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Neo-onnagata: professional cross-dressed actors and their roles on the contemporary Japanese stage

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NEO-ONNAGATA: PROFESSIONAL CROSS-DRESSED ACTORS
AND THEIR ROLES ON THE CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE STAGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

By
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May 2002
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Setsuko, the exact center of my universe, supporter, gadfly, partner, friend, wife, co-parent, Ariel’s mama, amanuensis, translator, interpreter, and art-lover, without whom this dissertation would not be.
In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people . . . The Japanese people are simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art.

Oscar Wilde
This dissertation follows the convention of *Asian Theatre Journal* and other academic publications in presenting the romanized names of Japanese individuals in the order naturally used in Japan, that is, surname first followed by the given name (e.g., Miwa Akihiro).
Acknowledgments

In his 2000 best-seller in Japan and the United States, entitled *Jiriki*, Buddhist apologist Itsuki Hiroyuki opened with the acknowledgment that “everyone except me is a mentor.” So it is as well for me. Still, I owe special acknowledgment to the following for their significant contributions to the completion of this work:

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Abstract

Neo-Onnagata: Professional Cross-dressed Actors and Their Roles on the Contemporary Japanese Stage explores the representation of male and female gender in the contemporary Japanese theatre. I particularly discuss a specialized subset of Japanese actor: the neo-onnagata, a contemporary theatre counterpart to Japan’s highly stylized classical kabuki tradition of cross-dressed representation. This dissertation represents my attempt to provide these basic aims: to situate the contemporary Japanese cross-dresser in Japanese tradition, to show how cross-dressing acts as a sharp social commentary and mirror, and to introduce some little-represented cross-dressing actors of the contemporary Japanese stage to the academic community at large. In addition, I examine the conservative gender role system of Japan and demonstrate how the neo-onnagata challenge traditional performance and sex roles. Particularly, I seek to showcase neo-onnagata as expanding opportunities for male actors and as new gendered models for men.
Chapter 1
Introduction (Dis-closures)

In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is very opposite of what it is above.¹

Virginia Woolf

Men are men but Man is a woman.²

C. K. Chesterton

In world history, men have in repeated instances exhibited an impulse to dominate: land, goods, ideas, each other, and women. Regarding the historical oppression of women, men have accomplished subjugation in the private sphere, in public civil life, and in sites of cultural representation, specifically, the stage. There are various ways of dominating, but in all cases the dominated must be controlled. Male mastery has thus displayed keen interest in the image, the gendered performances of women. One way of instructing, representing, or even erasing women has been to present male embodiments of Woman in the theatrical arena. Cross-dressing has consequently proven a dominant device in world theatre. Despite the ubiquity of the practice, it has frequently provoked commentary if not controversy in many cultures. Certainly this has been true in the history of Japanese theatre.

¹Woolf, Orlando, 172.
²The full quote is from Chesterton's novel, The Napoleon of Notting Hill. The sentence before it is, “Individually, men may present a more or less rational appearance, eating, sleeping and scheming. But humanity as a whole is changeful, mystical, fickle, delightful. Men are men, but Man is a woman.”
With an eye to the Japanese theatrical traditions, this study will explore ways in which the gender performance and customs of the onnagata (male performers of female roles) of the Japanese dance theatre, the kabuki, have been challenged and expanded by recent artists on the contemporary Japanese stage--those I call “neo-onnagata.” It is my intension to look at the work and philosophies of various artists that fit the stated definition of what constitutes neo-onnagata. These artists advance a wide variety of work and range from popular entertainers who garner public acclaim to pure artists who draw select core audiences--certain unifying points, however, unify their efforts. In my examinations, I hope to make a case for the neo-onnagata as performers who build on classic work to expand the kabuki definition of onnagata. Furthermore, I believe that the neo-onnagata liberate cross-dressing in various ways from conventional practices, beyond mere impersonation. Thus, I will demonstrate that neo-onnagata are opening up new career possibilities for male actors, without usurping females in those parts. Finally, in highlighting the constructed nature of gender and its elemental fluidity, the neo-onnagata performers model new sex role behaviors for men in general.

The term neo-onnagata is an original conception born of my desire to distinguish the serious actors mentioned in this dissertation from traditional life-apprenticed kabuki onnagata, who almost unswervingly play the repertory of canonical

\[^3\]Others include discussion of the career and social resonance of contemporary taishu engeki (working class popular theatre) performer Umezawa Tomio, Furuhashi Teiji (founder of techno-performance group Dumb Type—now deceased), and Peter, cross-dressed dramatic actor and singer (See Chapter Six).
It is, of course, true that famous kabuki and noh actors have, from time to time, done popular projects outside of the purview of their respective repertories. In these cases the actor is sufficiently commanding of an audience (and therefore, powerful) that they can bend the rules. Currently, onnagata Bando Tamasaburoh is so immensely popular that he can do, and has done, any project he likes (the film Natasya, stage productions of Medea and Camille, and a recent modern dance interpretation to Bach music in collaboration with violinist Yo-Yo Ma are but a few). Yet, even he must come back to the strict conventions of kabuki (and the kabuki onnagata).

The neo-onnagata are those cross-dressing professionals who work outside of the traditional kabuki system. The term does not include kabuki actors who dabble in another genre (film, fusion, dance) of performance, although this has certainly occurred. Some recent kabuki onnagata have used their popularity for new opportunities in other forms. They, nevertheless, are always responsible to the highly conservative kabuki social structure because of the deep-seated giri (social obligation) incurred during their life-long apprenticeships. Neo-onnagata, who have seriously trained themselves (in

4It is, of course, true that famous kabuki and noh actors have, from time to time, done popular projects outside of the purview of their respective repertories. In these cases the actor is sufficiently commanding of an audience (and therefore, powerful) that they can bend the rules. Currently, onnagata Bando Tamasaburoh is so immensely popular that he can do, and has done, any project he likes (the film Natasya, stage productions of Medea and Camille, and a recent modern dance interpretation to Bach music in collaboration with violinist Yo-Yo Ma are but a few). Yet, even he must come back to the strict conventions of kabuki (and the kabuki onnagata).

5The center of gay clubs and bars in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo. Between two and four hundred bars and nightclubs are densely situated in a block measuring roughly 160 meters (175 yards) by 180 meters (197 yards).

6See Chapter 6.
voice, movement, acting, often in kabuki techniques) and then forged a respected place
on the contemporary stage, have found that their strict stylistic training has brought
them the freedom to work in a wider range of theatrical possibilities. In actor Miwa
Akihiro’s case, he has even gained a forum of public celebrity that has allowed him to
speak his mind on a variety of social issues. In consensus-oriented Japan, a political
actor represents a very transgressive voice indeed, especially when we consider that the
views being represented may not only irritate commercial sponsors but cause dissonance
for conservative fans, those who have granted the cross-dresser honorary status as
spokesperson for women.

Sasai Eisuke, in summarizing his ideas, indicates that the word onna-gata is
usually written with the kanji, pictographic characters originally imported from China,
for “woman” and “form.” He, however, chooses to write the spoken term with the kanji
for “woman” and “direction.” In effect, he wants to approach Woman-ness in his
portrayals but does not attempt to replicate the exact form or shape of a woman. This
attitude indicates the aim of the fascinating experiments that Sasai continues in the
methodical exploration of constructing woman as an “internally signed” conception. His
portrayals both recall and reconstitute the point of view put forth by French theorist and
semiotician Roland Barthes, who in his orientalist tract Empire of Signs spoke to the
stated intent of Japanese cross-dressing actors when he controversially postulated
Woman as an idea rather than a nature. As such, Barthes restored the category of
Woman to the classifying function and to “the truth of her pure difference.” He saw the “Oriental actor” as eschewing the limiting representation of a (particular) woman for the more complex juggling of the signs of Woman.\footnote{Barthes, \textit{Empire of Signs}, 89-91.}

The neo-onnagata featured in this dissertation play a small but fixed role as artists in the theatre world of Japan but are effective representatives on a wider scale for suppressed groups and social issues in Japanese society. As such, they constitute a convergence of life and art that warrants close examination. While they display fascinating skill as performers, the neo-onnagata also are performing the identity of Woman with male actor-bodies, constantly challenging the audience to read subtext and to critique the gender and power structures of contemporary Japanese and world culture.

As a rule, conservative, masculinist Japanese culture has enforced strong gender codes, in every aspect of society. The resultant gender oppression has held true not only for women but also for men. This has occurred not only in society but onstage as well. The neo-onnagata actors have challenged gender conservatism and a strict binary sex-role model. In doing so they expose and expand the definitions and roles of gendered categories, thus inducing a more progressive social space for the male performer, and by extension, men at large.
Theatre has long been a reflection of social performance. Thus, the traditional modes of theatre in Japan, particularly kabuki, have tended to be socially conservative. Men have controlled the public performances, the societal images, and thus preserved the sex-role status quo. Even the famous kabuki practice of cross-dressing, the female role-playing male onnagata, has been an usurpation of the depiction of women by women themselves. Cross-dressing as a practice has, in kabuki, largely appeared to serve the conservative gender system and yet has also expanded gender possibilities by creating yet another gendered category, the onnagata. But, the onnagata designation is so highly stylized and bound to dynastic birthrights that it remains inaccessible for the non-kabuki male performer (and thus as model for average male behavior). Traditional Japanese notions of women as idealized mothers/wives/mistresses and men as work-focused bread-winners further rigidify male and female sex roles.

Neo-onnagata have followed a tradition in Japanese theatre of both embracing (in studying its forms) and challenging (in changing and expanding the definitions and traditions) kabuki. They challenge the fixed sexism and staid conventions kabuki, the fossilized images of Woman, and, by extension, the images of Man. These performers transgress the tradition and in so doing transgress gender codes. The effect can be the liberation of the male actor and the liberation of the male, generally. I contend that the neo-onnagata work to break down gender constraints, to liberate, men and women by expanding gender possibility beyond traditional conceptions of the binary. Cross-
dressing within the freedom of contemporary theatre is socially transgressive, instructive, and in keeping with trends in recent history, chiefly those that question gendered behaviors.

**Historical Precedents**

Like most cultures, Japan has a long history of cross-dressing, mostly instances of men playing women, in a variety of performances. Womanhood has been such an exquisitely structured and performative image in Japan that the guise and signs of Woman have effectively rendered the actual woman invisible. The most well-known example of such erasure can be found in the history of kabuki, as the art form went through three stages of increasing stylization and the eventual banning of actual women onstage.

The first stage of kabuki began as a common bawdy dance by a woman, Izumo no Okuni, a temple prostitute, who sometimes increased the erotic appeal of her performances by donning articles of male clothing.\(^8\) Her presentations evolved into a popular dance and story-telling form, which gained popularity across Japan and was played by both women and men. When the rioting samurai in the audience, fighting over their favorite actresses, became a source of anxiety for authorities women were banned from the stage. This was followed shortly thereafter by a similar ban on androgynous

\(^8\)She was depicted in screen paintings of the period dressed in a cruxifix and the pantaloons of Dutch traders.
young men., for similar reasons. Finally, no one was left to perform “hearty men,” older male actors who could appropriate and enact the cultural ideal of Woman. These actors accomplished heightened evocation of Edo period codes of feminine image, with such elaborate stylization, that women were entirely erased from the equation. Kabuki thus functioned in its inception as a conservative containment of women and their image. Just as in traditional Japanese arts *bonsai* (the artificial stunting of trees), *ikebana* (sculptural cut-flower arrangement), *haiku* (minimal distillation of the experience of natural encounter), and *cha-no-yu* (the arcane tea ritual), Nature had been framed, reconstructed, and mastered.

The banning of women from the stage and resultant stylization of the *onnagata* changed the social context of kabuki, raising the *onnagata* performance and the theatrical form to a higher status (still, however, eclipsed by the elite noh theatre). As a result, the male-bodied cross-dresser did not appear to be transgressing social norms; rather, he upheld and even shaped traditional ideas about the binary gender-role system. Such influence was made possible because the traditional *onnagata* was inextricably entwined and engaged within the arcane maze of social rules and linkages which continue to define the kabuki world as a microcosm of ancient Japanese culture.

The kabuki world was essentially a fluid one, but practices established during the Edo period, especially in the final settling of authoritative sanction, have remained the primary templates for kabuki tradition—both in text and performance. Meanwhile,
other theatre traditions have shifted with the changes of history. In contemporary theatre, it was the social refabrication of the 1960s that allowed for a radical freedom from many constrictive social modes. This time also witnessed a move beyond some staid or frigid conventions to other cultural/theatrical possibilities. New changes in behavior and attitudes meant that many previously inviolable traditions were at play in a society that depended on social conformity for its deepest meanings.

Kabuki became a male-dominated institution in a culture that has deeply privileged male supremacy. Japan’s masculinist culture is rooted in the traditional agrarian economy. Historically, men owned land and bequeathed land to first sons. Men carried the family name. Women, on the other hand, were attached to the families of their husbands and fathers, with little power or voice. They came to be seen as cooks and child-bearers, dismissed as appendages to the lives of men and male concerns. These attitudes have hardly been unique in world cultures and history.

The industrial revolution of the 19th century, however, gave many women, particularly in European countries, the opportunity to find work in cities and allowed them to establish independent lives and ideas. From those sweat-house factory beginnings, many women from a range of socioeconomic strata asserted the contemporary tenets of feminist doctrine and gender role expansion beyond essentialist biological exigencies. Japan, however, was a closed society during the colonial and industrial strides of the Western world. From 1602 to 1865, the period of Tokugawa
shogunate rule, Japan’s borders were sealed. Foreign encroachment was repelled, civil
dwars were quelled, and Japan managed to remain one of the few Asian countries
uncolonized by the West. Unfortunately, another result of the isolationist policy was a
lack of progressive social thought as might be stimulated by international ideas of
economic growth, free political experimentation, and female suffrage. Thus, Japan
retained feudal concepts of women as chattel, and the resultant pressure on men to be
responsible for all aspects of society, and fossilized the old Japanese divisions of gender.

Since World War II, Japan has made unprecedented leaps in industrial growth
and social welfare. The contemporary Japanese sex-role system, however, has been
modeled on the old agrarian/samurai systems. The fit of the two has created powerful
tensions. Women are distinct second-class citizens in Japan, with freedom and basic
rights, but little opportunity for significant social mobility in the corporate structure or
political power. These antiquated sex-role models have produced images of women as
weak, sexy, and dependant. Men are seen as strong, sexual, and independent. The
gendered images are rigid and unsupportive of human growth and happiness. Both
images are incompatible with modern systems of work and society. Some women want
to be strong and responsible for society and their lives. Some men want the chance to be
softer in affect and to share the responsibilities of power. The rigid sex-role possibilities
in Japanese society do not currently allow those things. Clearly, other gendered
examples and models are needed.

Aims of Dissertation

This dissertation represents my attempt to provide these basic aims: to situate
the contemporary Japanese cross-dresser in Japanese tradition, to show how cross-
dressing acts as a sharp social commentary and mirror, and to introduce some little-represented cross-dressing actors of the contemporary Japanese stage to the academic community at large. In addition, I examine the conservative gender role system of Japan and demonstrate how the neo-onnagata challenge traditional performance and sex roles. Particularly, I seek to showcase neo-onnagata as expanding opportunities for male actors and as new gendered models for men.

I will utilize various approaches and subject areas to explore the representation of gender and its many permutations in the theatrical space, specifically in the contemporary Japanese theatre. One central area concerns the cultural history of Japan and Japanese society itself, with its well-documented, ancient and starkly polarized cultural notions of sex-role behavior, obsession with the phallus, and Woman as acolyte of phallic representation. Other areas of investigation will be involved: para-kabuki spin-offs of the classical kabuki onnagata, as well as various traditional cross-dressing activities evident throughout the culture.

Much of my research includes contemporary materials and events, relevant reviews, texts, performances, writings about texts and performances—what is happening in the contemporary moment. The Japan Times, Japan’s largest English language newspaper, frequently carries interviews with performers and reviews of performances, as do the Daily Yomiuri and Mainichi Shimbun. I am fortunate to be affiliated with an on-line web entertainment guide called RealTokyo, which affords me the chance to observe and review performances. I spent six months specifically researching
contemporary theatre in Tokyo and, during that time, obtained promotional materials, programs, and, of course, interviews with performers. Performers and their promotional offices have been most generous in providing me with videos of performances, books by performers, and press clippings. As researcher at Nihon University School of the Arts, I have been afforded access to rehearsals of students for kabuki plays and to the Kabuki-za in Tokyo. Of course, performances themselves serve as the best research data. Also, I have edited the contemporary play by Hashimoto Osamu, *Jozoku*, which is featured in translation in Appendix V.

The dissertation also relies on gender theory. By far the most significant influence on this study has been the seminal work of gender pioneer Judith Butler, particularly her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, and her provocative 1992 article, “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary.” With her explications of gender construction, she has highlighted gender as a cultural performance. Historically, one of the most firmly held assumptions of patriarchal humanity has been that of an innate behavior encoding essentially tied to the biological sex. Often, this belief has influenced or even comprised civil jurisdiction and religious doctrine. Butler has articulately challenged that view by effecting a Foucauldian “critical genealogy” of categories (the status of women as subject of sex/gender/desire, compulsory heterosexuality and the production of a “heterosexual matrix,” maternity and the body as political subversion, etc.). Her work has particularly infuriated Christian
fundamentalists, who rightfully see her views as endemic of a contemporary social
erosion of patriarchal power and presumption (the very concept of God as a dominant
male, creating Man in his image, with Woman as afterthought and subset). Most
significantly, Butler sees cross-dressing as the laboratory of her theories, an upturning
of assumed implicit norms and proof of constructive possibilities. As she germanely
asks, “is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures
through which gender itself is established?”

It is Judith Butler’s work that has given me
theoretical underpinnings for my discussion of gender construction and the
expansion of gender roles.

So, if one views gender as performative, the cross-dresser can be a threat to the
gender status quo, able to critique and shed light on the values and premises of the
patriarchy. Cross-dressing thus exists as a fertile point of examination, for it can work
as a means of asserting dominance and control of the female image, but it can also
contest and critique that control, revealing that the investment in a natural female is a
power play (that can be challenged). The theatre, as laboratory and mirror of human
life, is a site where society works out its understanding of sexual difference and
relations. Therefore, my work examines the neo-onnagata in relation to the traditional
performance of cross-dressing, which has largely been conservative in kabuki, and will
analyze how specific performers contest and stretch traditional performance modes. In
doing so, they extend and contest the very ideas of Woman, modes of masculinity, and
gender in contemporary Japan. I believe that the performances of the neo-onnagata are
highly significant in contemporary Japan. Some neo-onnagata that I mention are gaining

Butler Gender viii.
high profiles in the media and thus possess a powerful degree of cultural influence. The significance of their work thus concerns more than the showcasing of their roles and careers. They are actively forging new ground, winning status and acceptance for male actors who wish to build careers playing cross-dressed roles in the contemporary theatre. Further, I believe that the work of this study is significant because it records neo-onnagata as templates for men who seek a softer, expanded version of the sex role, a greater leeway in interpreting accepted male behavior.

The constraints of kabuki helped originate the onnagata. The para-kabuki neo-onnagata, however, is not bound by the constraints of the traditional drama or necessarily obligated to outer signs of femininity. Neo-Onnagata: Professional Cross-dressed Actors and Their Roles on the Contemporary Japanese Stage explores the representation of gender and its many permutations in the theatrical space, specifically in the contemporary Japanese theatre. The neo-onnagata, this study argues, represent a new category of gender. In short, this dissertation will explore the dynamic tension between the stylized construction of Woman found in the traditional theatre and the radical movement toward an expended notion of masculinity, as personified by para-kabuki professional actors on the contemporary Japanese stage, the neo-onnagata.

Influences and Inspirations

My fascination with neo-onnagata practices can be attributed to a number of sources. Cross-dressing takes many forms in Japan. In my first year of living in Japan¹⁰,

¹⁰I first lived in Japan in 1987, when I was among the first wave of educational consultants brought over to Japan to advise Japanese High school and junior high school teachers on interactive classroom techniques. The Ministry of education initiative was called the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program. It still exists today, annually introducing some three thousand foreign teachers to Japanese culture, hopefully with
I was struck by the prevalence of cross-dressing incidences in Japanese culture, as well as in performance. One of the most popular costumes for parties in Japan is bad drag. Company trips to hot-spring resorts regularly feature cross-dressed spoofs enacted among the guests. On television, comics nightly camp for hysterical audiences, Benny Hill-style. The most famous example of cross-dressing in Japan is found in kabuki, which celebrates the cross-dressed onnagata. It seemed to me at that time that Japanese men felt a sense of relief from the stress of social pressures in donning the garb of women. This dynamic force, this interplay of gendered modes, I felt, spawned fascinating cultural theatre. I determined to learn more about what cross-dressed practice meant in the culture and in the various theatre forms.

Of course, theatre forms spring from (or against) previous experience and practice, as well as the societal context. In understanding innovations and subsequent developments in the theatre, it is necessary to know what came before, that is, the historical precedents. A great opportunity for me to survey ancient practices in kabuki and noh came with a series of tutorials with historian and specialist in Asian culture and religion Dr. John Henderson. He adroitly illuminated the Edo and Meiji periods and their social contexts. Further understanding came as the result of my interest in period films, especially those of the directors of the “golden age of Japanese cinema” (1940s - 70s). Particularly, An Actor’s Revenge by Ichikawa Kon (depicting the campaign of a noted onnagata to restore his family honor) and Eijanaika (What Does it Matter?) by
Imamura Shohei (a treatise on the social upheaval of the cyclic *okagemairi* pilgrimages during the Edo period) were instrumental for this work in their depictions of cross-dressing employed as convention and, at the same time, a vehicle for social subversion.

This study also exhibits the wedding of history and theory with practice. I was privileged to be accepted into a noh workshop in the summer of 1999, conducted jointly by Richard Emmert and noh actor Matsui Akira. This exposure gave me a working familiarity with common stories, tropes, and cultural attitudes of the classical theatre, as well as certain training techniques common to Japanese actors. I also have benefitted from sitting in on the *onnagata* training class of Dr. Hara Ippei (and Matsushita-sensei) of Nihon University School of the Arts and seeing the exact kind of work that actor Sasai Eisuke undertook to prepare himself for his para-kabuki neo-*onnagata* career.

Naturally, this neo-*onnagata* study owes a great debt to the work, voices and personalities of the artists examined. I was sometimes guided by published writings of the artists themselves, including Maruyama Akihiro’s *Murasaki no Reirekusho* (A Purple Resume, 1968), Miwa Akihiro’s *Tensei Bigo* (The Ultimate Truth Said Beautifully, 2000), and Sasai Eisuke’s manifesto/chronology *Boku Wa Onnagata* (I Am An *Onnagata*, 1998). The study also benefitted from numerous interviews. I was fortunate to have had the chance to spend six months in Japan researching this work. In doing so, I not only met and interviewed the featured artists but saw over sixty contemporary and classical theatre productions in a concentrated 1999 research period,
including many days spent in the most famous of traditional kabuki theatres, the Ginza Kabuki-za. I began to gain a glimpse of what it means to be a theatre artist and how difficult it must be to create original performance statements in the context of centuries-old social regimentation.

This study investigates many subject areas, and my analysis owes much to scholarship in gender studies, social theory, Japanese social history, and Japanese theatre practice. Although the work of Judith Butler has been most directly employed, other theorists have also informed my thinking. Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade” and Monique Wittig’s “The Mark of Gender” are both germane to the discussion at hand in that they lay the basic foundation for “womanhood” as a patriarchy imposed guise. They, like Judith Butler, have contributed the specific language of gender construction that wrests essentialist absolutes from sex role association. I have always felt that gender was something taught and open to reshaping. Butler, Riviere, and Wittig’s work gave me the courage of my convictions. Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex), the much-quoted pioneer of feminist theory, corroborates the idea of Woman as a concept. This is, of course, a vital forerunner to current conceptions of gender construction. Hélène Cixous (“The Laugh of Medusa”) extends this idea and articulates the possibility of using parodic device (symbolic and actual laughter) to subvert the patriarchal assumptive order. Judith Lorber’s Paradoxes of Gender was one of the first texts I read that codified and distilled my understanding of
gender as in-essential, therefore transient and interchangeable. Certain essays edited by Sabrina Petra Ramet in *Gender Reversals & Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* have been significant in helping me set up cross-dressing as a pan-human trope. This text broadened my understanding, as all of my influences are Western. I continue to seek Asian theorists and models from which to construct culturally valid assertions.

Lesley Ferris’s introduction and various edited essays from *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, as well as her readable *Acting Women: Images of Women in the Theatre*, combine historical reference with theory. As a feminist and New Historicist, she contextualizes cross-dressing and a historic and cultural practice. This work was my first opportunity to note how history can be viewed within feminist context. In seeking a model for clear language in academic writing, I was inspired by the concise example of scholar Alisa Solomon in *Re-dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*, 1997.

As a corollary, sometimes arbitrary, reading to the previously mentioned theorists, I have utilized the “sensuous epistemologies” of anthropologist Paul Stoller, who verbalizes the body’s vocabulary, in all its leakage, extrusion, micturition, and turgidity, as viable tool for academic exploration in his 1997 *Sensuous Scholarship*. I specifically welcome Stoller’s viewpoints as a counterbalance to Western fears of the
organic/sexual body and the ways that Western theorists unconsciously reflect that anxiety in their models. Stoller echoes social theorist Bryan Turner when he agrees that:

the body has a secret history . . . stemming from Nietzsche's Dionysian diversions into the erotics of the body, the sensuality of dance, and the rapture of ecstasy . . . but this secret history had been superfluous. In recent developments of social theory, there has been an important reevaluation of the importance of the body, not simply in feminist social theory, but more generally in the analysis of class, culture, and consumption.11

Both the theoretical and the sensual approaches prove to be useful tools in interpreting the complex mix of Eastern and Western views of sexual representation found in Japan. The same rationale holds true for utilizing the crucial work of Victor Turner (The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, 1969), which analyzes behavior within social groups and the ways that “deviant” behavior is adapted to normativity. I believe that social functions of cross-dressing and its culturalization can be seen in the light of the Turnerian model of liminality.

Tufts professor Laurence Senelick has been one of the most prolific of contemporary researchers on gender and cross-dressed artists, especially in introducing little-known historical figures and practices. His important and much-quoted introduction to Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts has provided inspiration for many to examine the field. His “Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural origins of glamour drag and male impersonation on the

11B. Turner, 11.
nineteenth century stage” in Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross Dressing (edited by Lesley Ferris) strongly informed the Western backdrop of this study, as well. But his most recent book (2000), The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and Theatre, will clearly be unsurpassed for years to come. Dr. Senelick’s research and globe-spanning observation have brought to scholarly attention one particular neo-onnagata performer in what is perhaps the first widely disseminated mention in English of shitamachi showman, Umezawa Tomio.

