite the media discourse that portrayed cat and other animal cafés as novel Japanese inventions, animal cafés are influenced by other business models in Japan that turned intimate interactions into commodity exchanges. Specifically, they are driven by a consumer demand for *iyashi*, healing, experiences, to counter feelings of anxiety and disaffection, which in turn is a response to the sense of precarity resulting from in the changing economic situation in Japan. Neoliberal economic restructuring, which

began to introduce flexibility in the labor market even before the economic bubble burst, created a situation in which Japanese people, particularly the younger generation most affected by labor restructuring, experience a sense of precarity that has spread from economic precarity into precarities of sociality and life itself.

This chapter will focus on the entrepreneurs who start animal cafés, and how they understand these conditions under which they brought into being this precise business model. Over the course of my fieldwork, I interviewed and observed eight animal café owners and four café managers who worked without the supervision of an owner. We discussed their backgrounds, the kinds of decisions that led them to open this type of business, who they are trying to reach through their business, and how they go about creating the atmosphere necessary to attain that goal. The majority of Tokyo animal café owners are male, having had the resources to back their entrepreneurial endeavors, but women, like Kaori, who can draw on family resources also have a presence among Tokyo's café owners. The business owners I met also had very close and personal relationships with their customers and the animals that lived in the café. I only encountered two cases in which the café owner was a small businessman with other commercial properties and he allowed a manager to run the business; in those situations, the managers' vision for the animal café was generally given free rein. This made it possible for me, as a researcher, to have excellent access to the business itself and ample opportunities to observe the work and dedication that business owners put into their businesses.

The majority of my informants had had little to no previous experience running a café or similar business, and had no formal training with animal care or experience working with animals professionally before they started their businesses. They are relatively young, in their 30s and 40s, running a business in which they empathized with the problems and concerns of

their customers, who were from the same age group. Many of them had previously worked fulltime jobs in offices, jobs that would have been considered the ideal working situation only one generation earlier. However, they did not have the patience or willingness to put up with the highly stressful atmosphere, one with little respect for workers, and chose to leave instead. In becoming small business owners, they did not necessarily decrease their workload, but they left behind much of the anxiety that came from being compliant with the wishes of their supervisors. To be a diligent cat café owner means that, in addition to the many considerations of a business owner, the animals also require continuous care, and most owners I spoke with arrived early in the morning, though most cafés opened at mid-day, to clean and inspect the health of each animal. The majority of the customer care, explaining café rules, delivering drinks, encouraging interaction between customer and animals, and accepting payment is done by the part-time employees, but owners will perform these tasks during quieter periods of the day when fewer employees are scheduled to work. Every owner to whom I spoke, who worked regularly without a manager, told me they worked well over eight hours a day and, as animals need to be cared for every day, seven days a week. Yet they described the work as more meaningful to them than their previous jobs, and they were happy with the success they had found for themselves.

3.1 THE GROUND IN WHICH THE SEED OF THE CAT CAFÉ IS PLANTED – BECOMING A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

The shift to an economic system based on labor deregulation and increasingly flexible employment has had positive effects for some and negative effects for many others in Japan, and globally (Borovoy 2012, Gershon 2011, Brown 2006, Harvey 2007). The positives of such a

change have largely been argued, by scholars and in the mass discourse, to be in the realm of increased freedom and opportunity for entrepreneurship. Even as there is a surge in popularity in popular social science books and self-help guides touting entrepreneurship as a way out of the confinement of the Japanese corporation and young workers are encouraged to take advantage of the freedom to explore the new avenues for economic success, there are many more workers who are faced with the negative effects of these changes, only able to find "non-regular" employment as part-time, temporary or contract labor, working in the increasingly economically-central service and sales industries. Animal café owners represent a segment of the younger generation that is able to successfully restructure their careers in the face of dissatisfaction with their previous career tracks. They are both willing and able to leave behind stable jobs and accept the risk of small-business ownership because they believe it will offer them more meaningful work, and thus more pleasure in what they devote their energy to.

The animal café owners I met during my fieldwork in Tokyo have been successful in taking advantage of the new opportunities provided by the shift towards entrepreneurship and the new market opportunities in the increasingly important service sector. Those who decide to start their own businesses had the economic and social capital to take advantage of these opportunities. While entrepreneurs shape their own lives more than office workers might, they must make their choices from "among the forms of life available to them" (Rose 1989, 230) and if one does not have access to the education, support and guidance or capital necessary for an individual to break out on his or her own, then those ways of living are not available. Typically, café owners come from successful backgrounds, with good college educations, and have had fairly successful careers before starting their own businesses. This mean that they tend to have savings to draw on, are seen as promising candidates from bank lenders, and are more attractive

as tenants for property owners who were renting space. However, these opportunities do not insulate them from the problems of precarity that have become pervasive in Japan today.

There is a gendered component as well in terms of who is able to succeed entrepreneurially. In order to open one's own business, it is necessary to first raise capital and men in Japan are more likely to have access to sources of capital than women. Women are at a disadvantage in this context in many countries (Song 2014). Men are more likely to have had well-paying jobs and savings to draw on, as well as more likely to be successful with bank loan applications. The female owners I interviewed, who made up half of my sample group, all drew on family support to establish their businesses. Kaori, the female cat café owner introduced at the beginning of this chapter, inherited the commercial space from her father so did not need outside funding to establish a business there. Women are also likely to draw on the funding of their spouses; the owner of Tabby's credits her husband's well-paying job for providing her start-up capital and the owners of Dōbutsuen, a mixed species animal café, are a married couple running a family business. However, women are still more likely to be managers or café staff than the owners (for a deeper exploration of this topic, see Robinson 2015).

Café owners are not just attracted to the opportunities of freedom through owning their own business; they are also rejecting a more traditional path to economic success. The option of full-time corporate employment is no longer a job that offers the stability, security and other benefits that once made it a desirable career direction (and even when it was, those benefits were largely restricted to men). The labor deregulation of the 1990s had led to "restructuring," as deep cuts and layoffs is termed, throughout the corporate world, drastically increasing the sense of precariousness even for full-time laborers. Many café owners worked for years in corporate offices and left to start their own businesses when they became disillusioned with their bosses

and the stress of their jobs. Hideki, who owns Tokyo's first cat café, hated that his employers seemed to not care about their workers and he tired of watching friends suffer through lay-offs. Manabu, who owns two successful cat cafés, realized that his dog was developing bald spots from stress because he was never home to take care of it. The realization that his work had become all-consuming and yet still unfulfilling was his impetus to try something new. Other owners, like Tetsuya, simply find office jobs uninteresting and are driven to seek out work that they find fulfilling. The fact that many café owners worked in office jobs further feeds their sympathy for their customers; they understand the stresses that drive them to animal cafés because, in their own way, their problems with the corporate world drove them to animal cafés as well. They are very aware of the plight of people like their coworkers who were still trapped in those high stress workplaces, unable to break away.

When my informants described the factors that influenced their decisions to become animal café owners, they described both their own personal economic considerations and why a small business in the service industry seemed like a smart career decision. In addition, they also identified the social problems that they saw around themselves and how they believed their cafés could help address those problems. During interviews, owners tending to point to particular experiences or moments of realization that caused them to decide to open a business based on friendly interactions with animals. Many were already thinking about making a career change, but the decision to open an animal café was often instigated by the realization that their peers, struggling with what owners identified as stress or depression (which I connect to issues of precarity), would benefit from the opportunity to socially engage with animals.

The first cat café in Tokyo, Kitty Home, was opened in 2004 by a former office worker, Hideki, who had had a comfortable job working for a gaming corporation assisting game

creators. He had spent his career observing their high stress lives, hunched over computers, and noticed that they tried to enliven their small office booths with pictures of cute things, like cats playing. And he watched many of those same hard working employees be laid off, when his company went through "restructuring" and reduced its workforce by a third. He feels that "companies in Japan are treating their employees very poorly, causing people to not want to work for them and feel stressed out." He became disenchanted with the corporate world, and what it demanded from workers. His first effort to establish an independent business was a small gaming corporation that he set up with a partner, but his partner moved away and he needed a new project. He had visited Taiwan with his then-girlfriend in 2003 and they had both been intrigued by Taiwanese cat cafés, the first cat cafés in the world, which are essentially normal cafés in which the owner's cats are free to roam around. Hideki's girlfriend insisted that Japan would benefit from a similar type of business.

While Hideki's inspiration of his business plan was a visit to Taiwan, his goal was to create a business in Tokyo that was to the Taiwanese cafés as a Starbucks is to a *kissaten* (a budget coffee shop). He focused on creating an establishment aimed at the kind of game company employees he had once worked with, offering them more of the stress relief that they had turned to pictures and videos of cats for. His girlfriend pushed him, however, to think in terms of a place that would be appealing to more people than just office workers. He decided to place the cat café in a type of space in which relaxation could be fostered. The business model had to accommodate the food and safety laws in Japan. Selling drinks where cats roam freely wasn't allowed, and he had to establish a time-based payment instead. Hideki's focus was on creating a place of relaxation, where highly stressed workers could come to decompress. He told me, "I wanted to create a casual environment instead of something that only people who are

deeply into cats want to come to." He told me he was trying to create a quiet place in the middle of a noisy area. He did not want to create a place that would only appeal to cat enthusiasts but create a relaxed place where people, lacking the opportunity to relax with cats in their own homes, could come and hang out. He sees the cuteness of cats as the antidote to the stresses of work.

Kaori opened a cat café that was not the first cat café in Japan (though it certainly predated the cat café boom by a number of years), but she told me she had no knowledge of the existence of other cafés when she conceived of her business. When she decided to turn her father's office space into a cat café, her decision was influenced by her desire to use the space for something that she thought people would enjoy, and she looked to her personal experience with cats for inspiration. When her father had first become ill, and was confined to a sickbed, unable to work or care for himself, he fell into a deep depression. Kaori was at a loss for how to help him, but discovered that her daughter's kitten began to sneak into his room and play with him, which Kaori fully credits for her father's emotional recovery. Influenced by her belief in the healing powers of time spent with cats, she decided to turn the available office space into a place to offer that sense of *iyashi* to others. In the beginning, she was thinking largely about the fact that many Japanese people do not have the opportunity to interact with cats, as many apartments in Tokyo do not allow pets. But, it was the crisis of the Tōhoku earthquake that made her realize how people need to experience these positive feelings on a day-to-day basis. Just as the Kobe earthquake had launched the term *iyashi* into Japanese discourse fifteen years previously, this earthquake helped Kaori realize that in times of crisis, many Tokyoites had no source of social support to turn to help them deal with the anxiety brought on by life events.

Similar motivations inspired even those business owners who opened their cafés during the animal café boom. They did not have to break new ground in the same way as those owners who opened the first cafés, but their stories revealed to me that they often put just as much thought into creating a space that would serve their community. Takako was inspired to open her animal café, in her case a rabbit café, because of the realization that there was a real need in Japanese society for "restful places." The experience that brought her to this realization was the unfortunate suicide of a friend whose daughter went to the same school as her daughter. Following that incident, she started to take notice of the many times trains were delayed because incidents of personal injury (*jinshin jiko*), which is well known code for a suicide on the train lines. After one such incident, she got off her train and went directly to a real estate agent to discuss her idea for a café, a place where people could go to recuperate when the outside world became too stressful.

For Takako, her goal when she designed her business was to create a place where it would be okay if you did not "read the air ($k\bar{u}ki$ wo yomu)", as she believes having such a place has become necessary to Japanese life. The term " $k\bar{u}ki$ wo yomu (to read the air)" was first used by the essayist Yamamoto Shichihei in his 1984 book "The Research of Air" (" $K\bar{u}ki$ " no $Kenky\bar{u}$) to describe the way in which individuals work to get a sense of what behavior would considered to be proper and attempt to conform to it. Paul Roquet notes, in a book on ambiance and media in Japan, that the emphasis on reading the air in recent decades reveals that "atmospheric cues have gradually come to be recognized as less a "natural" phenomenon than a product of social forces," and in fact, the increased emphasis on obeying unspoken guidelines that began around the time Yamamoto's book was published betrays that "the idea of a collective

"Japanese" atmosphere governing all social behavior began to appear less and less convincing, despite continued assertions to the contrary" (2015, 8).

Reading the air was a phrase that came up repeatedly during my fieldwork as a way of explaining why normal, everyday socialization causes significant stress among young Japanese. As Roquet points out, the discourse the inability of some to properly read the air "places the burden of conformity squarely on the shoulders of the person who cannot or will not adapt" (2015, 15). Keiko, a regular cat café visitor and a key informant of mine, told me that while the previous generation emphasized being in synthesis and alignment with everyone else, the current generation feels less in touch with the "right" way of behaving and feels the burden of instead attempting to judge without words the needs and wishes of those around them. The "proper" way of doing things is not apparent and more responsibility is placed on the individual to figure out how they are meant to fit themselves into society more broadly. Takako considers the fact that from a very young age one has to continuously read the air in order to make and maintain good human relations (ningen kankei) to be stressful and her goal in opening her business was to offer individuals a break from those expectations.

Tetsuya, the owner of Catacular, opened his cat café in the midst of the cat café boom, and he was interested in developing a new sort of space, offering something akin to pet counseling. He had some experience working with people in terminal care and noticed that they would talk with cats, almost as if they were counselors. Pet counseling was not popular in Japan, but just as he was thinking about the value of contact with animals, the cat café boom began in Tokyo. His business as he imagined it was "a café with people who wanted to discuss things where there were people to listen to their talking." However, there were not enough trained counselors available, so he shifted his target away from customers in need of trained counseling

and towards those who would enjoy and benefit from spending time with cats. His focal clientele were people who lived alone and could not have pets in their homes. He gave up on his idea of offering counseling and focused on becoming a normal cat café, but he never lost sight of the therapeutic benefits that his café could offer to his customers.

Testuya is also a good example of a café owner who was searching for fulfilling, meaningful work. He was forthright in admitting that he believed in the business model of cat cafés, and the opportunity to make money. But he also made it clear that his primary goal was not just financial success. He had had a stable job at a sales company but had found it uninteresting. He found the idea of making a place that would give people enjoyment appealing. In rethinking his business model, he responded to economic pragmatism, as therapists would be difficult and expensive to incorporate into his business model, and to the needs and interests of his customer base. He realized that people were attracted to cat cafés because it was a place they could come and not have to talk, but could instead just be with each other and with the animals, so he refocused on that so that he could offer an appealing experience to a wider group of people.

These people went into small business ownership for many of the same reasons that people worldwide do so – for the opportunity to be one's own boss, for the financial opportunities that come from being the sole owner of a successful business, because the resources to do so were available and there was a market for what was on offer. Yet it is the particulars of life in an economically and socially precarious Japan that influenced the people drawn to this particular business. Many cat and other animal café owners do not come from backgrounds that trained them to run their own enterprises; rather than aiming their careers towards entrepreneurship, they have turned to entrepreneurship to escape the new laissez faire corporate culture that has developed in Japan. The awareness of these problems also influenced

what they chose to do once they decided to open a business; while they were interested in creating a business that would earn a good income, they also expressed a deep awareness of and investment in helping people and offering them something that was missing in their lives. I do not wish to overstate the socially-responsive goals of animal café owners. Just as cafés varied in their focus, on relaxation or excitement, on socialization or solitude, the owners varied themselves in terms of their personal investment with customers and how they balance the not incompatible goals of money-making and social benefit.

3.2 HOW OWNERS SEE THEIR CAFÉS IN THE CONTEXT OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY JAPAN

The decision to open a cat, or other animal, café is affected by many considerations: who they are trying to attract as customers, how they were generating revenue, and exactly what kind of positive affect would be created. This section explores these additional variables within the context of the current Japanese social situation, examining how café owners oriented themselves in relation to other affective business and to the *iyashi* boom. Animal cafés are part of the *iyashi* boom, both because the affect that circulates in an animal café can most clearly and is most commonly defined as *iyashi* and because the societal discourse around *iyashi* considers animal cafés part of that trend, but they are also a distinct business model, that grew out of a particular socioeconomic context, shaped by the concerns of the people targeted as customers. The previous chapter engaged with the history that the animal café developed out of, but this section focuses on how café owners understand the work they put into their business ventures and the role their work serves in society more broadly. It also investigates how café owners understand

the lives and experiences of the customers they are trying to attract, an exploration that offers a better understanding of how these business owners experience life in a precarious Japan.

The earliest café owners particularly did not know if businesses of this type could succeed, but had a strong sense that offering a place of relaxation or a haven from the stresses of life would be well received by the public. The *iyashi* boom was well established by the mid-2000s, when these entrepreneurs began opening their animal cafés, and a number of the owners I interviewed recognized that the interest in *iyashi* was a consequence of the kinds of problems that drive customers into animal cafés. Hideki told me that he sees Japan as fundamentally a country that does not recognize workers as important and that trend has continued into the 21st century. That has forced Japan into a position of relying on healing spaces to push back against the stress that workers are forced to accumulate. According to him, "Japan is becoming a society that cannot do without *iyashi* (*iyashi* ga nakereba yatte ikenai shakai)." Businesses like massage parlors and cat cafés are spreading, and he believes that "if the cat café business is thriving, it means that Japan's current situation is not good." The extent of the problems of disaffection and lack of social support are reflected in the popularity of business that attempt to combat those problems.

Yet while some of the business owners I interviewed were clear that what their customers got of the experience in the café was *iyashi*, others were more hesitant to use that term. *Iyashi* carries connotations of relaxation through passivity that not all business owners felt represented the experience that they offer. Many are seeking to construct a space that makes it possible for visitors to feel comfortable chatting with friends, or where they can have the unusual experience of being surrounded by animals. Owners were likely to think about what their cafés offer to customers in terms of what those customers are lacking in other parts of their lives or what their

sources of stress are that they can avoid in the animal café. Both Takako and Hideki cited the need for a place to escape work stress, a particular burden on non-full-time workers whose placement at the bottom of the workplace structure means they are responsible for the satisfaction of everyone above them.

For owners who emphasize the sociality of the space or the connecting to exotic and out of the ordinary experiences, highlighting a sense of *iyashi* is not their primary focus. Yet, even if they do not use the word *iyashi*, they do recognize the emotional positivity that visitors get out of the experience of visiting an animal café. I identify *iyashi* in the café as a type of "absolute background," which Roquet defines as "a unified, coherent, and stable sensory surround" (2015, 52). This background provides a stable framework on which to ground "their sense of ontological security" and it "rests is the background of awareness, often just below the level of conscious attention (52)." The kind of experience that a visitor will have in an animal café is influenced by many factors – whether or not they come with a companion, their level of engagement with employees, animals, or other customers, the length of their stay – but their experience builds on the absolute background of *iyashi*, their sense of restfulness and relaxation. Café owners may not connect to the terminology of *iyashi*, but their discussions of the kind of experience they offer customers indicates a shared sense of the essential root of the animal café experience.

Café owners emphasized that they were trying to offer a social experience that would be restful and relaxing, largely realized through the focus on socializing with animals. A phrase that was used often was "ningen kankei" (human relations), and how they are more often sources of stress than sources of support. These problems of human relations do not mean that animal café visitors want to avoid social interaction, in fact they often feel the opposite, but they are

searching for a type of sociality that was not about taking care of others, but about receiving the positive social support and sense of community that they have trouble finding elsewhere. Kaori noted that this is particularly difficult for people in Tokyo, who have come from elsewhere in Japan in young adulthood, for school or their first job, and they are disconnected from the social support of their family and friends back home. This sense of disconnection from social networks in a growing problem throughout Japan but it is exacerbated for Tokyoites because of the physical distance from friends and family. Japanese people, as do many people around the world, tend to make most of their close friendships during their school years, with those relationships lasting for many years. They may also develop relationships with coworkers who join the same company at the same time as they do, and this is the kind of relationship that is not as available as workers in more contract or temporary work. The reliance on social networking services (SNS) or text messages common among the younger generations also means they rarely meet friends face to face, or speak on the phone with their parents, increasing the lack of a sense of connection (tsunagari). This issue can to Kaori's notice when she realized her patrons had nowhere else to go when the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami; they had a need for a place that was "their own place," where they have some sense of connection to others, a sense of connection that may have been lost when they moved away from their hometowns or is lacking from the unfulfilling, stressful jobs they currently have. This is also exacerbated by the increase in individuals who remain single until later in life, for whom "home" may be only an empty, single room. For these individuals, the animal café can be the place that is "their place" and visitors can spend their time developing relationships with specific animals or with the employees they chat with every time they visit.

Owners' recognition of the kinds of struggles their customers face allowed them to tailor the café experience towards customer demands, making them financially successful. Their empathy for their customers also means that they get pleasure from the belief that they are helping them cope with those struggles. Many owners spend at least part of their day interacting with customers on the café floor, talking with customers or just observing their interactions, and they get to see the positive benefits of the social connections customers make in the animal café. This, in turn, helps them make connections with customers. Kaori told me that "Tokyo is full of people cut off from their friends and family and they come to a place like my café and the presence of animals helps people become close to each other, like close friends (nakama). The animals help create a connection (tsunagari)." She uses the example of a visitor who adopted the sibling of one of her cats, and how it made her feel almost like she was related to the guest, as their pets were siblings. She enjoys the sense of connection to her customers and takes pleasure in the fact that she feels she's helping them connect to each other. At Ikeneko, a cat café, the manager hosts regular game nights, where visitors can play party games and get to know the other regular attendees. In 2014, the owner also gathered regulars together to ring in the New Year together and he told me how he felt he was offering an important service to these regulars, who might not have a better place to celebrate the holiday.

Even in cafés that cater primarily to casual visitors who just drop by for a half hour of relaxation, owners told me they felt they were offering an important service, which makes their work feel meaningful. Cafés, like Hideki's or Manabu's café Whiskers, cater to a larger population of occasional, casual visitors, tourists who will only visit once, or business people on their way home after a long day. Manabu's businesses have become very popular with office workers before they go home. In my discussion with him, he focused on the stress of long days at

work and the need to find a place to relax before heading home to an empty apartment. People need a place where they can go and see familiar faces and, while he hesitates to call it *iyashi*, he told me, "When you go to a place where you go often, you have a place that's your place, I think you become relieved (*hotto suru*)." In a previous generation, Japanese corporate workers might have gone to a bar where they know all the drink servers, but according to Manabu, the number of people who drink alcohol in Japan is decreasing. Manabu differentiates between the "familiarity" customers feel with cat café employees (or drink servers at a bar or a maid café) and friendship, which is deeper. Manabu sees customers as searching out a place to temporarily forget about their daily duties in a relaxing space, full of familiar faces, rather than a close personal connection. The sense of connection comes from feeling that they are recognized, that they are in a space that is their space. It is important to Manabu that he is part of creating a space to meet that need. The more effective these cafés are in serving customers, the more meaningful running these businesses is for café owners. While a café must be successful enough to maintain itself financially, it is truly a success, in the minds of owners, when it serves a purpose for visitors.

3.3 A BUSINESS MODEL DESIGNED TO APPEAL

In the preceding section, I discussed that qualities that the owners identified as lacking in the lives of their customers – a place to call their own, where they could enjoy a sense of community and familiarity, yet also be free to relax and not feel pressured to engage more than they wish to. This section turns to what the animal café owners did to capitalize on the *iyashi* boom in order to create a successful business in terms of what kind of café and business model they envisioned.

They tapped into earlier trends in commodifying *iyashi* and into the Japanese tradition of intimate interactions in a commercial context, but adapted the model of the animal café to fit the ideals of a healing experience sought by their customers at the time they opened their businesses. The business model that café owners established is influenced by earlier businesses that are part of Japan's affect economy, but has been altered to be in line with the need for *iyashi*, which, as discussed in the previous chapter is non-productive relaxation. Specifically, animal cafés offer an opportunity for sociality in a context on non-productivity, where visitors are free to be unproductive in front of others. The owner's vision is for what the animal café be and how it can be of value for visitors is largely expressed through the café design, both the physical interior design and the payment structure and financial model. Animal cafés are designed to be a refuge from the social pressure to be productive, instead of leading visitors to compete for attention, pushing them to engage with others, or even encouraging relaxation so that they will be more productive when they leave the animal café.

Animal café owners opened their businesses during the *iyashi* boom in Japan, and awareness of *iyashi* and the commercial interest in *iyashi* businesses of all kinds in the mid-2000s certainly drove animal café owners interest in creating a relaxing space, intimate but with a low-key level of sociality, to meet customer interest in *iyashi*. However, the business model of the animal café is not structured on earlier *iyashi* business, like chi spot tours or massage parlors, but other businesses that turned intimacy and sociality into a commodity—hostess and host clubs, and maid and butler cafés. Scholars have made the argument that economics and intimacy have always been linked (Zelizer 2005), and in fact that increase in commodified global processes have only intensified the linkage between intimate and personal relations and commodities (Constable 2009). What I am referring to in Japan is businesses that offer

customers a sense of intimacy with a server or entertainer in exchange for their payment to be there.

Businesses that commodify intimacy in this way in Japan go back as far as geisha, but the animal café is more an outgrowth of a type of business that began with hostess clubs, a dominant force during the economic boom period. They functioned as a space for corporate men to participate in masculine bonding through their interactions with each other and the hostess (Allison 1994). Hostess clubs were followed by host clubs, which were more popular during the 1990s. In her research on host clubs, Akiko Takeyama, explored their establishment in connection with the rise of neoliberal thinking in Japan, and the way that hosts turn themselves into commodities to be purchased by women looking for intimacy (2016). These businesses were centered on providing value through the opportunity for intimate connections. Maid cafés, and their cross-gender companions butler cafés, appeared, like animal cafés, as part of the iyashi boom, with their focus on offering visitors care to combat the stress of daily life. Also like animal cafés, they move beyond simple relaxation and also offer a sense of community and sociality. As affective needs have changed, so has the market response and the construction of a sense of community has become an important part of what these businesses offer. In the case of maid cafés, this sociality is based on an alternative form of masculinity, appealing to maid café customers who do not meet the Japanese stereotype of a proper man (Galbraith 2013). However, the decision to offer sociality with animals instead of with people meant that social interactions are less active; instead of focusing on fostering direct engagement, cafes owners have set up a system that fosters a shared sense of *iyashi* through an easy sense of familiarity and comfort that animals foster in humans.

Animal café owners take advantage of the fact that the success of these earlier business models, even on a fairly limited scale, successfully introduced Japanese consumers to the idea of direct exchange of intimate interactions for money, but the business they created also draws on the current demand for iyashi. Animal cafés are connected to these earlier business models in that, like host and hostess clubs and maid cafés, they commodify a social interaction designed to produce a positive affective experience. However, differences in their target clientele, the affect they are focused on creating and the broader cultural trends that they are situating themselves within affects how they structure their business model. The atmosphere that café owners try to construct is not one of productivity, as host and hostess clubs, and to a lesser extent maid cafés, are, but one that takes advantage of broad interest in iyashi and defines itself as a space of unproductivity. Roquet's work on background music makes the interesting point that this kind of music, used to create a particular atmosphere, is used to regular behavior, but how artists have attempted to do so has changed over the decades to reflect different ideals of labor productivity (2015, 25-47). In the creation of the animal café atmosphere, owners are influenced by similar considerations of labor and productivity, designing a feeling that fits today's consumers.

Animal café owners also differentiate their businesses from these other models in how they assess fees, charging money in a way that maintains the business but does not create any tension by pressuring customers to pay more throughout their visit. This connects back to café owners' goal to provide a service for their community, something that makes their work more meaningful. Animal cafés are aimed at a larger swatch of the population than more niche businesses like maid cafés and they are interested in serving a broad population of largely young, largely lacking significant disposable income, people, so café owners focus on providing an experience that is within financial reach of this group. Additionally, owners are trying to provide

an *iyashi* experience and wish to remove any stress that may come from customers having to spend their visits to the café thinking about money. The business models of host and hostess clubs, and maid cafés, are based on traditional commodity exchange, as visitors are paying for the food and drink they consumed, but the prices were obviously and heavily marked up to prices that were justified by the value of the intimate encounter with the host, hostess, or maid. Though visitors pay for a drink or a meal, they are there to enjoy the flirtation of the staff. Visitor have to purchase in order to maintain the interest of the bar or café worker. This is particularly true in host and hostess clubs, where workers will not subtly demand an outlay of money in order to keep that person's attention. It is also part of the maid café experience, though more indirect, as food and drink sets list the interactions with the maid that are included and more expensive choices elicit increased contact.

Café owners are trying to create an experience that is not based on labor or financial exploitation, of the customer, employee or animal, so they have chosen to make access to the café space at the center of the commodity exchange. Customers are paying for time in the café and the animals and human employees are paid to increase the customer enjoyment of being in that space, but the realms of commodity exchange and social interaction are kept mentally separate. Unlike the businesses described above, where personal attention is clearly being offered only in exchange of the customer's outlay of money, the visitor can stop thinking about the cost of the experience once they have agreed on how long they are going to stay. The commodity made available to visitors through time spent in the café is the affective enjoyment of *iyashi*, something that is created through interactions with animals and employees but also through the experience provided by the opportunity to relax away from the outside world. Within the space of the café, all visitors are treated equally, greeted or ignored by the animals according to their

nature and treated like a fellow animal lover by the café staff. Employees apply no pressure to pay more and customers are not constrained from fully taking advantage of the experience by lack of funds. Money is a tool for entry into the unique experience of being in an animal café, but financial concerns are largely left at the door. The owners' decisions in how they designed the café structure was done in order to remove the tension from the encounter, freeing visitors from the responsibility to think about the authenticity of the social interactions that occur inside the café.

As an *iyashi* business, owners place a strong emphasis on allowing customers to feel free from social pressures to be productive. Maid cafés are also spaces of *iyashi*, but they focus on freeing visitors from the social pressures to perform gender roles (Galbraith 2013), whereas animal cafés are interested in freeing customers from the pressures inherent in performing appropriate social behavior more generally. By structuring the encounters in the café around animals, customers do not have to think about how the other individual feels about the conversation, and they are free to be selfish, to focus on their own needs and interests, and are free from the responsibility to be attentive to the needs of others. Customers pay to enter, socialize as little or as much as they wish, and leave, recuperated and more able to face the demands of the world outside the café walls.

Café owners have designed their business in a way to create a packaged experience that is focused on their customers need for a sense of community. Instead of just a business focused on intimate direct encounters such as those in a host or hostess club, animal cafés place more emphasis on sociality than those businesses, and owners and employees work hard to facilitate interactions between customers and animals, and to make the entire café feel friendly and communal, whatever the customer may do with their time there. Interestingly, the activities that

the café owners make available to customers are non-gendered, even though gender is a factor in the café organization as they are more commonly owned by men but entirely staffed by women. When owners spoke with me about the type of customer they were trying to attract, burdened by stress or loneliness, this included both men and women, both of whom need the animal café experience, in their eyes. Yet, owners perceive female workers are more adept at fostering the friendly atmosphere that owners are trying to create. Tetsuya told me that when he conducted staff interviews he look for certain qualities – friendliness, the ability to carry a conversation, empathy – and he found that more common in women, which is why all his staff are female.

There are many practical decisions that café owners make in their specific café design to foster certain kinds of experiences. While all animal cafés are structured in the ways discussed above, animal café owners also make decisions about how to differentiate their business from other animal cafés. As iyashi contains both a sense of relaxation and a sense of connection to something outside oneself, this allows owners leeway in what kind of atmosphere they want to create, on a spectrum of purely about relaxation to purely about having fun, with a crossing axis of emphasizing social interaction or solitary enjoyment. Any of these experiences can be a type of *iyashi* experience; they will vary in what kind of customer is attracted to that particular style. There are also practical considerations, particularly in terms of animal care. For example, the space must be organized in a way that animals are not overstimulated, which could lead to hostile responses to visitors. Also, furniture choices that emphasize coziness, such as plush sofas and thick rugs, are harder to clean and will require more human labor to maintain a polished appearance. Employee hiring decisions are also significant, as the employee acts as the bridge between customer and animal, facilitating all social interactions that occur in an animal café and must be aware of and attuned to a visitor's needs so that the visitor never feels they have to ask for anything. Businesses can only be successful if the owners can successfully understand the niche they are filling and present the business in the right way.

To demonstrate this, I will describe the design decisions made by a few café owners to demonstrate how they created their own niche. Each owner focuses on providing an iyashi experience but they target different customers and offer slightly different forms of relaxation. This is demonstrated in particular by two cat cafés only one block from each other in a central Tokyo location. Both were established around five years ago and both are thriving. Hideki, discussed earlier in this chapter, was the owner of one; after the success of his first cat café, he opened a second location in a more central Tokyo location a few years later. The other cat café opened around the same time period just down the street. When I asked Hideki if there were any issues with another cat café being located so nearby, he told me that it was a completely different kind of business and there was no competition. This statement did not initially make sense to me. Both locations are cat cafés, businesses that charge customers by the hour to spend time in a space with cats. Both are affected by the same health and safety laws that make it impossible to sell drinks in a space with animals so both do not offer consumables but include access to a vending machine so visitors can get their own drinks. Both cafés include free access to entertainment goods, like a video game system, books and manga, to enhance customers' enjoyment. Yet closer investigation reveals the many different choices the owners made in designing their business that makes it possible for them to both offer iyashi to customers while not competing for the exact same customers.

Hideki's goal when he opened his café, Kitty Home, was to create a place of deep relaxation, a design that reflected his goal to create a place for highly stressed workers to find refuge from the noise of their everyday lives. In designing the space, he filled it with couches,

and even beds, and all the furniture is thickly padded, with an emphasis on comfort. The lights are somewhat dimmed, and it is not uncommon to see visitors curled up and dozing around the café. There is a huge collection of manga, Japanese comic books, shelved throughout the café, with a list of new additions at the front, available to any visitor and I observed many visitors who spent the entirety of their time in the café reading manga and not interacting with anyone. There are card and board games for the customers who come in small groups. Hideki's goal is to offer customers any sort of enjoyable, relaxing experience they might desire. The cats are part of the decor of the place more than the focus. They are free to roam throughout the room, but the majority of them stay close to the cat climbing towers or to their cages. Customers will reach out to pet a cat as it passes by them, or spend a few minutes standing by a structure upon which a number of cats are reclining, but a relatively small percentage of the customers' time in the café is spend in direct contact with the animals. The cats enhance the relaxation experience but the many other aspects of the café design create it. Hideki's vision for a business like this was a space for relaxation with cats in it and that is the space he created.

The owner of the other café, Ikeneko, by contrast, wanted to create a café where the emphasis is on interacting with animals. He includes seating in the café, but it is vinyl covered benches instead of cushiony sofas, located along the edges of the room, creating an open space in the center, in order to keep customer focus on the animals relaxing in the center of the room. Visitors spend little time just sitting around; instead they are sitting or kneeling on the floor, close to wherever a cat may be sitting or sleeping, and taking photographs or trying to get the animal to play. The employees have been trained to continually engage with customers, showing them how to keep the attention of a particular cat or demonstrating how it likes to be petted. Regular café visitors get to know each other and the staff fairly well and are easy to identify

when they enter the café, as they immediately start chatting in a friendly manner with the staff and the cats are happy to come over and play, instead of behaving standoffishly, as they often do with casual café visitors. As I mentioned earlier, the owner hosts events regularly during their off hours, like game nights or an overnight party to ring in the New Year, which also encourages the development of a sense of community. A café like this can be just as much a refuge as Kitty Home is but where Kitty Home is "a quiet place in the middle of a noisy area," Ikeneko is a place of community and socialization for people who find they lack that in their life. And thus, despite the outward similarities in customer type – stressed workers, both male and female, in their 20s and 30s – each type of customer is seeking out a somewhat different type of experience to meet their need for *iyashi* and these two businesses can coexist.

The other way café owners distinguish their café is by emphasizing a home-like feeling or emphasizing a more exotic experience. Tetsuya's café, Catacular, looks like a particularly brightly colored living room. His concession to the café role are foot tall tables throughout the room so customers have somewhere to put their drinks while they are in the café, but visitors spend more of their time lounging on bean bag chairs or relaxing on the sofa. Cats move throughout the room, occasionally curling up near someone but often running after toys. Employees are skilled at engaging a cat with a toy and then passing the toy to a customer who had tried unsuccessfully to get a cat's attention on their own. Many of the customers I spoke to in this café were people who had grown up with cats and being in a space like this is about connecting to the positive feelings they had in childhood; the café acts like a home away from home for people whose real home may be far from Tokyo. In contrast, some animal cafés offer customers the opportunity to interact with animals they would generally have little opportunity to interact with. Some cat cafés are filled with a wide variety of cat breeds, often rare ones. Some

customers are excited by the opportunity to spend time with an unusual type, like a Bombay or a Munchkin, and only spend their time in the café interacting with that type of animal. The expansion of the animal café market from cats to animals like rabbits, owls or other birds has largely been about a movement towards offering visitors a more unusual experience, a chance to interact with the natural world in a way that they would not normally be able to. As Merry White said in her book on Japanese cafés, "the importance of diversity in café culture cannot be overstated. While predictability, comfort, and a kind of nesting make cafés popular hangouts, the possibilities for novelty engage customers too" (2012, 65).

3.4 THE DECISION TO STRUCTURE CAFÉS AROUND ANIMALS

The most significant design choice that café owners made when they decided to create a business built around a relaxed sense of sociality and shared non-productivity was the decision to structure the experience around interactions with animals. The specifics of how human-animal interactions appeal to animal café customers is the focus of a later chapter. Here I focus on what owners believe the inclusion of animals adds to the café experience they are offering. Many business owners referenced the therapeutic effects that they believe interactions with non-human animals offer, which led them to see animals as an effective way to offer *iyashi* to customers. Others raised the idea that socialization with animals would help with patrons' issues of loneliness, offering a contrast to stressful everyday encounters. They identified animals as a distinction in business model type that would appeal to their customers and offer the kinds of experiences – socialization, relaxation, *iyashi*—that they would be willing to pay for.

Café owners told me that they realized cute animals are popular in Japan and people would want to come to a café for a chance to interact with them, but they also believe animals play an important role in helping people relax and release stress. This is largely based on their own experiences with animals, as animal café owners share with their customers a love of animals. This also means that they take pleasure from interacting with the animals in their own cafés, another way this kind of work is more enjoyable than more stable office work. They also recognize that interaction with animals is also, for many customers, about nostalgia and a connection to their childhood home, where many grew up with pets. Tetsuya's theory about the increase in animal cafés has to do with the lack of opportunity to interact with animals more generally, as Tokyo children often do not have pets at home. His café is one of the few I visited that were open to very young children, as young as five years, and this gives very young children the opportunity to learn how to interact with animals, a skill they might not otherwise develop.

Café owners often, though not always, have positive experiences with animals in their own lives that help convince them of the benefit of time spent with animals. Running an animal café leads to many owners having a close relationship with the animals that he or she has known since birth. That strong bond is part of what keeps the owner so involved and invested in the positive atmosphere and comfort and relaxation levels in the café more generally. It is one thing to decide to make money by giving people the opportunity to spend time with cats and another to watch people spend time with what at least two owners referred to as their "children." Owners are drawn into the lives and concerns of their customers, especially their regulars, by their shared love of the animals in the space.

A common reason an animal café owner chose to build a café around a specific animal, a cat or a rabbit or something more exotic, was that they personally had a positive relationship

with that species. They had positive experiences in their lives with animals and believed that animals could offer something beneficial to overstressed workers. Tetsuya, the cat café owner, was interested in building a space that would appeal to cat lovers like himself. Tokyoites lack opportunities to have relationships with animals. More than that, Tetsuya argued to me, cat lovers do not have an outside life; they do not meet other cat lovers while walking their animals like dog owners do and there is no place to build a community. He ties the rise in interest in having this community to the successful online communities that have brought cat lovers together digitally and he has found that his café functions well as a space for cat lovers to gather and talk about how cute cats are, to touch cats and to share information with others. More than that, his work with the terminally ill had shown him how interaction with cats had soothed people. Another middle-aged male café owner, Toru, runs a café outside of Tokyo, which has a variety of exotic animals, from owls to snakes and lizards. He was interested in creating a place that would gather people who were interested in the animals that he was - he started with snakes and expanded to other species over time. Moving beyond domesticated pets offers business owners the opportunity to focus on offering customers a more unusual experience over a primarily relaxing one, as well as breaking into a part of the market that was not as heavily saturated. Junichi, who owns one of the few owl cafés in Tokyo, recognized that many animal café customers were people who worked long hours and wanted a break before heading home, and he thought owls, a nocturnal animal, would be the right animal to connect with these visitors.

Café owners also recognize that spending time in an animal café can also help with feelings of loneliness and disconnection, not just because of the emotional benefits of contact with animals but also because visitors know that all the people around them share their love of animals. When my informants spoke of wanting to create an important new kind of space for visitors, they focused on wanting to create a broad community of anyone who loved animals. Numerous interview subjects mentioned that their visitors often come to spend time with animals in the café because they could not have pets at home. This recognition of the relatively limited means of their target customers (compared to the customers of businesses like host clubs and maid cafés) led most of the owners established fee scales that decreased the longer a visitor stayed in the café, and after visitors pay for three hours, no additional charges are levied, making it possible for people with very limited funds to still spend a significant number of hours in the café. I observed a regular visitor tell Manabu, at his café Whiskers, that he was stepping out of the café to eat and would be returning; Manabu explained to me that he would not charge the man to enter again once he returned, and would instead be able to enjoy the café for several more hours at no additional cost. The good relationship with regulars developed by making these allowances is worth the reduced income from a visitor on a single visit. In this way, animal café owners target customers with some, but perhaps not excessive amounts, disposable income. This is in direct contrast to other types of theme cafés, which are more heavily targeted to those who can afford to pay larger amounts in exchange for the experiences they seek. Animal cafés are positioned as equivalent to a normal outing, accessible to all, not a specialty experience that one has to be willing to dedicate income towards accessing.

Another rationale used by owners to explain their decision to create animal was to help reduce the stray cat population. Many cats end up on the street after their owners decide they do not have the time or skills to properly care for them. Kaori said that sometimes people take in a stray and think they can return it to the wild when it becomes too much of a burden, even though they will have adjusted to the food and warmth. Hideki, when he was conceptualizing an animal café, said "If customers have a way to interact with cats, they are less likely to adopt one for a

while and then let it go stray when the responsibility becomes burdensome." The opportunity to interact with animals is important to many Japanese people but they are often unable to invest properly in their care and these business owners want to offer customers opportunities that are less likely to lead to poor treatment of animals. This is yet another way that café owners see themselves as providing a community service, both to benefit animals and to offer an educational opportunity to customers.

When the earliest animal cafés were established, cats were a clear good choice for such a business. Many Japanese have positive feelings about cats and would appreciate the opportunity to spend time with them, something they could not do at home, and to spend time with other cat lovers. Cats would do well living inside the space of a café, as they do not need the exercise of larger animals, and could be caged when not interacting with customers. The newer types of animal cafés have built on the ideas and successes of cat cafés; having identified the characteristics that appealed to cat café visitors, more recently established businesses could expand the market into more exotic types while still offering "cuteness" and the relaxing comfort of petting soft animals.

3.5 UNSUCCESSFUL CAFÉS

The number of cat cafés in Tokyo today is around half of what it was at the height in 2009. Many cafés would have closed for the same reasons all kinds of small businesses close – high rent, market saturation, poor advertising, among other issues. Yet I found it interesting the businesses that started the cat café boom in Tokyo, the ones that opened initially, having weighed the needs of their consumer base, mostly still exist, while many what opened during the boom years closed

more quickly. While, of course, all of the business owners I met with were invested in opening a business that would be a successful money making venture, they were also attentive to the kinds of issues that their customers may have that would bring them to a business like this and the responsibility they have to the animals that works so hard in the context of the café. While individual owners cannot have complete control over whether or not a business succeeds or fails, I was able to observe certain qualities demonstrated by numerous business owners that facilitated their long term. These qualities include their ability to connect with customers, the attention they give to the animals in their care, their pride of ownership in their ventures, and their understanding of the social role that their businesses play.

The success of certain animal cafés over others was heavily influenced by their ability to connect to customers and offer them the types of experiences that they were looking for. Reputation then can spread by word of mouth. While internet and media presence play an important role in making potential customers aware of these businesses, many of the customers I spoke to first visit a café with a friend, meaning visitors are much more likely to visit cafés with good word of mouth. A quality that customers were often attentive to was that of authenticity; cafés run by people who were actually fellow animal lovers made it easier for visitors to connect to the people who worked there and to connect to the animals, who they could trust were being taken care of. The owners that I interviewed during my fieldwork did appear to care about the needs of their customers, and recognize the kinship between them, and customers responded to that.

Just the connection to customers is important, it is also important for owners to connect to the animals and be invested in their welfare. Many owners have deeply personal relationships with their animals, which lead to strong relationships with their customers. The long hours that must be put into animal care (disease would spread quickly in the confines of an animal café and owners face high veterinary bills if illness is not addressed immediately) help nurture strong bonds with their animals, and can lead to positive feelings for the customers who also demonstrate care for them. More than that, if they do not understand what attracts lovers of animals to a cat café, they are likely to undervalue the contributions of the animals to that atmosphere, and the animals themselves.

I interviewed a former employee of a short-lived cat café who felt that the owner was only interested in making money and had no understanding of what makes a cat café successful. Natsumi, the employee, later went to work for a more successful cat café and spoke with me about the differences she experienced. At her first job, the owner recognized the customer interest in unusual cat species and emphasized one particular breed in particular. However, his primary concern was increasing his income without investing more than he had to, and instead of buying cats from breeders and training them a life in cat café, he did not spay or neuter his cats, as is standard in a cat café, and instead bred them to increase the cat population in the café. He also kept these cats in the café during these sensitive times, and did not pay careful attention to their health, leading to disease spreading across the cats in the café. According to Natsumi, he did not create a positive atmosphere in the café, relying instead on the attraction of the cats to carry the café forward, and customers responded negatively. Many cat café visitors are knowledgeable about cats and were made uncomfortable by the health concerns, as were the employees, which affected their own ability to be positive with customers. That particular cat café did not last long.

During my fieldwork, I found that animal café owners had a strong sense of pride for what they had created. When I was in the field, all of the cafés that I visited during my fieldwork

were owned by an individual and I rarely had any difficulty making an appointment to talk with the owner of the business directly. In two cases, the café owner was not directly involved in the day to day running of the business, but both cafés had deeply invested managers who had run the businesses since their conception. I met two business owners with two locations, but it was more common for an owner to invest themselves in their sole location, developing strong relationships with the animals in the café and being primarily in charge of their health and care. Hideki told me that he believes franchising, which he defines as three or more locations, turns a business that is about taking care of animals and people into a business that's focused on maximizing profit. As a consequence, there would not be as much attention paid to keeping the animals healthy and hiring employees who really care about animals. Franchised animal cafés would be like black companies, where employees are seen as disposable commodities, and undermine the role these businesses currently play in society.

All of the above factors are important to the success of an animal café, and they all feed back to the central importance played by the café owners understanding the kind of social role that these cafés can play in the lives of their customers. Without that awareness, they do not know how to create the necessary atmosphere to offer them *iyashi*. More than that, if they do not understand what attracts lovers of animals to a cat café, they are likely to undervalue the contributions of the animals to that atmosphere, and the animals themselves. And this awareness is apparent to customers, who engage with a café, or not, is response to what they see the café invested in.

Customers are aware when owners seem more invested in making money than in creating a good experience. Yuna, a regular cat and rabbit café patron that I interviewed during my fieldwork said she could identify when the owners and employees of a café were knowledgeable

and working hard to make a "good place" with a "good atmosphere" and when they interested in their own ambition ($k\bar{o}j\bar{o}shin$) and lacked care for the animals themselves. She felt that the café boom, which led to the quick spread of animal cafés, did attract entrepreneurs just interested in making a profit who relied on first-time animal café visitors who were attracted more to the novelty than out of care for animals. She found herself turned off by such places, and was more interested in being in a café where the workers honestly care about animals. These types of animal cafés are less likely to succeed in the longer term, without a base of regular customers to rely on.

What these examples illustrate is that an animal café is not just a place where one can go to pet an animal. Though the food and drinks are rarely a significant draw, the atmosphere and everything else that makes an animal café an appealing third space are just as essential to the success of this new business trend as the presence of non-human animals. The important qualities of animals that make them an important part of Japanese people's lives will be more fully explored a following chapter, but it is also important to consider the work that was invested in the creation of a groundbreaking business that would both tap into an open market share and make a space for itself in the changing social support systems and networks in Japan today.

3.6 CONCLUSION

While both the very first cat café owners and the many more imitators who opened cat and other animal cafés over the last ten years were interested in creating a business that would earn them a living, the success of these businesses has been dependent on the business owners' awareness and understanding of what their customer base is interested in and how they should go about

offering it to customers. After the initial success of the original few cat cafés in Tokyo, the media's intense interest in these new examples of quirky Japanese life increased public awareness and interest in this type of business. The increased number of potential customers looking for a cat café in their neighborhood drew new entrepreneurs and by 2009, the Tokyo market was saturated with cat cafés. Something similar is happening in the United States today as media coverage of Japanese cat cafés created such interest in them that the first American cat cafés were crowdfunded, and more than half a dozen cat cafés have opened across the country in the last year.

When I began my fieldwork in the fall of 2012, the cat café boom was over and the number of cat cafés in Tokyo had fallen to around half of what it was during the peak of 2009. Yet Tokyo's original cat cafés, established almost ten years earlier, were still successful, and almost all of the cat cafés that I visited had either been established before the height of the cat café boom or had only been in business for a short time. The cat cafés that disappeared after the cat café ended were often the ones that opened during the boom years, likely solely in order to capitalize on the swell of interest in that type of businesses without an understanding of what was appealing about cat cafés to customers. They knew about the cat café boom and were interested in participating in it but there is variation in how seriously they took their responsibility to their customers' needs. The cat café seems like another example of an unusual Japanese fad, interested in something strange because it is new but fading quickly from the public eye. What business owners like Kaori and Hideki did was to realize the importance of a safe, social space to overstressed and isolated young Japanese. They varied in exactly what type of space they believed would appeal to customers and so they created different types of cafés that appealed to different types of customers, but they were focused on providing iyashi to customers instead of simply an exotic experience. They took on the challenge of balancing concerns for business success with the responsibility of playing an important social role.

4.0 THE AGENCY OF CUSTOMERS: CARVING OUT A SPACE OF THEIR OWN

In January 2016, CBS, the American television channel, aired an episode of their detective procedural *Elementary* in which the main character tracks down an informant at a New York cat café. This scene, airing twelve years after the first cat café opened in Japan and less than two years after the first cat café appeared in the United States, and on a channel known for primarily targeting older viewers, demonstrates the level of impact that cat cafés have made on the global, including American, popular imaginary. A business model that had been seen as a quirk when it first appeared in Japan, and then a fad, is now well enough understood in a foreign culture that it can be featured in a mainstream television show. Yet, despite the portrayal of the café as a regular business, the woman introduced as a cat-loving, cat café-visiting customer is anything but normal. She is presented as a woman on the autism spectrum and thus unable to interact well with other people, choosing instead to care about cats. The detective was able to track her down because her two qualities – interest in cats and the inability to interact with other humans – implied that she would be the type to visit a cat café.

However, to imagine cat (and other animal) café customers as socially incapable ignores the broader picture of the changing conditions and styles of sociality, and its increasing marketization, in Japan and globally. It also diminishes customers' agency in reaching out and creating the kind of social experience that they want in their lives, even if that experience is with animals instead of with people. During my fieldwork, I met a large array of animal café

customers who all had a shared interest in animals and a shared interest in seeking out *iyashi*, which drew them to seek out these businesses and embrace them. Instead of dismissing animal café visitors as unsocial oddities or presenting the embrace of *iyashi* as indicative of the passivity and laziness of the younger Japanese generation, it is more valuable to instead focus on understanding the people who visit animal cafés, why animal cafés are important to them, and what kind of experience they want to have at an animal café. Visitors want to engage socially, but they want a new kind of social interaction, one that is neither based on discourse nor constituted by obligations (the way human relationships are). What they find in the animal café is what I call "animal sociality," a matrix of human-animal relations that prioritizes affective connection, in the form of nonverbal, bodily connection rather than discursive communication.

This chapter explores these issues by situating these customers' experience in an understanding of the generation of Japanese who were born during the economic boom period, but came of age during the recession. They are now part of the workforce and living on their own, away from the support structures of school and family, and facing the challenges of life in today's precarious economic and social situation. Many scholars of Japanese youth culture have explored similar questions, looking at different members of this generation, those thriving and those struggling, from entrepreneurs to activists to net-café refugees. This work can only offer a perspective on one group, those for whom the *iyashi* experience and the chance to socialize with animals, best meet their needs. My thesis is that by exploring what their needs are and why animal cafés help them, I can offer a new perspective on changing forms of sociality in Japan.

The animal café customers I met during my fieldwork came from a variety of backgrounds, with different types of jobs, who spend their time in the animal café in different ways. While the majority of animal café customers are within the same age range, from their 20s

to their early 40s, they differ significantly in how often they visit the café, if they come alone or with a companion, and how long they stay. Some come with a friend or a significant other to take pictures of cats and chat over a drink for an hour before continuing on to other fun activities. Others stop by after a long day at work to pet a favored animal before facing the long, crowded train ride home. Still others come on their day off or for a whole evening, and spend hours reading, watching television or napping with an animal sitting beside them. All these customers would refer to the experience of being in the animal café as one of *iyashi*; being in the animal café, even for a short time, to enjoy the intimacy and the sociality of the space, offered them a sense of healing. Animal cafés would not be a source of *iyashi* for every potential visitor (and not everyone who enjoys one animal café would enjoy all types of animal cafés), but they offer flexibility in how customers can engage with them. Customers attracted to the idea of relaxing and being with animals can find the kind of *iyashi* experience that is right for them.

While not every member of this younger generation shares the same struggles and concerns of sociality, what all animal café customers have in common is an attraction to the form of sociality, influenced by their interest in *iyashi*, that the animal café provides. The customers attracted to animal cafés are interested in addressing two main needs—the need for a refuge from social pressure to behave in a socially normative manner, and the connected need for a type of sociality built upon social interactions where visitors will be welcomed and be free to express themselves without restraint of social rules. The animal café taps into both the current need for positive affective experiences and a 'place to call home (*ibasho*)' (Allison 2013), offering customers both an opportunity to connect with other living things and the chance to take refuge from outside stresses, where they are not required to attune themselves to the wishes of others and can instead focus on their own emotional needs.

The form of sociality that visitors engage in in the animal café is one of social connections based on non-communicative interactions, between the human and the animals and among the community of café visitors who recognize in each other the need for *iyashi* and quiet relaxation. As was discussed earlier in this dissertation, one of the consequences of the flexibilization of the Japanese labor force is increased precarity, particularly in terms of sociality, as it was so tied to the no longer functioning family corporate system (Allison 2012). The loneliness and need for a new kind of sociality that better fits how the younger generation relates to its own labor, society, and future has led to the demand for new spaces that cater to this generation. The popularity of animal cafés is an indication that this demand is publically acknowledged. The sociality created in the animal café is not constructed by people at the edges of society, available to those unable to participate in a more normative form of sociality; it is one of the new forms of sociality that are being constructed as an active response to the loss of older forms of sociality.

The people who visit Japan's animal cafés may struggle with loneliness or anxiety, caused by social problems or work ones, but their response to these struggles is not to close themselves off from the world but to reenter it. They take advantage of the opportunity for sociality offered by the animal café, one they feel is healing rather than controlling, to break out of their isolation. As was explored in previous chapters, the animal café is a distinct category of "third place" (Oldenburg 1989) that provides space for an *iyashi* experience because it is structured around a commodified space that visitors pay to enter, but once inside are welcome to be as engaged, with the animals or with the human staff there for that purpose, or as solitary as they like. Customers can retreat to the world of the animal café, for a short period once in a while or for longer more regularly, to receive the sense of *iyashi* they are interested in, and then return

to the outside world. Some of my informants had stories of recent struggles with depression, a need to withdraw, or severe social anxiety, but were matter of fact about their struggles rather than despairing. Choosing to interact with animals and other animal lovers in an animal café is not a passive choice, despite the focus on relaxation and low levels of activity, but one in which visitors are exerting their agency by participating in activities that are meaningful to them.