This study also owes much to several important works on Japanese history and culture. Winston Davis (Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change, 1992), gives great detail to the historical underpinnings of the okagemairi pilgrimages that establish spontaneous cross-dressing as an instrument of social protest. H. Byron Earhart (Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations, 1997) is highly regarded for his readable textbook on Japanese religious practice, including attention to Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian origins and practices. Herbert E. Plutschow (Matsuri: The Festivals of Japan, 1996) has provided the most detailed study yet of common performative Japanese folk practices, including entrenched ideas of sex role behavior.

From time to time, this study makes allusion to the religio-cultural effects and incarnations of Buddhism as they apply to both historical foreshadowings of theatre and the specific personalities examined. Editor Shirley Nicholson’s compilation of essays, The Goddess Re-Awakening (1989), the essay of Eleanor Olson, “The Buddhist Female
Deities,” in particular references the goddess as archetype of the feminine in cultural consciousness. Of use, as well, in this area were Jack Kornfield’s *Teaching of the Buddha* and William LaFleur’s *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan.*

In terms of gender and performance theory, I sought Japanese theorists who might be able to provide a clearer cultural understanding and uniquely Japanese theoretical models through which one could interpret/read theatrical activity. Unfortunately, very little is available. Japanese Shakespeare scholar and linguist Niki Hisae has remarked on a lack of in-depth criticism regarding theatre translation in her 1984 book, *Shakespeare Translation in Japanese Culture*:

> The powerful Japanese anti-theoretical tradition has been responsible for preventing us from studying the theory and practice of translation. Theory must go hand in hand with practice in translation studies. . . .

We may suppose that this cultural mind set has affected other areas of theatrical research as well.

Prominent Western scholars have tilled rich soil in Japanese theatre studies. My research owes an immense debt to the lifework of Professor Samuel Leiter, including his *The New Kabuki Encyclopedia: A Revised Adaptation of Kabuki Jiten*, but also *The Art of Kabuki: Famous Plays in Performance*, and the amusing and enlightening 1998

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paper, “From Gay to Gei, or How the Onnagata Bucked the Bakufu and Created Kabuki’s Eternal Woman.”

It was very important for me to gain a clear picture of costume and gender codes of the traditional kabuki onnagata, including the gestural and semiotic vocabulary that non-kabuki onnagata have at their disposal. In other words, I felt, as many neo-onnagata have expressed, that one must know the “rules” well in order to effectively understand their use and transgression. Not much had been written about the performance codes of kabuki onnagata, certainly not from a feminist perspective, until very recently. Therefore, I was delighted when Dr. Katherine Mezur told me about her work in that area. Her recent essay in the excellent 2000 Leiter/Sholtz-Cionca edited collection, *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage*, distilled her dissertation, *The Kabuki Onnagata: a Feminist Analysis of the Onnagata Fiction of Female-likeness*, to a sharp focus and shed light on the kabuki stylistic tradition. This was singularly useful in hypothesizing the preeminent role of semiotic gender artifacts in the kabuki onnagata’s performance.

I kept coming across references in 1960s Japanese theatre work to Terayama Shuji as a radical theatre theorist/director who made great use of cross-dressing as societal mirror; it was he who fatefully launched cross-dressed actor Miwa Akihiro’s long theatre career. I have been fortunate in my association with The American Society for Theatre Research, to encounter the research of Professor Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, 

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leading Terayama Shuji scholar, who has given Western academics an unprecedented window into Japanese theatre of the 1960s. I was able to find the following useful information in her dissertation, articles, translations, and adaptations: introduction and translation of “Inugami: A Play for Masks in One Act by Shuji Terayama”; “Showdown at Culture Gap: Images of the West in the Plays of Shuji Terayama”; and Blood Wedding: A Kabuki-Flamenco Fusion.

This dissertation represents my attempt to situate the contemporary Japanese cross-dresser in Japanese tradition, to show how cross-dressing functions as a sharp social commentary and mirror. I have tried to combine previous historical and theoretical research with my own experience and theorizing. In contextualizing males playing female roles in Japan, I will highlight how neo-onnagata both reinforce and challenge traditional performances and thereby expand conventional understanding of gender in Japanese culture for women and men.

Organization of Chapters

As Chapter One of this dissertation presents cross-dressing as a mode for challenging hegemonic gender construction, so Chapters Two and Three reference the patriarchal gender roles (and their subversions) in traditional and contemporary Japanese society. Chapter Two stresses the persistently phallocentric gaze of Japanese culture and its historical underpinnings. In Chapter Three, discussion centers on sex roles in the popular arts as expressed through episodes of cross-dressing presented in the media. Both chapters underscore the notion that, in contemporary Japan, theatrical cross-dressers are covertly infractionary because they are constantly subverting, yet
seemingly reaffirming the most deep-seated of Japanese assertions: that of gender essentialism.

In Chapters Four and Five, I will discuss the careers of two contemporary cross-dressers on the current Tokyo theatre scene, who differ in age, social strata, and aesthetics. The chapters examine their performances, media coverage, public perception, and personal interviews. Both artists are provocative in their own ways and impact segments of Japanese society as messengers of gender dissidence. They are critics of each other’s roles as well. The two offer further evidence of the fascination with, and power of, cross-gendered portrayal to, in the words of Teresa De Lauretis, “believe and sustain at once the possibility of . . . articulating a feminine symbolic.”

Chapter Four introduces an overview of the contemporary actor and neo-onnagata Miwa Akihiro, prewar representative of Romantic Art Deco-style elegance and undoubtably one of the most well-known and ubiquitous personalities in Japan. In his stage career he has worked with some of the great directors, actors, and playwrights of contemporary Japanese theatre. He is also a talk-show personality, advice columnist, beauty product representative, singer, and committed Buddhist, complete with his own denomination (“Maria Kannon”). Cult movie fans in the West may know him for his eponymous role in the Mishima Yukio adaptation of Edogawa Rampo’s Kurotokage (Black Lizard).

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14 In the very small world of the geinokai (media celebrity elite), it is not surprising that these performers know each other and have very definite ideas about their own and each other’s respective social roles and abilities.

Chapter Five delves into the career of new phenomenon and truly innovative neo-onnagata, Sasai Eisuke. In young performer Sasai we see a postmodern conflation of classic theatre techniques, gender reversal/questioning, and a newfound sensibility in Japan, irony. He markets himself simply as an onnagata, not only because he performs women’s roles but because he is trained in the classical kabuki arts and employs kabuki techniques and moments in most of his work. Sasai is linked to Miwa in having not only performed the classic Kurotokage (Black Lizard) but also a deconstructed version of it called Jozoku (Criminal Woman) in January of 2000. I also discuss Sasai’s portrayal of Blanche Dubois in a 2001 Tokyo production of A Streetcar Named Desire.

Chapter Six provides a discussion of more complex and challenging work of other neo-onnagatas, exciting artists with different paths and aims, who are “bucking the bakufu”\(^\text{16}\) and forging new ways to represent our changing and fluid understanding of gendered beings. In framing their work, I categorize these artists as practitioners in pure artistic pursuits, or of wide popular acclaim, or somewhere in between the two. This chapter features a rare glimpse at the career and social milieu of neo-onnagata Umezawa Tomio, who commands a more blue-collar audience than others mentioned. As part of a large family enterprise with peripheral yakuza connections and a decidedly “shitamachi” (downtown Tokyo) flavor, he unabashedly bills himself as the “Shitamachi Tamasaburoh,” after Bando Tamasaburoh, the most popular and elegant onnagata in kabuki today. He and his related company regularly tour a vaudevillian

\(^{16}\)This term is Samuel Leiter’s conception, representing the origins of the onnagata as response to the authoritarian banishment of women from the stage. My paraphrase of “bakufu” represents the exclusive kabuki structure and strict interpretation of the onnagata.
review all over Japan, tapping into the punch-perm\textsuperscript{17} and spandex pants crowd and their penchant for low comedy, flashy spectacle, and sentimental plot-lines.

In the conclusion of this study, Chapter Seven, I will discuss the social impact of the neo-onnagata reviewed and argue for their relevance as valid subjects of academic theatre research and their efficacy as implements for wider social change.

So much of Japanese culture and theatre remains unfamiliar to the rest of the world. To give all readers common ground I have felt it necessary to include several appendices as support information for the performance and cultural structures I discuss. Included, and referenced in this dissertation is a survey of recent Japanese history, located in Appendix I. This includes both a history of male dominance (how patriarchal views have held sway) and a history of Japanese theatre. There is particular emphasis on theatre and theatre figures from the 1960s. That is followed by a survey of Shinto and animism (Appendix II), a recounting of institutional deification of the male generative organ in the Hounen Matsuri Phallus Festival (Appendix III), an overview of the general background of and organic symbology in Suzuki Tadashi’s work (Appendix IV), historical information regarding the ecstatic gender play of the eijanaika pilgrimages (Appendix V). Finally, I include the first English translation of Hashimoto Osamu’s neo-onnagata play, Jozoku, written for a neo-onnagata about a neo-onnagata referencing the performance of a legendary neo-onnagata (Appendix VI).

\textsuperscript{17}The punch perm is a hairstyle greatly admired and worn by men who are affiliated in some way with the yakuza (Japanese organized crime), sometimes just day laborers and other construction workers. It is a short haircut chemically curled very tightly.
This dissertation represents a beginning for detailed examination of the nuanced neo-onnagata form. It is one of the first academic studies in English of the featured artists Miwa Akihiro, Umezawa Tomio, and Sasai Eisuke. Certainly, Sasai has previously been unmentioned. My hope is that this study contributes to the ongoing conversation regarding the construction and theatrical performance of gender. Finally, it is the specific intent of this work to provide documented evidence and source material of contemporary Japanese theatre practice, both for the casual theatre afficionado and the inculcated Japan specialist. Re-dressing, addressing, dressing, cross-dressing, undressing, un-crossing, and re-crossing sex-role boundaries: these are the landmarks in the unnerving and disputed territory of gender, of vital interest to women and men, that this work attempts to explore.
Chapter 2
Cultural Phallos-ies: Performing Gender

If an onnagata gets the idea that if he does not do well in his chosen career he can change over to tachiyaku (male roles), this is an immediate indication that his art has turned to dust. A woman must accept the fact that she cannot be a man.

Kabuki onnagata Yoshizawa Ayame (1673-1719)

Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts.
Placard in a Tokyo bar

Truth is a fiction. The true essence of Woman-ness is itself a fiction.
There is a tradition in this country to see fiction as Truth.
Neo-onnagata Sasai Eisuke

If gender is, as Jeffrey Weeks ascribes, a “necessary fiction,” then Japan has embraced necessity with fervor. 1 Japanese society exhibits perhaps the greatest sex-role distinctions on earth. In this country, men and women grow up side by side but with exclusive sets of clothing, expectations, and even language. 2 A patriarchal structure, where men are privileged as archetypes of leadership, is deeply ingrained in the culture. 3 Reinforcement of this privileged system of male discourses manifests itself in a variety

1Weeks, 1995.

2For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of onnakotoba or “female language, “see Womansword by Kittredge Cherry.

3Some historians point to the instances of female emperors and to the mythical female progenitor of Japan (the sun-goddess Amaterasu O-Mikami) as being evidence of a less patriarchal culture prior to the institutionalization of shogunates. There is certainly room for conjecture but I contend that dominant power has largely been exercised by men throughout Japanese history, exceptions not withstanding. At any rate, my primary focus is on the strong “discourse of essentialism” that has undeniably informed Japanese culture and institutions. This study seeks to highlight the constructed nature of gender that belies essentialist beliefs.
of ways: general highlighting of male and female roles and their differences, distinct declarations of “male-ness,” monitoring of and instruction in “female-ness,” and ritual worship of the Phallus. While this situation is slowly changing, the historical samurai archetype of male as strong ruler of a fiefdom of women and children has held long viability. Single mothers are socially ostracized and divorced women impoverished by a lack of alimony. The legal system of Japan privileges the male in most instances, even in cases of murder. Men who commit crimes against women, show remorse, and plead factors of alcohol or passion are generally excused from extreme (sometimes any) penalties.

Culturally, men are held to be somehow “purer” than women, though, like most else in Japan, there are examples to the contrary. But, this viewpoint seems to be generally held, reflecting patriarchal history. As a result, the friendships of men with other men are thought to be of the highest order. In adult comics marketed for young women, there is a whole genre specifically devoted to depictions of lithe feminine young men and their noble attractions to and relationships with one another. In sumo, the ritual wrestling of Japan, Shinto influence expressly forbids women to have any connection with the sport at all. The mostly naked wrestlers, who only wear mawashi (loincloths), are all male. Women are literally held to be too tainted, because of their

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Comics are not exclusively children’s texts in Japan. Adults read comics marketed for them for light entertainment, especially while on trains and subways. There are many of these, only a few of which contain the sexually explicit material implied by “adult reading” in the United States.

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Japanese culture has many homoerotic threads and subtexts.
menstrual flows, to enter the salt-purified ring. A similar superstition pertains to tunnel construction in mountains. If a woman enters the tunnel while it is being built, it is believed that the mountain goddess will capriciously cave in the tunnel out of jealousy. Similarly, men who attempt to cook or clean dishes may be driven from the kitchen, corroborating the view that this is not fitting for men or that the kitchen is the female sphere.

Japan’s long-held views concerning what have been deemed, through historical process, the “natural” roles of women and men may be found in a variety of images, documents, and texts of drama and ritual. One dramatic example is the declaration of the daimyo (prince with jurisdiction over a province) Danyemon in the kabuki play The Daimyo, who asserts: “Women ought to stay where they belong, in bed or in the kitchen.” Another such traditional view is voiced by the eponymous character from The Honor of Danzo: “A man is a man and does not need the help of a woman.” Such sensibilities are also evident in a play called The Horns, where an angry, jealous woman grows devilish horns when in hot pursuit of her beautiful young step-daughter.

6 A clash of the ancient and modern occurred a few years ago when the female Osaka governor Ohta Fusae asked to present the yūsho award in the ring to the winner of the annual Osaka sumo tournament, as her male predecessors had always done. Sumo elders refused her request. After some debate, she sent her male vice-governor, in the name of harmony.

7 A similar case to the sumo incident occurred at the occasion of the dedication of a recently-begun tunnel excavation. When it was discovered that the presiding official was to be a woman, the superstitious construction workers protested strongly. Again, the official stepped down, preferring harmony to a contemporary social statement.

8 Duran, 19.

9 Duran, 52.

10 Ibid, 66.
work conveys the time-worn belief in Japan that women are inherently prone to dark emotions. The horn motif is repeated throughout Japanese society, even in the traditional Shinto wedding ceremony, where the *tsunokakushi* (white hood) is worn to hide the bride’s *tsuno* (horns). Of course, there are several *noh* masks of the horned *hannya*, demon spirit of a jealous woman: respectively, the white, red, black, and gold *hannya*.

The origin myths of Japan set out the original notion of Woman as a source of corruption. The story of the progenitors of the Japanese islands, Izanagi and Izanami (Japan’s Adam and Eve), tells of Izanami descending into the underworld when mortally scorched giving birth to Fire. Izanagi makes an Orpheus-like journey to rescue his mate, but upon meeting her he becomes so tainted by her death-state that he quickly hurries back to the upper world to perform purifying ritual-ablations.\(^\text{11}\) In another myth, Japanese sun-goddess Amaterasu-O-Mikami is vexed and passively declines to light the world by retreating into a cave. Only another woman, Uzume, the “Dread Female of Heaven,” can lure her forth. Such myths teach that women are, by original nature, vacillating and unreliable, but paradoxically tempting and exotic; their gender exists as an enigmatic breed apart. Despite the presence of strong female figures in the myths, Japanese history has used such stories as these to reify the male.

Judging from a plethora of popular texts and performances, Japanese society enshrines women as mysterious yet necessary (for procreation, for child-rearing, for

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\(^{11}\)These tales of cosmogonic origin are related in the ancient documents the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, the closest to “texts” that exist for the Shinto cultural beliefs. Shinto is not a religion in the sense of others for this reason and due to the fact that it has no central god or moral tenets. One can only be Shinto if one is Japanese.
beauty, for grace). That necessity also fulfills a deeply decorative function. Indeed, Japanese institutions have frequently reserved a corollary but vital place for women, or Woman, as symbol of beauty, as witness to the acts of being Male. Women can even be seen as an extension of the male body, evidence of, as well as object of desire. In this context, it might be said that these women, or Woman, function as “adorned Phalluses,” referents to the male and male-ness but so antithetical as to constitute the extreme Other. The idea of the adorned Phallus may be described as an expression of over-reinforcement. The Phallic referent (the female) is elaborately signified—by clothing, hair, smell, and gesture—such that a distinct line may be drawn between her and the phallus-bearer (the male). In the Japanese context, men and women are held to be strongly different, and it is culturally important that everyone clearly certifies that belief. In turn, conventional wisdom, patriarchal hegemony, and wa (group harmony, the status quo) are upheld. This serves to strengthen male ideas, imagery, and power.

In this chapter, I wish to highlight the performance of the Phallus and gender regimentation in key sites of Japanese culture. Historical discourses of masculinity have created a picture of men as naturally supreme. I will examine several instances, including examples in contemporary society, in festivals, in historic times of upheaval, and on the stage. In doing so, I hope, not to essentialize Japanese culture, but to reinforce the absolute focus in the Japanese sensibility of the male as central social force (with resultant social pressure on men). In this light, male to female cross-dressing, as a feminizing of the male image is viewed as highly transgressive, contained within a strict

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12Following most noted gender theorists, a distinction is made here between the “phallus” (penis or penis representation) and the “Phallus” (that which is not the penis, but references it).
frame, and subject to conservative regulation. The examples contained in this chapter stress the aggressively patriarchal features of Japanese society. Such strong social construction tempts critique of the system and establishes free agents like the neo-
onnagata as threats to the established genderal order. They are, in fact, new performances of maleness.

In Japan, as in the rest of the world, an accident of birth yields a secondary sexual characteristic of phallic protrusion that is a lifetime tag of privilege. This marker assumes so much importance that it, and the traits assumed to accompany it (what most people call gender), must be not only noted but emphasized. In a binary societal frame, to not have the primary appendage determines relegation to other functions. Consequently, a constructed function of female-ness in Japan appears to be that of referent, or reflection of the all-important phallus (penis). With elaborate male-generated codes of dress, smell, speech, and gesture, the signified image of woman becomes adornment of the Phallus and mirror to male power, dominance and potency. The adorned mirror of Phallus/woman serves to reassure the phallic male that he continues to exercise preeminence.

For a male to assume the adornment of the subaltern is to deny his natural privilege, to cede power. Thus, male-to-female cross-dressing in this conservative society is either contained within heavily proscribed codes, as in the kabuki representation, or seen as a vehicle of confusion, a calling into question of the status quo. Further, the cross-dressed male is not merely a passive mirror but a reflexive being, an autonomous reflection, capable of altering the image at will. As free agent in a lock-
step society where status is determined at birth, the neo-onnagata yields great power as social critic and as a model for the expansion of male roles.

In Western society this idea—use of the male actor’s body as Phallus to highlight, parody, and feminize the male domain—has certainly been the historical norm as well. The Greeks famously utilized grotesque phallic representations in their costuming for comedies and, as women were socially restricted to the home, reduced depictions of the female to masks and costume pieces. In the 16th century, the Jesuits took this further by banning not only women but all female roles from their theatre. In various stages of European history, women themselves were banned from stages, ostensibly because they excited male lust but also because it was presumably more wicked for women to be mimetic than men. By corporal absence, the concept of gynecity contained in the “virtual Feminine” was all the more pervasive.

But, the wilting phallus needs a visual representative and mirror to be reassured of gender mastery. The trappings of gender thus must be clearly delineated and reinforced. Perhaps only deepest existential philosophizing has rivaled the efforts spent on establishing gender roles. Though imbued with a staunch weltanschauung of received essentialist belief, Japan has spent a long history in intricate detailing of the construction of the gender system. In the para-theatrical realm, most gender modeling has revolved around performing reifying rituals of maleness or male superiority. This reinforces what has been seen as evidence from Nature. Animist nature worship,
inherent to the indigenous set of rites and beliefs known as Shinto,\textsuperscript{15} has emphatically yielded performances revelatory of the historical phallocentric view of gendered construction. According to the historical record of performance, Nature upholds the patriarchal view.

**Phallic Festival**

I was shocked when I visited Tagata Jinja close to Inuyama Palace. The shrine was dedicated to a huge male genital. There are various shapes made of wood, stone or paintings. From the ancient times, it (the Phallus) has been said to have a spiritual power and the source of fertility, therefore, it is natural that it is worshiped.\textsuperscript{16} Mizuki Shigeru, “Tagata Jinja” in *Youkai Gadan (Picture Book of Monsters)*

As opposed to Japan’s image as the harbinger of ultra-chic fashion and technology trends, Japan presents another face. It is one of very few contemporary world powers where indigenous folk religion overtly celebrates sex and procreation by public processionals of ithyphallus and vulva symbols. Folk religious customs provide a direct link to Shinto ceremonies and processional rituals of antiquity, like the Hounen Matsuri (“Abundant Year Festival”), also dubbed the “Penis Festival.” This ritual takes place at the Tagata-jinja (Tagata Shrine) at Komaki in Aichi prefecture of Honshu, the largest island of Japan.

\textsuperscript{15}Shinto is for convenience’s sake designated as a “religion” but this is perhaps a misnomer. It is uncharacteristic of other nominal religions in that it revolves around no central text.

\textsuperscript{16}Mizuki, 13. “ I met a taxi driver in this town and she told me about a strange tree in the middle of a street in details. Anyone who tried to cut this tree died. There has been three people who died in this way, so the tree is left in the middle of the street. I imagined this tree has a special spiritual spirit so I touched the tree but I did not notice anything different from ordinary trees.”
In studies of anthropology and comparative religion, the worship of generative power as expressed by adoration of the phallus has been identified as a marked feature of many primitive religions. In antiquity, phallic consecration was practiced by the early Semites and Greeks and became an important part of the worship of the god Dionysus. Phallicism and its counterpart, the adoration of symbols of female fertility (as typified in the worship of the ancient goddess Cybele, a deification of the female generative or mother principle), are both manifestations of nature worship. In present-day India a female symbol, the *yoni*, and a phallic symbol, the *linga*, are symbol/artifacts in the worship of the Hindu god Siva.\(^\text{17}\) From the Buddhist pantheon, the Japanese goddess of mercy, Kannon-sama, has appeared incarnated as dildos in sex shops and, in fact, can be seen as a penis-like structure, slim and jutting, from the tops of mountains around the Japanese countryside.\(^\text{18}\)

Japan’s indigenous cult and religion, Shinto, has also included such veneration of the ancient icons of fertility. Shinto (in Japanese, "the way of the gods") originated in prehistoric times and has held a unique national position in the history of Japan, particularly in recent times.\(^\text{19}\) During its early period, the body of religious belief and practice was nameless and without fixed dogma, moral precepts, or sacred writings. Worship focused on a vast pantheon of spirits, or *kami*, mainly divinities personifying aspects of the natural world. Such spirits were believed to exist in the sky, the earth,

\(^{17}\)Vanggaard, 1972.

\(^{18}\)One notably on a promontory in front of the train station in Ofuna, a small municipality on the southern edge of Yokohama.

\(^{19}\)See Appendix I.
heavenly bodies, and storms, but not excluding animals, men, or even elements of the body.20 Rituals of worship included prayers of thanksgiving; offerings of valuables (such as swords and armor and, especially, cloth); and ablutionary purification from crime and defilement.21 Most notable were symbolic noh performances, and various sacred and profane fertility rites.

The origins of the Shinto Tagata Shrine and its annual festival are not clearly known, but the reason for the festival's long-lived and present popularity is understandable. The attraction of the site and the event issue from a natural, simplistic expression of primitive Japanese wishes for a plentiful harvest, wishes given emblem in a seven-foot-long phallic symbol painted bright red. This wooden phallus is carried every March fifteenth by a procession of twenty strong men as an offering to the widow goddess of rice fields to whom the Shinto shrine here is dedicated. The Bacchic parade has also been described as having characteristics of the Dionysian processions of ancient Greece.22

The sacred emblem of Tagata Shrine echos the frank sexuality of medieval Japan, prior to Western-introduced prudery. Practices have now become more modest.


21Earhart, 9.

22McCooey, 3.
The phallic symbol formerly was attached to the loins of a straw warrior doll in the procession, but in recent years that practice was deemed "too coarse" and was discarded. Later, conveyance of the symbol by itself was considered to be too bold.

Now, the emblem is "housed" under a modest shrine-like roof, though it protrudes from both ends, "denaturalizing" or unveiling "the construction. Nonetheless, the ritual is still controversial. In the last hundred years, the clash between primitive simplicity and modern complexity has grown, as has the symbol itself. Both phallus and festival keep getting bigger and more grotesque. The festival, which used to be a quiet celebration, has become more rowdy as people see it as a curiosity and an outlet to "relieve stress." Urban Japanese view the event as an embarrassment, and few ordinary Japanese in other sections of the country have ever heard of the ritual. When they have, it is often dismissed as "some crazy rural thing," the unfashionable and foolish activity of inakamono, or "country bumpkins."

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23 Hearn, Glimpses, 511. Koizumi Yakumo (Lafcadio Hearn) noted the encoupled straw figures mentioned as a kitoja-no-mono (ex-voto) and as part of the remnants of a "phallic cult, probably common to most primitive races, and formerly widespread in Japan.

24 Harris, 144. British performance scholar Geraldine Harris has used the term "denaturalization" to describe this kind of image/process.

25 Awata (McCooey, 3).

26 The fading religious significance of the festival, however, hasn't stopped the crowds from growing. In the mid-1960s, attendance was about 20,000. In 1993,
When encountering the festival and site, one observes the primacy of male-ness reigns at Tagata Shrine. Everywhere on the shrine grounds are phalli-like mushrooms, natural and carved rock manhoods sprout, singly and in clusters. Stylized, disembodied male and female organs are available, for sale, in every permutation. One can find tiny entethered couples with movable parts, pictures of disembodied sexual organs, and, most incongruous to the Western eye, penis and vagina candy pops on sticks, which are everywhere devoured by excited children. Tagata Shrine also caters to worshipers seeking personal benefits by selling prayers and amulets for health, traffic safety, and one for “everything you wish.” There are talismans as well for Tagata's specialties: en-musubi ("tying the knot"), pregnancy, safe birth, and protection from venereal diseases. When a wish comes true, the amulets are to be returned to the shrine, along with a new amulet as an offering of gratitude to Tamahime. But it is the phallus which focuses attention during the festival. The shrine of Tagata has one of the largest collections of erotic toys, aids and phallic representations in Japan. Next door is a

approximately 70,000 people were estimated, including at least 3,000 foreigners. American airmen stationed at the nearby former Komaki Air Base (now a Japan Self-Defense Force installation) and other servicemen coming from as far away as Zama in Kanagawa Prefecture have had some part in giving the festival the fame it has gained among foreigners, including diplomats.