My informants shared with me numerous stories about the stresses in their lives, the annoyances and burden of always being polite or sensitive to the needs of others, the strain of trying to understand what other people were thinking, and the challenge of maintaining their composure in the face of these daily demands. Yet animal café customers respond to that challenge by finding a space where they are free from those burdens and can focus on their individual desires. Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork, this chapter uses my informants' stories to show who animal café customers are, the challenges they face and the needs they are trying to meet and how they use the alternative space of a cat café for *iyashi* as part of their strategy to achieve what they recognize as a good life. This response, to search out new avenues for economic or social success in an effort to redefine what makes their lives both pleasurable and meaningful, is being expressed by young people across Japan.

4.1 THE PEOPLE WHO VISIT AN ANIMAL CAFÉ

The people I interviewed during my fieldwork are drawn to the animal café because they feel it offers them a break from the expectations they feel pressuring them in their daily lives. These pressures are largely tied up in issues of human relations (*ningen kankei*), such as a sense that they are expected to meet high societal standards of success by the people around them, from

friends to strangers they meet at a party, or the feeling that when they are around other people they are responsible for their happiness. They are interested in engaging in a space that offers them a sense that it is their place, like a home would be, but also a place that is free from the societal expectations about appropriate behavior in Japanese spaces. These customers come to the animal café not as a retreat from society and the embrace of *iyashi* does not indicate that they are passive consumers. They come to animal cafés in response to these stresses, embracing the opportunities that come from the cafés position as a third place, and carving out their own place in Japanese society. The individual experiences of animal café visitors vary, but they are connected by a rejection of social expectations about how they define their human value through performance of "appropriate" behavior, particularly that of productivity. The younger generation is under pressure to serve Japanese society by helping the economy rebound from recession and to pay into social security, yet the ideology of investing totally in the success of the nation is one that many younger Japanese no longer feel connected to. This leaves some feeling isolated or disaffected and others depressed or as if they are failing. I found that the decision to turn to the animal café was one they can use to push back against that pressure and critically engage with the criteria of what makes a successful life.

The target customers of animal cafés are largely between their mid-20s and early 40s, the generation that came of age after the end of the bubble economy. While customers can range in age from middle-schoolers to retired people, the cafés are well known among and most popular with people in their young adulthood. When I discussed my research on animal cafés with Japanese people over the age of 40, they commonly did not know what I referred to, while younger adults are not only familiar with the concept but have either visited or know people who

had. This is the generation for whom the search for new forms of sociality drives their innovation and investment in new spaces like animal cafés.

The people I met at animal cafés came from a variety of backgrounds and social situations, but a common idea was that the idea of a space, aimed at people like them, where they could enjoy iyashi with animals, attracted them. They sought out the opportunity to enjoy a space away from all those expectations, stresses and burdens where they would not feel lonely and would instead feel accepted. All of my informants came with positive feelings about cats or rabbits and the majority visited animal cafés for the first time because they were seeking a chance to pet and play with animals. However, a number of my informants told me that while, of course, animals play an important role in making a visit to an animal café enjoyable, their impetus to come back was because of how much they enjoyed the feeling of *iyashi* they received there. Yuna is a regular cat and rabbit café visitor in her last year of college. While her social life is fairly wide, as she interacts regularly with classmates, coworkers at her part-time job, and children at the orphanage where she volunteers, she regards those interactions as surface only. She is attracted to animal cafés because she can interact with animals without having to hide her feelings. She told me that the first time she checked out an animal café it was because she is a deep lover of animals, but she went back because she was healed (*iyasareta*).

The informants I interviewed had a broad variety in what level of engagement they have with animal cafés and the level and sources of stress they identified in their lives. One interesting correlation was that when certain kinds of life stresses increased, so did their engagement, and when it decreased, so did how often they visited a café. If an individual felt the need for *iyashi* less strongly, because of other sources of support in his or her life or better work or home life conditions, they were likely to spend less time in an animal café, but the difference between

casual customers and regulars is one of intensity of need, not necessary the quality of the need. Keiko, introduced in the introduction, told me about the pressure she felt to succeed and take action to secure a good future for herself when she was on the job market; she turned to a cat café during that time so that she could be free from that pressure but still get to be social. When those particular stresses ended, after she moved into graduate school, her level of engagement with her favorite cat café decreased as well, dropping from regular visits, at least one a month, to once every six months. Hiro, another regular cat café visitor, had visited a cat café in Nagoya, his hometown, with friends out of curiosity, but only became a regular when he moved to Tokyo and was struggling with loneliness and depression caused by the lack of contact with his family and girlfriend back home. I also spoke with a number of people who were very casual visitors to animal cafés, such as Kazuo, who had been to a cat café three times in the year prior to our interview. He told me that he did not feel he has any particular stresses or problems in his life; for him, a cat café is a place to visit with someone he does not know well as the atmosphere makes both people more comfortable and they can get along better. For Kazuo, a visit to an animal café does reduce tension, but instead of it being a tension that broadly affects his life, it is a social tension that he finds common when trying to get to know new people.

Feelings of isolation or stress are not unique to this generation, but it is facing the unusual challenge of having grown up during a period of great success and an entrenched sense of national solidarity and yet is now faced with the loss of the sense of their place in society and the feeling that the work they have put in (in their education and at their workplaces, to be part of Japanese society) is now wasted on a precarious Japanese future. The avenues that many have turned to, particularly technology, to provide an antidote to their loneliness, do not really alleviate these problems. When I asked my informants about how they connect with people, they

point to social networking services like Facebook, but admit that it does not really help them feel less lonely. Sherry Turkle, a scholar of the effect of technology on what it means to be human, goes so far as to argue that technology fosters social isolation; it "offers the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other" (2011, 1). There is a need not for the "stranger intimacy" that abounds in internet relationship, but a sense of personal, affective connection. As a number of my informants, owners, employees and customers, raised the point that if the need for *iyashi* was not becoming increasingly necessary, businesses like animal cafés that provide *iyashi* would not exist. As Hideki, the owner of Kitty Home, said, Japan is becoming a society that needs *iyashi*. I asked all my informants if they felt animal cafés would still exist in Japan in ten years, and many told me that these businesses will exist as long as they are needed and they do not see that need disappearing anytime in the near future.

Many of the people I met at Tokyo animal cafés express insecurity about their futures and share with me their struggles to build successful lives for themselves, but they also convey, if not optimism, a sense of perseverance. They are interested in exploring different kinds of career paths, even if they are more insecure than a traditional corporate position, in order to take control of their futures. Working for oneself can be risky, but full-time jobs can be risky too in the current economic climate. I met a number of people working for themselves or working some form of temporary job while they tried to move onto a career path that was interesting to them.

One married couple, Rie and Shun, who I got to know both together and separately during my fieldwork, have struggled for years to develop some sort of stable life situation. They had met in college and moved to Tokyo together when Shun got a job. When I met him, Shun had recently quit his full-time job at a recording studio to work "free," and was struggling to

establish his own business. He had worked for years for an established studio, including 18 months as an unpaid intern, and thought he would be better off as an entrepreneur where he could have more control over his career, but discovered there are a lot of business management responsibilities that he was unprepared for. Rie had been working as an office worker at a company since they moved to Tokyo, but she had recently got her CPA (Certified Public Accounting) license because she believed it would create new job opportunities. Over the period I spent with her, she tried to find jobs in accounting but her lack of experience made her a poor candidate in Japan. The hours that the couple put into trying to improve their careers takes a toll on their relationship. Shun largely works nights, visiting clubs and scouting bands to record with, while Rie works days. She also struggles with her husband's decision to suddenly quit his job and become an entrepreneur, and she is dealing with additional stress because her father's company, of which he is the owner, has not done well during the recession and she worries about her parents' livelihood as well as her own.

Akane is also an entrepreneur; she studied at a jewelry vocational school and now sells her crafts online. She acknowledges that because she works alone from home she does not have a lot of face to face contact with others. It is not an easy career track, but she likes beautiful things and is happy that she can work on them. She is not unhappy with her life, but she is glad that a place like an animal café exists, where she can go and relax with animals without having to spend too much money. She usually visits for an hour, spending around \$10, which is cheaper than a trip to the movies would be. When these informants talk about their daily challenges, they do not ignore the stress that they add to their lives with their striving, but are more focused on what they need to do to get by, and they appreciate opportunities and experiences, like time spent in an animal café, that can help them deal with that stress.

The sense of social precarity that people like Rie and Akane deal with, caused by concern about the future or social isolation, is connected to issues of their economic precarity, but issues of social connection are not limited to those who do not have the structure and stability of a full-time position. Many companies are trying to increase profits by increasing the workload of their employees, increasing stress and limiting the number of hours workers can spend on their own needs. Cafés near major commuter train stations are popular with full-time employees, who visit the café after work for a few hours, often multiple times a week. Cat cafés are busiest during the evening hours from 8pm to until closing at 10pm, as workers who are trapped in their offices for long workdays stop by to spend what remains of their evenings with "their" animals.

Hiro is an informant who has a well-paying job and works a reasonable number of hours a week, yet he found himself suffering from deep depression following his job transfer to Tokyo, away from his social network in Nagoya. Despite a fairly stable economic situation, monetary concerns influenced his decisions to take the transfer to Tokyo, despite the loss of his social support network, which led to a long struggle with depression. He shared with me his feeling that his generation generally is more reliant on the internet to communicate with others, which leaves them lonely and in need of "skinship" or physical touch. He does not socialize with coworkers outside of work and is physically isolated from people he feels comfortable with. He spends almost all of his time outside of work alone. He became a regular cat café visitor since his first visit, shortly after moving to Tokyo, and he feels that the contact with animals helps him deal with his loneliness.

Other than economic concerns, my informants talked about the stress that is caused by their daily social interactions. There is strong pressure in Japan to maintain proper "face" in front of others, and focus on the other person's wishes and interests, without sharing one's own feelings. A number of my informants described what they felt as a lack of real communication in their lives, and the feeling that, when they did converse with others, they had to maintain a careful awareness of what they were saying. Numerous informants spoke of trying to read the air (kūki wo yomu), described in a previous chapter, turning interactions with other people into a source of stress as they watch their words and try to guess at how they should be behaving. Sachiko, in her early 40s and thus one of my oldest informants, works in a Noh theater, where she is responsible for the comfort and happiness of all the guests, who are often elderly and fairly demanding. She told me, "It can be very trying (taihen) to always have to be thinking about honne and tatemae (one's true feelings and desires, and the behavior and opinions one displays in public)." At her workplace, she has to be very attentive (ki wo tsukau) to high and low status, and careful to avoid any rudeness (shitsurei). She finds the cat café appealing because it is a place where she does not have to watch herself.

Even with friends, many of my informants found they could not rely on the authenticity of each other's feelings; people are too trained to show only the best side to each other. This means that they also wish for honest expressions of emotion, but they have few people in their lives they can be honest with. Hiro told me, "It's a little sad to say but, when I'm with my friends, I honestly don't know if they like me or not. It's fun to be together, but there can be fights or having to do things you don't want to do.... When you're interacting with a cat, and it's acting like it likes you, you know it really likes you."

Yuna told me that she searched out *iyashi* experiences at animal cafés because "human interactions can get tiring, even if things are going well." She gave me the example of when she participates in a dance team, another social activity she does for fun. When she meets with her team, they need to figure out who is participating, which song to choose and how to choreograph

it. And some people may not be as willing to help as others. She is clear that there is a difference between stress and harm; just because the actions of another person cause her stress does not mean they mean any harm and she may generally enjoy spending time with them. She does not lack friends, yet she recognizes the work involved in maintaining friendships and needs relief from that sometimes. She told me, "I could want a friend to be more helpful, but that's just not the friend's nature." She could really dislike that part of her, but like everything else about the friend, which motivates her to keep the friendship, but they still clash when it comes to that issue. So, a lot of the time when working on something with responsibilities, friendships get hard."

When I ask my informants why they believe animal cafés are so popular in Japan today, the lack of opportunities for honest communication was a common answer. Some informants felt that there are simply fewer opportunities to interact with other people, particularly if they live alone and spend all their time at work. Saori is a regular rabbit café customer who visits her favorite café once or twice a week to spend time with rabbits. She is in her mid-30s and still lives alone and only socializes with friends twice a month at most. She told me, "I'm kind of sad because I don't really have time to communicate with people." This lack of opportunity for human contact leaves her feeling fatigued; after spending time in the café and being with rabbits, she leaves feeling better. Like Hiro and Saori, some customers simply do not spend enough time with friends or other supportive figures and enjoy the opportunity to be with other living creatures. Saori blames the increase in these kinds of problems on the increase in urban dwellers living alone who are not allowed to have pets in their apartments.

Many of my informants expressed the feeling that they had to present themselves as the "right" kind of person in social interactions, which was draining. Chihiro, another informant,

said that she has trouble making real friends because, "If you do talk about topics [you find important], they think you're weird. Maybe too serious or too offending or something like that. Maybe. So I have to choose a topic very carefully, depends on which person I meet." This pressure to present oneself in a certain way is heavily internalized. Keiko, who, as mentioned earlier, first started going to cat cafés to help deal with the intense stress she was feeling during her last year of college, told me she likes being around cats because they do not "force me to explain why I'm not normal. Or, not not normal, but not in the same stage [of life] as other people of the same age." Keiko told me that she felt this pressure whether or not her activity on the job market was a topic of conversation with other people.

There has been a rise in the number of younger Japanese who isolate themselves from others because they feel overwhelmed by interactions with other people. The most extreme cases of this are known as *hikikomori* (the withdrawn), a term coined by the psychiatrist Tamaki Saitō (2013) in 1998 based on his clinical work. During my fieldwork, I met one woman, Makiko, who described herself as having been a *hikikomori* and now a cat café regular as she tried to readjust to a more normal lifestyle. She had been completely withdrawn for two years, earning some money through online work; financial concerns were a primary reason she was beginning to reengage with the world. But she was not ready to face a workplace, she told me, though she was beginning to apply for part-time service work. She had started to come to this cat café three times a week to help her readjust to being around people without the stresses of social interaction that had led her to become a *hikikomori* in the first place. For some café visitors, when the social interaction with other people becomes unpleasant or overwhelming, yet they do not want to isolate themselves completely, the animal café can be a way to engage with a welcoming, low stress community.

Much of this pressure ties in to the pressure to be successful, which means continually working to improve oneself and thus continually demonstrating that one is productive and working hard. In order to succeed in today's Japanese economy, there is pressure on young Japanese to become what Foucault called "homo oeconomicus" (2008), becoming an entrepreneur of the self (Lukacs Forthcoming Manuscript). It is this emphasis on productivity that animal café visitors are resisting when they choose to spend their free time embracing *iyashi* and non-productivity. My experience with animal café visitors is that they are people dealing with the stresses in their lives, both economic and social, by seeking out an experience free from these stressors, where they can instead indulge in emotionally fulfilling social interactions with animals, who put none of those pressures on visitors. The cause of their concerns and the extent of their interest in or need for animal cafés varies. However, the increase in popularity in animal cafés and how familiar they have become with young Japanese means that the idea of a space to get away from other people and be with animals is resonating with this generation.

4.2 CONSTRUCTING "ANIMAL SOCIALITY" AND MAKING A REFUGE

The owners who started these businesses had the idea of creating a community for animal lovers and using animals to encourage relaxation among overstressed Japanese, but the actual creation of that community came through customer engagement and how they have chosen to use the café. Customers are able enjoy a type of freedom there that is not available to them elsewhere in their lives; this freedom helps visitors counteract and treat the problems in their own lives. In addition to addressing existing concerns, they enjoy a sense of sociality that is lacking elsewhere in their lives.

Sociality is a term used so commonly and broadly in academic scholarship that it is important to begin by defining the term and elaborating on what I mean by the sociality that exists in an animal café. Moving beyond a simple definition such as "the capacity to be social" or "the state of being sociable," I use as my starting point the concept of sociality put forth by Long and Moore in their book on new directions in sociality. They conceive of sociality "as a dynamic relational matrix within which subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable" (2013, 4). Sociality is a process in which beings interact and create a variety of changing relationships. The "animal sociality" constructed in the animal café is one based on human-animal interactions, which are thus primarily more affective than discursive. This contrasts with how human sociality is constructed, though scholars do note the importance of affect in all forms of sociality (Clough 2008). The sociality of the animal café includes the social connections between visitors and with employees, but it is built on their shared engagement in non-productive relaxation rather than the relations based on productivity and active engagement that dominates spaces outside the animal café, by connecting social engagement with iyashi.

Animal sociality draws on the immediate sense of intimacy that humans have with animals, particularly companion species; although visitors lacks an established personal relationship with the animals, they nevertheless feel easy and comfortable with them. Humans engaging with animals also feel a freedom they cannot when they socialize with humans. Animals do not care about the kinds of things humans do, like whether one is successful, connected, or productive, and so animal sociality does not require presenting oneself in a socially acceptable way. My definition of animal sociality draws in some ways on the idea of stranger intimacy that is used media studies (Turkle 2011), which refers to the kinds of connections

people have with people they only know online, where the lack of real world association and anonymity allows certain kinds of intimacies. In a similar way, humans can have easy intimacy with animals without a real, personal relationship, which also means that there is no obligation to maintain that relationship. Yet the affective connection, as people can touch and pet the animals, and stare into their eyes, means that the sociality of the animal café does not leave visitors feeling lonely, the way the stranger intimacy experienced in internet relationships can. Additionally, much of the sociality is experienced by "being with" the animals, without speaking or directly engaging, in direct contrast to internet relationships, which require intersubjective intercourse and preclude physical interaction.

The construction of animal sociality occurs in response to the vacuum caused by the lack of earlier forms of sociality. The customers of these businesses were raised during the period when the dominant ideology was that the ideal family was a hard-working salaryman father, who socialized with colleagues after work, supported by a home run by a housewife. The rising generation is in the contradictory position of both not desiring that form of sociality, as husbands and wives lived largely separate lives and children generally had poor relationships with fathers who were always working, while also being unhappy about the fact they do not have access to a social support network in the way their parents' generation did. This has driven interest in a sociality that is the opposite of the high stress, group-focused sociality of their fathers that will be able to replace *both* the corporate support structure of friends and coworkers and the support structure of a nuclear family led by a housewife.

Visitors to a café thus have two primary focuses during their time in the café that they experience in conjunction; they want to relax and they want to have positive social interactions.

Customers are able to enjoy time spent in the animal café because it offers a type of sociality

built around interactions with animals, which are free from the stresses of human interaction, in an atmosphere that elicits the comforting feel and tone of the home. While they may have nostalgia for the positive sociality that young Japanese associate with the sociality of the home and family from the 1980s, they are not trying to replicate their childhoods or develop a familylike relationship with the other individuals in the animal café, but connect back to the sense of positive connection and support they had during that period. Animal cafés draw on the sense of nostalgia for the comfortable home filled with love and pets and family by creating an experience that mimics a sense of home that may have little connection either to the homes that their visitors currently reside in or resided in during the childhoods. The draw on a sense of home is part of the way that animal cafés can easily encourage a sense of familiarity and social connection. Hiro told me, "[When I'm in cat café] it reminds me of my cat living with my family, so I can elicit the feeling that I'm spending time with them. It's really similar to how I feel when I'm with my family and cat in Nagoya, when we are playing with our cat." By connecting to a sense of home, animal cafés create a sense of sociality based not only on connecting with the individuals in the café itself, but also on a connection to distant support networks. This sense of coziness is presented in the middle of dense urban areas; animal cafes are hidden away on upper floors of buildings and visitors are able to pull away from the outside world and a refuge from the hustle and bustle of the city.

The booming popularity of animal cafés made them a fad in recent years and many first-time visitors come expecting the café to be cool or exotic. Their hominess can come as a surprise. Akane decided to visit a cat café after seeing media coverage about them, and expected it to be a fashionable space, but found, when she visited, that is seemed more like someone's house, which she felt was more conducive to relaxation. Animal cafés combine the opportunity

to touch animals with the chance to unwind. Visitors to zoos or pet shops with animals on display prioritize direct interaction with animals; they enter, watch and touch the animals, and then continue on to other activities. Visitors to animal cafés take the time to remove shoes, put down their bags, and sit with the animals. They may pet or play with them, they may watch the animals, or they may just *be*, absorbing the sense of sociality that comes from the "familiarity bonds" with the animals and other animal lovers.

For this generation, feelings of "hominess" can exist in a commodified space like the animal café. They have become familiar with the idea of looking for sociality beyond the home, which is often a space of solitude, so they feel comfortable embracing the opportunity to engage in caregiving with publicly shared animals. The relationship between caregiving and public relationships with animals will be more fully explored in the following chapter. The home-like aspects of the animal café – the comfortable couches, gentle music, etc. – encourage visitors to think of the café as their own space, like their home would be. The activities of others do not infringe on this sense; instead, the opportunity to be around others, though not necessarily in direct interaction with them, is part of the attraction. The human employees and the animals are available to give attention to each visitor, so no one feels ignored, but there is no social pressure on the visitor to interact more than they want.

An important aspect of the animal cafés' position as a third place, rather than a home, is that visitors are free from the expectations about appropriate behavior that were built into the home of the 1980s, which carried expectations about one's role and relationship to family members, as a father, mother, or child. They are also free from the expectations of productivity that characterizes the other spaces that today's young Japanese spend time in. The animal café is designed to place no pressure on visitors. The café rules, clearly stated when visitors enter, deal

only with the health and safety of the animals; the implication is that there are no other controls of behavior, though visitors behavior is still shaped by their understanding of polite public manners. Customers are not required to stay in one seat, as one would in a normal café, and café employees are available to soothe customers or encourage them to try new things if they seem interested but hesitant. Customers also influence each other indirectly. Animal cafés are kept uncrowded, so customers do not have to have more than minimal contact with each other if they wish to remain isolated, but they observe each other. If one customer reads one of the available *manga*, another customer may come over after that customer has moved on to select their own reading material. Regular customers demonstrate the range of acceptable behaviors and visitors less familiar with the café learn through observation how free they are to circulate through the space.

This is a major part of what makes animal cafés alternative spaces. They allow customers to prioritize their own personal needs, and free them from the societal pressure to be thinking about the needs of others before their own. This does not mean that all visitors are anti-social people or that they are incapable of social interaction, but they enjoy being free from social expectations for short periods. Yuna, as mentioned above, is quite social, with much human interaction in her daily life. But she told me, "There are some times when I feel tired of human relationships. Even though I have no big problems, I may have situations where I clash with other people." And "even if things are going well with people, there are always ups and downs, but with animals, you can always be honest and open." So she turns to the animal café where feeling connected to others is easy, where she does not have to watch what she says. She enjoys going to animal cafés with friends, but she only takes close friends, with whom she does not have any tension that could mar the relaxed atmosphere of the café.

A major appeal of socially engaging with animals is that animals do not have the expectations that people feel they must live up to, as they can when interacting with people. While many visitors enjoy occasionally chatting with the companions they came with, other customers, or employees, there are also many who explicitly do not want to talk or interact with other people. However, even for these customers, a visit to an animal café is a social experience, but with animals instead of people. Keiko found she went to cat cafés most regularly at a time when she felt overwhelming pressure to do well in life and felt she was not able to meet societal standards. The cat café is a place free from that pressure, and she can let go of that stress. She told me, "In a cat café, the main purpose is to interact with the cats, so it doesn't come to it, the question 'Are you alone, or do you have friends?' [The cats] don't care. They don't care if I have many friends or not...When I go to the cat café only by myself...[it's] always about caring about myself...I think one of the nice things about a cat café is you don't have to speak with other people." Keiko tends to be fairly quiet when she is in a cat café; she enjoys just sitting and watching the movement of the cats. She does not feel alone, but she's allowed to focus on herself in a way she does not feel comfortable doing when she is with other people, even friends. Her stress levels are lower now that she has successfully navigated the challenging job application process, and she only makes the time to visit cat cafés when she needs a quick break or if a friend wants to go. The time she spends in a cat café is proportional to her need for a refuge from the outside world.

The animal café is not about retreating, but about a kind of sociality that relaxes instead of burdening visitors. Keiko experimented with cat cafés as an alternative to just staying at home; she wanted to avoid negative social encounters but she did not want to isolate herself. Makiko, who identified herself as someone who had been a *hikikomori* for two years, used a cat

café as a stepping stone towards more social interaction, when she was trying to transition out of her isolation. I met her during a visit to Whiskers cat café; she was instantly identifiable as a regular based on her familiarity with the animals and her ability to make the space her own. She moved quickly to a corner spot, which gave her more room than other seats in the café, as well as more privacy, basically creating a space for herself that was her own. She could turn her back to the room and use the curved wall of the seat to create a little play pen for cats, and she lured cats over to her with toys she knew they liked. This has become her habit as part of her slow reemergence into the world; she comes to the cat café three times a week, spending whole days there, being with the cats who had become comfortable with her and slowly becoming friends with the staff, who she feels care about animals as much as she does. She does not have a lot of money; she had done online contract work to pay expenses during the period she did not leave her home, but had reached the end of her savings. She is looking for a job, but is nervous about interacting with people more regularly and finds spending time in the cat café makes her more comfortable to be around people again.

The regular customers I interviewed were more likely to talk about human relations (ningen kankei) as a source of stress in their lives and the need to escape from that stress to a place where they are not expected to perform socially more often than casual visitors. For regular customers, the animal café is less about connecting to other people through animals, but about connecting directly to animals, in order to address their need for social connection (tsunagari) without needing to interact with other people. For many customers, this is because they are lonely; they lack other people with whom they can connect, friends who they might enjoy bringing to an animal café with them. In addition to that, for some, socialization with people is a

source of tension and unhappiness, more than a source of support, and they turn to animals because animals lack the cultural "masks" that Japanese people wear during social interactions.

For casual visitors, the sociality of the animal café is one based on connecting to other people through animals, instead of primarily connecting to the animals themselves. Animals reduce the tension of social encounters, as demonstrated by their effectiveness in animal-assisted therapy. Furthermore, they offer visitors something to focus on when they do not know how to interact with each other, which can facilitate interactions between visitors who come to the café together but who lack a close relationship or are nervous about interacting with each other. This makes animal cafés a common location for a first date, as attention can be turned to feeding snacks to the rabbit at their feet or taking pictures of a cat curled up in a basket when conversation becomes difficult or uncomfortable. For casual visitors, animal cafés are a safe, comfortable location in which to spend time with people while limiting the pressure to keep one's companion entertained and engaged by oneself. Casual visitors are less in need of the refuge of an animal café, yet they still enjoy and benefit from the *iyashi* atmosphere in the café and the opportunity for a relaxed sense of sociality. One of my informants, Kazuo, is an excellent example of an occasional café visitor who uses cat cafés to facilitate positive social interactions with people he is not close to. Every time he has visited a cat café it has been with someone he was trying to get to know better, from a date to a work acquaintance, because he thinks that the animals act as buffers and can help them to feel comfortable enough to get to know each other. His personal need for *iyashi* is relatively low and he does not think members of his generation are alienated from each other. Instead, he feels that the internet is making it easier to connect with people. However, that leaves young people without the opportunity for face to face communication.

Visiting an animal café with a companion can also be a way to deepen or strengthen a relationship. This removes some of the pressure to be focused on each other; companions can always turn to the animals for a conversational topic or a distraction. Rie told me about wanting to visit a cat café because of her love for animals, but also because it was something she shared with her husband. The tensions in her marriage, because of economic pressures and how little time they have together, led her to push for them to spend a rare free day together in a cat café. Spending time in the café allowed Rie and Shun to leave behind their economic concerns and bond with each other over their shared love of cats.

Knowledge of animal cafés has come to be fairly ubiquitous in the younger generation, spread through friends and colleagues who have visited one, through social media when others share photos from their visits, and through mass media coverage, in magazines and on television, over the last ten years. The kind of visitors who would enjoy the experience of visiting an animal café then generally self-select, deciding to visit a café themselves or seeking out a friend who could introduce them to the café. Casual visitors are more likely to visit with a companion, in order to get to know them better in the relaxed context of the café, but also because a companion acts as an anchor in an unknown situation. Visitors who come with someone often spend a lot of their time in the café separate from their companion, exploring the café, and then reconnecting with the companion over the shared experience.