27There is a strong association in Japan between the shape of certain mushroom and the penis. A long slim male member with a large glans may be referred to as a matsutake, after the rare and fragrant mushroom.
museum housing a variety of embalmed animal penises. Such an intense phallocentric site cannot help but be a magnet for questing libidos and curious scholars, as well as a profound manifestation of Japan’s fascination with male power.

As much as this celebration, and the Japanese themselves, reify historical discourses of the mythic male, there is a lacuna, a stutter, a nagging doubt, evident in the event. Where does the gaudy masculine space end and the dark feminine “abyss” begin? Despite essentialist confidence in fixed gender conceptions, de-constructive cross-dressed representation can reveal cracks in the images. A theoretic model for blurring of gender image lines has been offered in Derridian terms by British feminist performance scholar Geraldine Harris:

It [the phallus] can only function in travesty or drag when “veiled” and visible through its opposite, the feminine “surface,” which like the phallus itself is no-thing. Therefore, there is effectively a difference and no difference between the phallus and all these things, a difference “without any decidable poles, without any independent irreversible terms.”

The gendered poles, thus, can be critiqued as in-different because they signify, imitate, and leak into one another. The Tagata Festival is interesting not only because of what it displays. It also reinforces a belief in female “absence” because the enormous phallus effectively precludes symbolic competition.

Early Japanophile journalist and professor Koizumi Yakumo (Lafcadio Hearn) noted in his *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* that the esoteric meaning

of the Japanese verb nazorareru implies a mimetic magic, part of Japanese pre-modern cultural understanding. Such etymology could provide an entry into why the Tagata Jinja Festival celebration of sex and procreation may have continued resonance, even in post-industrial Japan. Common meanings of nazorareru include “to imitate,” “to compare,” or “to liken.” However, in relation to the workings of mystic acts of faith, it is understood to mean “to substitute, in imagination, one object or action for another, so as to bring about some magical or miraculous result.”

Contemporary Japan is beginning to look at other possibilities for constructing the male role. If there were a “magic” way to allow a natural expression of maleness that did not constrict, that allowed for a variety of expressions for the phallic body, such transformation would a true liberation.

The overt purpose of the phallus festival is to laud the male, and then substitute that image for a masculine presence. This is a way of placating/appeasing the spirits, for the sake of a felicitous male heir. But the hyperbolic performance of masculine dominance may constitute a more profound, less specific attempt to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony as a whole. It is interesting that the female counterpart shrine, the O-gata Jinja, is only a side trip from the main procession. It is a very small shrine located nearby, consisting of a bifurcated tree stump. The procession stops to imbibe and moves on quickly. Indicative of the male focus of the festival day, there is not much in the Ogata Shrine of interest to the participants.

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29 Hearn, Kwaidon, 57.
Thus, historical signifying progenerative binaries, bring Shinto, and the ancient use of the ritual of the fertility festival, into meaningful contemporary function as evidence of a Japanese belief in gender essentialism.

**Phallic Rebellion**

Abandoning ourselves to the urgency of Nature,
We sing and dance. There is no past, no future,
But only the present. . . .
The world is a dream;
Let us lose ourselves in it.
The reality of thunder
Cannot destroy the dream between us. . . .
(Excerpts from Okuni-kabuki songs from 17th c.)

Nature has been used as a guidepost in Japan for affirming/reinforcing a cultural belief in the essential immutability of the male and female. It has been presented in folklore and in the ways that natural formations have been categorized; rocks, trees, gods, and humans occur in sexual binaries with set behaviors. Cultural power has utilized the “mystic” to dictate relations in society. Yet, certain sites, cyclic historic moments, devaluate and resist this assertion. Gender play erupts during times of social upheaval, when authority becomes weakened and the general order is otherwise broken down. Such ruptures demonstrate that the crossing of gendered boundaries has historical roots. While cross-dressing has been chiefly appropriated as conservative tradition, it can at times be transgressive, serving to question and to provoke social anxiety. At these times, male constraints are unheeded and flaunted.

In 1866, as the Meiji Restoration began, the Tokugawa shogunate fell due to an unstable social system and pressure from foreign governments. The *samurai* class was officially abolished, and class lines were no longer certain or recognizable. Oppression
of the recently tenanted farming masses was harsh, and peasants no longer had the strength of their *samurai* and *daimyo* to enact justice. Social strictures in an already restrictive culture left the common man with few options to escape poverty and an unbearable psychological pressure to accept his fate.

What occurred in this repressive era was an event of social hysteria (that has emerged several times in Japanese history): farmers and shopkeepers left their work and rushed as one into the streets.\(^{30}\) The participants evidenced dancing, laughter, all manner of lewd gesture, and a freedom from authority, including gender codes.

A liminal and carnivalesque atmosphere, a spontaneous *matsuri* (festival) sprang forth. The event was socially subversive and rich in the spontaneous play and trance-like disembodiment, which are at the very heart of performative activities and theatre itself. Phallic representation and costumes, including those of the other gender, were prevalent. The colorful revelers careened through the streets, topless, masked, arms asway, singing “*eijanaika eijanaika* (What the hell!).” Men wore women’s make-up and kimono. Women waved wooden swords, and some men or women were semi-clad. Others laughed and drank while engaging in frenzied chanting with their eyes rolled back. Not surprisingly, the authoritarian government was terribly anxious about these suspensions of everyday rationality and uncertain as to how to deal with them.

Eventually, responses included brutal repression and even general slaughter.

The wild behaviour brings to mind Turner’s structure for the reintegration of liminal societal elements. We may note that even a mass hysteria as Rabelaisian as this

\(^{30}\)Among others, the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 understandably contained several instances of mass hysteria in its aftermath. Besides the expected fear and confusion, there were wild rumors about Koreans poisoning the water supply.
one had a sense of ritual about it. In fact, that is probably what gave the historical cycle of dis-order a conduit for channeling back to a state of “normative communitas.” The government spread the word that a talisman, an invitation to commune, had been “issued” from the god(s), the ostensible purpose being to establish agency and to reassert control of the event.

In characterizing the eijanaika phenomenon, the worshipers danced and chanted in meiadic altered states, leaving behind earthly tensions and finding a place at the edge of consciousness (through wine, sexual frenzy, physical exertion) where a “catharsis/purification” could occur. These trance-like, erotic rituals in Japanese antiquity and myth link up to descriptions from early texts that describe the beginnings of kagura dance and noh drama.

All Japanese contemporary theatre and dance is a response to kabuki and noh, either as expansion or rejection. Therefore, it is important that performance, including the highly theatrical eijanaika performances, be understood in relation to the ancient stories. The earliest seeds of the Japanese theatre, and a link to the ritually erotic, can be traced back to myth. According to the Kojiki, the earliest recorded text of Japanese mythology, Ama-No-Uzume, the “Dread Female of Heaven,” climbed on top of a tub in front of the cave in which Amaterasu-Omikami, the Sun Goddess, was hiding her life-giving light. In the style of an ancient shamaness, Dread Female went into a trance, and began to stamp her feet, slowly at first, but progressively faster, rolling her eyes and wildly waving her spear. She went into an erotic frenzy that, cheered on by the eight

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31In fact, there were leaflets found that had suggested that the people go on pilgrimage. Some historians have suggested that forces of opposition to the government may have taken advantage of group mentality in order to foment revolution.
million other deities, reached its shuddering climax when she revealed her breasts and then “pushed her skirt string down to her private parts.”

What is one to make of these historical instances of genital bearing and obscuring? Clearly, it would seem that the impetus in these events was to perform and thus claim personal pleasure/power in ways that were heretofore unavailable. Men in Japan generally had the general freedom to walk in the sun with their shirts off and to widely spread their legs and wave swords/phalloi with abandon. On the other hand, they carried heavy social responsibilities in Japanese culture, as heads of households, as bread-winners, and as community members. In the eijanaika event, freedom for some men may well have included the relinquishing of rigid expectations/roles, a sensuous reversal of the erotic gaze, and the manipulation of the available “sexy” signifiers of women (colorful kimono, lip rouge, and pale foundation on the face). A window of opportunity opened, however briefly, to resist the pressures of being male.

I reference the dance of the Dread Female in noting that, as bearer of no phallus herself, she evoked hysterical laughter by her active lifting of the genital curtain, signifier of femininity and recess. One way of explaining the outburst is to point out that many people around us are “Others,” in that they are unknowable from the facade they present. Gender confusion, as Butler and Garber have noted, provokes anxiety.

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**32**Truncation of the Buruma account/translation, 3.

**33**The dress and manner of a person may indeed fool the most intimate of relations. Various historical examples abound. One was 1940s band leader Billy Tipton. She lived as a man most of her life, passing successfully with three different wives. All were astonished when the coroner released the news of her true biology. Which was her “true gender?” A more well known instance was referenced in the hit play *M. Butterfly*, by Henry David Hwang.
Laughter often evidences cathartic relief from anxiety, thus providing some explanation for the laughter at the Dread Female when she disrobed.

The lifting of the female genital flap can be seen as metaphor for the act of cross-dressing. Laughter is ultimately transgressive and doubly so when accompanying the broaching of assigned gender indicators. Such incidents and historical practices enlighten our investigations of neo-onnagata. Freed (“dis-robing”) from such strictures as the kabuki costuming signs, neo-onnagata may evoke the confirming nod of the status quo or the Medusan laugh of the avant garde.

Gender highlights performance and construction through a variety of means. In the eijanaika occurrences, color (spectacle), repetition (text/spoken word), and dance (bodies in motion) spontaneously combined to create a performative event. Audience and performer melded together in a pure mutual ludic spirit; the shogunate was audience as well. The bakufu was recognized and named as oppressive force. Public empowerment gave way to in such thinking as this: “You may tax us into poverty but we can still feel a communal joy.” Traditional gender roles became a suspended mode, subject to the fluidity of a pre-constructed state. There are not so many times when oppressed adults can experience such public states. Only a mass delusion or a mentality of upheaval as created by ruptures in the social fabric would likely elicit it. At such times, the hegemonic social order (as enforced by patriarchal authorities) and even perceptions of Nature itself can be revealed as performed constructions.
Phallic Nature

It has been a historical and cultural tendency in Japan to reify and reconstruct Nature. We can see it in all of the traditional arts, from *bonsai* (stunting of plants) to *kitsuke* (how to wear, reconstruct, and walk in kimono). The stage has exhibited such appropriation as well. In the contemporary theatre, directors have used phallic imagery. Among these, internationally acclaimed director Suzuki Tadashi has presented gender signifiers at their most primitive levels.

Suzuki re-constructs Nature in the bodies of his actors and his use of powerful natural symbols. Suzuki’s manifesto of acting style, *The Way of Acting*, presents a difficult method of working the lower body that was designed for compact Japanese bodies. Such movement, skillfully employed, summons raw natural power for which only narratives of epic proportion can do justice. On the basis of his natural aesthetic, Suzuki incorporated this organic acting style into his early productions of Greek plays (*The Trojan Women* [1974, 1984], *Clytemnestra* [1984], *The Bacchae* [1984]). He also highlighted a most curious prop: the *daikon*, or Japanese white radish. Homegrown, ubiquitous and symbolic of Japanese rural life, the *daikon* can be quite long (two feet or more) and thick as a man’s arm. *Daikon* are invariably white and mild to the taste. They also call up an unmistakable phallicism, which is consciously referenced throughout the

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34 For more on Suzuki Tadashi, see Appendix III.
culture. On the stage, they easily become totems for sexual potency, and as representations of the bodies of actors in contemporaneous space. They may be symbols of natural power or they may epitomize the feminine referent (as in "that which is not the phallus").

As per the requirements of the Greek sagas, Suzuki’s female characters are astonishing daikon-women, hubric and wracked with sorrow. As a result, his productions require actors of enormous physical stamina and presence. Among notable performances have been portrayals by Suzuki’s muse, the cyclonic man-woman Shiraishi Kayoko, and by the accomplished woman-man, Sasai Eisuke.

Suzuki gave venue to the cross-gendered body as symbol of nature in his work when he employed rising neo-onnagata Sasai Eisuke as an actor in Dionysus, staged for the opening of the Mito Museum. It was a very challenging experience for the young Sasai, who was trying to establish his credentials as a serious para-kabuki cross-dressing performer. In his autobiography, Boku wa Onnagata (I am an Onnagata), he writes:

Difficult work with Suzuki Tadashi. Second experience with him (after a brief role in King Lear). Short bursts of very intense work in rehearsal. No freedom to express actor’s work. Actors feel like embodied Suzuki puppets. Not just movement but line delivery and breaths. No individual input accepted. Atmosphere is one of complete subservience to Suzuki. After rehearsal you are secluded and controlled. Rehearsal after rehearsal with no day off. No day off for Christmas. Even in a war, there are truces! It made acting seem so uninteresting and tedious. First
day of production was not a welcome event. At SCOT nothing else is welcome except the Suzuki Method. Any production by Suzuki is immediately recognizable. Ex-Suzuki actor Shiraishi Kaiyoko was the only one ever liberated by this method!  

Sasai was able to garner acclaim in this production and at the same time extract meaning from a draconian regime of formalized theatrical activity. He found that Suzuki’s harsh training indeed replicates the raw power of wild nature. Suzuki’s use of what he sees as models of Nature yielded positive results in the performance possibilities for Sasai, despite the difficulties.

Suzuki’s radical body work is conservative in its Japanese emphasis on rote training, painful muscle work, and hard angles of the body, hallmarks of masculine exercise. In subtler forms, the training of kabuki onnagata also includes strong bodily distortion. The traditional methods of distorting the body inherent to kabuki are intended to enhance feminine form and focus the actor. In combining Suzuki’s forceful “male” techniques with fluid refinements of the “feminine,” Sasai gained strength and learned much in establishing himself in a new definition of the kabuki onnagata.

Suzuki’s methods of body training, along with kabuki dance and onnagata training traditions, became another tool in Sasai’s arsenal of techniques for cross-gendered portrayals. It is ironic that the phallus-bearing, cross-dressed Sasai portrays

\[\text{\textsuperscript{35}}\text{Sasai, 55.}\]
organic women, using techniques of natural power, which he would elsewhere use for less conservative ends, that is, to re-construct gender.

**Phallic Woman**

Womanly adornment may be one easily understood element of feminine representation. But, to construct a projection of femininity using just the manipulated body, without wigs and other accouterments, as Sasai has done, challenges the boundaries of what we recognize as male and female. Such practice brings us to the heart of the essentialism versus constructivism debate, which has informed the critical discourse of women’s bodies and their social images. History and cultural tradition reveal attempts to constrict gender boundaries. But, despite conservative legislation, gender as an unbounded fluidity continually confounds binaries and regulations. Indeed, the idea of a “phallic woman” challenges the gender system beyond its binary agenda.

Attention to this point illuminates my study of the neo-onnagata. Models from the West have challenged the system in ways that have involved more radically American notions of extreme bodily transformation. They have thus become further testing ground for the theoretical new constructions of gender that the neo-onnagata present in the East. In 1988, a new participant who challenged all preconceived theoretical notions of gender mesmerized the Women and Theatre Program (WTP) of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE). This individual was
actor/director/playwright male-to-female postoperative transsexual lesbian Kate
Bornstein. She delivered a performance that caused much reflection in the academic
community. After first reciting a male character’s monologue, one she had once
performed as a male actor, she then she played a female role as she had once done in her
male body. Feminist theater scholar Jill Dolan described the implications of the event as
follows:

Watching her perform, I was unsettled by my awareness that Bornstein
has no neutral body, that even her biology is not immutable but, rather,
constructed. Spectators pointed out that a certain Brechtian distance is
implicit in Bornstein’s position, that her body editorializes on itself the
moment her choice is made textual. Bornstein performed a
noncoincidence of body and language, a postmodern dissociation of
presence and discourse.  

Many critics cite Brecht’s verfremdungseffekt, which give a “splendid sense of
remoteness to . . . events,” 37 to interpret gender dissonances in performative terms. In
this way, we may view gender in an entirely new light. For Brecht, the object in
question must be “stripped of its inconspicuousness” 38 and naively reexplained in order
to mine new meaning. Thought by many to be one of the most basic of assumptions,
gender is thus startlingly called into question. Bornstein speaks to a growing interest in
“performing the body,” and her work stretches assumed gender boundaries.
Contemporary performers and directors have taken up the gauntlet to challenge gender
assumptions. They have focused attention on creating new modes and lenses through
which to approach artistic material. One of the major explorations in such

36Dolan, 77.
37Brecht, 93. In English, the “a( lienation)-effect,” distanciation or detachment.
38Ibid, 143–44.
performances has involved re-framing, “detaching” of performer and audience from assigned sex-roles, thus illuminating the construction of gender. Cross-dressed performance is the foremost testing ground for such assertions.

To reassert the basic premise of this study, I argue that the neo-onnagata, as Japanese performer of gender construction, both exercises and illustrates those very Brechtian detachments and contradictions. Indeed, as both bearer of the phallus (the superior penis) and adorned Phallic doppelganger (the inferior woman image), the neo-onnagata presents a splendid paradox. He is part of the system and also outside of it. He both proves and disproves the traditional gendered order. Perhaps there is, to relocate Gertrude Stein’s infamous observation, “no there, there.” But I contend that the neo-onnagata is cartographer of a vital geography, a re-mapping of the gendered body. Re-construction of the gendered-self in the Japanese neo-onnagata highlights gender as a performative act. As parallel to the private act of applying the phallic adornment of the kokigami penis-puppet, the male-to-female cross-dressed actor may be dressed in the most conspicuous of feminine garb. He may alternately enter into a new state of identity by re-defining gender categories. Indeed, the phallus, and its representations, is ubiquitous in the long history of Japan, re-affirming the interests and agendas of a male-dominated society.

The neo-onnagata use their unique positions, of both phallus bearer and referent, to shift focus onto the feminine image. They juggle gender, desire, and the idea

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39 Speaking of her birthplace, Oakland, California.

40 Japanese culture provides us with a perfect representation of the adorned phallus in the kokigami. Kokigami is the practice of dressing the erect penis in whimsical costumes of folded paper as a kind of sexual foreplay.
of phallic supremacy in a performance that plays along a taut continuum, both illustrating the conservative construction of feminine image and open new liberating space for male gendered performance.
Chapter 3
Across Genres: Gender from Literature, Media, and Text to the Stage

One must go to a theatre where a woman’s role is taken by a man to see it done really well.

Playwright and historian Leo Duran¹

Karada, karada, karada, dakara (The body, body, body, sooo)
...Koara ni naritai raion (... A lion who wants to be a koala)
Raion ni naritai onnanoko (A girl who wants to be a lion)
Onnanoko ni naritai otokonoko (A boy who wants to be a girl)
Iina iina naretara iina (We wish we could all be what we want to be)
Iina iina naretara iina (We wish we could all be what we want to be)
Theme of NHK daily children’s show Okaasan to Issho (Together with Mother)²

One theory of theatre’s origins highlights its instructive value; performance served to pass along the oral traditions and stories of previous generations. According to this view, primitive theatre helped explain natural rhythms of the universe and patterns of life and death. It offered religious/spiritual teaching and acted as a vehicle for moral reinforcement. Performance thus functioned as an agent of conservative community forces.

In the history of Japan, we see the educational goals of theatre implemented through ritual and dance. Kagura (court dance) and noh came to reflect the morality of the elite. Kabuki began in humble origins as a sensational entertainment though later

1Duran, Plays of Old Japan, 1921 p. xii.

²Okaasan to Issho has been a mainstay every weekday morning on the NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai or “Japan Broadcasting Corporation”) television station for more than thirty years. It functions as a kind of societal filter through which the mind of every child in Japan passes. There is tremendous reinforcement of fitting role-specific behavior but this one subversive line seeps through in the opening song: “A boy who wants to be a girl. We wish we could all be what we want to be.” A wistful cry from the collective subconscious? Or an elliptical remark, inviting the next line: “But we can’t!”
was elevated to high art. In remaking its own image to comply with government control in the Edo period (1603-1868), kabuki was forced to serve as a vehicle for “manners and morals.” At that point, the genre established itself as the mediator and even arbiter of human intercourse in Japan, particularly regarding gender and gender relations. From its origins in a female performance, kabuki was transvalued. It came to voice the view of high conservativism. As such, kabuki was a marker of woman’s image and her place in society. Consequently, actual women were displaced, edited from the stage in favor of the stylized onnagata. Kabuki, through the compulsions of the conservative patriarchy, had thus asserted notions of maleness, as well.

This supplanting of actual women by men playing women has been seen in numerous instances the East and West. Goethe intimated in his observations of boy-actors that women were ostensibly excluded from acting in their own bodies in part because their “natural” inclinations (sexuality) reduced the artful construction to lusty reality. Such appearance was not credited as “acting.” In the case of kabuki, public portrayals onstage by women were seen as sites of civil disruption and thus a threat to the control of the governing bodies. Kabuki survived by adopting and conveying the most conservative possible images of women and gender (and, by extension, men).

3For more such viewpoints, see Duran (note opening quote of this chapter) and famous kabuki onnagata (and writer on how to be one) Yoshizawa Ayame in “The Words of Ayame” of The Actor’s Analects.

4Of course, there is a strong case to made for the eradication of women from the stage for conservative purposes as ironically destabilizing the cornerstones of gender essentialism that conservative doctrine holds so dear.
During the pre-electronic dawn of family, theatre, and temple (community ritual), there was very clear and constant reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Through centuries of history and cultural evolution, other institutions have assumed the role of moral inculcation and the teaching of gender. In contemporary times, information pathways have modeled cultural notions of morality and sex-role behavior. Most modern cultures reinforce the binary template of image and relations that feminist scholar Adrienne Rich has labeled “compulsory heterosexuality.” Perhaps the chief purveyor of gender modeling today is the media.

Certainly in contemporary Japan, one learns gender codes through self-reflective literature, in media representation, at the movies, through animation characters designed for computer games, and on television. The roles thought appropriate for men and for women are clearly delineated by clothing, colors, stance, and speech (both language and vocalization). From the earliest moments of childhood, society molds and gives images and models that shape the individual, setting appropriate gender behavior. This is hardly unique to Japan but becomes notable in that Japanese gender indoctrination is more rigid, direct, and protracted. Not only young girls but also women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s receive endless advice, and admonitions. They hear (and are shown) that they should wear short dresses (but not too short), love pink, speak deferentially, walk in short strides, have high squeaky voices, appreciate art, adore cooking and small

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5 Monique Wittig calls it the “heterosexual contract.” Judith Butler has expanded the concept to “heterosexual matrix.”

6 For more on Japanese women’s specific language, see Womansword by Kittredge Cherry.
children, and bear a generally passive demeanor. Men as well as boys should use rough language, speak loudly (or not at all), obsess on electronics and vehicles, excel in math and science, display ineptitude in the kitchen and with children, and make bold decisions.

The Japanese popular media are filled with lessons on how to be male and female in Japanese society. Mothers and fathers in Japan want to reinforce those images, and many continue the lessons in the home through every sentence (women have their own words and inflections), name choices (boys are called by the affectionate honorific -kun after their given names; girls are designated as -chan), gesture (boys are rebuked physically, girls verbally), activity (boys compete in physical games, girls read and do quieter activities), and even bodily designations (little boy’s penises are called o-chin-chin, or “honored little wee-wees”; vaginas are unnamed, simply designated as shita, or “down there”). Of course, in such a rigid system, deviation becomes all the more attractive, even probable. We need only look to the closeted and not-so-secret sexual proclivities of Victorian England and Ming Dynasty China\(^7\) to see how transgression becomes all the more alluring to humans under the burden of extreme sex-role stricture.

This chapter will examine vehicles for traditional gender codings that exist in the popular media of Japan. It will also look at one literary work written early in the twentieth century, Kurotokage (Black Lizard), that has, despite its origin as ordinary

\(^7\)Senelick, The Changing Room, 111. In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1643), numerous male actor/prostitutes who played music, danced, and were “rouged like women” were said to practice “the terrible vice.”
detective fiction, proven to be a highly successful media vehicle for cross-dressing and societal commentary. As such it has, in turn, been used to challenge conservative media images, and to challenge its own previous incarnations. The neo-onnagata of direct focus in this dissertation, Miwa Akihiro and Sasai Eisuke, have worked in various media (Miwa most of all). In particular, Black Lizard has played a part for both in their public recognition and successful careers. These media savvy neo-onnagata have utilized the conservative media. They have also presented images that belie the conservative binary role models of gender, augmenting traditional notions with new sex-role possibilities.

Miwa and Sasai offer particularly transgressive images in their nuanced presentations of strong capable women. They expand the possibilities of male performance in Japan, as well. In support of this conclusion, I look to the work of gender theorist Judith Butler, who, in her explication of gender construction, Gender Trouble, reformulated Foucault to advance a “feminist genealogy” of the category of Woman.¹ I submit that, if a cross-dressed man is revealing the fluidity and image of Woman as a constructed entity, he can participate in shifting the discourse, inaugurating new possibilities—in this case, the feminine Man.

The neo-onnagata of the Black Lizard lineage have entered the fray of gender discussion and has offered layered commentary on traditional Japanese images of women (and on the universal tragic retribution for being a “bad”—read “dominant”—woman). Through cross-dressing, they have coopted the limitations of the traditional female role and used it to serve resistant ends. In doing so, they offer new opportunities

¹Butler Gender 5.
for the male actor. The new cross-dressed actors have manipulated popular fascination with the alternatively gendered performer from the page to the stage, to film, and back to the stage again. Neo-onnagata, thus, advances new gendered images that circulate in the media in a subversive instruction, collapsing gender binaries, and opening new territories for male actors (and males).

As noted, perhaps the dominant modeling of sex-role behavior for Japanese culture comes through television. Japanese children spend a proportionately smaller amount of time watching television than do their American counterparts, but they still are sufficiently inculcated by television fare. Certain series have remained in syndication for generations due to strong audiences. Morning and afternoon cartoon shows tend to feature groups (rather than individuals): either assemblages of harmony-seeking children (in constant dialog over aberrant members), squadrons of superheroes, villages of fabled folktale characters, or anthropomorphic animals.

One of the most beloved of the last group, emblazoned across many commercial goods, is the eponymous hero of the Japanese animation series Doraimon. The

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9Japanese children aged 6-10 spend approximately 3.5 hours per day watching television, (according to the Sept. 30, 1999 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities Statistics Bureau and Statistics Center of the Management and Coordination Agency of Japan under the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications of Japan, 19-1 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku Tokyo 162-8668 Japan, Phone : +81-3-3202-1111) as opposed to their American counterparts who, according to US television viewing statistics, watch five or more hours (per day).

10So-called “character goods” are astonishingly ubiquitous in materially well-off Japan. All manner of cartoon personalities emblazon kitchenware, clothing, furniture, bedding, all interior furnishings, and food items, as well as the endless permutations in print advertising, film, reference in cultural literature, and as mascots for television commercials.
cartoon tells the story of a blue, earless “atomic” cat from outer space\textsuperscript{11} who befriends a little boy named Nobita (his neighborhood name is “Nobi-kun.”\textsuperscript{12}). In one particular episode, Nobi-kun is elated when he finally achieves, after much effort, the difficult “butterfly shape” of the string pattern game “aiwatori.”\textsuperscript{13} He triumphantly shows the string to his father, who promptly breaks down crying over his son’s effeminate activity. The father tells Nobi-kun that men don’t do such a thing. The father asks, “Kotoko rashiku? (Aren’t you manly?).” He continues: “Aiwatori isn’t manly. Soccer is a better, fiercer, more manly game.”

Nobi-kun is crestfallen and goes outside to play with the neighborhood girls. “Can I join your amimono (knitting) club?” he inquires. The boys overhear and jeer at him. Nobi-kun cries and rushes to confide in his friend Doraimon, “Why can’t boys knit or do cat’s cradle? This is a difficult world.” Doraimon confirms that such is true and, as usual, offers a solution. He presents one of his patented magical inventions from the future, a drop candy called “Otokonna,”\textsuperscript{14} which “makes boys act like girls” and vice versa. After covert distribution among the children, the candy causes the boys to waver, simper, and bicker amongst themselves; the girls become ultra-competitive and oppressive.

\textsuperscript{11}Doraimon is earless because his ears were burned off on entering the earth’s orbit.

\textsuperscript{12}“Kun” is the familiar honorific given specifically to young or lower ranking (than oneself) boys. Its counterpart, “chan” is used for young or lower ranking girls or for men for whom one wishes to designate as “cute one” or “darling.”

\textsuperscript{13}“Cat’s Cradle” in the United States.

\textsuperscript{14}A conflation of the words otoko (man) and onna (woman).
The now-aproned father (evidently everyone in the neighborhood has had some of the candy) is running to the doorway of the living room every few minutes to attend the calls of the mother, who is smoking and reading the paper, legs crossed wide. Nobi-kun is discomforted by this unnatural world and begs Doraimon to change things back, forsaking his sissified ways forever.

In such a cartoon text, one notes the powerful gender coding presented to young viewers. These shows can be viewed as a training ground for the strongly polarized “natural order” of sex-role differences in Japan. Men are coded as inherently competitive, domineering and rough, yet strangely helpless and in need of caretaking. Women, on the other hand, are assumed by nature weak and indecisive, happiest when given a subservient role to an alpha male. Role-reversal is utilized in the Doraimon cartoon and others as an amusing and outrageous comic device because cross-role behavior is thought to be so unlikely. The cartoon reinforces the dominant perspectives.

But, there is always a leakage in traditional gender representation, indicating fluidity within. Media images are not completely conservative; they do allow resistance and play within certain constraints, though the meanings are often veiled. For example, in reference to Western popular culture, Judith Butler has deconstructed the Carole King anthem “You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman.” What would seem, and has often been adopted as, a hearty confirmation of gender essentialism is darkly subverted
when the emphasis is placed on the word “you.” In this case, the song indicates an other-generated “metaphor of the natural” and a revelation of other possibilities without the coercive template placed by the (presumably male) “you.”

To illustrate the point further, one can reference the *Nihon Mukasi Banashi* (Japanese Folktales of Long Ago) television animation series. In one installment, the Edo-period actor Tanokyuu crosses into the woods, despite having been warned that a fearsome, giant, magic snake lives there who will consume him. Of course, the snake sets upon him, but first asks him his name. Mishearing it as “*tanuki*” (rather than Tanokyuu), the reptile informs him that he does not eat *tanuki*, “only humans.” The two strike up a lively conversation, during which the snake asks the Tanokyuu/*tanuki* to change into the likeness of a young girl, since he has not seen a beautiful young creature for a long time.

The actor first reaches into his trunk and quickly dons the guise of an old woman, but the snake is repelled and reacts angrily. After several attempts to portray

\[15\] Butler *Gender* 155.

\[16\] Also to be found in video by Amuse Video, 2000.

\[17\] The *tanuki* is a racoon-dog indigenous to the mountainsides of Japan. It has much the same characteristics of curiosity and fastidiousness of a racoon but the longer legs and elongated body of a dog. They were thought by ancient legend to be imbued with magical powers, including shape-shifting and the granting of wishes. They were said to be mischievous but polite and generally benign to humans and to love drinking sake (Japanese rice-wine).
different female images, each incurring the serpent’s ire, Tanokyuu arrays himself as lovely young girl. He acts the role with life-saving urgency, with cooing, demure glances, and breathy voice. The snake is impressed with his transformational ability.

At this point, the creature, apparently disarmed by “femininity,” grows very familiar with the actor and confides in him/her that the one thing that he cannot stand is the smell of smoke; it makes him feel weak and powerless. Of course, the actor makes note of this but foolishly asks what would happen if he divulged this to anyone. The snake thunders that he would find the “tanuki” and make life miserable for him. The clever actor replies, of course, that he would never do this.

The dim-witted asp asks in return what Tanokyuu/tanuki dislikes, and the actor relates that he hates more than anything the sight, smell, and feel of money. The two soon bid farewell, to the eventual undoing of the snake and enrichment of Tanokyuu. What is the actual lesson here? That (as intended) quick wits are necessary in a pinch? Or that cross-dressing will get you in “gender trouble”?

Reinforcement of traditional gender roles has commonly been featured in folk tales. But such texts are ripe for contemporary resistant readings and reveal that evidence for role insistence and its attendant movement toward the limen is only thinly-veiled. Prominent exploration has mined and reinterpreted such Western children’s classics as Snow White and Cinderella. In Eastern conception, one example of
subversive role-reversal appears innocently in revisitation of the old Japanese folktale, “The Monkey Dance and the Sparrow Dance.”

In this famous story, an old woodcutter and his wife happen upon monkeys and sparrows frolicking in the woods under the influences of special magical wines. The old couple steal gourds of the wine to recreate the dances themselves. When they get home they taste each others’ gourds and begin to dance, the old woodcutter like a graceful sparrow and the old woman like a chittering monkey. This disturbs the man who owns the woods, rousing him to indignation:

Here, here! This will never do! If you’re going to dance, a woman’s dance should be graceful and lady-like, like a sparrow’s dance. A man’s dance should be bold and manly, like a monkey’s dance. Not the other way around! . . . You’ve been drinking the wrong wine. Change bottles at once and see what happens.18

Of course, this “appropriate” switch occurs, and the tale ends with the conclusion that the wines and their attendant effects are why men now dance in a “manly” way and women in a “graceful and bird-like way.”19

Cartoons and stories, like the examples previously, cited in a very basic way teach Japanese culture. They in fact reinforce assumptions of gender roles so that new

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18Sakade, 28.

19In this fable, too, we are reminded anew of the radical notion of cross-dresser sans “dress.” Neo-onnagata Sasai Eisuke explores the territory of the notion of feminine portrayal without the benefit of padding, wig, or make-up.
generations will continue the societal models of previous generations. But, as noted before, sex-role essentialists are so convinced of the truth of their convictions that they cannot imagine other possibilities. Thus, within the very instructive narratives lies the destabilization of the conservative throughlines.

For example, in the previous tale of “The Monkey Dance and the Sparrow Dance,” there is evidence of a Japanese cultural belief in the essentialist nature of men and women. The gourds certainly contained essences of animal “nature. One might hold that the behaviour was induced, i.e. constructed, due to the influence of the respective bird and monkey elixirs.” Anxiety and indignation are aroused in the woods-owner, who jumps to restore the social order so quickly and with so much vehemence. Of course, the interesting paradox in the story (or perhaps the real intent) lies in the way men’s and women’s roles are already assumed by the woods-owner as fixed. Paradoxically, this undercuts the “that’s-why-we-are-this-way-now” didacticism of the conclusion.

This story certainly came to be as a way of demonstrating/instructing the natural order of male and female behaviour. The fact still remains that the man (“bird”) and woman (“monkey”) in the “The Monkey Dance and the Sparrow Dance” successfully donned the guise of the Other for a few ecstatic liminal moments. If not for the retributional gaze of the voice of authority (society?), they might have continued their cross-gesturing in ignorant bliss. They had unknowingly and disturbingly effected a
reversal, an un-undoing of their usual heterosexual dance, potentially one in which the female, as the prototypical hyper-sexed and dominant “monkey,” may have been poised to ravish/devour the delicate passive “bird” male. Despite this subversive genderal upheaval, the context of the forbidden activity took place within the proscribed paces of the traditional odori dance of rural festivals and performance. Thus, the possible overthrow of the natural order was contained and restored.

“The Monkey Dance and the Sparrow Dance” illustrates an example of one of the many folktales in which the ideas of fixed sexual orientations and rigid binary gender roles bear no close examination. Contrary to conservative intent, scholars continue to examine the meanings of the rhetoric of gender, in hopes of gaining new understandings. Writer and scholar bell hooks has disputed the term “orientation” because it denies individual autonomy.20 Judith Butler decries notions of an “orientation” being fixed at all.21 The word gender itself is used in a variety of shifting contexts. Libraries use it to code “women’s studies” and “feminism.” For the general public, gender means the sex of your body (“boy” or “girl”). Image and identification


21 Butler Gender 160.
would seem to be assumptions, virtual conceptions on a fluid continuum. Any attempt to draw a firm line between one and the other may be confounded.

But one of the many fascinating aspects of Japanese culture is its ability to accommodate contradiction. Challenges to the established social order are made and then absorbed into the status quo. There seems to be a better understanding of the vagaries of individual construction because the assumed codes of behavior are so strong. The “strong silent man,” the “young stud,” the “good wife,” the “chattering gossip,” and the “loose woman” are all recognizable types both in life and on the stage, because cultural influence has built them to a certain degree. On the other hand, individuals in Japan may have trouble clearly constructing themselves, and their sexual identities, without extensive societal guidance. The examples of popular media reification of rigid sex roles found in this chapter are signals of a society with a great need to mold and parent. My question is this: if sex roles are innate, then why is it so vital that individuals be closely monitored and instructed on “appropriate” sex role behavior and image?

Cross-dressing confuses the idea of a clear image of assumed identity and is thus seen as a threat to the patriarchal system. In the previous examples, we can note the instances where cross-dressing is permitted either as an outrageous comic device or a lamentable confusion that demands remedy. Of course, if cross-dressing is re-framed as a reconstruction of Nature, in the service of Art, it can then be understandable and contained. In Japan, cross-dressing has traditionally been labeled and accommodated in the kabuki onnagata, a form revered by the public and the media. The neo-onnagata of
this study fall outside of that form. They lie somewhere in the public consciousness between kabuki onnagata and drag queen. Thus, the ability of the neo-onnagata to be agent of social change lies in attaining recognition and acceptance in a culture that already has very strong societal models and perceptions in place.

**Societal Perceptions of Cross-dressing**

A hierarchy prevails in the general mind encompassing a pyramid of views of “acceptability” regarding how cross-gendered agents are perceived in society. Except for the kabuki onnagata, all may be considered threats to codes of maleness. As such, they nonetheless occupy different degrees of status vis-vis conservative culture. At the top of this pyramid are the onnagata of traditional kabuki theatre. Highly accepted and elite, onnagata have a revered place as highly trained and stylized embodiment of essential Edo-period woman-ness. They are an established part of the image of Japanese culture as seen by the culture itself. There may be no clear analogy in the West.

A second type, well-accepted in popular media, is the cross-dressed actor, a more general and widely ranging category. The cross-dressed actor’s career choice is nonetheless often misconstrued by the general public. Conservative members of society assume that the choice indicates the performer’s sexual preferences. This category includes the theatrical performers of the “legitimate” stage and in the media (television

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22Sasai Eisuke, the late Charles Ludlum, Charles Busch, Umezawa Tomio, the late Glen Milsted aka Divine, and others have expressed a preference for the term “actor,” for they all have done roles, as well, playing men dressed in male clothing. They have tended to see cross-dressed roles as their “specialty.”
and film) who make their careers by assuming cross-dressed roles. ²³ I believe this category to be the domain of the neo-onnagata.

In a third grouping are clinically designated cross-dressers, people who literally challenge the assumed binary of male/female in a medically/ psychologically dysphoric mode. This grouping includes transsexuals, those who feel a sense of gender disjunction between emotions and body, and transvestites, hetero- or homo-sexuals who feel compelled to dress in the current culture’s idea of the opposite gender’s apparel, often just for themselves, for sexual gratification, or through the impetus of an obsession. Individuals in this category, under the proclamatory and inclusive banner of “transgendered,” have periodically stepped forward to offer political and/or theoretical insights that have proved provocative in discussing both essence and construction of gender. The (transgendered) performer Peter is an example of this grouping, although he also has been mentioned as an onnagata by actor Sasai Eisuke.

At the bottom of the social scale, the drag queen occupies bar culture, the “floating world” of Japan. Drag queen, okama ²⁴ in Japan, will be defined here as a gay or bisexual man who regularly constructs an exaggeratedly (flashy) "woman-ly" persona(e) in order to consciously or unconsciously express social meta-commentary

²³Thus, the neo-onnagata falls into this grouping.

²⁴Literally, “rice pot.” Also used as a mild epithet for an effeminate gay man, like “fag,” as opposed to the more clinical and descriptive terms, homo, and gei.
about gender and society.\textsuperscript{25} Most often, the public platform is a parade, a cabaret, a contest, or some other entertainment event. They often employ wit and humor; such presentations require loquacity and intelligence to be truly effective.\textsuperscript{26} Drag queens dress in coded fashion for the gaze of specific groups within the greater culture, most often a homogeneous gay one. There is often an attempt to dress for impact, exaggeratedly, often artfully. The purpose is not to look exactly like a biological female but to construct another version of "woman." The Japanese \textit{okama} has consciously adopted this ostentatious Western model, but, as in the secret society “molly houses” of Victorian England, there probably were always men in Japanese history who gathered surreptitiously to avoid sumptuary stigma.

Japan, with its historical tolerance for homosexual activity (as long as it does not threaten the creation of traditional family units) has had an easier time of accepting cross-dressed performers in mainstream culture. They are regarded as novelties, harmless whimsies, and mere entertainers. It is thus difficult for such entertainers to seek higher recognition. This lack of acceptance may be due in part to ingrained

\textsuperscript{25}This is, of course, not to say that elements of the previously mentioned categories don’t also inform the dynamics of the drag queen. The boundaries of any such attempt to characterize this activity are necessarily messy and bear no very restrictive nomenclature.

\textsuperscript{26}The wit and humor of American and British drag queens is covered exhaustively in \textit{More Man than You'll Ever Be} by Joseph P. Goodwin, 1989.
resistance to social mobility in Japan. Or, perhaps it reflects changes in the perception of roles. To quote a line from cross-dressed play *Jozoku*: “This is *this*, and that is *that*.”

The remainder of this chapter will examine a particular instance of cross-dressing that moved from literature into popular electronic media, from pulp novel (with conservative images of woman) to a celluloid platform for cross-dressing stars. I will discuss the trans-media trajectory of a 1940s detective story entitled *Kurotokage* (Black Lizard). I have found it to be a fascinating case study for the possibilities of non-classical cross-dressing in Japan, as the stage and film versions of *Kurotokage* have served as a vehicle for two well-known cross-dressing actors. It was not the original story that garnered such widespread recognition but its stage adaptation. It was just a popular story in a detective series until the play became a huge media hit. It did so by using cross-dressing of the title character in service of cultural critique. When the story moved to film, it gathered an even wider enthusiastic audience. As such *Black Lizard* challenged dominant media and cultural representations, and served as the first major effort of a neo-onnagata. Each incarnation has been able to effectively critique the social order under the guise of mainstream entertainment. In sum, *Black Lizard* has been a widely accepted laboratory for cross-dressing. As deconstructive analysis of the story itself and of society, *Black Lizard* became an example of neo-onnagata in popular media acting as agents of gender critique.

**Birth of the Black Lizard**

Little did Edgar Allen Poe know that the macabre literary genre he defined would have anything to do with Japan, the theatre, subsequent media (film), or
constructed Woman. Nonetheless, it is from his genius and his influence that we can trace the beginnings of a story that refuses to die after almost a hundred years. The work and its characters have gained currency through various “translations”; the story is poised to enter yet another phase of its unlikely resurgence. Examining the story and its media incarnations, we can trace an ongoing genealogy and explore the power of cross-gendered portrayal to, in the words of Teresa De Lauretis, “belie and sustain at once the possibility of . . . articulating a feminine symbolic”\textsuperscript{27} and to explore the viability of gender binary.

The progenitor of 	extit{Kurotokage} was Hirai Taro, born October 21, 1894, son of a merchant-lawyer. He graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo in 1916 and subsequently tried his hand at diverse clerical jobs without much success. In 1923 an unemployed Hirai, an avid reader of Western mysteries, wrote a short mystery and submitted it to the only mystery magazine in Japan at that time, entitled 	extit{Shin Seinen} (New Youth). It was published immediately, and the wide acclaim it received launched him on his highly successful writing career. He chose for his nom de plume 	extit{Edogawa Rampo}, after Edgar Allan Poe (pronounced edogah-aran-poh in Japanese), whom he greatly admired. He unabashedly sought to emulate the American's gothic sensibilities. In his subsequent thirty years of writing (d. 1965), Rampo acquired a reputation among Japanese mystery story enthusiasts that surpassed that of his famous namesake. With a prolific canon of work that included more than twenty full-length books, countless short stories, children's books, and essays about the mystery story written during the

\textsuperscript{27}“Upping . . .”, 336.
beginning of the Showa Period (1926-1989), as well as the post-war years, Rampo has been hailed as the “father” of the modern detective story in Japan. Though only a few works of his has been translated into English, (the short story collection, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*,\(^{28}\) Rampo has received many honors; a literary award for mystery writing bears his name. The award is considered a prized stepping stone, like the Akutagawa and Tanizaki-*sho* (awards), for advancing the careers of young writers in Japan.

Perhaps the most renowned of Rampo’s work in Japan is the novel *Kurotokage* (*Black Lizard*), the story of an arch-villainess with a penchant for fabulous jewels. Her defeat comes when she falls in love with detective Akechi Kogoro, the Japanese embodiment of the "hard-boiled dick." The Black Lizard covets the Star of Egypt, a huge diamond in the possession of a wealthy dealer, so she plots to kidnap his daughter and ransom her for the diamond. She arrogantly alerts the dealer to her plans, who then nervously hires Akechi, "the most famous detective in Japan," to protect his daughter. Akechi and the Lizard match wits, each anticipating the moves of the other. Along the way they develop a mutual affection, but each tries to play out his and her respective good/evil role and tip the balance of power. Eventually, Black Lizard succeeds in kidnapping the daughter and gains the Star of Egypt as her ransom. But she has no intention of releasing the girl to her father. Instead she wants to make her a “living statue” in her collection of embalmed “dolls.” Akechi rescues the girl, and the Black

\(^{28}\)There is a movement among some Japanese ex-patriot writers in Great Britain to change that.
Lizard, uncharacteristically foiled, realizes that her icy heart has melted. Unable to live with rejection and defeat, she ingests poison and ends her life.

The Black Lizard narrative highlights the inherent theatricality of crime. Explicit wrongdoings--rape, vandalism, kidnapping, theft, murder--are themselves cultural performances, and have often been presented as such. Crossing boundaries means breaking “rules.” Rule-breakers have always been fascinating fictional characters--providing that they know the rules well enough to bend or flout them cunningly.

Traditional literature and theatre of Japan has been no different from others in this regard. The scamp, the scallywag, the rogue thief, the evil mastermind: all have been popular characters onstage, in classic fiction or received legend. It is thus not surprising that a work concerned with rule breaking should act as vehicle for the cross-dressed breakers of the traditional gender codes.

The story certainly offers much to note in terms of gender construction. Patriarchal narratives have typically cast Woman, from Eve to Cruella DeVille, as evil, the real source of trouble for mankind. Among the scariest and most diabolical of Japanese villains are beautiful, wicked women. Zeami Motokiyo’s noh play *Yama-uba* (mountain hag) engendered an entire category of kabuki pieces, “yamamba-mono.” These are plays about hideous witches who can take the form of lovely young women

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29 One example of this kind of presentation is the doctoral dissertation of Louisiana State University associate professor and feminist scholar Jennifer Jones, on violent woman of the stage, *Offensive Females: The Construction of the Criminal Woman on the English Stage.* (University of Colorado, 1995).
The hannya is said to be the nasty indiscriminately avenging ghost of a woman who died in a jealous rage. A great attraction in plays of both the kabuki and noh theatres, the actor playing the character of the hannya wears one of the most distinctive of classical Japanese theatre masks. It may be black, red, white, or gold but always features jutting horns and clacking teeth. In the same vein, the tsunokakushi (horn cover) of the bride in a Shinto wedding is symbolically hiding her jealous demonic horns. Likewise, the hannya of the kabuki and noh theatres is the most splendid and fearsome of evil-doers. In more recent times, murderous mistresses and gorgeous female gang-leaders occupy the pages of comics, as vulgate translations of popular classical mystery and horror stories. The cult and mainstream popular media of today trace back to very old Asian literary lineages, representing woman as bad, or easily tempted to evil.

Japanese cultural roles loom large in the Black Lizard tale. Despite her treachery, the Black Lizard is a true lady. She defers to men in her public social role and strokes male egos in the preferred way. In the motivation of the Black Lizard, we see a displacement of greed by love. Finally it is love that proves her downfall. In the end, it would seem that it is faltering feminine weakness and illogic that doom her, the most typical stereotyped female qualities. In fact, the point here is that the Black Lizard is a stereotype, cultural and genderal. She represents fixed gender, a conservative notion. Note the social engineering built into mystery writing, personified here in a dragon lady motif. It privileges the male-identified rational mode but punishes the female-identified emotional. Likewise, the role of Akechi, Lizard’s detective nemesis is a cultural type of the cool professional man who keeps his head even in the face of temptation.

The hannya is said to be the nasty indiscriminately avenging ghost of a woman who died in a jealous rage. A great attraction in plays of both the kabuki and noh theatres, the actor playing the character of the hannya wears one of the most distinctive of classical Japanese theatre masks. It may be black, red, white, or gold but always features jutting horns and clacking teeth. In the same vein, the tsunokakushi (horn cover) of the bride in a Shinto wedding is symbolically hiding her jealous demonic horns.
However, these themes and characters are the weft and warp of all mystery stories in Japan. One wonders why this particular one has been so attractive to adaptation and manipulation across genres. I contend that it not the original story itself but the subsequent retelling of *Black Lizard* that has given this essentially ordinary popular story a unique currency. For some time, there has been a cultural discussion in Japan on the need for greater freedom from staid gender roles. It was thus in large part the *Black Lizard*’s gender commentary through cross-dressing that has generated the work’s current attention.

Novelist and playwright Mishima Yukio adapted *Black Lizard* as a play in 1964 and then as a kitschy 1969 film vehicle for himself and the Japanese cross-dressed actor Maruyama Akihiro (later Miwa Akihiro). Maruyama and Mishima had been friends for years. It was Mishima who introduced Maruyama to 1960s avant-garde director and playwright Terayama Shuji. Terayama was so taken by the originality of this cross-dressing performer, who worked outside of the traditional kabuki “home” for such actors, that he asked Maruyama to join his fledgling theatre group, *Tenjo Sajiki* (Upper Gallery). Terayama wrote a vehicle especially for him, the group’s inaugural production, *Aomori-ken no semushi otoko* (The Hunchback of Aomori, 1967). Terayama featured Miwa in his next production, *Kegawa no Mari* (*Marie in Furs*, also known as *La Marie Vison* and *Mink Marie*, 1967) as well. This production highlighted
Miwa’s acting and established him as a phenomenon, that is, a well-regarded cross-dressed actor outside of the traditional kabuki theatre.

Terayama Shuji scholar Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei has isolated the themes in *Aomori-ken no semushi otoko* and *Kegawa no Mari* and argues that the works portray a “helpless, feminine Japan raped and sodomized by the decadent West” (another example of the dynamic tension of force and complicity that kabuki and bunraku playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon held to be elements of true art). Sorgenfrei also speculates as to the reason for Terayama’s “desecration of all that is sacred to the Japanese.” Namely, that of exposing a very human, and specifically Japanese, “fear of the loss of personal and cultural identity.” This criticism highlights the profoundly transgressive impulse of Terayama Shuji’s work. It is understandable that Terayama would want to make use, given his political orientations and agendas, of the multiply-coded, cross-dressed male body of Maruyama. A signifier of cultural blurring and site of


32Sorgenfrei, “Inugami. . .” 166. Chikamatsu’s words carry great weight in coming from the prolific playwright whose works exhibited such skillful retelling of cultural themes and such basis of the canon of traditional works that he has been referred to as the “Shakespeare of Japan.”


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gender and sexual anxiety, Maruyama, for Terayama, offered a multiplicity of ways to proliferate and subvert the conventional image of Woman--as Whore, as Enchantress, finally as Ur-Mother. In short, Terayama exposed via cross-dressing the oppressions in Japanese society.

Maruyama was vaulted into wider prominence by his collaboration with Terayama. In 1967, Maruyama was looking for a rich opportunity to expand his range and acting talents. *Black Lizard* had been an interesting tale and a modest success among its readership. It had captured the interest of Mishima, who saw a real potential for much more than the traditional conservative detective tale. He saw in *Black Lizard* a cultural critique on Japanese mores and value through emphasis on the evil villainess as cross-dressed representation.

Mishima, like other Japanese intellectuals, was appalled at the ways that Japan had constructed itself slavishly according to the trappings of Western society. He felt that the culture had lost its way. In his novels and plays, decadent characters move toward doom or confusion unless redeemed by some purifying element. Usually, that element is devotion to a fundamental ideal or death. Mishima saw the same courses open to Japan.
Cross-dressed Miwa personally appealed to Mishima as an artist devoted to an aesthetic of refinement and elegance. But, perhaps he saw in Miwa’s body on the 1960s stage a representation of the decadent indulgence that was, in Mishima’s view, leading Japan on a terrible path. He viewed the West as a gaudy, seductive force on Japan, constructing Japan in its image. As representation of this, Miwa in the role of the Black Lizard villainess is a true constructed woman, in fact, a monster of construction. She loves feminine garb, jewels, fashion, grand hats, gloves, cloaks, and peignoirs. She is a constant performer, alternately cooing and commanding, tricking man after man into doing her bidding. The man who finally wins, Akechi, resists her charms. In the same way, Mishima wanted Japan to be strong in its traditional ideals. Miwa was the perfect actor to represent the evil West. Ironically, Miwa went on to became one of the strongest voices in Japan in presenting new alternatives to the traditional culture.