The presence of animals is central to the *iyashi* experience of an animal café; they are fundamental in bringing together the relaxed quality and the social quality of a visit. They allow a type of sociality built on familiarity bonds, not deep, personal relationships but ones built around comfort and ease with others, both through the interactions that visitors have with the animals and the bonds that visitors can develop with each other and with café employees over

their shared love of animals. Their presence allows customers to relax in a way they say they cannot outside the café. Rie spoke passionately about how being around cats let her release tension in a way she could nowhere else. "For me, [the] cat is special. We have other fun, other special things [to do], many things [are] interesting, but [the] cat is special...How relax[ed] I feel with cats. Sometimes I strongly want to be with a cat."

Many young people I spoke to about the popularity of animal cafés told me that this urge is what has driven the animal café boom, and argue that the rise of that need to be with animals is driven by the inability of many young people, living in small apartments, to have pets, and their sense of disconnection in the city from the "natural world." Yet, the way that my informants described their feelings about animals, and what about them that attracted visitors to these cafés, also had a significant amount to do with the fact that animals are free from social confines that café customers feel restricted by. Rie told me she was envious of cats, who can be selfish in a way that she wishes she had the freedom to be. This was a common response when I asked why cat cafés were so popular. Despite the fact that cats are not readily friendly to strangers, visitors liked that the cats were free to express their disinterest; it deepened the sense of honest connection if a cat deigned to engage with a visitor. Yuna, who prefers rabbit cafés over other types, put her enjoyment of them this way: "Rabbits are a type of animal that live as they like; they usually don't get attached closely to their owners and don't learn tricks [to make their owners happy]. Rabbits only do what they want to do even when they're with us in a same space, so it's impossible for humans to have their own way. However, there are still some times that they come close to us by themselves or that they show like they want to be petted. That's the reason why I like rabbits – basically they're a free type of animal but still I can have a sense that we're connected to each other at a certain level."

The qualities of the animal café that make it appeal to visitors reflect the changes in what young people in Japan are looking for in their lives today. They want to be free, to choose their own path and to be as productive or unproductive as they please. They want to be connected to others, but they do not want to be beholden to maintain relationships. Much of this relates to their search for a good, or meaningful life, and their resistance to the pressure on young people to live the same kinds of lives their parents did, serving society. Not only is that no longer economically possible, but young people have become disillusioned with the exchange of freedom for stability that the previous generation agreed to. When animal café customers speak about the appeal of the "natural" world that animals represent, they are expressing an interest in the freedom from the human world that animals represent to them. The rise of this need to be with animals is tied to the customers' own need for a sociality free from expectations of performing their social role, where they can be as selfish as the cats are allowed to be. The animal café is a refuge, not just from the stress of social interactions, but from the work that they must put into behaving "properly" in those interactions, which is the root of that stress.

As the economy and sociality were intertwined in Japan during the era of the "corporate family system", issues of sociality and economics are intertwined today. As young Japanese adapt to a new labor system, they are also creating new systems for sociality. They engage in activities such as relaxation in the public space of the animal café, moving non-productivity from the private realm into a communal space. This is not just socially transgressive, but connected as well to the issue of economic value to society. In enjoying the sociality of the animal café, they are taking economic action as well, in the form of resistance to economic pressures.

4.3 IYASHI AND THE FREEDOM TO BE SELFISH

Animal café customers are attracted to a sociality that is built around a rejection of normative expectations of selflessness, hard-work, and productivity, and visit the cafés to step outside of mainstream space and meet their social and emotional needs. In contrast to the image of the incapable animal café customer on the television show mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, animal café visitors are taking deliberate action; they have identified stressors in their lives and are choosing to embrace the animal café as a response, in small and large doses. Much of the appeal of the animal café for customer is thus about control; it is a place where they feel free from the control exerted by the other people in their lives and able to feel in control of one's own behavior.

The animal café offers visitors an opportunity to counter stresses that come from a social expectation of being of service to others, of wearing a constant mask of consideration and thoughtfulness, of trying constantly to offer social and affective support. Japanese people are taught from a young age to focus on the needs of others, and not put themselves and their individual ideas forward. Saori spoke extensively on this issue.

As there's a Japanese proverb that says, "the nail that sticks out gets hammered in (*deru kugi wa utareru*)," it's really important in Japan that everyone shares the same kind of opinion. In other words, if someone says anything different from other people, there will be a negative reaction and the person will "get hammered in". So I think that this cultural atmosphere makes it hard for Japanese people to expose their inner feelings or express their own unique personalities when they have to discuss on a specific topic.

Therefore, when Japanese people have to decide something, they tend to think the way that wins the largest vote or gets a large number of consent is the best and the right thing to do. In other words, people who say things different from what the mainstream is saying will be treated as an outcast. So now, more and more people prefer to communicate through superficial, short and simple expressions. Speaking for myself, this makes me feel like the society is lacking warmth. Basically, parents are teaching their children from a young age not to do things for the reason that you'll be a bother to neighbors, your teachers, to

strangers, and you become focused on your responsibility to them to stuff down your own behavior. That education turns into a feeling that you must not make anyone else unhappy.

Despite this long tradition, young people in Japan are exhibiting and expressing more discontent with that situation than ever before and pushing back on these social conventions. Yuna said that she felt "maybe it is easier to express one's feelings more than before. In Japan, it used to be more common that you needed to follow the crowd and go to what others around you wanted. But now, it seems to be more common for people to do as they please rather than listen to others. People were stricter about politeness in Japan before." She feels that this is a good thing, because "although sometimes it is fun to go along with others, it is also important to do what one wants to do."

The behaviors I observed during my fieldwork demonstrated that there is a portion of this young generation that is taking action to do what they want, and need, to do, to take care of themselves, even if it means not behaving as a "proper" Japanese person. Keiko's decision to head to a cat café when she felt overwhelmed but did not want to isolate herself, Makiko's decision to use the café to re-enter society, and even Kazuo's decision to use animal cafés to facilitate interactions with people he wanted to get to know better are all ways in which my informants talk about choosing to embrace the animal café as an active response to issues they identify in their lives. The language that my informants use to talk about the experience of being in an animal café may initially seem passive; they go to *iyasareru* – to be healed – using the passive form of *iyasu*. But they tell me they "go to be healed," they take an action to receive an affect. They actively reflect on what their issues are and how best they might respond to deal with them. The opportunity to be healed is something they go out and claim.

For the younger generation, under pressure to increase productivity so as to succeed in a volatile economy and responsible for their own social welfare in a way that earlier generations were not, *iyashi* is a way to counter the toll that life in Japan takes. The embrace of relaxation and non-productivity is a way to exercise aspects of themselves that they cannot exhibit elsewhere. In the animal café, they have carved out a new type of space in in which they can address their social and emotional needs, as a response to the lack of "a place of one's own" that Anne Allison argues is central to the issue of social precarity among this generation. A surface understanding of the appeal of *iyashi* leaves one with the impression that these young people are embracing inaction or laziness, but I argue that they are being proactive in improving their life condition by deciding how best to spend their time to care for themselves.

4.4 CONCLUSION

A better understanding of the customers who populate animal café and their motivations for embracing this type of experience offers insight into how they are responding to life in recessionary, precarious Japan. These businesses offer a type of sociality that is replacing support systems that are no longer available to the younger generation and is suited to the challenges of their current lifeways. This is built around a rejection of societal expectations for social performance, and is constructed in two ways, through interactions primarily with animals, with whom visitors can express themselves more freely than they could with another person, and through the commodified consumption of time in an intimate, home-like space. Animal cafés function as both social and intimate spaces, both as a "third space" but with elements of the socially supportive and energizing "first space" of the home.

Customers' reasons for visiting animal cafés and what they do when they are there illuminates how this engagement is of value to them and fulfills their needs. Even casual visitors to an animal café can receive *iyashi* as they step away from the demands and stresses of the outside world, and get an affective boost from a friendly interaction with a café employee and a chance to see and play with – though rarely cuddle – an animal. However, for customers whose need for sociality and intimacy is stronger, the more time they spend in the café, the more they are able to develop real relationships with the employees and particularly with the cats, who come to recognize the regulars. Over the course of my fieldwork, I met with many customers; the primary difference between occasional visitors and café regulars was the degree of the stress they felt from their obligations to others in their everyday lives. And customers who were regulars during periods of heightened stress might reduce their visits drastically when they had readjusted to their situation.

Japan has entered an era in which individuals are forced to take responsibility for their own emotional well-being. Despite the negative discourse about the resilience of this younger Japanese generation, my informants demonstrate that they are willing to create and engage with opportunities to meet their own needs. They were thoughtful about the difficulties their generation faced and their individual issues and concerns, yet positive about the good experiences that they were available through the incorporation of animal cafés into their lives. Through my interactions with different animal café visitors, I came to know them as people who were actively choosing to purchase a particular kind of experience because it helped them deal with issues and alienation and precarity that have become pervasive for this post-recession generation. Their goals for a better life for themselves are based on a pursuit of stability and connection instead of financial success, as it was defined by the previous generation, so they may

appear to be unmotivated. However, the way that many of my informants used the animal café to improve their sense of self and reduce issues of stress and anxiety demonstrated that they are invested in creating what they feel are better lives.

5.0 THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP: CAFÉ ANIMALS AND THE TRANSMISSION OF AFFECT

On a cold winter day, I visited the Ueno Zoo, Japan's oldest and largest zoo, situated in Ueno Park, a green space carved out of a densely-populated section of Tokyo. I was taken there by Misaki, a woman in her mid-forties who spends her weekdays working in sales at a small company. But she also spends her weekends working as a volunteer tour guide at the Ueno Zoo, specializing in the native Japanese species exhibits, something she had been doing for three years. She had responded to a volunteer recruitment advertisement on the zoo's website, because of her attraction to animals and her interest in teaching others about animals and the world that they live in. Yet she expressed frustration with her work at the zoo. She wanted to educate visitors about the lives of animals, their habitats, environments and, in particular, the threats they are facing, but the visitors she met were more interested in the zoo as a source of entertainment than a place of education. To me, she used the example of the ptarmigan, a puffy white bird that is quite popular among the young women she leads on tours. They are highly endangered and she wants to talk with visitors about their problems, but "people are only interested in saying they're cute (kawaii) and that they are healed (iyasarete iru) by seeing them." I asked her if the Ueno Zoo helps connect people to nature or helps them think of themselves as part of the animal kingdom to and she replied, "No. Maybe some people do, but the Ueno Zoo, especially because it's in the city, is a place of entertainment." She called it a misemono koya, a circus show tent.

For Misaki, the Japanese visitors she meets, often families with young children or young adults with big cameras, are not thinking about the animal, but about what they want personally from the experience, which often does not serve the animals well. She is steadily trying to improve the situation, to educate instead of just entertain, but she finds it a struggle.

This was further illustrated when we reached the dhole, or Asiatic red dog, enclosure. The enclosure contains an island, covered in trees and plants where the dhole can relax in an atmosphere designed to elicit a sense of their natural habitat. A moat separates the animals from visitors without having to put them behind cage bars. Leaning on the barrier around the moat a few feet from us were two young men looking at the dholes. One man jokingly called out to the dhole sleeping at the edge of its island, commanding it with a phrase I did not catch. The two men then burst out laughing as the dhole awoke at the noise and looked up, before strolling away. I turned to Misaki for clarification. She explained that the young man had commanded the dhole to "transform." Dholes, wild dogs that used to roam throughout Asia before habitat loss and other factors destroyed their numbers, have folkloric qualities, akin to that of the native Japanese tanuki, which are believed to be able to shapeshift. The young men, with the opportunity to learn more about a species, were less interested in gaining new information than in engaging with the animal on human terms, having an interaction based on the cultural construction of the animal as a folkloric figure.

To understand the specifics of the human-animal relationship in Japan today, one must consider the context within which Japanese people are engaging with animals. What I observed in this visit to the Ueno Zoo offered an insight into how urban Japanese relate to animals. Like animal cafés, zoos are human spaces and the experience of interaction with animals is understood and engaged with on human terms. The encounter I observed was ostensibly built

around connecting humans to the "natural" world but it was clear from my observations and Misaki's stories that when many Japanese seek out animal interactions, many are interested in interacting with animals on human terms, seeing them as entertainment and engaging with the image of the animals that they have created for themselves instead of trying to know the animals on their own terms.

This chapter focuses on exploring human-companion animal relationships in Japan and specifically in animal cafés, and I begin this way so as to explore the human context in which Japanese people interact with animals and their goals for these interactions. Scholarly research in many fields over the last two decades has explored the social origin of overall cultural attitudes and understandings of animals. What I observed through my fieldwork in Japan is that the places that exist to allow urban dwellers to interact with animals, like zoos and animal cafés, are constructed in a way that purports to connect people to the "natural" world of non-human animals, but is largely structured to exoticize domestic animals. Typically, the interaction is structured to allow people to escape from the pressures of the social constraints that exist in human culture by connecting to animals who are free from those concerns. Access to animals, who can provide this release, has become a valuable type of entertainment. This is especially important for younger people whose conditions are more precarious, for whom having pets at home is not possible, and who therefore find access to animals is a commodity worth paying for.

This chapter delves into the nature of the human-animal relationship in the animal café and how that connects to new social patterns and institutions that have come into being in Japan. The chapter begins by exploring how humans conceptualize animals, before moving on to how the people of Japan frame their relationship with animals in terms of their own cultural context, shaped by their historical role and the mythological understanding of animal spirits. This

introduction aids in understanding the following section on how the experience of being an animal in an animal café and spending time with animals in this context is an extension of human-animal relationship into new realms, based on commodifying the affective potential of the animal. It will explore the changing relationship young Japanese have with animals, particularly companion species, as issues of precarity have driven demand for *iyashi*. Many younger Japanese turn to animal cafés to enjoy the benefits of animal companionship without the responsibilities, in exchange for a reasonable fee. Animals living in cafés are called upon to provide the positive affect of *iyashi* to visitors, performing the reproductive labor that visitors find nowhere else. This chapter explores what it means to consider animals as laborers that provide affective support, how that fits into a broader understanding of how productivity and reproductivity are reconstituted in Japan today, and the role of animals in that economy.

The placement of animals in a café context positions them as different from pets. Visitors expect companionship from café animals in the same way they would from pets. Yet the way they engage with the animals in a commodified space creates a boundary around the human-animal interaction and leads visitors to view that exchange in terms of commodity consumption. Visitors come to the café, offer money in exchange for the opportunity to benefit emotionally from the animal interaction, and then return to their everyday lives. Customers care about animals, as evidenced by their interest in animal cafés, but the focus is on meeting their own need for intimacy and sociality. The shift in responsibility for their own emotional self-care has led younger Japanese to engage with new types of businesses and spaces that make it possible for them to receive the positive affects they require. I will contrast people's conceptualization of how animals experience their interactions and what the experience of life for animals in a café is like and explore more deeply the specific relationships that my informants have with the animals

at cafés they frequent, one that is an extension of the companion animal relationship but is also part of an experience that is situated as a commodity exchange.

5.1 CHANGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS

Scholars of human-animal interaction, in attempting to understand the complexity of relationships that exist between these groups, have explored many ways that animals' lives connect to humans', often from a historical or animal-rights perspective. Scholarship has examined the use of animals to define, in opposition, what it means to be human. Animals are used as a frame to explore human ethical and moral quandaries, food production of and by animals, and the labor of animals (Mullin 1999, Nagel 1974). Anthropologists have long studied these relationships, from Lévi-Strauss' early work (1966) using symbolic analysis of human-animal relations to the very recent interest in multispecies ethnography, lead by the work of Donna Haraway (2008), Eben Kirksey (2014) and Eduardo Kohn (2013). These scholars explore "the host of organisms whose lives and death are linked to human social worlds" (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 545) thinking about anthropology as "not just confined to the human but [as] concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves" (Kohn 2007, 4).

Much of this scholarship has challenged the dichotomous division between nature and culture and many attendant binary divisions: between human and animal, and between wild and domesticated. This is part of a broader anthropological reevaluation of binary divisions that have long shaped anthropological discourse. Multispecies ethnographers focus on "contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down" (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010,

546), exploring the human-animal relationship without arbitrary divisions. Some focus on the role of non-human companion animals in the lives of humans (Podberscek, Paul, and Serpell 2005, Haraway 2003), other focus more on food animals and other species that provide important labor in human society (Swanson 2015), while still others focus on the often overlooked, but still important role that non-animal organisms, such as bacteria, play in human societies (Kirksey 2014). Scholars are demanding recognition of the way that humans and non-human animals shape *each other* over the course of their evolution, upending a more classical focus on the ways that humans domesticate other animals, drawing them into human spaces for human purposes.

My work on animal cafés is informed by this "animal turn" in anthropological literature, but I focus strongly on how the people involved understand the role of the animal in their lives and why they conceptualize these interactions in particular ways. The expectations café visitors have for their human-animal interactions is based on what they see the animal representing and offering to them. This is in turn shaped by that transformations in sociality that affect how they engage with other people, as human interactions are often more a source of stress rather than support. An important move in recent human-animal studies is to think of animals within specific cultural contexts, and thus also influenced by the same phenomena and forces that are shaping the lives of people within those contexts (Franklin 1999, Ritvo 1987, Tester 1992). As Mullan and Marvin argue in their book Zoo Culture, "in an important sense, animals are human constructions...they are also man-made in the sense that they are thought about by man, and it is the animal as it is thought about rather than the animal itself which is of significance" (1999, 3). Animals have long been viewed as a resource or a tool for human purposes, as both workers and products on farms, the hunters and the hunted for both consumption and sport. Animals still perform many vital functions in human societies, but they are increasingly called upon to perform affectively, as people turn to companion animals for the emotional and social benefits they provide.

Psychologists and medical practitioners are also exploring the quantifiable physical effects that animals, especially domesticated pets, have on individuals, and this in turn has led to increased analysis of the benefits of animal-assisted therapy. There is mounting evidence of the positive physical and psychological effects that interaction with animals brings to people (Altschiller 2011, Arkow 1987, Wilson and Turner 1998). In the United States, this has correlated with the rising number of people, many of whom are veterans suffering from PTSD, who use therapy support animals, primarily dogs, to deal with trauma and anxiety in their daily lives. A groundbreaking study in 1980 demonstrated that cardiac patients lived longer if they were pet owners (Friedmann et al.), and was followed by a series of other studies examining how contact with animals physiologically produced relaxation (Katcher and Beck 1983).

More than just offering social support directly to a person, interactions around an animal helped facilitate interactions between people, as the animal acts as a buffer, reducing tension (McNicholas and Collins 1995). "Animals stimulate conversation by their presence and unscripted behavior and by providing a neutral, external subject on which to focus" (Kruger and Serpell 2006, 28). It has become increasingly clear that animals can be a real and important source of social support. Social support, defined as a "generic term covering a variety of positive acts, interpersonal transactions, and social provisions that arise from social relationships and which are widely accepted to enhance human health and well-being" (McNicholas and Collis 2006, 49) includes interactions with animals as the evidence is clear that interaction with animals does improve human's well-being. Serpell claims that "this salutary effect of social support should apply to any positive social relationship; any relationship in which a person feels *cared*

for, loved, or esteemed" (2006, 16). While we must be careful when assigning feeling such as love to a non-human animal, if we focus on how the person feels about the interaction, we can observe that the individual's belief in their relationship with their animal makes them feel socially and emotionally supported.

5.2 ANIMALS IN JAPAN

An important part of how the Japanese conceptualize and understand the natural world is expressed by the idea that animals have an intrinsic connection to it that humans lack. The native Japanese religion of Shintoism sees the natural world as filled with *kami*, or gods, some of whom are human (many of the Japanese emperors have become kami after their death), but many are the spirits of significant natural landmarks such as waterfalls or ancient trees. The long history of folklore about animal spirits also connects to the conception of animals as more connected to the natural world. I do not mean to imply that the Japanese have a uniquely harmonious relationship with nature, a criticism that has been leveled at writers expressing theories of Japanese uniqueness (Ambros 2012), or that visitors to an animal café are confused about the difference between a domestic cat and a cat spirit. Yet the traditional conceptualization of animals in the Japanese practice of Shintoism or Buddhism does influence how café visitors think of animals as more "natural" or "wild" than humans are. Customers who visit an animal café are interested in having the opportunity to be close to animals because it gives them the opportunity to connect to something outside their normal, human world. This is even more true for the more exotic animal cafés that have become popular within the last few years. While cats are attractive to customers

for many reasons, customers interested in getting close to a real, wild animal have driven the current boom in owl and other bird cafés.

Animal spirits, anthropomorphized animals and animals in their natural habitat have been depicted in Japanese art for hundreds of years. The Chōjū-jinbutsu-giga, usually shortened to the $Ch\bar{o}i\bar{u}$ -giga, is a famous series of scrolls painted in the 12th and 13th centuries at a Kyoto temple. The scrolls depict scenes of anthropomorphic animals such as rabbits and monkeys behaving as if they were human, as well as mythical creatures and imaginings of foreign animals. The depiction of animal species in art and folk tales offers insight into how the Japanese today define their relationship to the animals. There are numerous cat-like *yōkai*, supernatural creatures, like the bakeneko or the nekomata, which shapeshift into humans to move about the human world, sometimes to take revenge and sometimes to experience human life. The cat's strange eyes, slitshaped and drastically variable in pupil size, feed into stories about cats' shape-changing abilities. Their changeable nature, from friendly to vicious in a moment, further supports the sense that they are uncanny, or at least aware of things that humans cannot comprehend. These stories also demonstrate that cats have always been seen as on the border of, or potentially connecting, the natural and human world. This understanding of animals is not unique to Japan, but Japan has an extensive folklore that explores cats' position in this liminal space. Depiction of these spirit animals has also changed significantly over time, mirroring how the Japanese relationship with animals has changed over time. The spirits of animals that used to be seen as vengeful are now seen as non-threatening personal guardians, a change occurring in conjunction with Japan's new spirituality culture (Ambros 2010).

In Japan, people have traditionally seen animals more in terms of the role they serve in society as workers than as pets. Though Japan is now dominated by its urban areas, it was

traditionally a rural, agriculture based economy; the conception of Japan as connected to nature and the growth of food remains an important part of how Japanese people conceptualize their relationship to their land. Animals (fit into this understanding because they) were primarily seen as working animals, not as pets. Rural dogs were useful for hunting or as guard animals. In a rice-growing economy, cats were valued for their ability to kill mice and other rodents that might damage the rice crop.

Today, animals are being called on to serve domestic and community roles that would have previously been filled by family members or friends. The changing economic and social situation means that people are looking elsewhere to meet their emotional needs. The value of animals as affective support drove an increased interest in animals as companions in recent years. Pet ownership in Japan has gone through a series of mini-booms, starting with the first sharp rise in dog ownership that began in the mid-1970s and peaked in the early 1980s. The generation that typically engage with cat cafés were young children during this period; they, associated pets with the sociality of the home and grew up with animals as members of their households. By 2015, according to the Japan Pet Food Association, which does a regular survey of pet ownership, pets have become a common part of a Japanese household. Dogs are the most popular pet species, with 14.42% of households owning a dog, closely followed by cats, with 10.09% of households having a cat. Today, dogs are a common sight throughout the country, playing in parks with their owners or tucked into handbags at a coffee shop. There are websites

⁴ Statistics published by the Japanese Cabinet Ministry's Secretary of Public Relations in 2010, in a document entitled *dōbutsu aigo ni kansuru yoron chōsa*, "Public Opinion Research Related to Animal Protection" show a steady increase in dog purchases beginning in 1975, with surges in the 1990s and 2000s.

⁵ For the complete survey, see http://www.petfood.or.jp/topics/img/160129.pdf

dedicated to ranking the most popular dog types, with the preferred breeds being toy dogs such as the mini-dachshund or toy poodle.

Neighborhood shops are increasingly filled with adorable outfits customers can buy for their dogs, among other pet care goods. Being out with dogs also encourages socializing with people. During my fieldwork, I lived next to a large park along the Tamagawa River; the local dog owners all let their dogs play together by the river at roughly the same time every day. One owner of a Labrador told me that she had not brought her dog out specifically to meet up with other dogs and their owners, but did enjoy spending time with the people she encountered when walking her dog, usually the same group of people who walked their dogs at the same time. Cats, on the other hand, are more often encountered as strays, as Japanese pet cats tend to be restricted to the indoors. It was exactly this fact, that dog owners had ways to meet each other and form communities but cat owners did not, that inspired the owner of Catacular to open his cat café.

The Japan Pet Food Association 2015 survey also asked participants how pet ownership benefited them, and respondents mostly cited ways in which being with animals improved their emotional and social health. More than half of married respondents said that having a pet increased the amount they conversed with each other, and more than half of single respondents said that they no longer felt lonely with a pet. One-third of both dog and cat owners said that their impetus for getting a pet was because they wanted *iyashi* (healing) and *yasuragi* (comfort) in their lives. Pets are much more common in households of older, married couples. Paul Hansen notes in an article on the increasing importance of animal family members, that much of this growth in pet ownership is driven by people whose adult children have left home (2013, 86). He argues that "the desire for touch – both corporeal and affective – is at the center of Japan's current urban dog population explosion" (83), a more recent spike in pet ownership during the

early 2000s. This new demand for companion animals is also driven by the decreasing birth rate and the rising need for affective connection. More households in Japan have a pet than a child under the age of 15. Animals step in to take the place of missing affective relationships. "Dogs replace, though they do not necessarily displace, former human relationships that are clearly affective in nature. Dogs, at the least, are envisioned as stand-ins, and perhaps in some cases actual replacements, for particular and significant human others" (93). Hansen is clear that his informants did not equate their pets with children; they understood that their dogs were dogs, but they believed in their dogs' agency and capability. Their pets have become like members of the family because they are filling the emotional role that previously would be expected from human family members.

Companion animals have a unique place in the lives of humans as the quality that pet owners want and need from their pets is more immaterial than the goods and labor that we expect from food animals or agricultural animals. That close relationship with pets heightens the pet owner's sense of obligation to care for the animal. The traditional understanding of the human-animal relationship focused on the bond between owner and pets, while also emphasizing the power imbalance between the human and the animal. As Hurn states, "...the sociocultural (and legally sanctioned) expectation is that pets belong to individual humans who have certain responsibilities towards these animals, but also the power over the animal's life and death" (Hurn 2012, 98). The human-animal relationship is highly influenced by the sense of responsibility for care that comes with being a pet owner and living with an animal that is so reliant of the owner for its survival. How then is the human-animal relationship affected by the lack of responsibility for care that the visitors to an animal café have?

5.3 THE HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE CAFÉ CONTEXT

The benefit of animal companionship is today a commonly expressed idea in Japan, but for many Japanese people, pet ownership may not be an option, for financial reasons, for logistical reasons, such as apartment restrictions, or for more emotional ones, such an inability to commit to full-time animal care. Yet there is still a desire for touch and affective connection. Animal cafés have arisen to meet the demand for animal companionship, but their existence and structure has also changed the experience and expectations of animal contact in these circumstances. The companionship of animals is offered in a commercialized context, in which the human-animal relationship is both restricted and carries an expectation of something valuable, such as *iyashi*, in exchange for what visitors pay to be there. The most significant way this changes the relationship is that visitors can derive affective benefits from the experience, but they do not have the same degree of responsibility to the animal that a pet owner does. This influences café visitors to think of animals primarily in terms of their use in meeting the visitor's needs, which the visitor has paid the café to make possible, and focus much less on the animal's needs or experiences as a laborer in the café.

Visitors to an animal café can take advantage of many of the benefits of interaction with animals—the relaxation and reduction of stress, the opportunity for undemanding social connection, the feeling of being recognized and understood—in a controlled context that customers are welcome to engage with and then disengage from as they please. The animal café is a third space in which visitors do not have to deal with the burdens and responsibilities that are present in the first space, the home, or the second space, the workplace (Oldenburg 1989). In the context of an animal café, this also means that the social relationships they have in the animal café, with the animals or staff and other customers, is designed to be without the burden of

responsibility as well. This means that customers can do what they want, enjoy themselves however they prefer, they can be social with an employee or a cat, get what they want out of that experience and then walk away after an hour and leave the responsibility to feed or clean up after the animal to someone else. Animals fit into this atmosphere in terms of what they expect from customers in two different ways. Animals do not expect social considerations from customers. They also do not expect customers to maintain a relationship, which allows customers to patronize the business on their own terms and timetables, primarily concerned with what they want and need.

Visitors are drawn to engage with animals in this way because it better fits their needs and lifestyles than pet ownership. For some of my informants, this kind of relationship serves them better because of financial considerations, as pet ownership requires significant capital. Yet I also met people during my fieldwork who had the space and money for their own pet, but sought out the café experience because it offered them a different type of sociality, based on relaxation with animals and other animal lovers without any responsibility to perform in any particular way. Visitors to cafés can interact with animals on their own terms, with animals they may not want to own such as rabbits or owls, and not take on the physical or emotional burden of becoming a full-time care giver. Sachiko, who I introduced in the previous chapter, started visiting a cat café after her beloved pet cat had died. She found her café visits enjoyable because she got to meet her need for animal contact without having to become a pet owner again, something that she did not feel emotionally ready to undertake.

The limited nature of the relationship with a café animal does not mean that those relationships are not meaningful to visitors. Like the relationship between owners and their pets, café visitors frequently develop a strong bond with a particular animal who becomes "their" cat

or rabbit when they visit. One of the employees I spoke with during my fieldwork told me that one of the most difficult situations she had to manage was when two visitors who had the same cat as "their" cat came at the same time. They both expected the cat to be available to play with them and had no interest in sharing. The relationship differs from that of pet ownership in that café visitors lack both the power over the animal and the responsibility to care for the animal's needs, and that means the interactions I observed reflected a greater sense of entitlement to the attention of the animal than I have observed with pet ownership. Café animals and the customers who come to spend time with them are influenced by the new demands for affective connections is affected by the Japanese understanding of companion animals, but is also informed by the commodified aspect of the animal café and the broader conceptualization of certain realms of life, such as those of sociality, in commodity terms. While café visitors can feel strong affective bonds with café animals and regulars may spend many hours with the animals, in a café that feels like their place, they only gain access to the animals in exchange for payment, and they have expectations about what their payment entitles them to.

As the primary goal of visitors is to have the *iyashi* experience they have come to the café to obtain, the interactions that visitors have with animals are shaped by what they see the animal as offering or representing to them. Some of my informants spoke of how connecting with animals helped them release their stress and relax, and so their interactions with the animals were focused on developing that sense of connection. Sachiko goes to cat cafés because she feels she needs contact with animals in her life, and simply being with them was what provided her with a sense of *iyashi*. "It is a relief, a peaceful thing, even just being next to and seeing a sleeping cat." This practice, of sitting next to an animal in an animal café or just watching it, was a common one.

This also means that the bonds that visitors develop with certain animals reflect associations they have with a certain cat or rabbit rather than the relationship they have with that particular animal. When I asked several different people why they liked one animal over another, I was frequently told that the animal reminded them of their pet back home, either in looks or temperament. Often being around cats simply reminds visitors of having childhood pets, and the good feelings they associate with that period in their lives. My informants often grew up with pets and left behind beloved dogs and cats when they moved to Tokyo as adults for higher-level schooling or occupations. Being with animals is reminiscent of a childhood spent with animals but also of childhood with family. Shun, introduced in the previous chapter told me "(When I'm in cat café) it reminds me of my cat living with my family, so I could bring myself back the feelings that I'm spending time with them. It's really similar to how I feel when I'm with my family and cat in Nagoya, when we are playing with our cat." He regularly visits the same cat café to spend time with his favorite cat, Kinta, who reminds him of his family cat.

Customers are drawn to animal cafés because they believe that spending time with animals will give them a feeling of *iyashi*, a feeling that is important enough to them that they are willing to spend their time and money for that experience. While many businesses in Japan say that they offer customers *iyashi*, there is something unique and distinct about the opportunity to be in close contact with non-human animals. The animal café customers I met with spoke of how connecting with animals helped them release their stress and relax, while also energizing them through the social interaction. More than just a place to get away from outside stresses, time spent in an animal café helps visitors feel better because they are spending time with animals. Animals offer a unique and valuable affective experience in Japan today.

5.4 THE CIRCULATION OF AFFECT BETWEEN ANIMAL AND HUMAN

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the concept of affect, and how iyashi, the product purchased and consumed in animal cafés, is best understood as an affect. Brian Massumi argues that affect is a type of intensity, both mental and physical, that exists between people, whereas emotion is personal – affect once it has been internalized, or "intensity owned and recognized" (1995, 88). Massumi, who draws on the philosophy of Spinoza and work of Deleuze and Guattari (1993), sees affect as existing between and in relation to things and bodies. It is a potential for response not yet actualized, and becomes actual through embodiment. This definition of affect aligns well with the way iyashi is experienced in the animal café; it is in the space and it is the interactions of the individuals, the people and the animals, that leads to its embodiment within the visitors. I argue that the animal café is a space that has been commoditized and visitors pay to enter and engage in an experience that provides them the positive affect of *iyashi*. It is a space of social reproduction, where visitors can take a break from being economically productive and focus instead on self-care. The human employees and the animals perform care work through their labor to create iyashi, which helps visitors rest and recuperate, and return to the outside world better able to be productive. I turn now to the question of how affect is produced, consumed and transmitted between the human and the animal in the animal café.

The first level of interaction that all customers have with the animals in the animal café is visual. While regulars may become familiar enough that cats will be willing to curl up next to them, it takes many visits to reach that level of familiarity and the majority of café visitors only stop by occasionally, when they feel the urge to see an animal. For these customers, they will spend their time in a café looking at and taking pictures of sleeping cats, watching rabbits hop

around on the floor of the café or enjoying drinks and chatting with friends while the animals sit around them. Customers can pet the animals but most café customers are respectful to the mood of the animals and if the animal moves away from them, they will let it do so. Some cafés will sell snacks that customers can use to attract the animals, a very successful tactic in rabbit cafés as rabbits otherwise are largely uninterested in interacting with people. Bird cafés largely prohibit interaction with the birds, though they may have a small room which customers can pay a small fee to enter and hold birds for five minutes. It is very unusual to see a cat rubbing up against a person or sitting on their lap, indicators of a close bond with that person. But that experience of being with an animal, even if one cannot touch it, still creates an affective response in people and is the first step in creating an *iyashi* atmosphere.

The Japanese phrase *me no hoyō*, which roughly translates to a feast for the eyes, was used by my informant Ayumi, a former cat café employee, to explain how customers get *iyashi* just from looking at cats. The Japanese feel that certain sights can offer comfort to the eyes (*me*) and thus the person. Cat cafés are particularly popular with people with cat allergies because it gives them the opportunity to have that feeling just by looking at the cats and being in the space of the cat café, even if they cannot touch them. Sachiko describes this feeling as *anshin*, peacefulness, which one can get just by being with and looking at a sleeping cat. She compares it to the feeling of parents looking at a baby and thinking "*ganbarō* (do well)," when they want it to strive to succeed in life. This way of describing the relationship with an animal relates to the feeling of *amae* and feeling closer to something because it is weak and one wants it to succeed. Seeing animals as cute also helps customers connect to animals in this way. Many of the features that humans identify as cute are characteristic of infants or juveniles and trigger protective responses (Mullan and Marvin 1999).

To develop some type of affective bond, the visitor needs to feel connected to the animal in some way. Sometimes that comes from feeling a sense of kinship to the animal, perhaps to how the visitors' life is, but often from what they wish for their lives. When Yuna watches rabbits, she "likes seeing them move around freely, and seeing their energy." She does not need to be touching the animal all the time to feel like she understands it, and that understanding comes from her interpretation of the animal's feelings based on how she would feel in that situation. Sachiko enjoys what she feels to be the authenticity of the animal's behavior, which contrasts with the ways she interacts with other people in her life where expressing selfishness is unacceptable.

As Kohn wrote, "How other kinds of beings see us matters. That other kinds of being see us changes thing" (2013: 1). Café visitors speak of benefiting from seeing animals, but it is also important to feel that they are seen by the animal. The most evocative way my informants speak of this connection is through their sense of communication with the animal. This communication is in some ways one-sided as animals can listen or not, but the café patrons are driven by the need to be heard and that kind of communication fits their needs. Eye contact is essential to this kind of communication. All the species present in animal cafés have faces that customers can look into. I believe that, as cafés moved away from domestic species towards more exotic ones in order to break into new terrain, owls were seen as a reasonable choice because they have faces that people can gaze into. Misaki said that she believes you can get *iyashi* from an owl, even though you cannot pet and cuddle it the way you would a rabbit or a cat, just through looking. She said for her it was about "feeling that it was understanding (*rikai*) of me. The feeling that the animal can understand me." I asked her if that understanding is the same way humans understand each other and she said, "Humans can. But they sometimes do or they sometimes don't."

While scholars might differ on how much communication there is between a human and a nonhuman animal, the visitors to animal cafés themselves are quite clear that they are communicating with the animals. They are not only sharing their thoughts with the animal, but they feel they are being understood. When I describe what an animal café is to someone unfamiliar with the topic, they often easily see the appeal of a cat or a rabbit, but are confused by the fact that owl cafés are the third most popular type of animal café. When first encountering the idea of an animal café, the appeal of soft fur and a warm body cuddling against yours seems obvious to a Western observer, but customers in an owl café cannot curl up with a raptor, and touching is done carefully or not at all. Yet if one begins with the understanding that customers go to animal cafés to develop an affective, communicative relationship, the owl seems more reasonable because it is the only bird with a face. For customers looking to connect more "authentically" with a wild animal, a creature free from the constraints of human society, the appeal of cats and rabbits is limited, and connections to lizards and fish are difficult. Hansen drew on the work of Levinas in his evaluation of the affective appeal of pet dogs when he said that face to face contact is necessary to acknowledge the other and their difference of being. "Such an experience is necessarily experiential and specific. It is a meeting not in theory but in reality; a meeting in shared time and space through the physical and affective register of face" (2013:98). Hansen believes "the face is essential for the affective resonance" (98) of an animal or even of an emotional care robot like Paro, which is designed with the face of a seal. This is true even in the more fleeting encounters between a person and an owl at an animal café. The face of the owl not only allows the customer to feel they are connecting to the owl but it also allows the customer to feel that they are seen, and understood.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the sociality of the animal café is based on the non-verbal communicative nature of the connections formed in the animal café. This section demonstrates how essential animals are to that sociality, thus why I call it "animal sociality." The sense of connection between visitors and animals comes from communication based on affect rather than on discourse. The opportunity to pet an animal, look into its eyes and feel as if the animal is seeing and accepting the person, to feel welcomed when an animal chooses to curl up against that person are all central parts of the sense of sociality offered by the animal café.

5.5 USING THE ANIMAL TO CONNECT

Connecting to one animal is also about connecting to something beyond that animal. Keiko, one of my informants, told me, "I wanted to build a special relationship with one of the cats because if I do so, I feel that this place is mine. I know this cat. When I come here, I can see this cat. So, here's mine." That is the animal they seek out when they arrive and interact with for much of their time in the café. At cafés like the one Sachiko visits that have different cats working different "shifts," the regulars will know their cat's schedule and visit when that cat will be available. Visiting the café when "their" animal is there helps visitors to feel connected to the café itself, making it feel more like their space, and the people in it, who feel connected to each other through their shared love of animals. For customers seeking sociality through the animal café, the animal not only socializes directly with the visitor but helps the visitors connect socially to the other people there.

Another important sense of connection that comes through connections with the animals is one with the "natural world" that the animals are perceived to inhabit, a world in which the

animals are more free ($jiy\bar{u}$) than humans can be, constrained as we are by sociocultural rules. When customers enter an animal café, they are entering a place that is separate from the world they move through in their everyday lives. This space is not only separate from home life and work life but it is free from the culturally defined responsibilities of those spaces. With that fact in mind, plus the addition of animals roaming around in a way they do not generally do in human spaces, sends the message to customers that they are in a place more connected to nature than to culture. In my research on animal cafés, I found that visitors generally felt cats were more closely aligned with a sense of the domestic, while animals like rabbits or owls were seen as more wild, but all animals were seen as wilder and more connected to nature, and thus free from cultural constraints, than humans. Visitors are attracted to the animal not only because of who the animal is but also what the animal represents.

Despite visitors' sense of displacement from their normal lives into the wild space of the animal's world, the animal café is, of course, not an authentically wild space and the animals are not as free and wild as visitors perceive them to be. Shirane, a scholar of Japanese literature and culture, argues that Japan's relationship to nature is established through secondary nature, a medium like a carefully tended garden, a pattern on kimono or poetry, that blunts their actual understanding of the reality of nature (2013). In some ways, animal cafés play this role, allowing visitors to interact with animals in a way that feels real and wild, but is not; they are communicating with the animal through their own interpretation of their relationship with the animal. Even owls, the species of animal found in animal cafés that visitors have no prior experience with, who seem exotic and outside of normal human experience, have been raised by hand by humans so that they will recognize humans as a compatriot instead of a threat and will thus be more suited for life in an animal café.

Many people in Japan are attracted to the opportunity to interact with animals in a "natural" way, as demonstrated by the popularity of monkey parks ($yaen\ k\bar{o}en$), which have existed since the 1970s and remain popular today. Yet monkey parks are just another example of businesses in which people have interfered with the lives of animals for the purpose of meeting human needs and interests. The behavior of "wild monkeys" in Japanese monkey parks is so modified, manipulated through feeding so they are present at times convenient for visitors, that these animals cannot be considered to be truly wild (Knight 2006). These parks brand themselves as $shizen\ d\bar{o}butsuen$ or "natural zoos," which position themselves as "a vantage point onto wild nature" (249), where "animal viewing in the monkey park is premised on humans moving in animal spaces" (252). The purpose of this manipulation is to allow Japanese customers the impression of connecting with animals in a space that is authentic to them, a place where they are more likely to be happy than in human spaces like zoos.

This engagement with animals in a way that is perceived to be authentic yet is firmly shaped by humans is seen in the interactions of visitors to an animal café. The word most commonly used in my interviews to describe the cats in the cat café, and cats more generally, was free ($jiy\bar{u}$). This is their most distinctive characteristic to customers who find cats appealing because cats are free from the social rules and obligations that control human lives. Yet the cats in the cat café live highly controlled lives, primarily kept in cages when not working the café floor, performing affective labor for the benefit of customers. Some customers are aware of this fact. Hinata told me that when she is in an animal café, she thinks about the feelings of the animals:

I wonder what animals really wish for. Animals can bark, and like, they can express their emotions sometimes but they can't talk so it's really up to the people to decide. Animals are "made" by humans, whether it be dogs, cats, or rabbits. The strays and wild ones are different, but mostly, humans take care of them and

breed them, sell them to make money off them, and people buy them from others to take care of them.... You can never really know what's happiness for them. For example, the rabbits at the rabbit cafés are called "rabbit staffs", so cats at the cat café are technically also "staff" ...but it's not like they get any money, even if they're touched by humans they might not want to be touched by.

She enjoys spending time in the café but wants to make sure she's not imposing too much on the animals and engages them primarily when they come over to her, when she's offering them food. However, her perspective was an unusual one. Most customers are attentive to the enjoyment of the animals, and feel that interactions where the customer and animal are both having fun are better for both of them, but it is unusual to think about the animal's life when the humans are gone. Mullan and Marvin's book on the culture of zoos note that "the fact that he [man] is able to arrange around him creatures from all parts of the world, to make decisions with regard to the quality and conditions of their lives and to give shape to the world for them in terms of his imagination and desire is, in the end, an expression of power" (1999: 160). Visitors to an animal café may not have the same control over animals that a zoo curator does, but there is a similar exercise of control over the world of the animals in the café, and on some subconscious level, the visitor to the café enjoys feeling in control of a social encounter. Customers are primarily looking for a positive social interaction with an animal that helps them feel better, and encountering the animal in a human-created, human-controlled space enhances the interaction for them.

5.6 CARE AND EASE

The fact that visitors are not responsible for the day to day mundanities of animal ownership, from being home to feed them to checking them for illness and taking them to the veterinarian,

does not preclude visitors from engaging in a certain kind of care work in the café. The people who patronize animal cafés are animal lovers; they benefit affectively from the opportunity to engage with another being, and one of the ways they can engage is through touching, soothing and connecting with the animals. At the same time, the amount of energy and time they invest in caring is controllable in a way that care work elsewhere in their lives is not. When my informants discussed caring for the animals, they generally noted how easy it is. Animal cafés are not just affective spaces; they are spaces where that affect is easily accessible on demand. This is necessary for the success of the café as a commercial space; visitors expect to get what they pay for when they enter.

As my informants talked about how the Japanese view animals today, a number made connections to the Japanese concept of *amae*, dependence, which argues that the ideal relationship is one of dependence on the caregiver (Doi 1981). Though the neoliberal ethic present in Japan today is challenging this conception, and women increasingly express frustration with societal expectations that they be primarily caregivers, the sense that "it is nice to be needed" still holds power (Alexy 2011). Animals are dependent on their human caregivers without necessarily being demanding, especially in an animal café; they only need to make sure the animal is emotionally contented. In an exploration of the importance of touch among precarious Japanese, Allison went to a cat café with an informant who needed a break from caring for her elderly mother. She writes, "Touch is sanitized, aestheticized, channeled…one can linger over the brushing of a cat's body while leaving the nuisance of care to the paid attendants…the affect sought is materialized through an inter-bodily (if trans-species) sensation of connectedness" (Allison 2013, 108).

One young woman, Yuna, that I met at a rabbit café, talked with me extensively about her perception of the Japanese relationship with animals. Yuna told me, "It's hard to care for people, but it's easy to care for and love animals." Children grow up learning that taking care of someone who depends on you is how you show love, and "Kids first have a desire to do what their parents do, which naturally becomes 'taking care of something.' At first, it could start off with a baby doll, or a stuffed animal, but as they grow older, they become interested in caring for a living thing. You can feel wanted and needed by pets because they rely their life on you, and some people like that feeling." Animals also differ from people because they will more "obediently dote on you (sunao ni kawaigari ni)," so that feeling can be conveniently elicited in an animal café for customers to enjoy. Many Japanese families without children and single people living alone would like to have someone to care for, and animals can make that possible. Sachiko said she feels animals are especially important to DINK (Double Income No Kids) families like her own. Even though she does not have children, she still has "the feeling of wanting to protect (mamoritai) something." There is something about taking care of someone weaker than oneself that resonates in Japan and animals are increasingly filling the emotional void. One informant told me that she felt that her previous history with cats as a child continues to help her not only to enjoy spending time with animals but also to feel a sense of connection to and responsibility for the care of all animals. This is part of what makes being in an animal café meaningful to her.

The younger, precarious generation in Japan has little time to address their need for caregiving and have become adept at efficiently meeting their needs through the patronage of businesses like animal cafés. Pet ownership is very time consuming, but people who still want contact with animals can get it quickly and easily. The fact that animal café visits are easy is

what keeps customers coming back. Mai, a young woman whom I met spending her Friday evening relaxing alone at a cat café, had first visited a café because what she had seen in the media had made her curious. When I asked what made her return for a second visit, she told me, "It was easy to do." She found it easy to go by herself, with no judgement about being alone, which is in contrast to other enjoyable activities she might engage in, like karaoke, shopping, or regular cafés, which she needs to do with friends. Rie told me that the animal she cares most about is her childhood pet cat who lives with her family, but visiting a cat café gives her a close approximation to that bond. "I find the best cat is my cat. But I don't have much time to meet my cat, so the cat café is near here so I can get a chance to see cats. It's very easy."

Japan's pet and animal café boom demonstrates that the Japanese relationship with animals today is shaped by the social changes that have created a new need for affective connection. The demographic changes, such as the late marriage age, decreasing birth rate, and increasing number of married, childless couples, have created a demand for something to take care of and be cared for by and animals are increasingly filling that void. For those without the financial resources to have a pet to fill that need, the marketplace has responded by creating a place where visitors can pay for that opportunity. Today's Japan's animals are still working animals, but with a focus on affective labor rather than more traditional types of work.

5.7 LIFE FOR ANIMALS IN THE CAFÉ

The commodification of animals' labor has meant that they are shifting from companion to café worker. They are treated as workers who add value to the functioning of the café by the owners and employees and so their lives in the cafés are necessary different from the lives of a beloved

pet. In her study of cat cafés in Japan, Plourde goes so far as to argue that the labor of the cats themselves is affective labor (2014). The animals interact with customers six days a week and when they retire for a break or for the night, they curl up not a bed but in a cage. Rather than primarily interacting with their owners, they are handled by strangers every day. This change in quality is demonstrated in the kind of behavior that café animals exhibit. They are trained to be friendly and engaging, and yet they also demonstrate more signs of stress at the end of their work day than a pet would. This section explores the experience of animals in the café and how their behavior and actions are turned to serving the affective goals of the café.

The quality of life for an animal in an animal café is generally good, as the owners and employees I met during my fieldwork demonstrably cared about the animals and paid careful attention to the physical needs and health of their animals. This is both humane and good business sense, as unhealthy and unhappy animals make poor companions for visitors. I have been told by informants that during the peak of the cat café boom there was a greater proliferation of cafés run by people who wanted to take advantage of the economic opportunity presented by the boom and they often cut corners in animal care. However, visitors responded badly to the lack of care and ill health of the animals, and the cafés that I visited during my fieldwork period were all well-run. Physically café animals are well cared for, with the majority of café owners spending an hour or two each day before the café opens checking them for signs of disease, brushing and cleaning them, and feeding them. Yet the life of a café animal is not an easy one, as they do not live the lives of pets, but instead spend all of their time entertaining visitor after visitor, and being touched by dozens of people throughout a day. They are carefully trained to be generally amenable and pleasant at all times. They are not companions, but employees working to provide the *iyashi* experience that customers have come for.

Animal cafés are largely wide open spaces, designed to encourage freedom of movement for visitors and animals alike, encouraging them to encounter and interact with each other, while also allowing space for either to withdraw into each's own space. The majority of cat cafés have areas where the cats can move to in order to escape people, either high shelves or platforms that they can climb to out of human reach or separate rooms that employees cycle them in and out of as they exhibit signs of anxiety or irritation. Most rabbit cafés keep a dozen or so animals in the café, with most kept in cages most of the time while three or four move around freely for half hour periods, allowing time for the ones that have been engaging with visitors to rest and be undisturbed back in their cages.

When too many of the animals in the café are avoiding human contact, often a sign of overstimulation, it is the human staff's job to either cycle the animals through the café (in those that have some animals sequestered at any one time), or find the animal that is least stressed and encourage it to engage, so that customers can have the access to the animals that they came for. In Catacular, one of the youngest cats did not like to be petted, but did like to play, so when too many of the cats were asleep or hiding, an employee would usually be able to get him to run around the room and jump on a toy, using her familiarity with him to elicit behavior that a strange visitor would have difficulty with. Many cafés also use snacks to wake animals up and get them playing. Many rabbit cafés and some cat cafés, like Whiskers, sell snacks for a few dollars to help customers draw animals close. Cafés like Catacular or the rabbit café Usa-chan distribute food or snacks to all customers when the energy in the café lags, giving everyone a chance to attract some animal attention.

All of the animal cafés I visited during my fieldwork keep only animals raised for that lifestyle (though more recently a number of cat shelters have begun running a version of an

animal café designed to find homes for rescued cats), and they have been carefully trained by café owners, and regularly monitored by regular employees, to be non-aggressive towards visitors, and thus largely unresisting to being touched, picked up and handled by strangers. I was unable to observe this early training as all the cafés I visited were well established when I started my fieldwork, but I was told that constant interaction from an early age is important. Cats are raised with the other café cats and are thus comfortable and non-aggressive with them. Café animals also are touched and held by a variety of people from birth; they learn to accept this as usual and are thus not resistant to human contact. I never witnessed a single instance of a café animal becoming aggressive with a customer, though cats will occasionally hiss and swipe at other cats. At Catacular, one of the Siamese cats tended to be territorial, claiming a particular spot for herself and the youngest, and most playful, cat would occasionally challenge her for access. As soon as the Siamese let out a hiss, the café employee working that day had swooped the young cat up and she deposited him in a separate room to cool down. The young cat was punished with isolation and learned not to be aggressive or pushy, but the employee kept the incident from interrupting the enjoyment of the customers in the café, who barely noticed the interruption.

This training, of course, is done differently with different species. Cats are a domesticated species and generally do not object, and even welcome, human contact, and so the focus in their training is on putting up with contact even when they would rather be left alone. The cats in cat cafés are noticeably more patient about being continually woken throughout the day to be touched than others I have encountered. During a regular visit to a cat café, there will usually be a few cats wandering around the room or relaxing on a cushion near the customers, a few cats staying near the areas customers can reach but sleeping, and a few cats that have moved up to a

shelf or other area out of the reach of customers, indicating that they wish to be left alone. If too many cats are sleeping and customers seem dissatisfied, an employee will usually bring out a favorite toy and attract the attention of one of the more playful cats. Employees do not force the cats to engage, but draw out the cats out using their knowledge of what they like.

Café staff pay careful attention to how many hours cats have been "on the floor," to use a shop keeping term, and make sure that they have regular opportunities for rest. They also keep an eye on unhappy body language such as a hunched back or fur standing on end, and intervene quickly if any cats hiss or swipe with their claws, primarily at other cats rather than at people. When animals are out in the café with people, they are expected to be available for the enjoyment of customers; they will be mildly punished with isolation if they do not present the appropriate qualities and rewarded with play or snacks when they are willing to move among the customers.

It is equally clear when a cat is fully rested and eager to interact with people, so cafés create schedules for when animals will be out in the café so their energy will be put to use entertaining visitors. One afternoon when I was relaxing at Whiskers with Makiko, a young black cat came prancing down the stairs into the main room of the café, tail held high in the air and moving quickly. Makiko laughed and told me that "he has just come on shift." He had been kept away from customers in a separate room all morning and, now that it was four o'clock, he was let in to interact with people and was clearly more eager to play than some of the cats that had been out all day. He was noticeably more willing to go up to café customers and his friendliness was rewarded with bits of chicken that customers had purchased.

Animals like rabbits and owls are more challenging to keep in cafés because they are less domesticated than cats. Employees in these cafés are attentive and helpful in showing hesitant

guests how to touch or hold these animals. As long as there is no danger to the animal or the visitor, employees let the customers engage with the animals however they want. Of Tokyo's few bird cafés, there is only one where customers are free to touch and hold the owls throughout their stay; the others allow only short, carefully supervised opportunities to hold the birds. In this one café, visitors are given basic instructions, such as how to hold the jesses and to ask employees for help returning an owl to its perch, but they are able to hold multiple owls on their bare arms during a visit.

I spoke to one of the employees about what led these owls to be so passive and accepting of human touch and she told me that the owner personally hand-raised all the owls from hatching and taught them to think of humans as kin to them and not a threat. In fact, we were told to be more careful about separating the large owls from the smaller species that they might identify as food than about our own safety from any of the birds. The owls live their lives on human schedules, awake during the day instead of night, which an employee at a different owl café told me was not uncomfortable for them as their schedules are simply decided by when their food is available. The owls also have no social contact other than with people. Smaller owls may be tied with their jesses to the same stand, but larger birds are kept tied to their own stands and can only be moved around by people.

Rabbits, by contrast, are not aggressive and thus require little training to be in a café, but employees have to be attentive to signs of stress that rabbits, a prey animal, may exhibit. Rabbits invariably move away from visitors, hiding under couches or in their hutches, but can be coaxed out with food. They also have to be soothed and allowed to rest more than an animal like a cat. Rabbits are the animals most likely to exhibit discomfort with people, struggling when visitors try to pick them up and freezing once they are lofted into the air, a fear response. Yet they are

also the easiest to attract, as most rabbit cafés sell rabbit snacks and they are eager enough for food to climb into laps and allow petting as long as they continue to be fed. If the rabbits in the café are too eager to hide from visitors, the employees will usher them towards visitors and encourage guests to buy a snack. In one rabbit café, I was told to point out a rabbit I liked the look of from the cages and it was deposited in my lap for me to play with. I could keep it close by offering food, but also because it was uncomfortable jumping down from the height of my chair.