It was in 1968 that Mishima, impressed by his friend Maruyama (Miwa)’s beginning success and obvious talents, asked him to star in his adaptation of Edogawa Rampo’s *Black Lizard*. The stage production, directed by Matsuura Takeo and produced by Shochiku Studios in April of 1968, was a runaway hit. A tour followed, performed over the entire length of the Japanese islands.

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³⁴ He had first met him when Miwa was sixteen and working as a “host” in a gay bar in Tokyo, *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colors). This was to be the inspiration for Mishima’s novel of the same name, as well as the first dance choreographed by Hijikata Tatsumi, co-founder of butoh.
Shochiku subsequently decided to produce a movie version (starring Maruyama, *otokorashii* [manly] Kimura Isao, and Mishima) to be directed by Fukasaku Kinji. The movie was filmed in September of the same year (1968). The stage production continued into the next year. Maruyama played in his hometown of Nagasaki in September; he reprised his performance again in Tokyo in October. Miwa’s performance assumed iconic status, like Brando’s Stanley Kowalski. The role has proven the hallmark of his career. When he revived it in 1984 in Paris (he was forty-nine), no one else had yet dared to touch the part. He reprised the role again in 1994 and 1997.

Critic Stephen Schiff, upon the 1991 video release of the movie in the United States, described the film in this way:

There is no madness quite like Japanese madness, and no camp quite like late-sixties camp. Put them together and you’ve got *Black Lizard*, a 1968 Japanese caper movie just now swamping these staid shores. . . . This is the story of a swanky female jewel thief who kidnaps nubile youths and ferries them to a hilariously glizoid secret island, there to turn them into naked love statues—one of them, weirdly enough, is portrayed by Mishima himself. Miss Lizard is played by the silky transvestite actor Akihiro Miwa (then known as Maruyama), who flounces around in an impossible collection of boas and chokers and turns every flourish of her cigarette holder into an arabesque. Meanwhile, in the background, everybody does the frug.

Indeed, it is this incarnation of *Black Lizard* that resides most powerfully in the popular Japanese imagination, not the original short story. The film has entered the cinematic cult canon. In the overwrought style of the film, out of time and place, the characters seem rather cartoonish, but, in Japan, the cartoon, the anime, the manga have effectively embodied societal questions and anxieties. They often perform service

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as a site for deviation from stress in a regimented society. In the *Black Lizard*, we thus see beyond the cartoon or printed page, to where gender is contested and challenged via cross-dressing in Japanese culture. In addition, *Black Lizard* gives great visibility to cross-dressing outside of kabuki or gay clubs, imbuing the form (and Miwa) with an aura of legitimacy.

Miwa Akihiro’s portrayal in *Black Lizard* was radical in many ways. Foremost, the film widely established cross-dressing as a legitimate performance apart from either a kabuki stylization or a foolish charade. In portraying a believable female (albeit a stereotyped villainess), Miwa demonstrated that men and women were not as widely dissimilar as believed. In fact, he established himself in the film and in subsequent work as a model of expanded “elegant” possibilities for male behavior. Further, Miwa challenged the notion of fixed gender identity and behavior in his continuation of wearing flowing feminine clothing offstage. Men could subsequently point to Miwa Akihiro as successful, respected model for their own explorations in role-behavior. He parleyed the popularity of *Black Lizard* into a career of wide exposure and influence, giving him a platform for influencing Japanese norms. Finally, Miwa broke the glass ceiling for male actors who longed to gain legitimacy in serious cross-dressed roles outside of kabuki. In doing so, he opened space for a new generation of actors who could find careers in their own creative replies to traditional forms.

Miwa set a precedent with his transgendered portrayal of the Lizard Lady. In all of his performance, he has simultaneously transgressed against and worked within the
conservative Japanese social structure. He has done so by using the norms of Japan the social behavior, hard work and formal recognition of senior members, to present new gendered behaviors. It is precisely this tension, the working against and yet within, that has in large part held audiences in thrall to the ongoing life of the Black Lizard story. The neo-onnagata vehicle has served a role in taking a traditional forms and broadening it to a variety of social reflections.

Miwa Akihiro reprised the role of the Black Lizard again in 1994 and 1997, but by the late 80s and early 90s a new male cross-dressing actor, one who evinced an altogether different sensibility from Miwa’s, had quietly put his own stamp on the production and role. In the 1999 Tokyo Fall theatre season versatile neo-onnagata actor Sasai Eisuke played the role to great acclaim.

Sasai Eisuke is the premier model of the neo-onnagata. In his book of essays, Boku wa onnagata (I am an Onnagata), Sasai Eisuke has explained the motivating forces behind his work:

Let me explain what I consider onnagata to be: I am an onnagata who does everything (classical, shogekijo, avant-garde). My goal is to construct onnagata while shedding the outer trappings. . . . People don’t really understand a non-kabuki cross-dresser. You are not in kabuki? Are you are a transvestite? No? What are you? If one is a Miwa Akihiro, in your own category, people bow down and have no question. Maybe I’ll always be explaining and refining this. Orthodoxy of all onnagata (as in the supposed legitimacy of only kabuki onnagata) is an illusion, if the woman played by a man has dramatic power then that is the orthodoxy of that actor and that set of techniques. Truth is a fiction. The true
essence of Woman-ness is itself a fiction. There is a tradition in this country to see Truth appearing from fiction.\textsuperscript{35}

Such was the theory. Sasai has practiced these tenets in his work since that writing, notably in the September 2000 production of \textit{Jozoku} (Woman Criminal) by playwright Hashimoto Osamu. \textit{Jozoku} is a postmodern adaptation/commentary on both the traditional Edogawa Rampo \textit{Black Lizard} and the adaptations. It is presented as the ruminations of a verbose actor playing the part of Black Lizard in the play. In the first act, there is an inner monologue of the motivations for the actions and feelings of the Black Lizard herself. In the second act, the moments of the play and film are spliced together, played and replayed, revealed and questioned. The work was reminiscent of the parody and reflexive questioning seen in Split Britches/Bloolips’ 1992 production of \textit{Belle Reprieve}, their now infamous deconstruction of \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Jozoku} showcased Sasai’s captivating performance style. The sophisticated Tokyo theatre audience not only read the theatrical signs, but the contemporary cultural gender commentary. The literary references, ironic nods to the original play, the mannerisms and costumes in the film, and even Miwa Akihiro’s previous performances were all referenced. The show ends with a spotlight on what seems to be the white

\textsuperscript{35}Note that Sasai refers to himself as \textit{onnagata}, an expansion of the kabuki role-type and cultural acceptance. Neo-\textit{onnagata} is my designation, as a performance with basis in the kabuki model, with equal status and with even further possibilities.

\textsuperscript{36}In Chapter Five, I discuss Sasai’s performance of Blanche in \textit{Streetcar}.
feathered dressing gown in which Miwa mortally convulsed at the end of the film. This gown, however, is made up of polyvinyl shredded plastic bags and is disembodied. The actor has already left the stage.

In *Jozoku*, Sasai (in collaboration with Hashimoto, the playwright) interrogates both the stereotyped aspects of the story and Miwa Akihiro’s performance. Miwa played the Black Lizard with hair and make-up intact and unruffled, even to the Lizard’s deathbed. Conversely, Sasai frames the story with a somewhat disheveled appearance as a contemporary woman at the beginning and as a maddened and disillusioned Black Lizard at the end. Further, the disembodied dressing gown brings home the idea that the Black Lizard, Miwa, and the act of being a woman in society are all constructions. The socially taught performance of woman-ness can thus be shed, replicated, and re-constructed by other actor-bodies—those of both males and females. It is in this way—highlighting and revealing the constructions of gender—that Sasai and other neo-onnagata offer exciting new possibilities for social critique through contemporary theatrical interpretation.
This text of Jozoku has now been translated into English\textsuperscript{37} with an eye toward production in the United States. From short story to ensemble play to film to postmodern reflexive monologue to translation and foreign performance, Edogawa’s literary conception has shown remarkable resilience across literary genres and media. Despite its origin as conservative narrative, it has been remade as vehicle for cultural questioning via the resistance image of cross-dressing. The story was appropriated by those seeking to question gender. In fact, it has served as a legitimizing force in presenting the device of cross-dressing as legitimate cultural critique.

The neo-onnagata actors serve an important social function as facilitators in the ongoing exploration of male and female roles that has been an international dialogue. Certainly, it is a part of the slowly evolving cultural discussion of Japan, a part of which is rethinking old patterns of fixed gender coding.

Roland Barthes, in Empire of Signs, spoke to the artful truth of Japanese cross-dressing actors when he postulated Woman as an idea rather than a nature, a most radical refutation of the essentialist conservative view. He saw the “Oriental actor,” in the portrayal of the onnagata, as eschewing the limiting representation of a (particular)

\textsuperscript{37}See Appendix V. In Chapter Six is information on the career and social resonance of contemporary taishu engeki (working-class popular theatre) performer Umezawa Tomio. Also mentioned are Furuhashi Teiji (founder of techno-performance group Dumbtype—unfortunately now deceased), and Peter, cross-dressed dramatic actor and singer.
woman for the more complex and rewarding juggling of the signs of Woman. I would contend that the neo-onnagata further controls and manipulates the frame in which one does the “juggling,” giving much wider commentary.

In conclusion, gender and cultural rebels Mishima Yukio, and neo-onnagata Miwa Akihiro and Sasai Eisuke launched an obscure literary work into multiple reflection/reflexion. This was achieved through a bridging of the conservative images presented in the Japanese media with the transgressive nature of cross-dressed representation. The cross-dresser appeals to the casual observer on television on film as an odd, “otherworldly” creation. But, in subtle ways, the cross-dressed actor presents ways for male actors, men, to find new avenues for expression. Some young men who have followed the careers of Miwa and Sasai and other neo-onnagata have found the expanded possibilities for the male role to be liberating.

This chapter has looked at recent incarnation of “spirits,” literature and the media, which have stepped into Japan’s spiritual vacuum as “gods” of omni-conscious popular culture. Television, film, and literature, flickering virtual conceptions that spring unbidden from Japan’s psyche, have upheld very specific essential models but are

38Barthes, Empire, 89-91.

39The gender rebel aspect applies to Mishima because he affected a hyper-masculine martyr sensibility, “muscle drag,” as a veil for incipient, and promiscuous, homosexuality.
concurrent with permutations that add all the more evidence to being slip-gendered, “inside the fiction,” because of such suspiciously shrill and pervasive insistence to the contrary. In literature and media, many examples can be found of a singular interest in cross-gendered portrayals and performances.

In the next chapter, I will highlight actor Miwa Akihiro as a most attractive and provocative muse for various directors in reinterpreting classic dramatic/literary narratives. He has carved, through tenacious professionalism and a commitment to an “aesthetic of elegance,” a unique position in the Japanese theatre world, one of unprecedented power. He can choose his own projects and has achieved an astonishing ubiquity in his manipulation of the mass media. Miwa brings into play a refined life performance of Iconic Woman through forthright expression of his unique gender formation elegance. He “naturalizes” his presence so thoroughly as to constitute his own category. I would suggest that Miwa Akihiro is, in fact, the “queen” and founder of the neo-onnagata form.
Chapter 4
“The Queen of Japan”: Miwa Akihiro

Spirit-Kannon-sama-Lama-Spiritual Teacher

I’m rather short and so traditional male roles would be limited for me, but as a woman, ah!¹

Miwa Akihiro

Miwa Akihiro is rare in being a contemporary onnagata, and even rarer in having an activist/resistance mentality.

Sasai Eisuke

But they are all so subtle, full of art and age again doting and flexible
So as—I cannot tell—we may perchance light on a quean may cheat us all.²

Mosca, Act II Scene VI Volpone (Ben Jonson)

Miwa Akihiro has proven the originator of the neo-onnagata form. That is to say that he has pioneered a lifestyle as a serious performer apart from the kabuki tradition. Miwa began his career as a singer and gay activist but has widened his scope to include the theater, film, television, animation, print, radio, and a variety of other projects of cultural and performative interest. Although there are many gay performers in Japan, he has gained a voice of authority and credibility among the general public, not only in sexual matters but on a variety of other social issues as well. His status as cultural arbiter is widely accepted and courted.

¹Unpublished interview by Hamilton Armstrong with Miwa Akihiro (Tokyo, 2000).

²The word “quean” denoted a prostitute in Jonson’s day but queens and prostitutes have great commonality in being archetypal examples of gender as performed in relation to the responses of society.
In this chapter I hope to further the discussion of what constitutes a neo-onnagata actor through examining the progenitor of the form. Miwa’s life and work prove that the career of a male-to-female cross-dressing actor may be viable on a wide scale, gaining public acceptance beyond the boundaries of the traditional theatre. Further, his work demonstrates that it is possible to transgress the historically rigid sex-roles of Japanese culture. In speaking of the neo-onnagata as another gender, or as a cynosure of gender fluidity, Miwa serves as a conspicuous example. His life, offstage as well as on, argues for a model of gender fluidity, one that rejects polarities. His work underscores how neo-onnagata may make serious contributions to theatre and the possibilities for multi-gendered casting. In these respects, Miwa Akihiro’s contributions have been herculean. He has expanded the parameters of Japanese masculinity and paved the way for other cross-gendered male artists. Miwa is the founding-mother, or “queen” of the form. Finally, he has tapped into the anxiousness of contemporary Japanese culture, as it seeks new gender models and identities to expand the rigid binaries.

One definition of a “queen” is "a goddess, or thing personified as female, having supremacy in a specified realm." Other aspects of the term include "a female creature,” a “male homosexual" and "a playing card marked with a stylized figure of a regal woman." Taken together, these ideas point to abstract conflations of femininity, accomplishments of a kind, and sexual embroidery on the cultural borders. Performing the complexity of female and male construction in the contemporary age, Miwa Akihiro
is the longest-reigning male-to-female cross-dressing artist on Japan's pop culture scene (that is, apart from the traditional kabuki theatre). Without doubt, Miwa Akihiro (born Maruyama Shingo) is the grand dame of the Japanese talkshow, *chansons* (tavern torchsongs) and theater circuit. He is distinguished from the vast array of celebrities in Japanese media and pop culture because he has been a part of so many important historical collaborations, with a repertoire that continues to revisit the roles that were created for him. Tirelessly in the forefront of the public eye as actor/singer/personality, he has performed his life, as Woman, and as Elegant Man. Both are possibilities because they are roles, constructed genders.

Perhaps Miwa best represents this study’s examination of cross-dressed males challenging traditional sex-role and theatrical casting parameters. He has long elicited the admiration of the female, as well as male gaze. There is something about his depiction of elegance that conjures beauty, while making one aware at all times of the male corporeality beneath the veneer. His unique persona fascinate and lure the viewer into a tacit psychological complicity with the feminine image. His Woman-ness becomes an elaborate redefinition that subverts the pre-conceived notions, not only of binary gender, but also the form of the cross-dressed depiction. Many cross-dressers seem to be blatant creatures of artifice. Miwa, on the other hand, naturally assumes his femininity and is very appealing as a human being. In short, he constitutes a model for the neo-onnagata as alternate gender.
Prior to a full discussion of Miwa’s work, it is important to place him in the context of an increasing amount of play in the cross-dressing image. Some see all cross-dressing as “drag.” While this is true in a sense—all roles and identities are “drag” as well—the societal view of the “drag queen” is a derogatory one. Miwa has overturned that notion to gain popularity while employing some elements of the “drag” personae in his constructed image. Nonetheless, Miwa is most effective in his societal commentary because he sculpted such a unique and “natural” position. I would contend that “mainstreaming” of the gaudily cross-dressed drag queen has reduced the effective social critique of the serious cross-dressed portrayal. This phenomenon distracts from the serious work that other-gendered performers like Miwa have advanced over the last twenty years.

The Mainstreaming of Drag: An American Export

I hate this "Disney-fication" of drag queens. I think a drag queen should be subversive, should threaten family values, like you're not sure if any minute she might pull a switchblade out of her ratted beehive.

Director John Waters

The essence of drag and camp is about people on the margins. Sexual and gender outlaws create work from that very particular place of being outside of the mainstream.

*Paris is Burning* director Jennie Livingston

Camp is motivated by rage.

Theatre artist Charles Ludlam
Miwa Akihiro energetically rejects being called a “drag queen.”³ I think this is because the term carries a kind of unwanted semantic and socio-economic baggage. The implied denigration seems to lessen Miwa’s artistry and serious theatrical work. More importantly, like many innovators, he resists the idea of being limited by a label, being placed in a notional boundary. But, if we take a wider conception of the term, Miwa does display the political consciousness, regal manner, cutting wit, and perquisite social anger that we associate with the late-night cabaret artists in gay communities around the world.

Some feminist observers have recognized the boundary-blurring commentaries in some drag shows and have been strong supporters of the drag milieu as a site of subversive commentary. It is a Greek chorus to societal hypocrisy regarding what constitutes a woman. Some have furthered that discourse in constructing the “drag king.”⁴ Other critics have decried drag as a reinforcement of the superficial sociosexual

³2000 Miwa interview.

⁴Note that women who dress as men for similar purposes of social commentary, as personified by groups like Split Britches, or “drag kings” (as designated by lesbian stand-up comic Lea Delaria,) are not discussed in this essay. Since men have historically been defined as not having a "constructed" gender, the resonance of taking on the male image may have more to do with the idea of appropriating power, a different subversive dynamic.
constructs imposed on females for men's consumptive or territorial desires. No doubt certain misogynist elements, jokes about "fish" and such, have invited such criticism. Perhaps, however, drag as a subversive political form transcends mere bodies and personalities. The very fact of men constructing themselves in feminine image, and women as men, implies that genders can be reconstructed and expanded.

Performance highlights the constructions of life roles. Simone de Beauvoir famously described the constructed nature of woman in *The Second Sex*:

> One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

Men have traditionally not been characterized in the same way, but recent work in masculist studies is beginning to do so. Of course, males are culturally reinforced to be “masculine” in certain specific ways. Materialist feminist/lesbian theorist Monique Wittig expounds upon de Beauvoir's notion further to hypothesize that lesbians, as nonparticipants in the constructed (by men for men) role of "woman" are, therefore, not women (or, we should say, not a "woman"). Wittig thus discards the term for a whole

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5 bell hooks, Janice Raymond, and Marilyn Frye are a few of these. See hooks, *Is*, 61.

6 This refers to remarks alleging an acrid odor to women’s genitals. These kinds of comments marked the construction of the 1940s and 50s drag queen and have been made by some homosexual men in order to vociferously assert their exclusive preference while mysogynistically reviling the objects of their aggressive disinterest.

7 de Beauvoir, 249.
group, who, she states, prefer to designate their essence as "lesbian." If the term has been discarded and is truly "up for grabs," perhaps drag queens can now appropriate the term “woman” and legitimately label themselves as "women" or “neo-male.” After all, by extension, who participates in the defined construction of this particular image more fully? Such reordering of terms plays fast and loose with semantics, but the fact is clear that many gay men, lesbians, straight men and women engage with drag queens or their image in current mainstream culture and are attracted to such depictions, presumably because of the "ur-woman" they see and to which they respond.

Through the ages, males have exercised power over females, but at a high price. Domineering roles are rigid, burdensome, and inappropriate to the needs of humans in modern life. There is a need to soften the male image and discover new possibilities for masculine behavior. Males who can successfully incorporate traits traditionally associated with femininity subvert social mores but may reconstruct themselves as better, more adaptive beings. Fluid gender play is thus a tool for constructing new selves. We can make our own culture and affect future realities. Cross-dressed actors offer such models.

Harvard anthropologist James L. Peacock made an interesting observation regarding the lure of the cross-dresser to the audience, in this case Javanese watching ludruk-play transvestites:

The transvestite fascinates . . . not simply because of his identity with fantasy and illusion, but because he manifests tension between that...
illusion and reality . . . In art, reality is cheated. Constructing women from men through padding and wigs, culture conquers nature.\footnote{Peacock, 213.}

In other words, the audience is attracted to an un-natural evocation, which, again, comprises the allure of the theatre. De Beauvoir, Wittig and Peacock all highlight the theatrical and highly performative construction of what various cultures see as Woman and as Man. Actors, can easily “conquer nature” because nature is the last thing that theatre and media audiences want to see. The wide attraction of neo-\textit{onnagata} Miwa, as all \textit{onnagata}, is his elicitation of the unspeakable, that ephemeral recognition that gender exists primarily as a set of cultural instructions inculcated from birth.

Late anthropologist Victor Turner espoused a theory which helps to explain the recent unprecedented ubiquity of the drag queen in America and internationally. He described a "proto-aesthetic" set of procedures in society for incorporating liminal events and processes. He detailed the steps through which the disruptive person (or people) is included or rejected:

\dots in the first stage, \textit{Breach}, a person or subgroup breaks a rule deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting. In the stage of \textit{Crisis}, conflicts between individuals, sections, and factions follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of character, interest, and ambition . . . \textit{Redressive Action} is often ritualized and may be undertaken in the name of law or religion . . . \textit{Outcome} (or “consummation”) - the fourth stage- may be either (a) the restoration of peace and "normality"

\footnote{Peacock, 213.}
among the participants or (b) social recognition of irremediable or irreversible breach of schism. There may be a "transvaluation of values."9

The transvaluation concept is particularly apt regarding the reception of the cross-dressed actor.

Until recently in the United States, only a few cult figures had emerged among drag queens to present an “acceptable” image. To gain public approbation would require that the gendered performance be seen as a part of a historical process, disciplined in its area (in keeping with the American work ethic), and with an ear to current trends. John Water's creation of the late Divine was one example. With the ongoing influence of homosexual taste and aesthetics on society, and Hollywood's plundering of cult culture for inspiration, however, newly acceptable role-models have become widely known. The Lady Bunny made her splash in Wigstock: The Movie (based on the annual New York drag festival in Central Park). RuPaul even appeared in a Spike Lee film (Crooklyn), The Lady Chablis, star of John Berendt's run-away best seller, Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, put out her own best-selling autobiography.10 The saccharine To Wong Foo . . . With Love From Julie Newmar played off of the success of the Australian export, Priscilla: Queen of the Desert to penetrates public consciousness. Recently, John Cameron Mitchell’s Hedwig and the

9Turner, 8.

*Angry Inch* has capitalized on New York stage success to play on film around the world.

I believe that American society has, in the manner of Turner’s model, transvalued the drag queen in order to control his transgressive and threatening invective. He has been made acceptable to common social mores, as a kind of jester or holy fool. Miwa has single-handedly elicited that reaction in Japan, with a similar transformation. That is, he is accepted as an acceptable mainstream entertainment, an artist, moreover, as a voice of influence in society. I believe Miwa has had a greater influence than people commonly realize, as a model for male choice in gendered behavior.

But, though I believe transvaluation to be an apt model for the mainstreaming influences of society, I caution that the full extent of Turner’s conception be acknowledged. By bringing the transgressive member into the center away from the limen, society is irreversibly changed, to the extent that what was unacceptable has now been incorporated into the common cultural fabric. The point here is that in accepting a cross-gendered actor and vocal social critic like Miwa into the mainstream, the conservative mainstream liberalizes to an extent. In this case, precepts of male gender roles must be given freer play to accommodate the new member.
"Drag makes fun of the absurdity of society's expectations that any of us fit easily into our genders," declared *Paris is Burning* director Jennie Livingston.\(^\text{11}\) Social transformation is remarkable when it occurs. As apt example, cross-dressing per se is truly threatening to a traditional, family-oriented culture. Judith Lorber, feminist and sociologist, refers back to Robert Stoller \(^\text{12}\) when she states that "ordinary, normal people" feel that "the impulses toward, or fear of, turning into someone of the opposite sex" must be suppressed in order to uphold gender boundaries and "the deep gendered-ness of the modern Western world."\(^\text{13}\) Therefore, anxiety over members of society who breach traditional gender mores is not surprising. But in order for society to grow, for men and women to reach a fuller potential as human beings, they must have the knowledge that they are not bound to untenable and constrictive gender roles.

Japan, with its historical tolerance for homosexual activity, as long as it does not threaten the creation of traditional family units, has had a somewhat easier time accepting cross-dressed performers (outside of kabuki) in the main culture, at least in a basic way. That is, the cross-dresser is not physically attacked. However, performers have had difficulty in seeking higher recognition. Ingrained resistance to social mobility or to changes in the perception of roles has played a major factor in cross-dressed actors being discouraged from legitimate theater careers outside of kabuki. Also,


\(^{12}\)Stoller, Robert 1985, 152.

\(^{13}\)Lorber, 9.
dynastic kabuki onnagata have resented encroachment onto their treasured and hard-won approbation. More often, the cross-dressed actor’s attempts to find a professional niche have simply been ignored. In a culture where construction of the individual is often based on consensus and group values, the greatest social rebuke can often be non-recognition and ostracization.

In America, the recent waves of cross-dressed depictions that swept the country have not merely been signs of increased social tolerance but subconscious efforts to divest drag queens of their real power as social critics. The open doors to cross-dressed performers have proven to be Faustian exchanges for success and money. One may see an analogous figure in the rock star, in a genre of rebellion, who suddenly becomes successful, fat and wealthy. As a part of the system, one has greater access to the ears of the populace but a decrease in motivation to critique, musically or otherwise (i.e. why rebel against a system that benefits you so much?). And, of course, the artists themselves are complicit in this material exchange.

The knowing wink of the drag performer, the ribald aside, the chilling political skewering, and subsequent jolts that audiences experience in the small context of the cabaret are not readily transferable to mainstream culture. More often, the widely popular vehicle for mass consumption (movie, play, comic, character, drag queen) is "dumbed down" to conform to the expectations of culture-at-large.

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"If this trend brings drag into the public eye in a positive way, then by all means crank out more," says Miss Bunny, who is prominently featured in Wigstock and has a small part in Wong Fu. "I'm ready to sell out, in other words." (Milvy 1995, 7)
There has long been a marginalization of the drag queen in gay culture as well. Appreciated by many and always colorfully thrust to the front of parades, drag queens have nonetheless presented a problematic image for those in the gay and lesbian movement who would like to enter into privileged institutions. Activists prefer a public image of gays as "just like the people next door" rather than florid, frivolous creatures dancing in jock-straps and waving dildos. Drag queens, gay transvestites and homosexual transsexuals\(^\text{15}\) have tended to be erased from the political nomenclature of mainstream gays and lesbians in either public or private designations. Late Ridiculous Theatre founder, director and drag performer, Charles Ludlam, comments on such a prejudice:

> When we played in San Francisco in 1980, everyone thought "this is going to be the biggest smash in history." But the gays did not come out, the gay papers panned us, people were saying to me, "Nobody says this to your face, but they don't think you're good for their image."\(^\text{16}\)

Japanese homosexuals battle the same issues on a smaller scale. It is not in keeping with general societal and individual preference to loudly rally for special rights, in disruption of group harmony and society. When such vocal rebellion occurs, it may be mild, and of a social conservative nature, in keeping with the generally conservative

\(^{15}\) Transsexuals, per se, would have only a slight overlapping of goals with the gay movement, their's being more of a medical and psychological concern. A transsexual who felt that she was a lesbian wrongly assigned to a man's body or a gay man trapped in a woman's body would be a different story altogether. Writer, theater activist, "gender outlaw" Kate Bornstein is an example of this.

\(^{16}\) Ludlam, 229.
nature of Japanese society. The *okama*, or drag queen, poses a special image challenge to those lobbying for social rights for homosexuals.

But drag is an undeniable part of world history and international influence. In America, Lord Cornwall, first British governor of New York after seizing it from the Dutch, represented his queen by dressing like her. The drag queens of Stonewall began the breakdown of discriminatory barriers, an event which contemporary homosexuals should not take for granted. In addition, gay individuals have negotiated heavily the social space not to be compelled to parody heterosexual roles. Again, to quote Ludlam: "We shouldn't give up our difference. We're a different force."

Some have decried the inclusion of drag and the camp aesthetic into mainstream American culture, fearing that this has excoriated drag’s best quality. That is, drag as a homosexual trope held a keen bite of in-group revelation about sex, gender and social hypocrisy. Again, Victor Turner’s model illustrates the nature of avant-garde art, as well as other forms of social criticism, to struggle with the dilemma: to work for change within society’s structure and modes or be forgotten. The destiny of subversive forms is to be assimilated. They must be subtle, enacting change from within, or face hard suppression from society. On the other hand, retention of cult status has social penalties, but the very marginalization of the perspective helps to hone a keen critical commentary.

Japanese culture both resists and revels in similar cycles of parody and reflection. There is some broader application regarding this principle vis-a-vis the cycles

\[17\] Ibid.
of marginalization and transvaluation we find in Japanese theatre and the role of the cross-dresser. The neo-onnagata is an example, as male-to-female cross-dressed performer engaged in serious dramatic work outside of the kabuki dynastic tradition. These performers are now experiencing a burgeoning acceptance despite initial resistance to the heretic aspects of their work (seen as “against” the kabuki onnagata). Miwa Akihiro began his career as a “sissy-boy” singer, a cultural curiosity. He went on to become a respected performer and social critic. To this day he has a heavy performance schedule and holds forth on social issues regularly in the newspaper and on television. His concern continues to be the changing ways that men and women interact and behave within society.

Miwa has been but one voice in an ongoing cultural conversation in Japan regarding traditional roles of man and women. As young women in their 20s and 30s are experiencing the liberation of a contemporary society in flux that allows many to have a large disposable income (because they work and have no expenses, living with their parents) and fewer societal pressures, they find that they wield some control over society’s directions. They exercise their limited personal power in delaying or deciding against marriage and children. (These were the same young women who, a generation ago, were proclaimed social pariahs as “Christmas cakes”\(^\text{18}\) and seen as family and

\(^{18}\)The term no longer carries much weight but it previously referred to young women unwedded or unengaged by the age of twenty-five or so. About thirty years ago, the confectionary industry got the brilliant marketing idea of linking the eating of cake
These young women, with time, money and little home obligation are joining middle-aged theatre audiences in supporting the concerts and re-visitations of classic theatrical work of neo-onnagata like Miwa Akihiro. The phenomenon may indicate that neo-onnagata are doing work that is resonant with gender exploration and the interests of young men and women at the forefront of social change.

**Miwa as Neo-Onnagata**

Theatre is performance in signified repetition. Thus, gender is theatre, images and gestures that we thoughtlessly absorb and endlessly perform. Gender has been posited as, respectively, an identity bound to the chromosomal body and a cultural and material product. To paraphrase gender scholar Judith Butler, we may ask: is cross-dressing a genderal imitation or does it “dramatize the signifying gestures,” through which gender manifests itself? And, is gender only bipolar?

This study seeks examples that run contrary to the bio-essential model, that is, I believe gender to be a fluid continuum. Neo-onnagata constitute a theatrical site along the gender spectrum. Miwa Akihiro is a prominent neo-onnagata. But he is important in this examination because he so skillfully manipulates the masculist gaze of the Japanese in his production of feminine elegance. His work constitutes a subgender of its own. As such, it represents an important landmark as another gender possibility in the

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with Christmas Eve celebrations. To this day, many Japanese are under the impression that this is an American custom that has been transported to Japan. An unsold Christmas cake is of no use a day after Christmas. Thus, a young woman, the Christmas cake, was thought to be de-valued past her “expiration date.”

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19Butler *Gender*, viii.
performance of femininity within the male. He expands male gender roles while opening new vista for the male cross-dressed performer. His representation of Woman has become well known along the gamut of Japanese media.

In the subsequent biographic information, I will highlight several aspects of Miwa and his career. He has worked with and served the reputations of some of the legendary figures of Japanese early avant-garde theatre, film, the literary world, and television. As a gay activist he has brought a political dimension to his work that is seldom seen in Japanese entertainment. Miwa has positioned himself as a cultural critic through his many books, personal appearances, lectures, and talk-show appearances. His audiences are middle-class. They have often been made up of women and men who seek his example of femininity and his advice. My aim in this chapter is to present a brief survey and snapshot of the life of a performer, a neo-onnagata, who has thoroughly embodied the advice of famous 17th century kabuki onnagata Yoshizawa Ayame. The renowned onnagata wrote that the successful onnagata should enhance the onstage depiction by seeking true feminine elegance in all aspects of offstage life. Miwa may be said to be less a “pure theatre artist” than a gender investigator. His career has consisted of a variety of performances. Miwa has performed both onstage and off, engaging society in a running commentary of tenacity and charisma. In that capacity, he has given freer range to notions of binary roles.

Like many strong personalities, Miwa forged his career out of hard experience. Miwa (nee Maruyama Shingo) was born on May 15, 1935, but his mother died when he was only two. He grew up in Nagasaki near the red-light district and attributes his versatility with feminine modes to his childhood in the bustling port town. Miwa relates:
I was able to observe the lives of all sorts of women, from high-class ladies to geishas and prostitutes. Nagasaki was an extremely cosmopolitan city. There were cinemas playing French and English films, music stores blaring jazz. This was my education.\(^{20}\)

Having survived the 1945 bombing of his hometown when he was only ten, Miwa dropped out of music school at the age of sixteen. Taking little else than a desire to use his clear contralto voice, he came to Tokyo and slept in Shinjuku Train Station. But it wasn’t long before he was able to promote himself and his ability. The Gin Paris Club, in the upscale Ginza district of Tokyo, offered to employ him as a singer. At the same time, the enterprising young effeminate man began to work in the Brunswick Bar, a “coffee shop for beautiful boys.”\(^{21}\) It was there that he met playwright and novelist Mishima Yukio, who was "doing research." Miwa describes the encounter as follows:

> He was a hotshot writer, so everyone was fawning all over him. But I've never been big on power and authority, so when he called me over to a seat near him I just shrugged. He asked me, "Do you want anything to drink?" and I said, "No thanks. I'm not a geisha." He said, "You're not being very cute," and I said, "I don't have to be cute, I'm beautiful." He was speechless.\(^ {22}\)

The two formed an intense but platonic friendship, which lasted until Mishima's ritual suicide in 1970.\(^ {23}\) This self-assurance and straight-forward attitude would eventually...

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\(^{20}\)Sakurai, 1996 interview, 1.


\(^{22}\)Ibid.

\(^{23}\)The writer also contributed the preface to Miwa's best-selling autobiography, *Murasaki no Reirekusho* (Purple Resume), now in its 40th printing. Journalist Joji Sakurai has written that Mishima visited Miwa after a performance of *Hymne a L'Amour* with an large bouquet of red roses, one week before his infamous suicide. Miwa has noted this appearance as having been the author's farewell to him: “When I saw the roses, I knew I would never see him again.”
bring Miwa a sumptuous lifestyle. His acquisitions have included pink foreign cars and a large collection of jewels. Miwa has achieved lasting fame in the country he refers to as the most advanced in the world for its attitude toward homosexual performers.24

Such rewarding of individuality constitutes one of the many paradoxes of Japanese culture. When discussing cross-dressed performance in the United States, I noted the Judeo-Christian taboos that reinforce a transgressive aspect to such work; in Japan there are historically no such restrictions. In fact, a tradition of acceptable cross-dressed image exists in the kabuki onnagata, but there is deeply ingrained sex-role rigidity that the kabuki symbolically reinforces as a conservative tradition. In addition, centuries of sumptuary code and deep-grained conformity to authoritarian control have fashioned a culture known widely for group investment in the received norm.

But Miwa Akihiro had the vision, as a young person, to go against the tide of social pressure. In 1952, at seventeen, Miwa made his chansons25 singing debut. Naturally, a male in this genre associated with Edith Piaf raised eyebrows in the land of bushido (samurai warrior code) and polar sex-role distinction. On the other hand, as stated before, Japan does not conceive of homosexuality or effeminacy as being a "sin."

24 Other flagrantly feminine personalities include Misawa Kenji, the “Onnapetz,” and “Peter.” Their orientations are never discussed and, as such, constitute examples of the very Japanese predilection toward a blinkered view of aberrant elements in the landscape (Coke machines and scattered tourist refuse along the trail up Mt. Fuji., politicians blasting bull-horned speeches in parks, a grid of cris-crossed power lines in the terraced countryside, a halved plastic milk-carton as water container in a serene moss garden, etc.).

25 This followed a trend at the time toward foreign culture, especially the perceived cache of French art forms.
They are seen more as personal oddities, private matters not openly discussed. Some well-known examples include the social recognition kabuki onnagata lifestyles and the historical relationships of some samurai and emperors.

But, unlike private life, the entertainment world in Japan is hard and fickle. Miwa was taunted and generally dismissed by the critics, but he renounced them in turn and moved forward in his career. He was fully committed to chansons, his medium for resurrecting the Showa aesthetic (Japanese Art Deco) that had been repressed by the military with the war. So, he exploited public fascination with his feminine beauty and gestures to gain a platform for representing a new gendered possibility for men. By upholding an aesthetic of androgyny, combining feminine grace with his young masculine body, Miwa challenged the established male gender codes of his culture. In the face of such resistance and against critical response, the public nonetheless accepted him.

Uniquely for Japan and the times, Miwa went further to openly declared his homosexuality and became an advocate of homosexual rights in 1957 (twelve years before Stonewall in America). Remarkably, the public reacted warmly to the novelty of this "sister-boy" who belted out rough paeans to workers, like “Meke Meke” (1959) and “Yoi Tomake no Uta (Construction Day-Workers Song, 1966).” Women flocked to his concerts, intrigued by his social awareness, elegant aesthetic (an image far removed from the life of the common housewife), and sensitive persona. Men followed and found themselves attracted to his femininity despite themselves. For a decade, he rode the
waves of his singing career and made headlines with increasingly flamboyant cross-dressed apparel.

Indeed, freedom has shaped and defined his personal life. It is typical of Miwa’s life that he was at the forefront of historical transition. Traditional mores were changing after World War II, and with new prosperity came heightened attention to fresh cultural voices. In looking back on his various projects, Miwa has observed that an idiosyncratic and outspoken viewpoint has accounted for a large part of his appeal to the group-oriented average Japanese (who nonetheless yearns to find individual gratification):

Mishima once said to me, 'I envy you. You dress and behave exactly as you please,'" he said. "Back then in Japan, it was unheard of to be a singer-songwriter," he said. "In the West, there were plenty of people who would perform their own compositions, and I thought, there can at least be one in Japan. So I became a pioneer in this field. I experienced tremendous opposition from people in the industry."

In 1967, Miwa, still Maruyama, was looking to expand his range and try his acting talents. He was vaulted into wider prominence and given the opportunity to display a deeper artistic expression by his collaboration with noted 60s avant-garde playwright, director, musician, film maker, poet, and artist Terayama Shuji. Like Man Ray and Boris Vian before him, Terayama was a renaissance man, in the spirit of the 60s, interested in bold new ways of expressing the human condition through a plastic theatre. He recognized another child of the age in Miwa and approached him to play the lead-role in the drama *Aomori-ken no semushi otoko (The Hunchback of Aomori*,

26Sakurai, 1996.
1967). As noted in Chapter Three, Terayama featured Miwa in his next production as well, *Kegawa no Marie* (*Marie in Furs*, also known as *La Marie Vison* and *Mink Marie*, 1967). For Miwa to be involved in such work meant that he was no longer just a lone aberration but a part of a subversive movement. He was now part of a wave of young people who seriously challenged the ways that society had been constructed. This included social relations, government policies, and social conditioning, including the inculcation and interpretations of gender. Such social critique involved a deconstruction onstage of the untenable, often repulsive, strictures of Japanese contemporary culture.

Terayama’s Upper Gallery Group did not disappoint social iconoclasts in their original productions. *Kegawa no Marie*, written by Terayama, was modeled on a grotesque and abstracted Miwa-like character. The story depicts a decadent transvestite (played by Miwa) named Marie (with a *Sunset Boulevard*-style minion) who mothers a beautiful teenage boy, Kinya. The innocent boy has no contact with the outside world save for when he captures butterflies for his collection. Young "Eve" (Monshiro, the hooker living upstairs) intrudes upon this Edenic world, tempting the boy to partake of her charms. Initially interested, he is too emotionally unbalanced to be sexual. He murders her when she discloses the terrible "secret" of his real father and mother. Marie had, for reasons of his own, arranged for the rape of the boy's mother by a worker, as revenge for an unkindness. Marie then had become a "true woman" by mothering Kinya tenderly. At the end of the play everyone is crazed, dazed, or dead. The piece reflected Terayama's obsession with toxic mother/son relations and reminds one of the retro-
Monique Wittig, in her discussions of the hegemonic system of compulsive heterosexuality, has isolated incest as so powerful a cultural taboo in “the straight mind” that, relatively speaking, homosexuality seems absorbed into it (heterosexuality) as an aspect of itself.\textsuperscript{27} Seen in this light, Terayama, in casting Miwa as man-mother-lover, created a strangely sympathetic characterization. The Japanese audience could conceivably read the Miwa body as an extension and critique of themselves. Japan is often characterized as wetly emotional and a culture given to fanatic devotions, sometimes with bizarre and self-destructive results. Any anxiety over the idea of the real homoerotic possibilities onstage—between the bodies of Miwa the male actors and the young male in the child role—was subjugated to the monstrous dark \textit{amae} (complex dependencies between people, particularly parent and child)\textsuperscript{28} of the central figures: mother as source of succor and seduction. As a star in the complex gender and social resistance play of Terayama’s work, Miwa progressed in public image as a serious artist with a message. He represented a successful way for young men to achieve social acceptance as social critic of even the most treasured (albeit in crisis) of social conditioning, that of conformity to the strict gender binary. Another high point of Miwa’s career came in 1968, in a role that forever cemented his range and regality in

\textsuperscript{27}Wittig \textit{The Straight Mind} 108.

\textsuperscript{28}This a difficult concept in translation because, although people in all cultures have such relationships, the Japanese place special value/recrimination on it and have sculpted many manifestations of it in the hierarchy of society.
the public eye: his portrayal of a the powerful female criminal Shochiku Studios potboiler *Kurotokage* (Black Lizard). As noted in Chapter Three, this cult film classic was adapted from a novel by the Japanese gothic/mystery writer Edogawa Rampo. Mishima, who adapted the story for stage and wrote the screenplay for the film, was impressed by the vigor and originality of his friend. He had been astonished by Miwa’s tour-de-force turn in *Kegawa no Marie* and then asked him to play the mysterious jewel-clad vamp/criminal Black Lizard. The film was a success in Japan wherever it played.

Reviewer Stephen Schiff noted the flamboyant cult aspects of the film and Miwa’s performance. But, Miwa used the vehicle of the Black Lizard to sculpt a new role for actors in Japanese film. Prior to *Black Lizard*, Japanese films largely featured “types”: the samurai, the young lovers, the rebel, the priest, the dutiful public official, among others. Never before had there been a chance for a male to play a role as a modern woman, only as traditional kabuki *onnagata*.

But, Miwa’s portrayal was not a mere impersonation; he created a being onscreen that transcended gender. He advanced a feminine depiction clearly generated through the male body. This dichotomy was accomplished with finesse and ease. As example, Miwa/Black Lizard uses the cigarette as phallic signifier in an intriguing bit of stage business. He/she signals to gang members from the hotel room; he makes a smokey circle with his lit cigarette, which is extended in an elegant holder. The gesture draws attention to the male arm of the actor. Yet, as the camera follows the arm up to
the lips of the musing Lizard, we are pulled back to the elegant female demeanor. In Miwa’s portrayal, his body, and performance give rise to a manifestation of femininity that is not an impersonation of a woman but an expansion of masculinity, a dissonant, transgressive neo-\textit{onnagata} performance.

Another moment that typifies Miwa’s neo-\textit{onnagata} performance as the Lizard comes when she is surrounded by her gang on their island hideout, including macho men and a mystical snake-woman. The Lizard controls them all with her powerful personality and with various vocal commands. Miwa, as Lizard, orders them in a voice that is alternately soothing and rough. His voice moves into a male register at times, but rather than jar the viewer, the vocalizations succeed in reinforcing an authoritative energy. The effect is one of simply being the powerful Lizard, apart from usual male or female types or norms.

Miwa set a precedent with his gendered portrayal of the Black Lizard. Subsequent stage productions of \textit{Black Lizard} have featured Miwa, Bando Tamasaburoh the celebrated \textit{onnagata} of kabuki fame, and neo-\textit{onnagata} Sasai Eisuke. A recent revival of \textit{Kegawa no Marie}, in Tokyo and Paris, demonstrated the renewed interest in the 60s which has swept Miwa into a new and iconic fame. He has been acclaimed by the kitsch-conscious younger generation. Of course, with that new audience has come even more comprehensive quiz and talkshow appearances, essential rituals in the Japanese \textit{geinokai} (celebrity) universe.
Miwa has used the media images of gender (focus of Chapter Three) to his career advantage and to position himself as a social critic. The so-called "wide shows," news/talk/variety shows, of Japanese television have been a frequent platform for Miwa’s unique personality. One widely held perception of Miwa views him as a wise, good, and sublimely positive person. On this basis, Japanese women have sought his advice in matters of love and self-fulfillment, as an “agony aunt,” in the same way that Americans seek the advice of Ann Landers or “Dr. Laura” Schlesinger. On a ‘90s edition of comedian Yamada Kuniko’s daily talk/variety show, Miwa was polite but detached during the various inane activities of the show. He became animated, however, during the segment when he advised one unhappy audience member to dump her tyrannical husband, secure a young lover and find personal fulfillment, in spite what social pressures might dictate. Perhaps this kind of panacea was not helpful to the individual questioner, but, clearly, the breathless romance and ‘60s-style recklessness of such a take-charge philosophy is appealing to the audience. Miwa has lived what he espouses, so the possibilities for individual and social change are not unachievable.

Indeed, there is something of the sixties feminist/rebel in Miwa, who seeks to empower women and to liberate men. Although he would not identify himself in such terms, he shares common ground with such voices as Wittig in configuring gender as an act of the will. He views gender as a volitional guise. As Wittig states in “One is Not Born a Woman,” what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an “imaginary formation.”

29Wittig 48.
famously asserted that one is not born a woman, Wittig also postulates “female” as a construction. Hence, by extension, maleness is likewise fluid and contingent. Miwa puts such theory into practice in his adherence to a life in “pursuit of elegance.” As an actor, he sees the feminine image as his best physical suit. In his personal life, he does not seek an imitation of women but creates a new constructed possibility as elegant male.

Some might argue that, like the kabuki onnagata, playing all age ranges and variety of women, Miwa has skillfully turned his sex into an irrelevance. On the contrary, it is the aura of maleness that informs his transgressive gendered presentation. I maintain that his work is transgressive in the sense that Miwa conjures the inner life of his female characters in a contemporary presentation, using--in Brechtian fashion-- an unapologetically male body as vehicle. The effect is not particularly stylized, neither male nor female but a natural blend of both. He performs femininity while expanding the definition of the male image. Such depictions as those of Miwa and other neo-onnagata represent anomalies that threaten the social order in that their work calls the order into question. If an actor on the contemporary stage can portray a natural feminine incarnation, with or without physical verisimilitude, then the range of choices for gender role behavior for both men and women can be seen as vast and changeable.

In viewing Miwa’s work, I note that he uses various techniques to suggest feminine and “elegant” behavior. One is his placement of his body in space. His posture is straight and graceful. He does not walk on tiptoe, although he is sometimes in heels. But, like a Western dancer, he lifts the body center, as though a line through his body was drawn upward, suggesting a lighter quality of being. This he achieves with
grace, naturally giving youthful aura to his movement. Miwa certainly utilizes the kabuki onnagata technique of pulling down the shoulders and turning the body slightly away from the audience at all times. He sometimes wears gloves but conceals his large hands. Instead, he keeps them in curves and arcs, gesturing animatedly like a European. His hands constantly are drawn to his hair, traditional signifier of the feminine. Often, Miwa has worn wigs but more often recently he has simply worn his own natural long hair in public appearances. I note that he seldom wears breast padding. He does not want to look like a woman. In appearances as himself, as well as the majority of his onstage work, Miwa Akihiro represents a new gendered creation—a man who incorporates feminine elements in his body, his work, and his life.

Miwa has built a career as representative and anomaly: of his signified gender, of his culture, of the entertainment marketplace, of his age. As regards his transvested persona, he combines the homegrown tradition of the signified woman found in noh and kabuki theatre with the borrowed elegance of Art Deco romanticism. It is a tricky balance that Miwa successfully negotiates. He skillfully transmits and inhabits a series of signs which evoke the “abstract concept of allure” known as iroke in Japanese.30 Roland Barthes explored this mechanism in his semiotic reading of Japanese culture and performance, Empire of Signs:

30Senelick 1992, xi
The transvestite actor . . . is not a boy made up as a woman, by dint of a thousand nuances, realistic touches, costly simulations, but a pure signifier whose underneath (the truth) is neither clandestine (jealously masked) nor surreptitiously signed (by a waggish wink at the virility of the support, as in Western drag shows: opulent blondes whose trivial hand or huge foot infallibly give the lie to the hormonal bosom): simply absented; the actor, in his face, does not play the woman, or copy her, but only signifies her . . . if, as Mallarmé (the symbolist poet) says, writing consists of “gestures of the idea,” transvestism here is the gesture of femininity, not it’s plagiarism; it follows that it is not at all remarkable . . . to see an actor of fifty (very famous and much honored) playing the part of a young woman, timorous and in love. . . . Woman is an idea, not a nature; as such, she is restored to the classifying function and to the truth of her pure difference: the Western transvestite wants to be a (particular) woman, the Oriental actor seeks nothing more than to combine the signs of Woman.  

In expanding the conventions of his classical theatre counterparts, Miwa has demonstrated his “gestures” in modern adaptations of traditional vehicles for women as well as roles written for him. In 1996, an astonished audience witnessed his onstage transformation from withered crone to tender debutante in the Tokyo revival of Mishima’s modern noh play, Sotoba Komachi. Miwa shifts the old and new in infinite combination with his multi-layered gender performance. He subtly counters reality (Adam’s apple, straight waist, absence of prosthetic bosom) with subliminal gesture (a turn of the head, a delicate laugh.)

Culturally, we see in Miwa a series of signatory echoes inhabiting each other. East and West reverberate and combine in postmodern image. In him we find a devout

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31Barthes Empire, 89-91.
Japanese Buddhist man cloaked in lavish Western women’s clothing. He directs and acts in Western-style productions of updated Meiji-Era (1867-1912) mysteries (based on Edgar Allen Poe’s gothicism) and ancient noh ghost-texts. Performing in contemporary Japanese (as opposed to the classic Japanese language of kabuki and noh), using the stylized kabuki vocal keen, he attracts modern Japanese audiences who have eaten at McDonald’s before entering the proscenium theatre, a space located high on the upper floors of a multi-conglomerate Japanese department store skyscraper.

In the arcane matrix of the Japanese popular entertainment industry, more latitude has always existed for the performer than in the specialized systems of the West. Singer/stage-film-television actor/talk-show host/author/product-endorser Miwa Akihiro is as ubiquitous as his entertainment industry peers in this respect. What is interesting is how each medium showcases different aspects of his signification of Woman. Television offers the sincerity of Miwa the auntie, as wit and dispenser of homespun wisdom. Concert performance features a scold and diva. Commercial work highlights his beauty and youthful skin. Film has demonstrated his vocal power and name recognition as an “actress.” Unsurprisingly, the theater, with its multilayered sign systems, affords the most opportunities for manipulation of the Miwa Woman-image and illusion.

It is not only in the corporeal (in his body and culture) and theatrical realms that Miwa combines the feminine, the cultural beliefs of West and East, and his forceful opinions. Miwa Akihiro has fervent spiritual foundations that inform his social criticisms as well as his life. He has published his tenets in a series of books in which he has
detailed his conflation of the female deities Kannon-sama, Buddhist goddess of mercy, with Mary, the Catholic Mother of Heaven. In his recent book *Tensei Bigo (The Ultimate Truth Said Beautifully)*, Miwa expresses his ideas of Buddhist brother and sisterhood modeled on the serene anima spirit of “Maria-Kannon.” For him, peace can be achieved through a commitment to personal and universal beauty. This includes an expansion of gendered norms away from behaviors that constrain the individual in their personal fulfillment or in the betterment of society. His most devoted fans number themselves among his spiritual followers and receive updates and newsletters containing his writings.

Using the Buddhist goddess Kannon as special identification is a perspicacious choice. If we trace the cosmogonic origins of the deity, we find that the male Indian incarnation Avalokitesvara, in traveling through Asia with the spread of Buddhism, was re-conceived in womanly form: in China as Kwan-yin, Tibet as Tara, and in Japan as Kannon-sama. She is the most popular of the female devotional figures in Japan, in fact one of very few. Perhaps, only Benzaiten, goddess of art and music, is as well known and popular. Kannon is the goddess of mercy, special protector of children and the helpless, and is often depicted as a radiant benefactor. In addition, however, Kannon

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33“Sama” is an honorific of great respect.