Unless customers pay extra to purchase snacks – dried vegetables in most rabbit cafés and chicken slivers in the few cat cafés that offer the option – interaction with the animals largely requires that customers approach the animal. The animals of all breeds receive more than sufficient human contact and are unlikely to approach a stranger to play. Regulars are the exception, as they visit often enough to develop a bond with their favorite animals, and these animals will seek them out when they arrive, usually just sitting by or on them. More casual visitors, they are free to approach the animals relaxing around the room, and often begin by just looking at or taking pictures of a cat or rabbit. Customers often reach out to stroke a passing animal, which may shy away or may allow the contact. If a cat is awake and moving around, employees will often step in to get it playing with a toy, and then will pass the toy to a customer, explaining how to use it to keep the animal's attention.

There is an issue with animals in animal cafés being overstimulated, as any particular cat or rabbit will be engaged by dozens of customers in a day, and more on the weekend. Rabbits will hop away from reaching hands, hiding under chairs and in corners. Cats show dissatisfaction with body language, moving away from a person they want to leave them alone or hunching and fluffing out their fur to make themselves look more menacing. However, the animals also clearly

display their pleasure when they are having a positive interaction with a customer, whether it be a brief game chasing a toy or greeting and rubbing against a regular they are comfortable with. These expressions of enjoyment reinforce the bond with the customer who gets pleasure from seeing the animal happy. The café visitor feels that he or she has succeeded in making another creature happy which makes that person happy. This sense of enjoyment, contentment, *iyashi*, is what brings customers to the animal café, and it is strongly tied to the sense of connection with the animal that is engendered in this space. This sense of affect is made accessible through the actions of the animals, the actions of the people, and through the construction of a story about the relationship between the two.

The life cycle of a café animal is another way in which the lived experience of these animals is different from that of a pet. Cats live their entire working lives in the cafés, before their age and inability to play with customers sends them into "retirement." The owners I spoke to generally felt that cats older than nine or ten years old would be better off not in the café. In the cases of cat retirement that I know of, the cats were adopted by regular, dedicated customers, becoming full time pets. Other customers like to hear news about cats that have retired and are pleased to know that they are doing well. Neither rabbit, bird or any other type of animal café have been around long enough to have to deal with the question of elderly animals, though rabbit cafés are more likely to offer older rabbits for sale, supplementing the cafés income with pet sales. These factors mean that owners must consider their animals as sources of value for the café, evaluating how many years an individual can work and what visitor to animal ratio will be most cost effective. The animal's experience in the café is necessarily different from that of a companion animal, despite the apparent similarity.

5.8 ANIMALS BEYOND THE HUMAN

On the main page of the cat café Tabby's website, visitors can follow a link to a page dedicated to introducing the cats to their audience. This includes basic facts such as name, breed and age, but also short snippets of insight into each cat's personality. One particular cat is smart, observant and "can read the air ($k\bar{u}ki$ ga yomemasu)" while another is mischievous and will run away quickly, and a third is like an older sister to the other cats. Similar stories and animal introductions are offered in most of the cafés I visited in some form; cat cafés often have albums of pictures and descriptions for patrons to browse, while rabbit cafés will have handwritten tags on the cages with the breed and a short description. These stories help brand the animals, transforming them from indistinguishable beasts into entities with personalities, with whom visitors can develop a relationship. This also aligns the animals with other intimacy workers, like hostess and maids, putting forth the idea that the animals have particular personalities that visitors will benefit from spending time with and thus making the money they spend on the experience worthwhile. Some cafés even refer to their animals as "staff," presenting them as beings performing labor in the café to create the sense of *iyashi* that visitors come to consume.

In the animal café, there is an emphasis on creating a personal connection with particular animals, and these descriptions are designed to offer visitors a window into the "real" lives and worldviews of these animals. For customers, this helps them meet their need for access to the world of the animal, something they perceive as natural and wild, and free from the social constraints they feel. The stories told by these albums, and those told to me by both employees and patrons about who the animals are and how they relate to people, are part of the affective experience of visiting a café. Creating an image of how the animal thinks makes it possible for the people in the café to connect affectively to it. This section turns to the affective connection

between people and animals in these cafés, looking at both how people describe the way they interact with animals and the effect of these interactions and also considers the unrecognized labor that animals must perform in order for that affective connection to be possible.

Kohn's seminal work *How forests think* urges anthropologists to think beyond the human, recognizing that "what differentiates life from the inanimate physical world is that life-forms represent the world in some way or another, and these representations are intrinsic to their being" (2013, 9). He draws on the works of multispecies ethnographers like Donna Haraway (2008) who see "that there is something about our everyday engagements with other kinds of creatures that can open new kinds of possibilities for relating and understanding" (Kohn 2013: 7). I connect these understandings of human-animal relationships to the conceptualization of affect. The way that an affect built around trans-species connectedness is created, transmitted and consumed offers new perspective both on affect and affective labor and on human-animal relations. Café animals are transformed from pets and companions into actors who produce affective value for humans.

Essential to understanding the relationship between customers and café animals is understanding how visitors conceptualize what the animal is, and particularly, how that contrasts with who they are as people. My informants constructed representations of what the café animal is and how these representations are meaningful. In much of this dissertation, I have written interchangeably about the different animals in different types of cafés. However, it is in the stories that my informants construct about how they relate to café animals that the appeal of different species becomes more relevant. The generalizations that visitors construct around different species influence which café is most attractive to them. Cats represent the freedom of selfishness, as they can express disdain and disregard for people, and cat cafés are particularly

attractive to visitors who feel particularly stifled by societal constraints and demands to be polite and friendly. Rabbits are seen as weak and vulnerable and are particularly attractive to visitors who enjoy expressing their caring side. Owls and other birds are more exotic than domestic pets and are attractive to visitors who want to connect to something wild and outside of their normal lives. To some extent, each of the species represents all of these qualities - cat café visitors can feel they are caring for something weaker than them and rabbit café visitors enjoy the exoticism of spending time with an unusual animal—but visitors tend to gravitate towards certain cafés over others where they can have the experience with animals that most suits their needs.

Cat cafés were the first and still are by far the most common type of animal café in Japan. In discussing my research with people unfamiliar with the animal café concept, the question of why cats is commonly raised. Why not dogs or other types of generally friendly animals? Yet many of my informants spoke about the selfishness of cats as refreshing and enjoyable. If a cat rejects a visitor, there is no concern about it being a personal attack; it is simply the animal expressing itself naturally. Keiko said that cat café people aren't hurt, mentally, by the rejection of a cat because they can say to themselves, "Oh because it's [a] cat. They don't want to be touched right now. It's not because I'm wrong or did something bad to them, but it's just their nature. I think people who like cats like those aspects. Cats cannot be controlled perfectly and I think that's fine for them." Hiro also echoed these sentiments. When I asked him what he found appealing about cats, he described their selfishness; "they eat when they want to eat and sleep when they want to sleep." He contrasted this with his own life; in his job, if he tried to sleep at work, it would not be okay. Sachiko told me that the cat's selfishness creates a sense of distance that eases her mind (ki ga raku). The cats' independence and self-centeredness appeals to customers on two levels. It allows customers to enjoy the animal without feeling beholden to

maintain the relationship; cats do not care about customers that much so it is appropriate for the customer to come and go as they please. They also offer visitors a chance to vicariously enjoy a feeling of freedom from social restrictions. Office worker may not be able to live their lives as they please and have control over their own time, but they can, if only briefly, enjoy spending time with an animal that does have that freedom.

Rabbits, in contrast to cats, are not independent and aggressive, but soft and weak in a way that elicits protective instincts in the people I spoke with. Hinata was a woman I met when she interrupted a conversation I was having with someone about *iyashi* at a rabbit café because she was so interested in our discussion. She had not been a long-time animal lover, but had discovered how much she enjoyed being in a rabbit café after stopping by once out of curiosity. When she described the feeling of touching a rabbit for the first time, it was clear to me that the experience gave her something she was needing in her life. "When you touch a living rabbit, you feel its life. At the time [I went], I was very tired from my daily life, so seeing that, it made me feel like... if something so small can be alive, I need to work hard too." Rabbit café visitors often made mention of the physical traits of rabbits and what they felt they expressed. Yuna told me, "I think rabbits are cute because they look like a bit goofy to me, just like people find a bit clumsy person to be more likable than a perfect person." Saori talked about the way rabbits quiver, with their ears and nose twitching at all times and how that made her want to cuddle and protect them. Yuna says she enjoys watching rabbits because they are cute (kawaii), especially because their nose and mouth are separate and always moving, so she sees them as loveable and adorable. Visitors in rabbit cafés tend to be quieter and more relaxed than cat café visitors. The animals are likely to respond poorly to quick movement and loud noises and the best way to engage with a rabbit was to sit calmly, perhaps with some snacks as temptation, and let the rabbit come to you.

What was common to visitor descriptions of the appeal of animals, whatever the type, was that they are free in a way that people are not. And yet, in the animal café, people can have the opportunity to connect to the animal and, through them, to the animal world they see as separate from their own. Yuna described rabbits this way:

Rabbits are a type of animals that live as they like: They usually don't get attached closely to their owners and don't learn tricks (to make their owners happy). Rabbits only do what they want to do even when they're with us in a same space, so it's impossible for humans to have their own way. However, there're still some times that they come close to us by themselves or that they show like they want to get some strokes. That's the reason why I like rabbits: Basically, they're free type of animals but still I can have a sense that we're connected to each other at a certain level.

Rabbits may not learn tricks or respond to training, but once in a while, they'll want to be petted, which lets people know that they are still connected. This appeals to her because it evokes "a similar feeling to when it feels nice when people are not all over your personal business."

People in animal cafés identify and emphasize the traits in the animals that speak to them because this makes it possible for them to connect affectively to the animal. The understanding of the animal that they create through observation but also through conversations with café employees and the descriptions in the albums at the café makes café animals what Plourde called "sensual and fantastic sites of investment and imagination" (2014, 13). Yet animal café customers are often, on some level, aware of the contradictions inherent in caring about the freedom of animals that are confined in a café. This may have contributed to the success of the more humane animal cafés over the more exploitative ones. Natsumi, a young woman who has worked at a number of cat cafés, had her first job at a café run by a man trying to take advantage of the boom who had no real interest in the animals. His lack of care showed in the poor health of the animals, which café visitors found upsetting, and the business closed within a year. Natsumi told me that the café workers all loved the cats and used their own pay to take them to

veterinarians, and adopted them when the café closed. Hinata told me she justifies enjoying the work of the rabbits by ensuring she does nothing she sees as "force." If she can attract a rabbit with food, she will, but otherwise will just watch them. She visited a café in Roppongi once where rabbits were placed in the laps of customers and made to stay there; she felt bad about the experience and never returned.

Visitors recognize the animals as living beings, with feelings and needs, and want the experience for the animal in the café to be a good one, but they also craft their own stories about who the animals are and feel in the way that best fits what they need from the human-animal interaction. One way they do this is through the emphasis that what animals offer, caring and companionship, is done "naturally," as they cannot be compelled to engage with customers. This echoes arguments that have been made about the reproductive labor of women in feminist literature, who argue that women's labor in childcare and household management is largely unrecognized because it is understood to be in their genes (Vogel 2013 [1983]). Interactions with animals create the opportunity be cared for by another in a way that is more "honest" than human interactions. It also means that visitors are free from any obligation to return the care, or even recognize the effort put in by the animal, who may have preferred to have no contact with the strange visitor, or the human staff, who coax the animal into playing and engaging with visitors.

5.9 CONCLUSION

There is a history in Japan of investing animals with qualities that have become important in Japanese society as a way of reinforcing or valorizing certain kinds of behavior. The most famous example of this is the story of Hachiko, the dog who waited every day to meet his owner

at the train station and who continued to wait at that station for years when the owner did not return, having died at work. The story became a major part of the Japanese mythos, spread through stories in places like elementary school books, during Japan's imperialistic period in the early to mid-1900s. The qualities that Hachiko demonstrated—loyalty, steadfastness, devotion—were used to ensure young Japanese would up to express those same qualities for the benefit of the empire. The changing role of animals in Japanese society, and the qualities that are invested in them, reflects changing expectations for life and companionship.

Animal café visitors see the café animals as uninhibited, honest and free with their emotions in a way that the visitors wish they could be. They come to the café to experience these qualities vicariously, making an affective connection not just to the physical qualities of the animals—the soft fur, wiggling tail or nose, in-human movements—but also to their qualities that they invest in the animals—their wildness or natural-connection, their freedom from social rules, the honesty of their feelings. They feel they have access to these realms by their connection to the animal. The fact that these characteristics are what those involved with the animal café emphasize is a reflection on the purpose of the animal café more generally. The animal café is a place where visitors are allowed to be free from social pressures and do not have to stifle their feelings. The investment of these qualities in the animals only furthers the development of the *iyashi* atmosphere that is at the center of the commodity exchange in this place.

However, what makes these encounters, where visitors eagerly revel in the freedom and companionability of the animals, is made possible because the animals have been brought into a commodified space and are expected to perform in a way that will give customers the affective experience they have come to expect. They live lives that are not only unlike those of actual wild

animals, but are also unlike those of the pets that many visitors remember from their childhood when they come to the café. As the economy of affect has become increasingly lucrative in Japan, business owners are finding new ways to commodify affective encounters. Using animals as the providers of that affect through their labor allows it to be obtained more cheaply, as animals need only be cared for and not paid. Animals continue to play an important role as laborers in society, as they have since their domestication, but in the new realm of commoditized affect.

6.0 HUMAN EMPLOYEES AND THE EXPERIENCE OF AFFECT: SHARING THE BURDEN WITH ANIMAL STAFF

The first time I visited the cat café *Catacular*, I hesitated in the doorway, and peered in the window, trying to find my footing before I entered this unfamiliar space. A young woman in her mid-twenties opened the door with a smile and invited me in. The woman, who I would come to know as Sana, was dressed simply, in a pink collared shirt and skirt, with a tan apron wrapped around her waist, and she beckoned me into the front of the café as she stepped behind the desk. I explained this was my first time visiting, so she started by explaining the café rules, which included strictures about washing my hands to prevent the spread of disease and about not bothering the cats, particularly sleeping ones. I found her manner both professional and relaxed; she covered a lot of important material without seeming to lecture and made an unfamiliar experience seem normal and accessible.

Sana inquires about how long I am planning to stay, explaining the pricing structure, and then gives me a token to return at the end of my visit, so she can calculate how long I have stayed. She then opens the pet gate that separates the main body of the café from the payment area at the front, and gestures me through, showing me where to leave my shoes and bag, and where the sink is so I can wash my hands. She steps away at this point, allowing me a few moments to look around and select a place to sit at one of the low tables scattered around the

room. She then returns to take my drink order, included in the fee I pay to be in the café, and disappears into the back to make it.

There are cats lying all around the café; some are sleeping on high shelves or exploring the edges of the room. There is also a structure in the middle of the room, a tower filled with nooks and crannies designed to attract the cats; a number of them are lounging on the shelves of the tower or in the *nabe* pot on top. There are customers, all young adults of both genders, relaxing around the café; some kneel by the cat tower snapping pictures, others chat with friends while sitting on bean bag cushions, and one sits on the couch eagerly watching all around trying to take in the entire experience. When one cat passes close by me, I reach out to try and pet it, but it quickly sidesteps my hand, continuing on its way.

Sana, finished making drinks, reappears and takes in the scene with a quick glance. She grabs a toy, one she knows a particular cat enjoys, and uses it to grab his attention and get him playing with it. She drags it along the floor as he chases behind, running around the room. All the visitors are watching at this point, laughing, snapping pictures and joking with their neighbors about his antics. When the cat is completely engaged, the employee swiftly transfers the toy to the hands of one of the visitors, showing her how to drag it to keep the cat engaged. The visitor takes over, abandoning her drink for the fun of playing with an adorable cat. Sana and the visitor smile at each other and Sana encourages the visitor to try out different games with Kori, the cat, telling her about how Kori is a hunter and likes to go after toys that he thinks he can stalk. The visitor is emboldened and becomes more involved with Kori, while Sana steps away to another task.

When Kori gets tired, the visitor is less hesitant to approach him, and she sits down on the floor next to where he has curled up and starts to pet him. Sana reappears and offers to take the customer's picture with the cat. The customer laughs and smiles, and settles into a friendly conversation with the employee about the café cats, and how difficult it is to be a pet owner in Tokyo today.

When I reach the end of the period I had told Sana I was planning to stay, she comes by to gently remind me, and holds the cat gate open so I can gather my belongings and pay. She asks if I enjoyed myself, and when I tell her I did and that I will be returning often, she offers me a stamp card, which will earn me a free half hour of cat time after my tenth visit. She smiles brightly and waves goodbye as I head out the door.

On the main page of the cat café *Tabby's* website are all the normal things you might find on such a site – the hours and location, the café menu, the prices, and a list of the staff, with accompanying pictures. Unlike any other type of café, however, the staff pictures are not of the young women in their 20s and 30s who will take your money and bring you drinks when you visit, but of the more than a dozen cats that you will pet and cuddle on your visit. The only sense of the human staff you can find on the website is in the blog, which defines itself as "An introductory blog according to this cafe's human staff. It is information about things like the cat staff and an introduction to the café," and ends with, "please be healed by these cute cats." There is no information about the people who work ten-hour shifts, taking payment and making drinks, while also being welcoming, friendly, and acting as the bridge between visitors and animals. The healing, or *iyashi*, offered is presented as emanating solely from the presence of the animals; the place of the people in the creation of this affect is generally overlooked. The staff of Japan's animal cafés plays an essential role in making these businesses the successes they are. Many visitors look back on their first visit to an animal café and remember how cute the animals were, how many breeds of cat or rabbit there were, how relaxed and comfortable they felt there, but

they often won't realize how their experience was continually shaped, influenced and aided by the people who work there.

The animal café is an *iyashi* space, the construction of which has been driven by societal and personal needs and shaped by the way that different groups of people have engaged with it. In previous chapters of this dissertation, I have focused on the people who created animal cafés and their aims and goals in creating spaces that offer customers *iyashi*, and on the people who visit these businesses and what they get out of that experience. A third group of people is an intrinsic part of establishing and sharing a supportive, affective experience – the employees. These are the people who are on the floor of the café every day, being friendly, meeting the needs of the visitors, doing both the necessary material labor of collecting money and making drinks, but also the immaterial labor of making customers feel comfortable, building a connection between guests and animals, and facilitating the development of an *iyashi* atmosphere. All those involved put something into the creation of the animal café as a space of *iyashi*, and all benefit in some way. The owners imagined the possibilities, the customers realize its potential, but the employees do the hard work to make it a reality.

In addition to the work that the employees do to create an appropriate atmosphere and to make customers feel welcomed and comfortable, a major part of their job is to facilitate the interactions between animals and people, making the animal part of the animal café successful. All the species used in café models are at some level uncomfortable or uninterested with strangers, and, at the same time, visitors are often hesitant and unsure of how to make the most of their time in the café. The staff must make both groups comfortable with each other, while also making the space itself comfortable and devoid of reminders such as cat hair or rabbit

droppings, of the reality of animal care that could intrude on the fantasy of the animal café, removed from the real world.

The staff of Japan's animal cafés occupy an unusual position for service workers who perform care work, as they both labor to produce the affect of *iyashi* and they are in a position to consume it as well. They have found a way to find a job that allows them to take pleasure in their work, even if does not offer them long-term stability or a future career path. They are largely precariously employed, most commonly part-time workers and often socially precarious, waiting for marriage until their economic situation is more stable, living with parents if their family is Tokyo-based, with no real plans or hopes for the future. They are almost exclusively women in their 20s and 30s, a group that has long shouldered the burden of affective, service work in Japan. They are, in fact, the main target clientele of animal cafés. They perform affective, or emotional labor, creating and manipulating the affects that visitors benefit from, a type of labor typified by the drain that it places on workers. Yet many café employees are very positive about their jobs. Many of the workers I interviewed had worked at their cafés for more than two years; many of them had been working since the café had opened, five or six years previously. Many had been animal café visitors before becoming employees and continue to visit animal cafés on their days off. They have stayed in these jobs, even though the service industry is typified by fast turnover, because employees find they are able to receive *iyashi* through their work. Even as they work long, hard hours making sure the visitors also receive *iyashi*, they also have a chance to experience it, finding pleasure not necessarily through the labor they do, but by benefiting from the labor of the animals who also staff these cafés.

The benefit of working in an animal café for employee largely comes from the opportunity to be with animals, the same opportunity that café visitors pay to take advantage of.

When I asked employees to define *iyashi* for me, or to tell me what makes an animal café a place where people can receive *iyashi*, they all emphasized the fact that there are animals there. I found that they did not realize their own contribution; they work in conjunction with the animals to encourage the affective exchange in the café. They focus on doing their job, a job that can be emotionally draining, and they do not recognize their own role in helping visitors to heal. Their recognition of *iyashi* is tied to their own experience of the affect; they receive *iyashi* through the relationships that they have with the animals, their fellow staff and daily companions at work.

I argue in this chapter that café employees are reacting proactively to their precarious labor position by choosing a job that they can find pleasure in, and making their work as meaningful as possible through that choice. This echoes my argument in chapter three about café owners' investment in this kind of work as part of their search for meaning in their labor. Unlike the owners who come from positions of relative privilege and have a wider range of options to pick from, café employees are largely unable to find positions outside of service work, which is a major sector the Japanese economy, and their choices are limited. Much of the research on this sort of care work, or emotional labor, has emphasized the burden it places on workers and the exploitation inherent in the form. Animal café workers do represent a class of workers that are exploited in order for the system of flexible labor to be successful, but their position does not preclude them from engaging in labor that allows them to construct their own version of the good life.

Café employees play an important role in the construction of the sociality of the animal café, through their work creating relationships between visitors and animals and maintaining the comfortable, cozy atmosphere of the café. However, the unique construction of sociality in an animal café, based as it is on "being with" each other, rather than focusing on direct interaction

and conversation, also allows employees the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of that sociality, a type of sociality that is as appealing to them as it is to café visitors because they are attracted to cafés for the same reasons. Their work experience does not blur the line between labor and enjoyment. When they are engaging with customers they are working, and must maintain their focus on making the customer happy. However, their work, done in conjunction with animals, does allow space from them to experience the *iyashi* of the animal café. The way that the workers benefit is largely connected to the *iyashi* they receive from the animals and the sense of community they have with other animal lovers. Human café workers do not experience the same of stress at their animal café jobs because they perform more of a support role in the production of affect rather than carrying the full responsibility, which is shared with the animal worker.

To explore the experience of being a café worker, I will begin by offering an ethnographic introduction to animal café employees and their duties and responsibilities before moving into an exploration of how they function as both users and creators of *iyashi*, and how the experience of working in conjunction with animals affects their experience in the café. Analyzing the experiences of animal café employees is an excellent way to look at both sides of the experiences of young Japanese workers – the stresses of work life in Japan today and the rise of a sense of precariousness and lack of hope for the future, and how the opportunities to experience the beneficial effects of *iyashi* allows workers to keep struggling on.

6.1 WHO THE CAFÉ EMPLOYEES ARE

During my fieldwork in Japan, I found that the café staff were both the most and least accessible. Although café owners were often unavailable or not in the café itself, they were forthcoming and interested in sharing information when we did manage to sit down together. Visitors were incredibly friendly and, if they had time to meet with me outside the café, more than happy to cover any topic I was interested in. Café workers, on the other hand, were always available and seemed happy to talk with me in the café, yet unwilling to meet with me outside work hours. And they seemed confused as to why I would want to talk with them about their lives beyond the café. When they are in the café, they are part of that world, connecting to others through that lens and focused on the experience they are integral to providing. I came to see that the best way to understand the experience of being a café employee was to understand the person she is when she is at work, what she puts into that space and what she gets out of it, and what stresses and kinds of enjoyment she gets out of her work. This is informed by what I learned about the paths that brought them to this kind of work, but I had few conversations that delved deeply into their everyday lives outside the cafés. Our conversations revolved around what the work in the café means to them, what it takes out of them and why they chose this work in the first place and why they stay. The picture I developed of them was one in which the things that appeal to customers about the animal café—the chance to be with animals, to enjoy the cozy atmosphere, the opportunity to give care—appealed to café employees too. Even though their work is challenging, they are able to experience the *iyashi* of the animal café as well.

Over the course of my research, I conducted interviews with sixteen women who worked either part- or full-time at five different Tokyo animal cafés, four cat cafés and one rabbit café. This was largely done after I had developed a good relationship with the owners of a few cafés. The owners agreed to aid me in my research and let me spend time in a back room or office with any of the staff who were interested in speaking with me, interviewing them while they were officially clocked in but in private, away from their coworkers or bosses. My best resource,

however, was the relationship I developed with Natsumi, a twenty-six-year-old woman who was the veteran of two cat cafés and currently working at a third. I met her shortly after she had left her job at Whiskers through a customer with whom she had become friends. She gave me an outside perspective on multiple cafés and could speak without any potential constraint that may have influenced the people I spoke to within their cafés.

Despite café employees' important role in making animal cafés as successful as they are, most of the employees of animal cafés are classic examples of precariously employed workers, many not earning enough to live on their own, with little to no real long-term job prospects and no concrete plans or hopes for their futures. They have limited post-high school education; many went to vocational school for a year or two, some training in pet care, others trained for jobs that were not available when they graduated, forcing them to look for any available service work. Cafés often hire a mix of full-time and part-time workers, whose job duties are generally similar. The full-time employees often have more training in animal care or grooming, while the part-time employees are more likely to have experience in the service industry without any animal training, or are, for those in their early twenties, still in school.

The women I met are largely in their twenties and thirties. Those that grew up in the Tokyo area often still live with their parents in the family home. Many, though, moved to Tokyo after they finished high school, either to look for a job or to enroll in some form of post-secondary education, and live alone or with boyfriends, in small, often studio, apartments. A few of the staff I met were still students in four-year colleges and working part-time to support themselves, but it was most common that they had attended a vocational school for a few years before moving into service jobs. If this description sounds familiar, it is because animal café staff are very similar in background and life experience to animal café customers. In fact, most animal

café staff are also customers. They visit their own café or others on their days off to enjoy the same sort of *iyashi* experience that attracts any type of visitor.

Café employees experience of economic precarity means that investing in the future or even planning for it is difficult and thus makes finding pleasure and enjoyment in the current moment more meaningful. While their employment can be relatively stable, as an employee who develops good rapport with the animals and customers is worth retaining, their work is often part-time and lacks benefits. They work hard, often in ten-hour shifts a few days a week, staying from opening until closing, and do not earn enough to build up much savings. When I asked my informants about their future, their answers tended to be either vague, as if they had not made any real plans, or based more on what they wish will happen than on any real expectations. One employee at *Catacular* told me she expected she would be a housewife someday, a reality that is harder and harder to attain in today's economic climate. Another informant simply responded, "I'll do this for a while" when I asked about her future.

When my informants did share their dreams with me, they often revolved around animals. Almost all of them grew up with animals, they have come to work in these businesses because it gives them a chance to be with animals, and they would love to continue to work with animals in the future. One young woman, Tomoko, is only twenty and still in school while working at a cat café part time. When I asked her about what she wants to do she told me, "Maybe animal care, or working for a pet food company, something with animals." Emi, somewhat older at 37, has spent her entire career looking for opportunities to work with animals, particularly cats, moving from a vocational school for animal care to a job as a pet trimmer and then working for a breeder. She has found that work in a cat café is the closest she has been able

to get to her dream of becoming a cat breeder and trainer. She told me she is learning a lot about animal care here, and still hopes she will be able to make that future happen.

Café employees found their job opportunities through a variety of means, but were generally not looking for service work, but thought the opportunity to work with animals was satisfying enough to offset their misgivings about the service industry. Many of these women were regular visitors of cat cafés before they began working as cat café employees. In fact, four of the employees I spoke with, Tomoko, Hadzuki, Masayo and Nana, were offered jobs after they visited the cafés as guests and chatted with the café owners about their situations. As many of them had some form of vocational training in animal care, often employees had looked for animal-related jobs because of their training or personal love for animals and came across animal café job postings, and the remainder had been looking for any available jobs online or using Mixi, a Japanese social networking service. Many of the people I interviewed told me that they also continued to visit animal cafés on their days off, sometimes their own café and sometimes others. Everyone I asked told me that the experience of being a customer was absolutely different from being a staff member, and they enjoyed the opportunity to just be in an animal café and not have to put any effort into thinking about other customers the way they would if they were working. Some, like Tomoko, love all types of animal cafés and enjoy visiting cat, rabbit and dog cafés, while others, like Shizuka, are cat people and enjoy interacting with new cats at other cafés but have no interest in rabbit cafés. That these businesses are still appealing to employees on their off hours is indicative that they do not receive the complete relaxation that the customers they serve receive at the cafés that they are employed at.