34The other well-known female Buddhist deity in secular culture is Benzaiten, goddess of art and music, the only female representation in the “shichifukujin (seven lucky gods).” The other lucky gods are Ebisu, Daikokuten, Bishamon, Hotei, Fukurokuju, and Juroujin. Together these “gods” were actually conflations of happy deistic figures of Indian, Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, with influences of Hinduism, Taoism, and Shinto added to the mix. They were popularized as the “Hello Kitty”s of the late Edo period.
retains the male incarnation as well in certain conceptions. Like Kannon-sama, Miwa has contiguous multiple images and devotees who see him according to what fulfils their cultural expectations. In choosing to speak out on religious issues in a heavily Buddhist culture and aligning himself with a transgendered deity, he further cements his impact on mainstream culture and tradition. By reaching into the niche of Buddhist discourse, beyond the realm of the entertainment industry, Miwa further expands his audience.

Who comprises the Miwa audience and what are their agendas? First, as with many performers of long-established careers, Miwa can count on the attention of his earliest, most loyal fans. Many of them are middle-aged women who remember attending Miwa's chansons concerts when they were 1950s bobbysoxers. Nothing short of a sex scandal could ever dissuade this audience from supporting his work because Miwa represents their carefree “teen rebellion,” a very nostalgic and cherished period for societally-constrained Japanese. In a similar way, he appeals to certain well-off, mature gentlemen who see in Miwa the disappearing Japanese aesthetic of yesteryear. It is here that the semiotic signage is most seductive. For this group, it is the outer trappings that make the woman. The “Yamato nadeshiko” (old-style Japanese quiet beauty) was a type of young woman much prized by the pre and post war generation—

In India, however, the bodhisattva is generally represented as a male figure. In Chinese art before the Tang dynasty, Kuan-yin was also usually perceived as masculine, though literary and anecdotal evidence from as early as the fifth century points to a sexual transformation of this bodhisattva. By the tenth century, Kuan-yin's statues were becoming increasingly feminine, and by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the transformation into a female deity was complete.” http://lhamo.tripod.com/ Women Active in Buddhism (WaiB)
valued because she said almost nothing but radiated genteel loveliness. Miwa is not shy or demure, but he does cultivate the grace and gentility of another era. Among these audience members are numbered those who primarily follow Miwa for his advice on human relations and spiritual wisdom. Another segment of the Miwa circle of influence comprises young cult film and personality afficionados. There is an otherworldly quality that radiates from Miwa and his productions. These viewers are attracted to the edgy qualities and unintentional irony inherent in Miwa’s work.

But the largest Miwa audience can be said to be the television-viewing public—the majority of Japanese people. Miwa is a mass media commodity: he is present in daily television appearances, film projects, print (magazine interviews, newspaper views and reviews), interviews, commercial advertising (image on billboards, in subway, on packaging, in TV commercials), radio shows, and published books. It would seem that “anytime is Miwa time.” Therein lies his ubiquity. Generally given, performers tend to garner niche recognition and specialized audiences according to individual interest. But, few in Japan do not know Miwa’s name and reputation. His influence casts a wide net and thus embodies a kind of cultural force. In his late sixties, Miwa simultaneously creates, reflects, and recalls cultural history.

On at least three noteworthy occasions, Miwa has capitalized on the reciprocity between his art and the historical cultural current. The first, in the 1950's and 60's, involved his embrace of the chansons form, which was in keeping with the socialist spirit sweeping Japan at that time. Of course, his chance meeting with Mishima was propitious in leading to Black Lizard and other collaborations. Certainly, Yohko Tadanori and Terayama Shuji saw in Miwa a multiplicity of ways to proliferate the
image of woman--as whore, as witch, as Everywoman, as blank slate, finally, as cultural mirror in service to their radical political agendas.

The idea of Miwa as mirror to society may be apt. It best characterizes his social criticism, as well as his image of feminine and masculine behaviors. He sees his forthright words as a gift to a public that cannot avert its gaze. There is clearly in Miwa Akihiro a propulsion toward the grand idea. He is a student and tutor of the sublime in humanity. He has a great desire to change society and promote an elegant gender alternative for men and women. Japan may see in Miwa a shiny surface that delivers both the yearned-for Mother and Mistress. At the same time, Miwa constitutes an alternative to the established binaries of gender, a man as an adorned and lovely creature. To see him on stage and to speak with him in person is to be strung between a lacunae of gendered conception.. He is a re-constructed man, a man who signifies Woman, yet still evokes Man.

Miwa is the original construction of the neo-onnagata in his willingness to build a career of cross-dressing outside of the kabuki tradition. In addition, he serves as a strong agent of social critique and accepted model of feminine image. He is unbound by the constraints of the kabuki world, yet he has amassed a body of classic professional theatre work and has gained wide acceptance by the mainstream public. In sum, Miwa Akihiro has seized an unprecedented platform from which to model expanded concepts of gender for male actors and for all men. Many have pointed to Miwa as their role-model and inspiration. Such men have found increased opportunities to express expanded male behaviors and careers, with greater social acceptance. Miwa’s work and
life exemplifies the premise of this dissertation, that of presenting a new gendered paradigm in the performance of the neo-onnagata.

In the next chapter, I will examine the work of another neo-onnagata, Sasai Eisuke, a performer who has consciously walked in Miwa’s shadow but has emerged to develop his own version of the neo-onnagata portrayal of Woman. Sasai’s career has been shaped in very different ways from that of Miwa. He has exercised rigorous kabuki training, a quieter personality, and a purity as a serious actor. Sasai appeals to a different, much more elite audience and seldom does commercial work. His offstage life is as an everyday male, undistinguishable in a crowd. Nonetheless, there are parallels in Miwa and Sasai’s philosophies and attainment of public acceptance that bind them together as neo-onnagata. They are participants in work constituting a complexly transgressive “crossing.”
Chapter 5
Boku wa Onnagata: Sasai Eisuke

Dakini- Mystic Partners of the Yogin Supreme Instruments of Liberation- (Sangha)

As an actor, I’ve found that I did my best work dressed as a woman. So, I’ve gone with what has worked for me.¹

Sasai Eisuke

Let me explain what I consider onnagata to be: I am an onnagata who does everything (classical, shogekijo, avant-garde). My goal is to construct onnagata while shedding the outer trappings. Ultimately, if you want to understand onnagata see three productions of mine. One won’t do.²

Sasai Eisuke

Theatre scholar Katherine Mezur has recently asserted that stylized costume codes inextricably link the onnagata to his art: “we cannot undress the onnagata gender performance.”³ Mezur stresses the point that kabuki’s theatrical magic has depended heavily on the theatrical apparatus, that is, color and seasonal codes of costumes, the conventions of make-up and wigs, the music, the stylized set, the rarefied atmosphere of

¹Unpublished interviews by Hamilton Armstrong with Sasai Eisuke (Tokyo, 1999).


the performance, and the theater site itself. In doing so, she emphasizes the constructed nature of the onnagata image. Of course, in Japan the onnagata parallels the stylized geisha, who in turn is a 17th century male conception of the Japanese fantasy woman. Both geisha and onnagata reveal artificial feminine construction.

Actor Sasai Eisuke also believes that the trappings of the actor have been the hallmark of traditional onnagata performance. He relates: “serious costumes are important for any actor but especially for onnagata. A real onnagata needs to understand the art of dressing in kimono or gorgeous long dresses.” In fact, the onnagata of the traditional kabuki stage does seem a delicate contrivance, historically entwined in a virtual Edo period (1603-1868) conception of feminine image.

But in the contemporary theatrical setting, one removed from the set systems of historical tradition, neo-onnagata Sasai Eisuke has attempted to work without conventional symbology. He has attempted to portray an image of woman simply through the body–gesture, movement, expression. Sasai does this drawing from his rigorous kabuki movement training. He thus uses kabuki body movement to perform Woman without dependence on the kabuki costume and facade. Such work is a great step away from the kabuki frame as well as from conventional cross-dressed technique. Sasai portrays women as natural women and adds his own gendered nuance into the mix. What he creates is “believable,” though not typical woman or man. While he has

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4Geisha and onnagata have had historically close relationships, often trading beauty secrets, fashion trends, and even patrons.

5Notes from Boku Wa Onnagata (I Am An Onnagata) and personal interviews.
increasingly not relied on feminine costuming in his roles, of even greater significance is that Sasai Eisuke constructs a natural feminine portrayal, successfully taking on roles that have often been reserved for actresses. Thus, he expands possibilities for the male actor and for men in general.

In Chapter Five, I will trace Sasai’s training and career from its inception to his recent acclaim as premier neo-onnagata. In doing so I hope to demonstrate how Sasai performs the fluidity of gender successfully in a system of rigid sex-role and theatrical traditions. Atypically for many artists, he is exceptionally articulate regarding his vision and aims. Thus, scholars can benefit from Sasai’s own words gleaned from interviews, articles, and personal conversations. His thoughts will be presented here for the first time (in English). I will also introduce gender theory and my own observations to analyze this study of his career. In doing so, I wish to highlight Sasai Eisuke’s status in the Japanese performance community and in Japanese culture.

I will also discuss Sasai’s audience. In contrast to Miwa Akihiro, Sasai enjoys a smaller audience, though it is more intellectual and seasoned in the current movements of Japanese theatre. For example, a typical member of his audience would have more likely attended productions of the newest theatrical movement of Japan, so-called “quiet theatre, as represented by playwright Oriza Hirata (*Tokyo Notto–Tokyo Notes*), among others. As such surveyors of the Tokyo theatre scene, Sasai’s audience would be much more attuned to inherent gender statements, and their implications in a wider context.

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6Oriza Hirata’s work deals with social issues through everyday human interactions in ordinary situations.
In this chapter I assert that Sasai’s performance/embodiment is very successful, both theatrically and theoretically. That is, his construction of the image of woman is not entirely dependent on the outer appearance of the performer. The body and the experience of the male actor can project a feminine image that transcends traditional cross-dressing conventions. Sasai can be a “woman” or an “actress.”

He does not simply impersonate women, but he has successfully played various roles written for and previously reserved for females. In doing so he does not usurp actresses. Directors who want to hire a woman for a role will do so. Sasai, and other neo-onnagata bring another aspect to the portrayal, not of being “like a woman,” but of evoking common constructions of femininity. They incorporate the tropes of feminine image. In short, they create an alternatively gendered creation that may shed new and transgressive meanings on a given role.

Of course, an actor needs a thorough understanding of “the rules” of kabuki (natural, aesthetic, traditional, historical, onnagata kata,7 etc.) to successfully transgress or change them. Sasai is a highly experienced actor who has studied the dance, movement, conventions, and aesthetics of the kabuki onnagata for years. He has done so with the goal of applying these techniques through his body in the contemporary

7Onnagata can literally be translated as “woman (onna) form (kata).” This can indicate not only the shape of a woman but also the movements and ways of training that inform the unique feminine impressions that the kabuki onnagata conveys. In her doctoral dissertation, The Kabuki Onnagata: a Feminist Analysis of the Onnagata Fiction of Female-likeness, Katherine Mezur has enumerated further conveyance of this pregnant concept of kata to include gestures, movements and ways of training that portray role types i.e. subsets of onnagata Woman types (the courtesan, the princess, the doomed lover, the disillusioned matron, etc.).
theatre. Sasai has taken part in various kabuki fusion experiments as well as classic kabuki pieces (done, of course, outside of the main dynastic venues), but even in his naturalistic contemporary work one notes his debt to kabuki training. He skillfully uses traditional methods to challenge tradition and to expand the possibilities for roles using cross-dressed actors.

It is through the clarifying discipline of that training that we can see the ever-present “phallic halo” that envelops the Japanese woman-image. To clarify, Japan is such a strongly patriarchal society that most institutions and constructions are defined through the minds and gaze of men. Women have historically had no power and so have subscribed to and invested in the male definition of their images. Kabuki onnagata represent one such image, a male ideal of grace and femininity. However, it is a conception that erases natural woman entirely from the equation. Scholar Rob Kim Baum discusses this erasure in *Forging Female Identity: the Performance of Metaphor and Absence*:

Absence, presence, persona. Tensions between them is the essential problem in performance. Presence is not the subjugation of absence, nor absence truly the absence of presence--such polarities reveal the conquest of Levi-Straussian binarism. Absence takes many forms: silence, invisibility, denial, death. Female identity is a record of absence.²

It is ironic that in celebrating the form and nobility of Woman, kabuki banishes her.

The neo-onnagata actor does not participate in this banishment. Males not born into kabuki families are excluded as well. In fact, the neo-onnagata provides an attractive alternative for directors who would consider cross-casting a role. The same director might well consider hiring a woman to play a man. It would not be in the purview of this study to pursue this idea but another examination could well trace the influences of rising otokogata (male form) or females who specialize in male-roles. This term has been coopted by the Takarazuka all-female troupes for many years. Some of their members have gone on to play other male roles outside of the Takarazuka. The troupes are very conservative and exclusive. Perhaps there are rising neo-otokogata looking to challenge the Takarazuka traditions and to provide alternative gendered portrayals as well. The patriarchal history of absenting and erasing woman need not be an inevitability for the future.

Drawing on his arsenal of technical training, Sasai Eisuke selects the tropes of (and thus can reinforce or subvert) feminine absence (read Lacanian lack, as juxtaposed with the primacy of masculine protrusive “presence”) that inform the historical Japanese woman-construction. He does this by eliminating the ancient idealizations and by contemporizing the kata (forms). What results is an impression of modern feminine grace and expression that is highly transformative, without the usual trappings. I believe that Sasai’s work is important not only because it expands the possibilities for cross-gendered representation, but because it shatters the bio-essential model. If a male can

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successfully evoke femininity without wigs and padding, then the construction of gender must be high transferable and not innate. The neo-onnagata’s work can be liberating for men as well, who can see in Sasai that there are other possibilities for male gendered behavior. Thus, Sasai Eisuke can be seen as a significant contributor to the ongoing performative exploration of gender. This chapter will present an overview of Sasai Eisuke’s work, his viability as a non-kabuki onnagata. It will examine his training and career through his roles and his developing.

Let me reiterate that Sasai Eisuke is a very different entity from Miwa Akihiro. As opposed to the flamboyant Miwa, who performs in a celebrity milieu and media framework, Sasai has sought from the outset to define himself as a pure, professional, theatrical artist. It is this gravity of Sasai’s work that has allowed him to assume the roles of women characters. He is thus, at once, both actor and actress, a male with widened professional and gendered possibilities.

Sasai Eisuke was born December 15, 1958 in the town of Ishikawa in Kanagawa prefecture. A sensitive boy, he wanted to please his parents and to find a place for himself in the world that suited his earnest, artistic temperament. For Sasai that meant embodying, in some way, the graceful images of beauty that so impressed him in his youth when he saw kabuki theatre. He had a great fascination with female form and beauty. His models included the kabuki stars of his day, the lovely Japanese nihon buyo dancers who gave concerts and added a lively, refined flavor to local festivals, and the seductive female images of the movies. Sasai has mentioned particular fascination with Miwa Akihiro as the eponymous villainess in Black Lizard. He also enjoyed Vivien Leigh (in the Elia Kazan film) and Sugimoto Haruko (on the Japanese stage) as Blanche.
Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. These roles and images represented the kind of woman image that the artistic young man wanted to express. They proved his singular, near obsessive focus. He determined early on that he would be an actor of women’s roles.

This decision assured an uncertain career path for Sasai. In the Japan of his youth there were not many honorable venues for such ambition. As Laurence Senelick has noted in *The Changing Room*, very few of the many young men after World War II who, due to inclination or orientation, “channeled” the femininity of the *onnagata* aesthetic have had the talent, stamina, or connections to become professionals in the legitimate kabuki world. Sasai was excluded from this world. He would have to be strong and focused in opening up other possibilities. Particularly, he sought a career that would also garner the social acceptance of the classic form. Young Sasai prepared for this by grounding himself in as much technique and knowledge of kabuki form and actor training as possible.

Sasai inaugurated his training at the Nihon University School of the Arts, one of very few actual theatre departments in the Japanese university system (Wasuda is the most notable). His adviser was kabuki teacher and contemporary theatre specialist Professor Hara Ippei. He recalls Sasai insisting on playing *onnagata* roles despite the

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Senelick 96.

While family ties, an accident of birth, remain crucial, it is not completely impossible for one not so favored to enter the dynastic tradition. In the absence of a male heir of sufficient inclination and talent, adoptions continue the line of an acting name. Present-day *onnagata* Bando Tamasaburoh is a conspicuous example.
obstacles. Hara, as Sasai’s sensei,\textsuperscript{12} did not, however, allow Sasai to play any female roles in student productions,\textsuperscript{13} but he nonetheless inculcated an elegance of form that has characterized Sasai’s professional work. Professor Hara is himself an actor and long-time scholar of kabuki form and text. He demonstrates the various kata and explains their purposes and uses. He also brings in role-specific artists of the amateur and professional kabuki theatre to personally give instruction. Most often this instruction is administered through long hours of exercise and rote imitation (until the body memorizes the form deeply). Such repetition is the established Japanese method in kabuki and all arts. As a result, students work very long hours after class in exhausting physical reiterations of the day’s presentations. Such intensive preparation and craftsmanship have distinguished Sasai’s work from his peers, provided him with a laser-like focus. This work has been Sasai’s cornerstone in paving the way for the respect he has gained from theatre artists and audiences.

After many student productions and noncommercial projects, Sasai broke into professional theatre in the early 1980s. In 1982, Sasai’s new version of the \textit{Sakurahime} (Cherry Blossom Princess) story was presented at Za-suzunari Theatre in Shimokitazawa (a few stops before Shinjuku along the Odakyu train line in Tokyo).

\textsuperscript{12}The honorific title “sensei” carries with it the sense of someone of learning or attainment. The holder of an advanced degree in a given area would qualify, as would someone uncredentialed but who is a well-respected expert and teacher. Occasionally, it is also bestowed on a mature individual of superior position. In this case, the term indicates not only a teacher but also a mentor.

\textsuperscript{13}Professor Hara says that, as his classes were co-ed, he felt compelled to give the women’s roles to females students. He wanted Sasai to have a thorough understanding of all the aspects of kabuki so that the young man could be certain that he wanted to attempt an onnagata career. To this day, Professor Hara attends Sasai’s productions and delivers pointers to his former charge.
“Shimo” (as it is locally known) is a small theatre and jazz bar mecca, much frequented by college students, artists, and serious theatre patrons.

Sasai’s love of kabuki and desire to be a working member of kabuki, despite the closed society of the professional traditional form, led him to develop what he called “New Kabuki.” What was “new” about this expression was a freedom from the established traditions and customs of the dynastic classical theatre. Sasai simplified and streamlined the gestures and onnagata image as he saw fit. In New Kabuki, he gave modern expression to classic female kabuki characters. He honed his style through three productions of the prototypical Sakurahime (Cherry Blossom Princess) story. This period was difficult for Sasai. His work met with much resistance, and his presumption was criticized. Nonetheless, this was a necessary learning time for him, an integral phase in his path to a professional onnagata career.

From 1984 to 1990, Sasai was able to work with the established theatre company founded by Kanou Yukikazu, the famous charismatic onnagata leader of Hanagumi Shibai (Flower Group Show). Kanou, had in a sense, followed a path similar to that of Sasai. However, Kanou had become absorbed in the creation, directing, and administration of his avant-garde group, a group dedicated to retelling traditional Japanese stories. They then gave modern commentary using multimedia and postmodern anachronism. He called his style “Neo-Kabuki.” That style is characterized by kabuki images, characters, themes, and kata (forms), radically transposed to contemporary situations. The performances of kabuki-like sensibilities are then
juxtaposed with anachronistic items and atmosphere. For example, a typical Neo-Kabuki production would feature bright fluorescent colors, cell-phones, flashing lights, computerized sound effects, and a frenetic video-game ambience. Of course, such a raucous performance attracts many young fans and very few older kabuki afficionados. In 1987, Kanou took the artistic leap from promotional “Office”\(^\text{14}\) to artistic producer when he changed his group’s name from Kanou Jimusho to Hanagumi Shibai. Their first production under the new name was the noh and kabuki vehicle *Za Sumidagawa* (The Sumita River), starring Kanou and Sasai. Hanagumi Shibai followed with the classic Japanese summertime ghost story, *Yotsuya Kaidan*. The story of androgynous boy *Kaitei Shintokumaru* (Shintokumaru Redux), produced in 1988, was significant in that the role of Shintokumaru had been performed by Miwa Akihiro in his youth. These productions established professional credentials and a body of work that evidenced his foundation in kabuki, though he was not imitating such an approach. This would be key in providing him and the form he was creating with a legitimacy that Sasai craved. He would not settle for a marginal career as oddity with limited role choices. He wanted to re-interpret women’s roles.

\(^{14}\text{The word “jimusho (office)” or the katakana (offisu) or the romaji (roman-lettered word) “office” after some name, usually the founder’s, in this usage indicates a promotional/talent agency. It may be the representational body of one group or individual or may incorporate a stable of talents. The actual implementation ranges from that of an artistic producer to that of a events scheduling mill.}\)
Of course, Sasai Eisuke had a great deal to prove. The onus rested with him to utilize the entre provided by Miwa and others to further legitimize the non-kabuki onnagata. He has wasted very little time in his artistic career. He has performed in one production after another, some overlapping, and has achieved a prodigious body of work. The year 1988 witnessed an acceleration in Sasai’s performance schedule. October of that year brought a most interesting project, _Teikoku AIDS no Gyakushu_ (Royal AIDS Retort or Revenge of the Imperial Aides). In this effort, Sasai performed with butoh fusion group Daisan Erotica and a dynamic combination of actors from other groups at the Parco corporate theatre. This work was significant in beginning a trend by Sasai away from updating of historical women’s roles toward work that dealt with contemporary human issues.

_Teikoku_ was considered a groundbreaking effort. It was one of the earliest plays in Japan to deal with the AIDS crisis. The overarching aesthetic template of the piece was an atmosphere of Gothic Romanticism in which a vampire family represents the AIDS epidemic. Sasai, who played a “vampire queen,” describes this story as “reminiscent of the work of Edogawa Rampo,” that is, it was mysterious and intricately

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15 The Parco is one of a group of theatres previously mentioned in this study that have been a part of the movement away from the small underground theatres of the 60s and 70s, the “gekidan” to a produced system, becoming increasingly commercialized. Sasai discusses this phenomenon in his book _Boku wa Onnagata_, referring to these venues as “chugekijo” (middle-sized theatre groups).
crafted. The production featured lavish costumes and was well-received. Sasai, however, has cited his acquaintanceship with fellow actor Otani Ryosuke of the Tokyo Ichigumi group as being the most important reward of the experience. Otani played the role of the young writer who was in love with Sasai’s character. Backstage, Otani engaged Sasai with stimulating disagreements and discussions about technique and methods. It was Otani’s belief that the actor should “totally submerge into the character,” whereas Sasai held that the actor should openly acknowledge his own presence and complicity in the final portrayal. That is to say, Sasai believes that he would rather honestly present his body to the audience than try to pretend that the audience doesn’t see him, Sasai, the actor playing a character.

 foregrounding the male actor body is an approach consistent with the acting and the progression in his craft that Sasai has exhibited throughout his career. He continues to experiment. He seeks ways to divest the costumes and trappings of convention in order to portray character and gender through movement and acting alone. His previous discussion with Otani, of course, revisits the ancient conversation that goes to the heart of what constitutes mimesis. How much of the actor becomes the character? What is the process and result that comes from “becoming” someone else? In the case of onnagata actors, there is a dissonance between the words of Ayame to kabuki onnagata (infuse your daily life with femininity, never refer to your masculine self, submerge yourself in the women you portray), and portrayals (in daily life or

\[16\] Sasai believes this to be true because the character this will always be a permutation filtered through the mind, physical being, and experience of the actor.
onstage) of a celebrity self (a la Miwa) that offer various slants on the grand and alluring personality of the personae. Sasai chooses neither, instead opting for a visually frank Sasai who sheds his usual gendered male personality, though not completely, to reveal strong, other feminine selves in the person of the character. Just as Miwa Akihiro had done before him, Sasai paves the way for other young men who have longed to experiment with the traditional forms in a cross-dressed professional career.

In 1989, Sasai continued in his kabuki experimentation with a fusion piece entitled *Kabuki-za no Kaijin* (Phantom of the Kabuki). This piece conflated the horror tale with kabuki image and technique. But it was in 1990 that his acting experience and philosophy met a new challenge when he encountered the epic work of Suzuki Tadashi. Suzuki’s method and subject matter demanded the depths of physical and emotional stamina for performers and caused Sasai to reflect upon and bolster his arsenal of technique and artistry.

To briefly summarize Suzuki’s style and training technique, one could call it another response to the 20th century Japanese theatre conversation of how to represent the Japanese body and Japanese cultural themes onstage. This ongoing debate reached its peak in the 1950s and 60s. Suzuki has discussed his ensuing conclusions on representation in his treatise on his actor training technique, *The Way of Acting*. He declares, in essence, the mesomorphic and generally short-limbed Japanese body is unsuitable for Western-style movement techniques. He believes that the Japanese body,
with a lower center of gravity, \(^\text{17}\) requires a more rooted approach to dance and theatrical movement. As a result, Suzuki work emphasizes a great deal of squatting and lower body workouts. The performer achieves mastery through rote exercise and painful training, not unlike that of Japanese sumo wrestling. Interestingly, Suzuki found this powerful and earthy style suitable to Greek tragedies: the style invested them with a rawness that evoked primal man and emotion. *Dionysos 1990* (an adaptation of the Euripidean *Bacchae*), commissioned for the opening of the Mito Museum, was a most difficult endeavor for all involved. It especially ran counter to the light and graceful movement processes that Sasai had previously employed.

In Sasai’s opinion, Suzuki actors are discouraged from depth or creativity. Sasai dealt with such a conclusion by approaching the training style as a regime, like kabuki (and even as Suzuki work being a kind of kabuki). On making that recognition, he found rehearsal more positive and productive. The entire experience resulted in work of a very high caliber and made him stronger as an *onnagata*. The effort taught him to open his mind to other ideas and to persevere through the rigor and adversity.

\(^{17}\)As mentioned before in Chapter Two, this was a most difficult endeavor for all involved, but especially ran counter to the process that Sasai had previously employed. Suzuki instructor Leon Ingulsrud has illustrated this with a dance analogy. He says that, whereas the Western ballet dancer is seek a lifting illusion of the body six inches of the ground, the Suzuki technique seeks to push the body six inches below the ground.
Throughout his career, Sasai has employed such instructive and singularly thoughtful attitudes. These disciplined approaches have resulted in an articulate explication of the performance climate in Japan, of the traditional attitudes toward gendered portrayals. In service to sharing that viewpoint with the public, he has clearly articulated his perception of the neo-onnagata mission and the nature of truth. Sasai writes:

Is theatre so important in this world? Maybe not. Onnagata are often confused with transvestites. What is the meaning of my work? At one point I felt bad for my parents having a boy who is so serious about such an occupation. But I want to keep myself noble and proud and classical. It’s true that I have to do taishu engeki (broad period drama or variety acts) on TV for money. But I have to be a murderer or pervert or anything to elevate my possibilities. If these things are considered to taint my art, then . . . let it be tainted. In addition, they all broaden my repertoire.