There is a gender component to the kind of work that my informants can find; they are more likely to end up in service work because the reproductive care work required in this type of

job has been naturalized as inherent to women. Service work in Japan, and many other places, has traditionally been dominated by women, and this division of labor is influenced by assumptions about the natural ability of women to do care work. All the regular café staff and the majority of managers I met during my initial fieldwork were women, though café owners were more likely to be men. While scholars of care have called for a rethinking of the problematic assumption that care work should be given to those naturally good at care (Tronto 2013), when I spoke to owners about their hiring practices, they told me that the female candidates were most likely to demonstrate the qualities they were looking for, such as friendliness, a capacity for empathy, and an ability to connect emotionally with visitors. While the appeal of *iyashi* is not limited by gender, and customers are relatively evenly split, it is striking that the workers, drawn from the same population of young Japanese people who love animals, are so predominantly wome.

The fact that these young women are more likely to find work in the service sector does not mean that finding work that can be on some level meaningful or pleasurable is any less important than for people like the café owners who were able to create their own jobs by becoming entrepreneurs. Their opportunities are more constrained, however, and so they try to find that pleasure while working. Like many of the young people I met during my fieldwork, café staff live lives full of stress and anxiety related to a sense of precarity. They are interested in opportunities for *iyashi* to help them cope with these stressors, and, in fact, they are able to find some of that healing in the very businesses that can be a major source of stress in their lives. They focus on the moments when they can play with a cat, even as they are using that play to energize the atmosphere in the café. They find common ground with customers who they recognize as sharing the same love of animals as they do and swap stories about their childhood

pets, though the fact that they are paid to have those conversations continually affects customeremployee relationships. However, because the employee's responsibility is not to directly develop an intimate relationship with the customer, but to facilitate the customer's relationship with the animals, what relationship the employee does develop with the customer can be separate from the commodity exchange of a visit to the animal café. The best evidence I have that employees are able to find real pleasure in their work lies in the fact that the turnover rate is low. At Rabbit Corner, all but one of the staff had worked at the café since it opened three years previously, and many of the staff at Whiskers had worked there for four years or more.

6.2 DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ANIMAL CAFÉ EMPLOYEE

Animal café employees do have standard café work responsibilities, but they are really hired to provide aid in the development of the *iyashi* atmosphere. They check customers in and out, accept payments, make and serve drinks and keep the café space clean and comfortable. The majority of their time, however, is spent welcoming in and connecting visitors to the sociality of the animal café. Their work to create this affective experience is provided through conversation, through their actions to make visitors comfortable, acting as their guide to an unfamiliar space, and though the actions they take to bring customers and animals together. Both aspects of staff labor are important and necessary for the successful running of animal cafés, yet the effort expended on the non-physical labor is often unrecognized by guests, even as they enjoy the benefits of that work. Café staff expend as much or more time on soothing and entertaining guests and facilitating their interactions with the animals as they do on more mundane tasks. They, thus, do a significant amount of work, often working very long shifts, from opening until

closing, for comparatively low wages, as the skills they demonstrate and the kind of work they do is not rewarded in the service economy.

The everyday responsibilities of work in a café include manning the front desk, checking customers in and out and accepting payment, and working on the café floor, accepting orders and making and serving drinks. At some cafés, when business is slow, employees are asked to stand outside handing out flyers to passersby. A major work obligation is cleaning, a normal café responsibility that is exacerbated by the need to clean up after the animals. Animal cafés need to be kept pristine in order to facilitate relaxation; no visitor would feel comfortable in a space covered in fur and smelling strongly of animals. Time not spent with customers is usually spent sweeping up shed hair or wiping down tables, benches and shelves with disinfectant wipes. Rabbit cafés are a particular challenge as the animals are not housebroken. At Rabbit Corner, the employees sweep up all animal droppings and wipe down the vinyl sofas in the area where rabbits roam freely at least once an hour, whenever they can do so without disturbing visitors. At Usa-chan, the owner, the sole worker at that business, picks up rabbit droppings as soon as they appear, allowing customers to remain willfully ignorant of the inelegant realities of animal ownership.

Animal care generally is an important part of working in an animal café. It is, in fact, often what attracts staff to this work; they have training in animal care or a similar vocation and found that this job was the closest they could get to working with animals. The café owner or managers are usually in charge of physical maintenance of the animals—checking their ears and mouths, watching out for health issues—but staff oversee the daily care of the animals, such as feeding and grooming, and cleaning up after their droppings or fur. When I asked Emi about the unique challenges of working in a cat café, she went into specifics about the animals' care. She

enjoys working with female cats, she said, as males tend to be bigger and more of a challenge, and she feels that the cats are really sweet at her café. Many other informants spoke about the way interactions with customers are unique at an animal café, but Emi's answer reminded me that staff must develop strong relationships with the animals as well, in order to best care for them. They cannot do their job if the animals actively dislike them, and, more importantly, they need to know the animals' favorite toy or where it likes to be petted so they can use that information to help customers successfully make direct contact with the animals. However, that aspect of the work was often the part staff enjoyed the most, so they were less likely to bring it up as a challenge the way they did customer interactions.

The other part of the responsibility of the café employee is the labor they do to create the affective experience that is commodified in the animal café. This work in the animal café is accomplished through communication and interaction with customers, answering their questions about the animals in the café but also more general questions about cats or rabbits, and showing customers how to gain the attention and cooperation of the cafés' animals, through tips about what each animal enjoys or guidance on how to use the animal's favorite toy. Acting as facilitators, they have a responsibility both to the visitors and to the animals, and many employees told me that they had to work to protect the animals without causing offense to customers who were too aggressive with them. While guests were likely to note the feelings of *iyashi* they get from seeing or petting a soft animal, the staff spoke about the work they put into making the animals and guests comfortable with each other and how essential that is for the *iyashi* feeling of the café. Ikumi told me both the cats and staff are important (*daiji*) to the creation of *iyashi* for customers. I observed this repeatedly during my fieldwork. Uncomfortable or hesitant customers were drawn out by staff and helped to interact and engage with others. The

staff were also very good at reading customers and identifying who wanted to be left in solitude and who sought for social interaction. As the sociality of the animal café is built around interactions with the animals and the staff, the ability of the staff to make that interaction successfully occur is an essential skill for the construction of *iyashi*.

They also incorporate the building of an *iyashi* atmosphere in indirect tasks. When employees make food or drinks, they often use them as a way of extending the animal/cuteness immersion experience by drawing cat paws onto the foam of a latté or garnishing a pudding with eyes and a beak to make it look like an owl. Even the work they perform cleaning and tidying up discarded manga or cat toys further reinforces the cozy, domestic atmosphere, as they perform the productive labor necessary that customers have come to the café to put aside.

The kind of care work employees do is not based on creating a personal relationship with the customer, offering them care directly (though there are elements of that in their work), but based on fomenting the social bonds between the animal and the customer, and the customer and the café space itself, work that is central to the sociality of the animal café. The care work they perform involves caring both for the animals and the customers, removing the responsibility for the maintenance of that interpersonal relationship from the customers, thus reinforcing the freedom from responsibility that is an important part of the café experience. They do, of course, directly interact with customers frequently, but always, in some way, with the animal as part of the interaction. An employee may sit next to a customer with both of them facing a cat, talking about what the cat's personality is like or what the right way to pet it is. Conversations not about café animals will revolve around the shared interest in animals, and customers will often share stories about their favorite animals or childhood pets. Employees are called on to be friendly with customers, investing themselves emotionally in their work to create an affective response in

customers, which a few employees told me can be draining, but they also have many opportunities to leave customers to engage with the animals and turn to other tasks or take an opportunity to pet a cat themselves.

While customers may be focused on the animals and not fully aware of how essential the work of the café staff is, café owners are entirely aware of the important role that their staff play and emphasize this role in staff training. They hire staff not based on their service industry experience, but based on their ability to make visitors comfortable. During an interview, the manager of Ikeneko borrowed my notebook to draw a picture of how he imagined his café working. Unlike some other cafés where customers, animals and staff are each in their own corner of a triangle, his staff are between the cats and the customers, bringing them together, an essential job. Hadzuki, a cat café employee at a different café, described herself as an intermediary, demonstrating for me with one hand out to the cat and on hand out to the customer. It often works with the customer saying something like "Oh, it's cute" and Hadzuki would reply, "It is cute, isn't it?" and their interaction would go from there. It is a technique I noticed and used myself during my fieldwork to develop rapport with customers who I got to know in the animal café. Kaneko, a rabbit café employee, said that she is responsible for encouraging customers to interact with animals as much as possible (dekiru kagiri).

When I asked my interview subjects about the ways that their experience working in a café differed from their expectations of the job, the primary response was that they were expecting to perform one side of the job and were unprepared for the requirement that they do both. Emi's expectation was that cat cafés would have employees who oversaw cat care and employees who worked with customers; she had expected to work in a back room and never interact with visitors but instead found herself having to jump from attending to a cat to a

customer to another cat throughout the day. Ikumi, an employee at the same café as Emi, also commented that the combination of café work and cat care is more difficult than she expected before starting the job.

Employees who had visited animal cafés before working at them were more likely to express surprise with the amount of physical work involved. An employee named Kayoko told me that she knew she would have to make drinks but the image she had of the job was more one of playing with cats. The job is more difficult (*taihen*) than she expected as she must work harder than she expected to make customers comfortable and she worries about the stress on the cats. These employees' own experiences demonstrate how much of the work of the employees goes unseen by visitors. When customers see an employee waving a toy at a cat, they see the employee as just playing, when they are more likely getting the cats in a playful mood before passing the toy off to a customer too shy to approach a cat directly. Employees who had previously worked in service jobs but not in animal cafés were surprised by how important talking with customers is. That does not necessarily mean that they didn't enjoy the opportunity to talk with visitors, but they did not expect how many of their working hours would be spent just talking.

These myriad job responsibilities mean that the staff work both hard and continuously. If there is a lull in customer traffic, there are always cleaning to be done, and if the service tasks have been attended to, staff are expected to engage with customers and do whatever is necessary to make them more comfortable. This type of labor can create quite a burden on workers. Manami, a rabbit café worker, was quite outspoken about her issues with her job. In her midtwenties, she had trained in animal beautification but this was the only job she could find that allowed her to engage with animals. Yet rabbits turned out to be much harder to deal with than

the dogs she had trained on, and she spends much of her time cleaning up rabbit droppings and urine. But it is not only the physical labor she dislikes; she told me that dealing with customers can be very vexing (*kuyashii*). She must work a second job to survive and when she is not at Rabbit Corner, she works as a waitress at a snack bar, a business akin to a budget version of a hostess club where the waitresses must flirt with customers. She finds the work in some ways comparable, as the burden of entertaining customers is equally unappealing at both jobs. Despite her dislike of her job, she is a regular animal café visitor herself, going to both rabbit and cat cafés with friends. She loves animals and enjoys the opportunity to spend time with them and with her friends.

However, Manami was an exception among the staff I spoke to. While they shared stories of issues they had with their jobs—the hours, the hard work, tensions among staff members (tension often existed between part time workers and full time workers)—and a number told me that they enjoyed going to animal cafés as customers in order to enjoy the experience more freely than was possible when they were working, most of the staff said they liked their job. Most had been working at the same café for years, though those who had previously worked in service jobs had been more likely to change jobs after six months or a year. And many claimed that the reason was that they, like customers, got to experience *iyashi* in their work. For employees, *iyashi* works as a balancing force against the stresses of a low-paying, precarious job. They can find pleasure in the café experience, separate from the effort they expend in making sure the café functions smoothly. The next section turns the creation of *iyashi* in the cafés, through the labor of the staff and the cats, and how that affects their jobs.

6.3 PRODUCING THE AFFECT OF *IYASHI*, FOR THE CUSTOMERS AND FOR THEMSELVES

How is it that, despite their precarious situations and the stress and responsibility of difficult work, café staff spoke in largely positive ways about their jobs? As Natsumi, a veteran of two different cat cafés, told me, "To be honest, the payment was not very good, and the work itself -the amount of customers we got each week was kind of a lot—so if you think just about the money, it is not a very rewarding job. But with iyashi you have some sort of satisfaction...Without that feeling (iyashi), [employees] cannot continue working there, because of the payment...and what they are doing is not easy either." Café staff work long hours during which they are responsible for the physical maintenance of the space, animal needs, and continual investment in customer comfort and care. The feeling of iyashi is what makes this kind of work worthwhile, and the construction of an animal café is such that staff can participate in it as well. Animal café workers epitomize the stressed, precariously employed worker that is the target customer of the animal café, but what keeps them positive and committed to their jobs is the emotional benefits of being in a place where they too can receive iyashi. Their employment in an *iyashi* business sharing the burden with the animals also makes them more able to develop real, positive social relationships with customers, which increases enjoyment of their jobs and adds more value to the experience for regular customers. The customer's behavior and the employee's behavior mutually reinforce the *iyashi* experience. Each receives the opportunity to interact with new people, and to discuss a topic of shared interest. Each is also able to retreat from human interaction when they do not wish it—customers by finding a private spot to sit away from others and employees by focusing on non-interactive tasks, such as drink-making, for a brief period. The animals are the ones who are required to be available to the humans at all

times, while the human workers are allowed more freedom to work at "my pace," as Hadzuki described it. In this section, I will first explore exactly what kind of work employees do to help customers enjoy an *iyashi* experience, and then I will delve into how the employees' engagement with that atmosphere influences the employees' experience.

I spoke extensively with all my interview subjects about what they see as the role of iyashi in an animal café and how they felt they contribute to the aims of the animal café. The first issue was one of atmosphere. Employees need to think about how to create the best atmosphere (kuukan) for allowing overstressed visitors to relax (anshin dekiru). They do that by keeping the place clean and organized, and by welcoming visitors in, putting no pressure on them to behave in any particular way, allowing them to socialize or not as they please. Emi, introduced above, says that her café appeals to people because there is a lack of tension there; it simply attracts people who like animals to come and eat and chat. Her language when she described customer activities reflected that relaxed feeling; she used words like chatter (shaberu) instead of talk to describe the types of conversations she heard. She told me that even customers who came alone were more laid back and carefree (nonbiri). Chie, a full-time cat café employee of six years, told me that it is not good if the café gets too quiet; a quiet atmosphere makes people hesitant to do anything. I regularly saw employees waking up cats and getting them to run around and play if the café was too solemn. The goal is always to work in conjunction with the cats to control the atmosphere of the café – it is playful if there were lots of cats playing, it is calm if the cats are curled up and sleeping around the café. Employees attune themselves to the customers to judge what atmosphere is most wanted, and they can, to a certain extent, direct the behaviors of the animals to alter it. It is not acceptable for an employee to draw a customer into conversation if it seems like they do not want to talk, but if they get a cat playing with a toy while they kneel next to a customer, the customer almost always smiles and comments.

Though the employees create, develop and manipulate the *iyashi* atmosphere through their interactions with the animals, much of the *iyashi* feeling comes from the presence of the animals. This makes it possible for employees to receive *iyashi* themselves. Tomoko, a student and part-time worker who was a frequent visitor to cat cafés before working at one, says that the iyashi comes from petting animals and seeing their cuteness. When I asked her why she goes to cat cafés, she told me, "I go to peep (nozoki ni itte imasu)." There is something about the opportunity to be around living things that feels good. Kayoko, a part-time employee at Catacular, said that working with living things can be difficult, but, because she likes cats, she is soothed at the same time. Another employee at the same café, Hazel, is more hesitant to call the feeling that comes from being around animals iyashi, but she does think that it is important to experience the warm touch of living things. It is what makes an animal café different from a zoo, where you can only see animals. Many employees told me that it is important for humans to be around animals and nature. Hadzuki told me, "It is important to have an opportunity for a warm touch from a living thing." Ikumi, who works at Tabby's, told me that she gets more *iyashi* here than at any other part time job she has had, and when I ask why, she tells me, "Here, there are cats." Aya works at a rabbit café and thus doesn't have the same opportunity to get the animals playing with toys; she does not feel she is the one creating the *iyashi* atmosphere because the iyashi comes from coming into contact with (fureau) animals, but nonetheless she receives iyashi because she too has the opportunity to be in contact with, to touch, the animals. Café employees largely choose this work because of the opportunity to be with animals, and it was clear that the benefit they received made up for many of the challenges of this sort of work. Most of the

employees ended up choosing a job at an animal café because they simply wanted the opportunity to be around animals.

Equally important to the *iyashi* experience is the sense of sociality, based on the shared engagement in non-productivity and affective connection, which was the focus of chapter four. As explored in that chapter, the guests themselves play an important role in creating that sense of sociality and *iyashi*. The café employees are the other participants in those affective encounters, and they contribute to this atmosphere through their own relaxed chats with customers. When I spoke with Emi about what makes an animal café different from other cafés, she said that in a normal café there is a sense of nervousness or tension in the business. In an animal café, in contrast, everyone is more relaxed; they are focused on unwinding, eating and chatting, just being carefree and at leisure. For Emi, these relaxed conversations were at the heart of what makes her café a place of *iyashi*. Fujiko, one of my informants who had never intended to find a job with animals but ended up at a cat café when she could not find work in her chosen field, told me that she had imagined her job would mostly be about making drinks but instead found that "it is a job where I talk to customers." She told me that she believes café customers would still enjoy a café that simply had cats in it, but employees elevate the experience to one of connection and sociality among the individuals in the café. Fujiko says she focuses on shortening the distance (kyori ga chidimaru) between guests and cats. Her job is about being aware of what is needed at any moment, filling in the cracks around what the animals can do. Even when her customers are focused on their own pursuits or spending time with the cats, she told me she thinks about if the cats are getting along with people and if the guests are having fun, even while she is making delicious drinks and chatting with customers. A number of the employees told me

that interactions with customers can be a lot of fun, but they have to keep in mind that they are employees with the goal of making customers comfortable.

An exploration of the way that employees experience the affect *iyashi* puts the question of authenticity at the heart of an understanding of how employees experience their work lives. Café employees do have opportunities to experience the *iyashi* of the animal café; they can briefly play with or pet a cat, and chat about a shared topic of interest with a customer, and participate in the sociality of the animal café by pausing to just "be with" the animals and visitors relaxing in the café. However, while employees are not required to have significant, intimate conversations with customers, they are expected to talk to customers if that is what the customer wants, and can never entirely focus on their own social needs. Shiori, who works with Fujiko, told me that she feels she has to put on a facade to deal with difficult customers. Shiori is a parttime worker and thus feels her job situation is more precarious and less fulfilling than that of more stably employed full-time workers, but she enjoys her work enough to stay despite the low pay. The highlight of the job is the opportunity to be with cats, but she feels like she must always watch her behavior when she is around customers. When I asked her how she makes guests comfortable, she demonstrated her bright, fake smile, and artificially high-pitched voice for me. She offers up a positive persona for customers to interact with. Situations where employees feel pulled between their obligation to care for the animals and to make visitors comfortable can be especially difficult. Shiori told me that there are times that guests get angry at her for stopping them if they are bothering the cats and she feels both that she must set herself below the customer and avoid being rude (shitsurei) but she must also protect the animals and stop customers from hurting a cat.

Workers benefit emotionally from their work primarily due to the *iyashi* they receive from the animals and, to a lesser extent, from the sense of community they have with the other people in they engage with in the café. Their work may be precarious, but that does not mean that it cannot be fulfilling. The work obligation to be friendly with customers did not preclude employees from becoming friends with visitors, particularly regulars. Café staff and guests, as discussed above, have many similarities, particularly in their shared love of animals, and that makes developing close social relationships easier. Some regular customers can become friends, who employees socialize with outside the café, but employees may also have relationships that are based on friendly interactions in the confines of the café. They are brought together by their similarities, particularly their love of animals, and proximity, and so their relationships are built around that. These connections are different from the kind of personalizing interpersonal relationships that Hochschild argues is emotional labor (1983); employees spoke of these relationships as not part of their job duties, but a natural connection that arises from their shared interests and the time they spend together. These relationships, even if they are limited to exchanging cell phone emails or an exchange of small gifts on a holiday, are meaningful to them. The staff's experience of the café is different from the relaxed, carefree sociality available to customers, but they are able to enjoy some of the benefits, even in their place of work.

Employees also often spoke about the positive affect they received from the act of caring. In an earlier chapter, I addressed the emotional benefits that customers derive from the opportunity to care for the animals. This is felt twofold by café workers; they can get *iyashi* through the care they give to the animals and through the care they give to customers. They recognize that customers are experiencing similar stresses to their own and can appreciate the relief that employees' help provides. Fujiko told me that the shared love of cats helps her connect

with customers. She enjoys animals, and can empathize with the way that customers enjoy the animals. When the customers get happy and smile, it makes her happy.

Employees express pleasure in caring for customers because they feel empathy for the stresses that bring customers to the animal café. They can understand why customers feel lonely or stressed out by financial considerations because they struggle with the same issues; many employees visit animal café on their free days as well and they recognize what the animal café can offer. A few of my informants shared stories about dealing with demanding or unpleasant customers, but they were more likely to tell me stories about customers who come in, tired and stressed after a long day at work, who they can see cheer up over the course of a visit. I also was told about a customer, grateful for the friendliness of the staff, who brought small boxes of chocolate for all the café employees, and about a regular who eventually became a friend outside the café, after bonding with a staff member over their shared love of animals. Animals make a comfortable shared topic of interest, but the empathy I observed stemmed from an understanding of what brings visitors to a café like this. The connection caused by their shared sense of precarity helps staff invest in the emotional health of their visitors, and obtain pleasure from their investment in communal sociality.

As I have made clear, this kind of work is not without it challenges, but I was told over and over in interviews by employees that they like their jobs. They like the numerous opportunities to pet and cuddle animals; they develop a strong bond of companionship, which is especially appealing for those who cannot have pets at home. Many told me they enjoy spending much of their time chatting comfortably with customers, getting to know new people and connecting with them, even if they must also always present a friendly demeanor even in moments of annoyance or anger. They knew how to focus on the pleasurable aspects of their

work to offset the challenges, and how to focus on how their work could be meaningful, especially when they help or care for a visitor who is struggling or lonely. In some cases, a staff member's enjoyment of her work was not enough to overcome the challenges of this kind of precarious work. Natsumi told me about a coworker who liked animals and liked her job, but was only allowed to work part-time and was not earning enough to support herself. She was facing the decision of whether she might have to quit a job she liked in order to take a full-time opportunity that she would find less fulfilling. Shiori was another informant who shared her financial struggles with me. The pay was barely (girigiri) enough; she had left a previous job that had paid as poorly, but, at the root of it, she liked this job and would not quit. As part-time workers in some cafés are still required to work a long work day, though fewer days a week than full-time workers, it can make it difficult to have a second job. So, some employees, unable to find a second source of income, have to move on to other opportunities.

My argument about the potential for pleasure from this kind of work is not meant to critique the work on emotional labor, which has shined light on the burden of this labor, particularly as it is often unrecognized and unpaid, but to consider the particular situation of animal café employees. Despite their comparatively limited employment options, they have prioritized finding a work environment that allows them to find pleasure in their work even if they make tradeoffs in terms of pay and benefits, exerting their own agency in the experience of precarious labor. Anne Allison's 2013 book *Precarious Japan* focused primarily on the losses – of hope, of future, of sociality – that have been a consequence of the shift towards precarity. However, my own work found people who were more interested in accepting precarity as a new status quo and working within that system to find a life that is in service of their own interests. Animal café employees have found that this kind of work offers emotional benefits and keeps the

experience from being solely one of exploiting youth labor. One important way this happens comes through their ability to work in conjunction with animals, which frees them from having to put their emotions forward to be commodified, placing that burden instead on the animal staff.

6.4 SHARING THE BURDEN

What is unique about the *iyashi* produced in an animal café, in contrast to similar businesses like maid cafés or hostess clubs, is that the emotional responsibilities are met in conjunction with animal workers. The animals carry a significant part of the burden of affective labor by being the focus of customer attention, putting up with being petted, playing with the toys the customer waves, or eating snacks from the hands of customers. This does not mean that the human employees are not also responsible for working to produce a positive affective response in customers, but they primarily do it through facilitating the reproductive labor of the animals. This supportive role allows them the opportunity to emotionally benefit from a positive relationship with animals while they are working. While this does not negate the realities of a tiring service job that requires significant, running around and constant sensitivity to the needs of customers, it allows them to feel positive about their jobs, that they are receiving something from working there that they would not be able to get at another service job, and offers the opportunity to develop a sense of connection and community with coworkers and regulars that is unusual in the service industry.

The situation in animal cafés contrasts with prior research on emotional labor, which identifies the emotional toll that care work can have on workers, particularly service workers, who practice deep acting in order to authentically produce the affect that consumers receive

(Weeks 2007, Mann 2004, Grandey 2003). Kathi Weeks argued that it is not enough for a service worker to pretend to express positive emotions; she must also make herself feel those positive emotions if her labor is to be effective. And the greater the extent to which she feels the emotion, the more of her authentic self theyshe is selling. This leads to the laborer becoming not just alienated from her product, but also alienated from herself. If the performance of care work incurs an emotional burden and stressors on performers, how then is it that animal café employees instead argue that they are receiving a positive affective experience as they perform their work? I argue that this is a consequence of the blurred boundary that exists between the role of the employee and the role of the customer, which is in turn a consequence of the presence of another worker in the café, the animal worker. The animal is doing reproductive labor; it is communicating and interacting with the humans in a way that produces an affective response: a sense of well-being, relaxation, iyashi. The animal café functions as a space in which there are multiple encounters, between customers and employees and owners, and between animals and humans, which create an affective response in all individuals involved in the process. Each of these participants has a role in the creation of the iyashi atmosphere and the creation of an affective response in each other. That is what makes it possible for the employees to talk about the enjoyment they get from talking with customers even as they are paid to make customers happy by talking with them. They are consuming affect even as they participate in its production.

In an animal café, the responsibilities, and burdens, of doing labor for the production of affect, are shared with another laborer – the animal. Animal café employees work in conjunction with the animals in the café, sharing the emotional burden. The animals do this by being patient and available to customers, but largely by being themselves. Not all animals make good café workers and the cats that succeed in the café are trained throughout their lives to handle the

stress and be willing to endure extensive petting and human interference. It is the human workers who maintain the balance between the customer and the animal. When the visitors are disturbing the cats, the employee steps in not only to stop the interference but also to redirect it to something more productive, demonstrating how this cat likes to play or how this rabbit should be held.

Both cat and employee working together help customers get more out of the animal café than either alone. When customers would like to have a conversation but do not know how to start one, Hadzuki explained to me that, "There is a lot that goes through the cat. Like if there is a cat between me and a guest, he's say, oh isn't this cat cute, and I'll say, he really is cute." I discussed in a previous chapter about how animals can act as intermediaries to help customers make connections with each other; it is not surprising that they can help customers start a conversation with an employee that they do not know how to begin. At the same time, when a customer does not know how to interact successfully with the cat, the employee steps in to give guidance. This can be very subtle, such as when an employee gets a cat playing with a toy and then smoothly transfers the toy into the hand of the customer. I have seen this trick deployed in every café I visited, and customers were so distracted by the fact that they were successfully playing with the cat that they often did not realize how the employee had interfered. Employees can also be more direct. Shiori told me that she often saw customers who will just watch or take pictures of the cats, she will push them to connect with the cat, showing them what kind of petting the cat enjoys, encouraging them not to be hesitant.

This need to act as an intermediary creates a potentially difficult situation for employees as they attempt to balance the needs of the animals and the wishes of the visitors, but it also limits their function to a primarily supportive one, which many employees said was a less

stressful position. Fujiko had an interesting perspective on her work responsibilities as one of the café employees who had previous experience in the service industry. As a human employee at a cat café, she said, "I'm not the main person, the cat is main. More than to have a drink or talk with me, the guest comes to meet the cat. My role becomes one of support." She found that, for her, her work is easier than when she worked in a normal café, and her stress level is definitely lower. Hadzuki said, while working in an animal café, it is more about "my pace" and she can take opportunities to play with cats and relax. I never saw an employee who seemed to be ignoring her responsibilities or tasks, but I often saw an employee stop to quickly pet a cat who walked in front of her, or cuddle a rabbit briefly before returning it to its cage. The customers' focus is on the animals and, while employees are continuously looking for opportunities to step in and assist a visitor, they are also free to pause when they feel like they need to and enjoy the atmosphere and the animals themselves.

This helps us look at café employees as another type of café customer, who is also participating in the development of a positive affective situation, which in turn helps us conceptualize the way in which the regular café visitors are themselves participating in the creation of an *iyashi* environment. The customer's behavior and the employee's behavior mutually reinforce the *iyashi* experience. Each receives the opportunity to interact with new people, and to discuss a topic of shared interest. The animals are the ones who are required to be available to the humans at all times and the human workers are allowed more freedom to work at their own pace. This does then shift the emotional burden onto the animals, who often do exhibit signs of stress when over-stimulated by human contact. That stress is expressed in animals in the form of avoidance of humans, moving to parts of the room where people cannot reach, and irritability, such as hissing or scratching. However, their counterparts, the human employees, can

act on their behalf to limit that stress by giving animals breaks away from customers or by redirecting customers' attention onto other animals or into conversation.

This sharing of labor responsibilities makes the labor that animal café employees are performing very unusual for this kind of service work. Animal cafés are built around a shared sociality and structured in such a way that all of the individuals involved can participate in that. Labor is performed and value is created, but it is structured on building, if not a sense of community, a sense of commonality, something that café employees recognize and find to be important in Japan today. For precarious workers like the café staff I met over the course of my fieldwork, their primary considerations were about how to do their job well, to create an iyashi atmosphere that could be enjoyed by all, and how to enjoy their lives in the moment, rather than their futures or longer term concerns. They were invested in the beneficial opportunities they could offer. Of all my interviewees during my fieldwork, the café employees were the ones most adamant about the importance and significant role in society of animal cafés. They are the ones who most consistently reap the benefit of iyashi from animal encounters, and, more than café owners, understand the stress and alienation caused by being a precariously-employed, disaffected worker. They also heard numerous stories from their regulars about the stresses in their lives and saw how many of their customers benefited from visiting their café. The employees are the ones with the perspective on how getting iyashi at an animal café can be so beneficial. Their stories are central to understanding how these spaces fit into the lives of young people, even if their stress reduction they offer is limited, without the ability to drastically change the state of precarity.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Looking at how the employees interact with the space of the café offers another insight into the burden of responsibility. As was discussed in the previous chapter, an important part of the engagement with the *iyashi* atmosphere is the sense of abandon, a relinquishment of all responsibility to the others around you. The most significant difference in the way that customers engage with the café and the way that employees do is that employees have a responsibility to the animals and their care, and the constant awareness of that responsibility makes employees unable to relax with the complete abandon that café visitors enjoy.

I was able to gain insight into the difference in perspective about their obligation to be responsible to the animals from employees sharing with me the differences in how they felt about café animals when they visited animal cafés versus when they were working in them. Employees working in the cafés are able to consume a positive affect, but they are still workers and seek outside sources of relaxation and *iyashi* when they are not working. However, because many of them have strong, positive feelings about animal cafés, a number of them turn to animal cafés for that relaxation. And when they visit animal cafés, they behave much like normal café visitors, relinquishing any sense of responsibility to care for the animals and relaxing. Shiori and Shizuka both told me that it was nice not to have to think about the animals' care.

Visitors to an animal café, after a day of work in which one has to watch one's words and be attentive to unspoken signals, choose their activities in the animal café based on their own wants and interests. They engage in conversations with other visitors or employees to the extent that those conversations are enjoyable and no more. They engage with the animals in the same way; they pet or photograph or otherwise interact with them as much as they want and they do not need to take the needs or interests of the animal into consideration. They largely do not think

about whether or not that animal is feeling under the weather or is or is not feeling playful. The focus of the café, and what makes it most successful at producing *iyashi*, is that it is a space without a social responsibility to care about and be constantly attentive to the needs and wishes of others. This does not mean that animal café visitors do not care about the health and happiness of the animals, they are animal lovers or this type of business would not appeal to them, but they get relaxation from paying someone else to do the responsible thing and reaping the benefits of a fun communication with animals by themselves. Employees, during work hours, cannot let go of these concerns the way a visitor can

Employees play an important role as an animal caretaker. The café owner or a welltrained full-time employee is responsible for daily health checks of the animals, as illness in one animal can spread quickly to the others in the café and lead to huge veterinarian bills. Employees watch the animals throughout the day to judge their stress levels; in cat cafés, cats may be put into a back room or caged if they appear to be overstimulated and, in rabbit cafés, rabbits are cycled from their cages onto the café floor and back to their cages after they have had sufficient human contact. Employees come in before the café opens and stay after it closes to make sure all of the animal needs are attended to. The owner and employees share the collective burden and responsibility of being a pet owner to a dozen or more animals. During my fieldwork, a huge snowstorm hit Tokyo, dropping the most snow the city had seen in forty years, and shutting down all the city's train lines by early afternoon. When I asked employees at Whiskers how that had affected the café, they told me that the café had had many visitors who lived within walking distance of the café, and that the employees, needing to stay the whole day to make sure guests were attended to and that animals were fed and put to bed properly, slept on the café benches after they were all stranded by the snow.

This heightened awareness of the animals in the café does interfere with the level to which employees are able to receive *iyashi*, but it is also necessary to allow them to act as intermediaries between visitors and animals. Awareness of both the visitors and the animals' needs makes it possible for the employee to identify what is needed on both sides and do their best to provide it. This aspect of their job can add stress, issues Shiori, Ikumi and Kayoko all raised and I discussed in previous sections. Employees occupy their own space within the café, neither entirely customers nor entirely exploited workers.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In an effort to offer an understanding of what a Japanese animal café is, I have presented a picture of a space that is full of complexities. It is a business that attracted media attention from both men's and women's lifestyle magazines. Although dozens of television programs seemed fascinated with the novelty of animal cafes, the business model is an extension of a long tradition of commodifying intimate encounters. It is an example of an *iyashi* business that takes advantage of the *iyashi* boom, but focused on socialization instead of passive relaxation. It is a 'third place,' separate from other realms of life for the people who engage with them, but it is also the 'second place' of work for the owners and employees, and it is also a space that draws on feelings of the 'first place' of home to create a sense of *iyashi* for customers.

The idea of *iyashi* is itself deeply complex, almost contradictory, as it emphasizes both relaxation through escape from life's stressors and engagement and connection with the world outside oneself. Yet by drawing on the experience of *iyashi* and placing at the center of a public, social experience, animal cafés have managed to create a new kind of experience, one that allows visitors to engage in relaxation and relieve their stress. More than that, they are also able to perform it with others, freely expressing and addressing their need for relaxation and push back against the ideology of productivity that shapes so much of the lives of people in Japan today. Animal cafés offer a distinct, cohesive experience that encompasses these complexities,

remaining flexible enough to allow the people in the café to enjoy the space each in their own way, but coming together to form a new kind of community.

The goal of this dissertation is to argue that Japanese animal cafés draw these complexities together to create a new type of sociality, one that is appropriate for a generation of young people in Japan who are adapting to life in what Anne Allison calls "precarious Japan" (2013). The drive to create this type of space and sociality is both a consequence of the loss of earlier forms of sociality and other communities to affiliate with and the loss of a sense of stability that needs to be addressed. It is also a consequence of the new economic and social opportunities for new spaces, new job tracks and new lifestyles created by the changing situation in Japan today. The experiences and histories of the people involved with animal cafés vary, but their shared search for a "good life," particularly influenced by the search for pleasure and meaning in their work, in the face of economic and social challenges brings them together. The owners, customers, and employees' engagement with the animal café is influenced by their own concerns, values and needs, yet these concerns are not in contradiction with each other.

These elements come together to create a space focused on offering a type of sociality designed to offer a type of low-key communal interaction, that allows visitors to feel connected to others but under no obligation to maintain active interaction. Visitors are encouraged to put aside social pressures to be successful, active and productive in order to just "be with" other living creatures. It is strongly connected to the idea of *iyashi*, as the sociality of the animal café is based on a shared enjoyment of this affect. In this way, the café also fosters an intimate feeling in which non-discursive interpersonal interactions, with an employee, a human companion or, most commonly, an animal, can be the focus. The intimate interactions are within yet set apart from a broader communal space, which is in turn, within and yet set apart from Japanese society.

This type of sociality is aimed at a particular population, those who came of age after the beginning of the Japanese recession, and it is their increasing demand for spaces and experiences that meet their needs that has driven the booms in *iyashi* businesses and cat cafés. Animal cafés are not the only business in Japan that offers sociality, intimacy or *iyashi* to their clientele, but they are a distinctive contribution to the Japanese market for commodified intimacy and the *iyashi* boom, because they do not require direct social engagement but instead allow for relaxation and socialization if the visitor wishes for it. Animals, different from hostesses or maids, are present to be interacted with, but do not demand anything from the visitor. Animal labor is uniquely suited to be the kind of sociality offered by the animal café, allowing the creation of a sense of sociality that emphasizes while still highlighting the relaxation and freedom from stress that is central to the concept of *iyashi*.

Animal cafés stand out because of the essential role that animals play by providing interspecies social interaction. With the erosion of family and community based social support networks, social interactions with other people in Japan are more likely to be surface interactions, leaving young people without a social support network to rely upon emotionally. This is especially true for members of the younger generation who live alone and are preciously employed, as they interact largely with coworkers they need to please in order to have their work contracts renewed. Yet interaction with animals lacks the cultural trappings of interacting with other Japanese people. Interaction with animals has numerous physical and emotional benefits for these overstressed workers and interactions with a non-human animal can meet individuals' need for sociality. For people attracted to animal cafés, they can find the social contact they find they are lacking in their lives in their engagement with animals. At the same time, animals are effective at instilling a sense of relaxation in humans, creating the *iyashi*, healing, atmosphere

that is attractive to many people looking for a place to get away from the demands of everyday life.

What makes animal cafés effective in meeting the variety of social and emotional needs of visitors is their flexibility. Different people bring different backgrounds, attitudes and expectations with them when they visit an animal café and they use the space in different ways. A casual visitor, stressed after a hard day at work, may drop by to escape from that world for an hour and is focused on relaxation in a place of refuge. Another visitor, feeling isolated after too many evenings sitting at home alone, visits on an afternoon off, eager to enjoy a sense of closeness with people who may be strangers but to whom he feels connected to through a shared love of animals. Still other customers drop in out of curiosity, checking out a café they saw on a television program, or come with a boyfriend or girlfriend, happy to relax in the atmosphere of the café and get to know each other better. These customers are greeted and welcomed by a café owner, who is happy to put long hours working on the café floor because this job is more meaningful for him than his corporate one, and their drinks are served by a young employee who is tired from running around all day, but keeps a smile on her face and works hard to make the visitors comfortable.

All these interactions are welcomed in the café, with regulars who spend four hours in the café made to feel as comfortable as someone dropping by for the first time. Animal cafés are a space that blurs the lines between realms that scholars have traditionally spoken of as distinct⁶. They are both a public space, open to anyone and largely patronized by people who are strangers to each other, and a private space, claimed by patrons as their own space in which they engage in

⁶ More recent scholarship has argued for the recognition that space is not neatly divided into separate realms and society is a shifting landscape of overlapping spaces (Cassegard 2016)

activities like napping and cuddling with an animal that used to be limited to their own homes. They are a place of sociality in which social interaction is freely accepted, while at the same time being intimate places where visitors can focus on themselves and develop close relationships with an animal.

A large part of this flexibility is possible because they cost relatively little to patronize, which is in turn made possible by the fact that much of the care work in the café, provided by the animals, is unpaid. At Catacular, on a busy weekend when the café is full, there will be no more than two employees working, with the owner coming out from his office to assist during busy moments, such as when the cats need to be fed. The dozen or more patrons are kept entertained by the cats, while the employees are free to take on the tasks the animals cannot do, which keeps the number of staff who perform paid labor down. The cost of care, feeding and housing café animals is a consideration, but in the end, a visit to an animal café costs little more than a movie would. This encourages passersby to drop in and check the café out, and if they find they enjoy the experience, it does not feel like a significant financial burden to come back more often. This opens animal cafés, more than any other type of "concept" café, to a broader variety of customers and situates them less on the fringe of Japanese culture than similar businesses.

It is important not to present an unrealistically positive view of Japan's animal cafés, for while they can be a refuge and a place of freedom for visitors and even the owners who have found economic success with them, that ideal is made possible by a lot of hard work, which, particularly on the side of the café employees and the animals who populate the cafés, is difficult and can be exploitative. Both these groups invest a significant amount of themselves in their work, making visitors happy even when they themselves might be tired or upset or annoyed, the human staff because they need to work to survive and the animals because they do not know any

other life. The picture that I am trying to create of the animal café is a place that is a creation of this particular moment in Japanese society; its form and business model is an expression of numerous trends in contemporary Japan, particularly the increasingly important of an economy of affect.

7.1 SHIFTING LABOR PATTERNS, IYASHI AND COMMUNITY

Japan is in a period in which the understanding of community, sociality, affect and commodity are being renegotiated. The effects of Japan's labor shifts in the face of the increasing importance of flexible accumulation, particularly on the generation that came of age after the 1990 end of the bubble economy and the beginning of the recessionary period, had led to many social changes as this generation reevaluates their expectations and conception of a "good life." This is a period in which many are grappling with a sense of loss and disaffection, what scholars have termed living in a state of precarity, but it is also a period in which young people have the ability to make different choices for themselves than their parents did and different choices about their futures than they planned on when they were in school. The increased importance of immaterial labor has created new opportunities for creative affective labor in the culture industry (Allison 2009a, Hardt 1999, Lazzarato 1996, Lukacs 2015b), but it has also greatly expanded the population of workers doing part-time, exploitative work, primarily in the service sector.

These economic changes have had great influence on social support networks. For many full-time workers, socialization with coworkers was (and continues to be in some corporations) the main source of regular interaction with friends, and as more of the population shifts away from those jobs, they lack access to those networks. Marriage is being delayed or put off

indefinitely as a consequence of unstable incomes, the inability to set up a household together, the strain of working long hours to support oneself, or a host of other factors, which has undermined the family as a source of support for people in their 20s and 30s. And in Tokyo, where I do my fieldwork, the support networks of school friends and parents are left behind when young people move to the city for job or educational opportunities. Many of my informants told me they kept in contact with their parents via email or phone messages intermittently but only saw them once a year, when they travelled home for the new year holiday.

As I explore in chapter two, *Iyashi*, which translates to emotional and physical healing, has become an important part of the public discourse in Japan as a response to the problems of stress, overwork and precarity which are proliferating in Japan. During its earlier iteration, businesses and goods that identified themselves on providing *iyashi* were focused on reducing emotional anxiety and physical tension. However, with the continuing erosion of social support networks, *iyashi* businesses today, like maid and animal cafés, focus on problems caused by social disconnection, offering offer new models for sociality and intimacy through the commodification of the affect of *iyashi* in a social setting like a café.

Businesses like animal cafés, which are offering alternative kinds of sociality to replace the "company as family" ideology of the previous era, are at the center of this negotiation. In the postwar period, the family and company were dominant spaces in which identify was formed. However, the younger generation no longer has access to that system and is struggling find a new system of sociality to connect to, while also taking on the responsibility of protecting themselves and meeting individual needs. This has led to a variety of new "concept" cafés, social spaces built around different types of affective interactions, such as maid and butler cafés and male and female drag cafés, which differentiate themselves from businesses that use a concept as

a hook to distinguish themselves and attract business through their investment in meaningful social interactions turned into a commodity. These businesses have had their influence on the animal café, yet animal cafés have managed to distinguish themselves by emphasizing accessibility over exclusivity and focusing on becoming simply part of a daily routine for people to take advantage of on their terms. They are designed to be flexible, accommodating and welcoming to as large a population as possible. Spending time with animals is only ever going to be appealing to a portion of the Japanese population, and so this business model will never become commonplace for the entirety of the generation discussed above. However, for those customers who can find *iyashi* in animals, this business has become an important part of their lives.

For the animal lovers attracted to this kind of experience for their stress-relieving enjoyment of *iyashi*, these businesses have become part of their routine, allowing them to recuperate and return home more able to face the demands of the world outside the café walls. These cafés are structured to allow visitors the opportunity to remove themselves from the tensions of their everyday lives and relax in a pleasantly social setting. Customers are surrounded by animals who they can play with, or watch, or even just relax while the animals are around them. Customers may come alone and do not necessarily socialize with other people in the café, but there is an intrinsic social component, in that they are surrounded by other creatures and other animal lovers. Visitors can interact with the animals without having to be concerned about if their interaction is wanted. If a cat is not interested in interacting, it will walk away and if a cat runs up to a regular when they enter the café, the regular knows they are being recognized and appreciated for his or herself. Just being in a space filled with people and animals, even if the visitors prefers to relax by themselves, means that there is a feeling of connection and inclusion,

a sociality that is both intimate and encompassing. Spaces such as these ones are increasingly necessary in a Japan where individuals may not have easy access to other forms of sociality. The animal café customers are willing to pay for the feelings they enjoy in the café because it no longer seems strange to them; for many it seems like a normal way to get what one needs – turn to the market to provide.

7.2 THE LAYERS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ANIMAL CAFÉ

The multiplicity of ways that people engage with an animal café informed the structure of this dissertation. What kind of place an animal café is depends on who is involved with it and why. To best offer an understanding of the role of the animal café in Japanese society today, it was necessary to consider each of these groups on their own terms and with their life experiences and conditions in mind. And just as the complexities I elaborated on at the beginning of this chapter come together to form a cohesive business, the different people involved in the animal café are connected to each other, through the café, but more importantly, through their shared position as members of a generation that is adapting to the current conditions of precarity in Japan today.

As discussed in chapter three, the owners of Tokyo's cat, rabbit and other animal cafés are driven by two interests that may seem at odds yet have come together in this space—finding a successful entrepreneurial opportunity to support themselves and creating a space that serves their community and helps people similar to them. This is tied to their own need for meaningful work, making the opportunity to serve their community an important consideration in their career goals. Animal cafés are for-profit businesses, and a few of the owners had opened second locations to expand their research and increase their profits; it would be inaccurate to describe

the work they do as charity or even primarily driven by community need. Many of the café owners were pushed towards small business ownership because of economic changes in their lives, from corporate restructuring making office work unappealing to the loss of an income source forcing the search for new income streams. They were attracted to the opportunity to be their own bosses, control their hours in a way that they could not in the corporate world, and generally to the ability to create a 'good life' for themselves on their own terms, something that is happening across Japan.

Part of the meaning that they have found in their work lies in the fact that they are serving people like themselves, and making a community for them. The way they shape their businesses reflects what they believe will be appealing to people like them, and, even if they have managed to find a measure of financial success, they are not free from the reality of precarity in Japan. Some of the owners I interviewed intend to close their cafés when the cats grow too old to work and will be forced to find new opportunities, while others bring in new kittens to replace retiring cats and hope to continue for the longer term. This is the aspect of animal cafés in Japan that is most likely to change over the next few years. When I returned to the field a year after my primary research, I found a newly opened bird café was run by a consortium of investors, instead of by a single owner, and the trend towards corporate ownership seems to be continuing. Animal cafés are too lucrative to continue to solely be owned by individual entrepreneurs, but the trend was created and driven by these entrepreneurs' vision of a place for animal lovers.

Customers also bring complex impulses with them when they come to animal cafés, as was discussed in chapter four. They are searching out an opportunity for both intimacy and sociality, and have engaged with animal cafés in such a way to create both these senses in one place. This is driven by the need for a "place to call home (*ibasho*)," which means, for these

customers, not a place to live but a place that offers a sense of connection to and support from others that is closely associated with home. This *iyashi* experience, which brings together relaxation with outward connection, is one in which they receive the positive affect without the obligation to put their own energy into maintaining the space. Customer engagement in the space is driven by a feeling of lack in other realms of their lives and the kind of experience customers seek out offers insight into changing sociality in the face of precarity.

This mixture of low-key intimacy and sociality, fostered in the animal café, is further explored in chapter five, by focusing on the relationships that humans have with animals. Animals can be there for visitors, allowing customers to feel heard and recognized, without putting any pressure on visitors to present themselves in a certain way, they would have with other people. These relationships have also changed in the face of the changing relationship between affect and commerce, and the animals in animal cafés are called on to produce *iyashi* for consumers in a way unlike the human-pet relationship. Animals are treated as service workers, whose labor is consumed and paid for.

Finally, I delved into the experience of the human employees of the animal cafés in chapter six, who work the hardest to make animal cafés function successfully and whose contribution is most overlooked. They are a group that has been hardest hit by the changing economic structure in Japan, lacking the education and capital to take risks that might lead to reward and left instead to provide the flexible labor that others can capitalize on. They are in jobs at animal cafés because, despite vocational training and attempts to find jobs they would prefer that might offer more stability, these are the only type of jobs they can find. And yet, they speak most clearly about the value of animal cafés in Japan today, and they go to cafés on their days off to enjoy the experience as customers. They may be the population forced to carry the largest

burden of instability and precarity, yet they have found a way to find pleasure in their work, to make their jobs more than just the thing they must do to support their real lives elsewhere.

My informants are facing the same understanding of what life is like in Japan today, that precarity influences the options and opportunities open to them; that is what draws these groups together. This understanding helps them to recognize themselves in each other and further fosters the sense of *iyashi* that they come to the café to consume. They come together in the café as familiar strangers. They do not need to directly interact with each other to feel connected, though closer interaction is an option for those who prefer it. People can come to the café, enjoy a reduction in their stress and a positive affective experience, and then return to their everyday lives. This is the niche that animal cafés have carved for themselves.

7.3 RESISTANCE AND REPRODUCTION

Scholars on precarity place emphasis on the sense of loss, the sense of promises unmet and dreams unfilled that arise as a consequence of precariousness. In my fieldwork, I certainly found that many of my informants dealt with frustrations and stresses caused by increased precariousness, in both their work and personal lives. However, an ethnography of precarity in Japan today does not reveal a suffering public, focused on their losses, but on what they need to do to continue, to strive, to succeed. Precarity may be about the loss of something, but it is also about the potential for something new, for a new direction to explore. Not everyone will succeed in finding a new direction, as resources are differentially distributed. The people I met in my fieldwork reflect that; café owners could break ground on a new path toward entrepreneurship and work that they found more rewarding than their previous work, while café employees had

largely been forced into café work when other paths, work that they had trained for at vocational schools, were not available to them. Yet, these businesses appeared at a particular time in Japan, and their structure, and the experiences of the people who work at and patronize these businesses, reflect how young Japanese people are adjusting to their new situation by creating new social institutions to meet their needs.

When I began my fieldwork, I was interested in what new social institutions were being developed to meet the need to address feelings of precarity and to fill the vacancy left by the loss of other sources of social support for younger Japanese. As Anne Allison wrote "As older support systems dry up, newer alternatives—for pursuing, sustaining and creating life—must emerge to take their place" (2009b, 106). Though she focuses more heavily on the negative consequences of precarity in her 2013 book, her earlier article "The Cool Brand, Affective Activism and Japanese Youth" (2009a) she focuses more strongly on the subversive potential of affective labor, demonstrated when labor is "channeled in a way so as not to (re)produce capital" (92). She is speaking primarily of the labor of care, "efforts made to address, confront and transform the living conditions of Japanese who are struggling to survive" (103). While animal cafes cannot claim to be spaces that do not produce capital, as the owners and employees make their income through their labor at the café, there are interesting parallels to Allison's exploration of the potential of these spaces. Animal cafés' focus on allowing the performance of nonproductivity is driven by a resistance to an ideology that controls young laborers, demanding that their energy is focused on serving societal interest.

The people who work in the café—the owners and employees—are aware of and invested in the service they provide to people like them. The rise of businesses that offer sociality is a consequence of the increased awareness of the need for social interdependence to survive and

thrive in the face of precarity. However, the sociality in the animal café is a commodified one; it is on offer only in exchange for payment. The social support is not freely given but done as part of a job, even by the animals, who would at times prefer to be left alone but are kept on the floor to "work." This opens the door to questions about how commodifying an intimate relationship affects its affective potential and how a sociality experience in a commercial setting succeeds or fails to meet human needs for social support.

I found that, for visitors, the focus of the animal café on doing what one wants and needs encourages visitors to think about their personal goals in contrast to what their employer or society may want from them. In Japan, with its strong cultural emphasis on interdependency, there is still a strong emphasis on being focused on the needs of the group and doing what is best for society, while ignoring those who are unable to succeed in the current system. Neoliberal practices have led to increased freedom for some, but it has removed stability and security from many and many more are still participating in rigid, exploitative workplaces. The simple presence of a space dedicated to personal needs, away from spaces of productivity, offers room for negotiation and resistance.

It is in this context of eroding and changing sociality, and high stress and precarity that animal cafés came into being. Their role in Japanese society is still being negotiated, as they move beyond a fad and into a smaller but more established business model. But, so too are the relationships that younger Japanese have with Japanese society as a whole and the changing expectations for their productivity. This generation can use the animal café as a ballast to help them navigate these changes and take an active role in shaping the Japan of the future. They act as a refuge, a place to recharge and reenergize, and a space to reform their relations with other people and beings. They are part of the new affective economy, with all the potentialities for

exploitation and evolution of work involved therein. And, to the people who are drawn to them, they are places that are loved and necessary to help them continue day to day.

7.4 THE FUTURE OF HUMAN-ANIMAL SOCIALITY

As I have explored in this dissertation, animal cafés are a product of this moment in Japan and their function in society is continually constructed in the face of broader social processes. Anthropology allows scholars to delve deeply into an aspect of a culture, but we are limited in what we can see from our vantage point. I have presented an understanding of a certain kind of sociality present in Japan in this period, but this work also poses new questions about the formation and consumption of sociality in Japan, and the role of the animal in human society, in Japan and globally. To answer the question about whether or not, and how, animal cafés will continue to be relevant into the future requires continuing research in Japan's animal cafés.

I intend to continue research on this topic in a way that takes into consideration changes in the café model as well as larger economic and social patterns in Japan. I conducted my fieldwork in Japan at an interesting moment in the arc of animal café development. Cat cafés had been doing business for almost ten years and the boom period, which began in 2008, was over. The oldest animal cafés had cats that were reaching their retirement age, which was forcing owners to decide if they wanted to commit to another ten years of business by bringing in new kittens. It was also the moment when the phenomenon was moving beyond just cat cafés and the business model was expanding into new species and new experiences with animals as a consequence. It was a good moment to explore if the animal café would be more than just a passing fad, if it would become a somewhat more standard part of Japanese social activity. What

I had not expected at the time of my research was the global boom in cat cafés that began just as I was beginning my fieldwork, which led to both cat cafés opening in countries across Asia, Europe and the Americas and to a new tourist boom for cat cafés in Japan. While the increased interest from foreigners did not lead my informants to alter their business model, it has attracted corporate interest in the animal café, which might well alter the café dynamic in the future. I anticipate that continued research on animal cafés will need to explore this added dimension and will offer interesting insight into entrepreneurship and labor dynamics in Japan.

There is thus also room for cross-cultural research into the dynamics of people and animals in cat cafés in the United States. During exploratory research, I found interesting similarities and differences between the Japanese and American models. Precarity and neoliberalism that underwrote the rise of animal cafés in Japan are global trends. I learned that the stories and motivations shared by Americans interested in cat cafés echoed those of Japanese café customers. However, American cafés are built around the opportunity to adopt stray cats and the owners' motivations are drastically different from the ones expressed by Japanese owners who focus more on the customer's needs rather than the animals.'

In addition to potential research following the development of animal cafés in the future, there are also numerous research questions that are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but offer new directions for further research. I touch upon human-animal relations in this dissertation, but my focus is on the human experience of precarity and how they use animals to meet their needs. Yet I have not fully explored how and why sociality with animals is distinct from sociality with other people, and why this type of sociality is so appealing to certain populations. How have the changes in human-human sociality and human-animal sociality affected how people in Japan relate to and rely on each other? These are ideas and questions that

deserve more exploration and offer a way to build on the conclusions of this dissertation and move into new realms.

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