Let me explain what I consider onnagata to be: I am an onnagata who does everything (classical, shogekijo, avant-garde). My goal is to construct onnagata while shedding the outer trappings. Ultimately, if you want to understand my onnagata, see three productions of my productions. One won’t do.

People don’t really understand a non-kabuki transvestite. You are not in kabuki? Are you a transvestite? No? What are you? If one is a Miwa Akihiro, in your own category, people bow down and have no question. Maybe I’ll always be explaining and refining this.

Orthodoxy of all onnagata (as in the supposed legitimacy of only kabuki onnagata) is an illusion. If the woman played by a man has dramatic power, then that is the orthodoxy of that actor and that set of techniques. Truth is a fiction. The true essence of Woman-ness is itself a fiction. There is a tradition in this country to see Truth appearing from fiction.

That’s why I have to be a first-rate actor, and display nobility or else be a disgrace to all onnagata in history. Too many professional
actors don’t know anything and don’t want to learn. They should have an attitude of shame about being young and ignorant. Worst of all is an actress who is proud of simply being a woman. Japanese actors shouldn’t receive any money if they know nothing of the classical arts of Japanese theatre or even seen theatre productions or how to fold kimono! All training should involve these arts. They currently focus too much on dancing and singing.

Japanese theatre is ultimately for Japanese actors and the Japanese audience. The Japanese language and arts are beautiful and the future should build on the glory of the past. Noh, kabuki, bunraku, nihon buyo, shimpa, opera, dance, little theatre, Shakespeare; I like them all.\(^{18}\)

This passage conveys the essence of all that Sasai believes; these are the precepts that have guided his work and career. Note the struggle, obviously an ongoing one, to distinguish himself from the transvestite and drag queen. Sasai renounces the low status designations of street drag as images that have brought little social acceptance. Significantly, he voices his absolute dedication and commitment to his art, despite his circuitous route (sometimes doing blatantly commercial work to gain recognition and money) in achieving this goal. Most importantly, Sasai isolates “woman-ness” as a construction and an illusion. He grounds his work in his ability to manipulate the inherent fluidity of gender and the perceptions of Japanese people (who think of gender as fixed). Finally, he admonishes other actors for insufficient commitment and discipline. He enthusiastically considers the possibilities of building on Japanese tradition in contemporary ways. Note that Sasai groups Shakespeare with Japanese traditional arts, a yoking that is not entirely incongruous. Shakespearean production took deep root in

\(^{18}\)Translated from Sasai words.
Japan at the turn of the century and again immediately after World War II. It has been advanced as its own entity and tradition, in the inimitable Japanese way of symbiotic adaptation, expanding the definition of “Japanese theatre.”

The vision that Sasai Eisuke has for cross-gendered career legitimacy is notable in that it furthers both the discussions on gender and the evolution of the classic tradition. Thus, in his work, he continues to pave the way for other artists who seek to broaden their own possibilities. He reconstructs classic narratives as well as contemporary theater pieces (with gender fluidity and modern issues) with his deconstructed version of the kabuki onnagata. I use this term “deconstructed” because, as Katherine Mezur pointed out, the kabuki onnagata depends entirely on adornment, costume, and the kabuki framework to effect convincing portrayal. Sasai, on the other hand, is using various kabuki techniques to evoke natural, un-stylized femininity. But he strips away the outer trappings to reveal a male who asserts femininity and then dares to challenge female roles. In doing so, he redefines the other-gendered quality of the onnagata, marking out new territory of his own and other non-kabuki actors like him.

Sasai continued this direction in the 1990s. As actor and director, he displayed his work in a one-man show, Hana no Akegata (The Edge of Dawn, 1990) at Shinjuku’s Theatre Tops. The primary aim of this production was to introduce and explain the nature of his work as a non-kabuki onnagata. Of course, the vehicle was both artistic and fascinating. Sasai played a historical onnagata who danced the role of kabuki onnagata stalwart Musume Dohjohji (Dohjohji Temple Girl). This sequence is an infamous dance drama of a snake-demoness with terrifying sexual energy. The central character of the piece is Sanze Sawamura Tanosuke, the genius onnagata who lived from the end of the Edo Period to the beginning of the Meiji. The character is a figure with whom Sasai strongly identifies.

In addition, Sasai played the role of a prostitute who loved Tanosuke. In the last scene, Sasai again portrayed Tanosuke as the infamous historical onnagata who, after having lost both hands and both feet, played his onnagata creations with a fan or hibashi (metal chopsticks designed for picking up pieces of hot charcoal) in his mouth. This tour de force continued to establish Sasai’s expertise and roots in firm theatrical tradition.

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20 For more on this intriguing historical figure, see Samuel Leiter’s Kabuki Encyclopedia.

21 Sawamura was a great star of his day, with celebrated skills in the art of onnagata construction and great popularity. However, due to gangrene infection he eventually had to have all of his extremities amputated. He remained undaunted and became even more renowned, not unlike Sarah Bernhardt did in much the same way. Noted for his beautiful look and voice, he was one of the greatest luminaries of his age.
At this juncture, Sasai Eisuke was thirty-one years old. He had done a one-person show in 1987 at Jean-Jean (the site of one of Miwa’s first appearances) entitled Memeshiyatsu (Womanish). This production had previously featured a female actor. The challenge of taking on a female role, written for actresses, was a growth experience, an exercise in strict discipline. After that milestone, Sasai could truly claim the title of onnagata with impunity. It has been a career choice that has increasingly successful as directors are now considering Sasai among actresses when casting a show.

In tracing the trajectory of Sasai’s career, one notes that he repeatedly follows in the work and venues of Akihiro Miwa. This is not unlike a young male actor taking on Hamlet or Stanley Kowalski. When a character or actor becomes iconic, one way for others of similar talent and ambition to step out of that shadow is to make their own mark in the same work. Sasai could gain stature with his own kind of theatre by achieving a visibility comparable to that of Miwa’s as neo-onnagata. In my interviews with Sasai, he has related that he sees himself and Miwa as in the same category, as contemporary onnagata, albeit of different temperaments and agendas. For this reason, as homage and challenge, he has taken on a great deal of the territory and productions that had been associated with Miwa. This has included the work of Miwa’s friend, the late Mishima Yukio.

Interestingly, Miwa does not recognize Sasai in the same way, preferring to characterize himself as entirely unique.
In fact, in September of 2000, Sasai put his stamp firmly on the past and future with the deconstructed treatment of *Kurotokage* (Black Lizard) entitled *Jozoku* (Lady Thief), by Hashimoto Osamu.\(^{23}\) This production, as previously detailed in Chapter Three, emphasized the iconic potential of present day neo-onnagata. It established a link with a grand diva of past film and stage production, the Miwa Akihiro of a stylized youth. *Jozoku* serves as a contemporary vehicle for critique of the past through present ironic commentary and social examination. This revisiting of the *Kurotokage* story and its incarnations proved that Sasai had carved a place in the multiple reflections of the Black Lizard legacy for himself. He had successfully stepped out of the shadow of Miwa by making his own mark on this and other of Miwa’s most famous roles. This point might suggest that Sasai has been obsessed or competitive about Miwa’s place in the neo-onnagata milieu. But, in fact, Sasai himself has always admired Miwa and is grateful for his work. Nevertheless, Sasai has had to struggle to prove his worth to a public who places Miwa as the standard for contemporary theatrical cross-dressing.

Sasai has not only had to deal with the hardened views of a strictly gendered culture, but with his own inculcated attitudes about challenging the status quo. Sasai Eisuke experienced a career crisis and daunting challenge with his role in the 1990

\(^{23}\)The English translation of *Jozoku* is supplied in Appendix V.
production of Mishima’s *Madame De Sade*. This trial took place at the Mito Museum with a French director who had previously directed the show with a French cast in 1986. The piece used five male cross-dressed actors but featured Sasai as *onnagata*. Written for actresses, *Madame De Sade* has usually employed characters portrayed in the period that the Marquis de Sade lived. The director’s idea was to juxtapose actors cross-dressed (in Western clothing) with Sasai. Sasai would perform the wife of De Sade as the role would be played by a kabuki *onnagata*. Sasai did not entirely agree with this interpretation. He had a difficult time with the director. There were arguments over how to wear the wigs, whether to use the *janome* (Japanese oilcloth parasol) with Western clothing, among other things. Sasai believed the director tried to inject too many “Japanesque” qualities. He thought that the idea was unclear and the director had lost control of her vision.

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Sasai had a terrible experience in the production. This may not be so uncommon among actors, but the effort threatened to end Sasai’s career. On the day of performance, as he was getting ready to go onstage as Madame De Sade, he saw his image in a large mirror in the wings. Suddenly, an

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24 *Madame De Sade* was first introduced in 1966 and later written about extensively by theatre critic and academic Shibusawa Tatsuhiko. In the play, Mishima examined the character of the Marquis de Sade from the standpoint of his wife.

25 *Professional woman-portrayer* as opposed to “cross-dressed actor.”
overwhelming feeling of being mittomonai--shabby, unbecoming, making a fool of himself--swept over him. He began to despair that his vision of the contemporary onnagata would never gain legitimacy. His work all seemed a cruel joke, particularly in this role that had been played by so many so many noteworthy actresses (as previously noted by Shibusawa in his writings). Sasai-san suffered great doubt and shame when he saw himself in that mirror. Nonetheless, he had to go onstage. The choice was either to run away and renounce his lifework or to ignore his shame and proceed. Of course, he went on. Sasai confirms that it was this moment when he truly knew that his was a deeply legitimate undertaking--in Japanese: otoko issho no shigoto, a “man’s lifetime work.” This would be his oyakoko (filial duty of making one’s parents proud). The sentiment that Sasai evinces reveals a kind of irony. We note a contemporary gender portrayer reifying attitudes of Japanese traditional patriarchal culture. But, in all contexts, a big part of being Japanese has to do with embodying, in embrace or in rebellion, the legacies of Confucian ethics. Sasai has learned well how to be a good Asian man. He has a strong cultural identity and an assigned sexual body within which he is happy and well adjusted. These are important grounding points. Sasai is not rootless or “confused.” He is a male who works within society in his personal life. He is a neo-onnagata in his work and as such embodies a different gendered territory.

So, is Sasai part of an oppressive patriarchy? Sasai is a man in a male dominated world. But, as a gay male brought up in a heterosexual male society, Sasai understands
the mechanisms of female oppression. As such, he can conceivably have more credibility, catching the ears of men and women to reveal that gender roles have greater latitude than previously thought. Does he coopt Woman for masculinist aims? He does not. Sasai opens new possibilities for both women and men in forging new gendered possibilities.

Sasai’s challenges along the way in his career were trials that tempered the disciplined artist that Sasai has become. Following the experience of the Madame De Sade production Sasai unabashedly sought to fulfill the his original goal, that of embodying the images of his childhood dreams. He performed the Miwa vehicles Kegawa no Marie (Marie in Furs) and Kurotokage (Black Lizard) in 1998. They were important accomplishments in their nod, yet again, to the spirit and work of ongoing ice-breaker Miwa Akihiro. Classical nihon buyo dance concerts, such as his 1999 Mishikawa-ryu Nagoya Odori, have continued his licensed training in the traditional forms.

During a “live chat” at the Osaka MM Theatre in 1991, Sasai notoriously declared that "every man has a woman inside of him." This declaration begged various interpretations, all highly consequential to the gender fluidity that Sasai expresses. Naturally, his remark did not mean that he was a trans-sexual. He was making a statement about gendered perception, that masculinity or femininity, however they may be culturally expressed, is not bio-essential. In addition, Sasai’s homosexuality comes into play. Sasai has not been political or vocal in terms of his own orientations (again in context to the forthrightness of Miwa). But in this statement, one could also read that
Sasai considers affiliational preference to be unfixed, and configured along a fluid continuum. Of course, the “woman” he spoke of could also be seen as representative of the images he had harbored since his youngest days. Among those was the powerful impression of Blanche Dubois.

As I related previously, there are certain roles that represent a rite of passage for actors. Some of these roles are culturally specific; some are personal to the actor for some reason. Blanche Dubois is a universal icon. The role represented a very personal choice for Sasai. Arguably Williams’ most powerful and well-drawn character, Blanche Dubois impressed Sasai Eisuke indelibly when he saw her on film and on stage as a young boy. He was overwhelmed with a feeling of desire to portray her as an adult. Moreover, this very well-known role, performed by actors of a certain high caliber, would allow him to distinguish himself from other cross-dressed actors, particularly Miwa. A carefully drawn portrayal of Blanche with a sympathetic director could be the culmination of his neo-onnagata aim to portray contemporary women using his carefully acquired acting techniques.

Director Suzuki Katsuhide had proposed that Sasai finally seize the opportunity of portraying Blanche, but production rights were withdrawn after their initial granting. The estate had discovered that Blanche was to be performed by the male Sasai Eisuke. No cross-dressed performer of the role had ever been officially sanctioned, following the expressed wishes of Tennessee Williams. Williams naturally looked at his work through the lens of his time and through his own experience. In 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s America, cross-dressing was the domain of freaks and pitiable losers. In his work and life, Williams privileged the virile male character (Stanley, Big Daddy, Valentine Xavier in Orpheus
Descending) and the strong feminine woman (Blanche, Maggie the Cat, Amanda), homoerotic overtones notwithstanding. His few homosexual characters (Skipper of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, the consumptive Nightingale in Vieux Carre) are all peripheral characters who end badly. The one cross-dressed character he features, Lot—in Kingdom of Earth—only cross-dresses briefly and then dies of tuberculosis. Such portrayals likely reflected Williams’ self-loathing over his own orientation. But, that aside, he was no stranger to the aspects of the homosexual subculture, including weekend drag-shows. The arch humor and appropriation of gay female icons, larger-than-life characters like Eve (Bette Davis in All About Eve), likely led him to see Blanche as a tempting target for the same treatment. From this viewpoint, he could not legitimize such mockery with his imprimatur.

The Williams’ estate blocked the production of Streetcar as vehicle for Sasai to play Blanche. Nothing could be done for the time being though the project would not be discarded. The production was postponed until the estate would consent. Since rehearsal had begun and the theatre was already booked, the director quickly wrote Ginryuso (Silver Dragon Plant), a play he had already outlined with Sasai in mind. The play was performed at the Aoyama Enke Gekijo in 1992. Sasai-san starred in the role of Fumi, the wife in Ginryuso, with no dress, wig, or female make-up. It was a tremendous challenge to the onnagata actor and represented his purest exploration of gender questions. The performance offered a direct examination of the question of what exactly is needed to convey femininity or femaleness onstage; does a theatre audience have to see artifacts in order invest belief in a cross-gendered portrayal?
Sasai suspected early in his career that the skill of the actor would prove the key to a successful gender portrayal, apart from any outer trappings. He had a certain ability to create credible female characters based on his kabuki onnagata training. The role of Fumi confirmed this idea in the positive audience reception. As an onnagata actor striving for acceptance, this response was affirming. Sasai knew that his experiments were yielding positive work and critical acclaim, on a small scale. He believed that he could now apply the principles of cross-dressing minimalism to other female characters that he had longed to play, especially Blanche.

Portraying Blanche represented an ultimate challenge for Sasai. In preparing for this role, he came to consider his work in relation to other neo-onnagata and evaluated what bonded him to them and what set him apart. As explanation of Sasai’s vision, Sasai’s own words best convey his ideas about onnagata and about Blanche Dubois:

Miwa Akihiro is a rare contemporary onnagata. He has an activist/resistance mentality. Bando Tamasaburou is a genius kabuki onnagata. With talent and work he has created a renaissance in kabuki. I understand them and their happiness and unhappiness. If I dare to be in their category it is because our lives mutually are devoted to this art of the stage. Life is a stage; in these cases life and art are interchangeable. For me, as well there is happiness, but it is a lot of work . . . Naturally, I have a lifelong dream of playing Blanche in Streetcar. It has always been my dream. It’s well-written and universal. Who would not want to? Streetcar has always had a great appeal in Japan. It is my personal view that Blanche’s insistence on old-style traditions and pride, while at the same time being tainted, are consonant with the ideals of contemporary onnagata. And then, of course there’s the tragic ending, like that of traditional onnagata in kabuki. I was turned down to portray this role but if T. W. were alive I would go to him personally and I think he would understand and allow me to play this role.\(^26\)

\(^{26}\)Interview.
Miwa Akihiro has long had an interest in French culture but has never felt inclined toward American work.\textsuperscript{27} Sasai Eisuke, on the other hand, always played a variety of roles and saw Blanche Dubois as a tragic heroine that he would love to portray. Now an established artist, confident in his artistry, Sasai felt ready to meet the challenges of playing Williams’ most infamous heroine. In early 2001, he and his director had re-petitioned the Williams estate, this time sending press clippings and photos to confirm Sasai’s reputation. In a historic turn, the estate agreed and on September 7, 2001, Sasai Eisuke finally was able to fulfill a dream by playing Blanche in a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The production opened at the Aoyama Round Theatre in Tokyo. Directed by his old collaborator Suzuki Katsuhide, the show featured ex-Takarazuka actress Kuze Seika co-starred as Stella. Ex-boy “idoru”\textsuperscript{28} Kase Taishu played Stanley. The production was an entirely unique attempt to bring *Streetcar* and its themes into a contemporary understanding of a mythical Japanese New Orleans. The results were mixed.

A few weeks prior to the opening, I wrote a blind preview of the show for *RealTokyo*, a Tokyo art events web magazine. The piece appeared in the “RealTokyo Four Weeks” column. In my writing, I attempted to convey to a mass audience the historic and theatrical possibilities. There was also a mandate to point up the

\textsuperscript{27}There was actually one appearance at La Mama in New York. Miwa appeared in Terayama Shuji’s *La Marie Vision* when it opened at the small experimental theatre on July 8, 1970.

\textsuperscript{28}The natural trajectory of a male actor in Japan frequently involves being first launched as a *bishonen*, or beautiful boy, as a member of a singing group, a commercial model, or a television star’s sidekick. As he ages, he is given more substantial acting responsibilities, providing that he has a modicum of talent \textit{and} the ability to conform to the proscribed social script.
entertainment value of this gendered portrayal. I began by re-introducing *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the character of Blanche Dubois. Blanche was situated as an iconic Japanese image by recalling the famous portrayals of Dubois by Sugimura Haruko in the 1953 Bungakuza Tokyo (and Asian) premiere. Sugimura was said to have played the role “wistfully” and went on to play the role to eager audiences for thirty years, pleasing critics into her late seventies. I then introduced Sasai Eisuke, particularly to the English-speaking public who probably would not be familiar with Sasai’s career. In doing so, I stressed that Sasai worked as a cross-dressed performer and that he would probably be performing sans wig and padding; they could anticipate a bold portrayal. In doing so, I challenged the public to come and judge whether this technique would prove successful. My challenge was this:

. . . will Sasai’s Blanche be padded, wigged, and in feminine garb or will he dare to convince us of Blanche’s moth-like qualities and femininity with nuance and acting alone? How will Sasai’s dream manifest itself? There is risk of utter failure or thrilling success. Come join me there and find out.29

Sasai’s performance revealed, in fact, the natural progression of his technical and emotional expertise on the stage. This was a *Streetcar* with Blanche firmly at the helm. Unfortunately, the director’s general vision and most of the supporting cast were less


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than capable of meeting the demands of this difficult show. The old question of whether
*Streetcar* is about Stanley or about Blanche had no equivocation here.

Given the nature of Tokyo theatre in the year 2000, one can understand the
reason for the uneven casting; the overall event was a disappointment but not a surprise.
Because of the enormous urban population of Tokyo, most of whom have some degree
of disposable income, the arts thrive according to highly specialized commercial rules.
Given certain venues, certain producers, and certain key actors with followings like
Sasai, a production will always sell out. One might think that this would prove a license
for creativity. Sometimes that is the case, but more often the producer tries to limit the
budget. One common strategy is to showcase one major star surrounded by actors with
smaller numbers of niche fans. That was the case in the production of *Streetcar*.

Further, what is a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* without desire?
Stanley’s sexual energy is essential to the casting. In this case, a boy was sent to do a
man’s job. Actor Kuse is a handsome young leading man but lacks the acting chops or
charisma to give the role its due. In the absence of a strong Stanley, as engine of desire,
Blanche seemed on a path to ruin from the very outset, unassisted by any of the agents
(Stanley, Mitch) introduced in the play.
The alter-ego of Blanche, the old Mexican Flower peddler (Death to Blanche’s Desire) was replaced with a character called “Strange Man” (and he was). I was mystified by his actions and presence. He gibbered in French (why? Because it’s the “French Quarter”? ) and generally interrupted the proceedings, giving arch glances to the characters and audience, who froze in tableaux when he appeared. He opened and ended the show and was an altogether irritating framing device. In addition to this unnecessary character, other distractions had negative effects: breaks in dynamic tension, an absence of any element of New Orleans, loud rock music, and a generally weak supporting cast marred the generally bittersweet effect of the production.

However, for Sasai Eisuke, his individual performance was a great success. His role was not only a tribute to his own lifetime of preparation and culmination of his technique, but an homage to the two actresses from the West and East who defined the role in the Japanese mind: Vivian Leigh and Sugimura Haruko. Touches of both inhabited the characterization. Sugimura acted with a certain formality and stylization; Leigh invested the role with a barely restrained passion. It was, however, Sasai’s innovation to apply his minimalism to the role. He did so both in terms of spare visual signs of femininity and a delicate balance of appropriate Japanese sensibilities.

In this presentation of Streetcar, Sasai Eisuke used long-honed kabuki gestural techniques—feminine lowering of the eyes, shifting of the body angle, head, and neck—to...
show a woman desperately trying to hold onto human amenities and politesse through a fog of crisis and mental debilitation. This, in combination with very skillful (minimal and unisex) costuming effects, created a very stylized yet natural Blanche Dubois, with a quiet strength at core (beneath her nervous disposition). One sensed that Blanche would weather the storm of her psychological decay and rise eventually from the ashes. Looking at the play from the standpoint of the 1940s setting, Blanche had to suffer a penalty for her moral lapses, especially as a “bad woman.” But, I think that Sasai’s performance was more consistent with how Williams described his sense of Blanche. The playwright said in an interview years after the first production that he believed in Blanche’s strength, that she would serve time in a mental ward, be released, and open up a small dress shop in the French Quarter.

Of course, Sasai set the tone for the overall production and met what his collaborator Suzuki was trying to do. Suzuki’s clear intent was to update the production and to relieve it of accrued expectations and metaphors. Despite the failure of that idea as applied in this case, there are good reasons for a “de-sexualizing” of the play in Japan. Generally speaking, a Western play not reduced in “emotional pitch” will always seem unnatural to the Japanese audience. When early Japanese actors performed in Western plays, they often carried mimesis of Western physiognomy and emotional states to unbelievable extremes. Such portrayal is culturally incorrect for a Japanese audience. According to Japanese culture, passion is transferred through subtlety--blushes, and the eyes--rather than through kisses and bodily contact.

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30See discussion in Chapter One of theatre history in the Early Showa period.
In a nuanced performance, Sasai was able to transmit emotion eloquently in using the traditional kabuki conventions. Such gesture includes the onnagata lowering the eyes when overcome by emotion (such as when Sasai’s Blanche first sees Stanley). Later, when Blanche and Stella are discussing Stella’s physical love for Stanley (“I almost go crazy when he’s away for a week!”), Sasai used the kabuki device of biting a handkerchief, a famous code gesture of female erotic desire. Also, Sasai cupped his hands, folded his body, slightly turned, lowered the shoulders, and moved at all times, so that the arena audience had, not the impression of a flat male body, but a graceful slender woman. These are the very devices that scholar Katherine Mezur notes as quintessential to the kabuki onnagata.

The kabuki onnagata make great general use of the fan and other items of apparel (hats, sleeves, scarves) to convey emotion. So too did Sasai, in using his hands and some small bags. But, it was the wonderful idea to extend the sleeves on all of Sasai’s shirts that most demonstrated a kabuki application. The traditional floor-length sleeves of the furisode kimono serve as device for a variety of kabuki onnagata conveyances: in dance, as symbols for stage props, as coded gestures. But, a practical application is that they can minimize the size of the male actor’s hands, so that the actor can partially withdraw them, in keeping with the look of a small dainty female. Sasai kept his hands such that most of the time we could only see the fingers.

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31The furisode kimono is emblematic of an unmarried young woman, and is often brightly colored. After marriage, or after a certain age, kimono with shorter sleeve lengths and subdued colors prevail.
Williams was famous for his detailed descriptions of visual elements and metaphoric references for his characters. In *Streetcar*, Blanche is described as being ephemeral in her delicacy, suggestive of a moth.\(^{32}\) To that end, she is frequently costumed in white or off-white lace or chiffon. It was the stunning innovation of this production to dress her in flowing black, while all other characters wore white. She arrived tarnished, sooty, and in a state of sin. The exchange when Mitch confronts Blanche with her past was thus given tremendous resonance:

Mitch: Didn’t you stay at a place called The Flamingo?

Blanche: Flamingo? No! Tarantula was the name of it! I stayed at a hotel called the Tarantula Arms!

Mitch [*stupidly*]: Tarantula?

Blanche: Yes, A big spider! That’s where I brought my victims. . . .\(^{33}\) As a “Black Widow,” she conveyed a mortal trajectory to her unraveling and decline. She also evoked the character, sadly erased in this production, of the Grim Reaper/Mexican flower vender who sells flowers in memory of dead loved ones.

Of course, kabuki makes strong use of color symbology. The Shinto bridal kimono is white. When Sasai took the arm of the old doctor at the end, there was a sense of “marching down the aisle,” heading somewhere special. Of course, the kimono used for ritual suicide is also white, as is the burial kimono. As in the West, white bespeaks purity.

\(^{32}\)Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 5.

\(^{33}\)Ibid, 146.
Significantly, Sasai wore no wig and no padding to suggest breasts. Rather, unisex shirts were shirred up the center or artfully draped for womanly curvature. At the same time, trousers were clearly in evidence, with shoes that could have been worn by either sex. The presence of the actor’s maleness, his penis-bearing body, was never denied. Rather, his pseudo-femininity secured the common gaze, female and male.

The production evidenced a most effective switch of the costume color palate in Scene Ten. When Stanley Kowalski returns home (on the evening of his child’s birth) to a barely coherent Blanche, rather than foreshadow the impending rape with red silk pajamas, Stanley changes into a black T-shirt. In the next scene, all characters had changed into black except for Blanche, who appeared in angelic white. Thus, all had been tainted by their complicity in Blanche’s undoing, and Blanche was redeemed by her holy insanity, her complete sacrifice to the ideals of love and beauty. After she uttered her famous declaration of reliance on “the kindness of strangers,” she seemed radiant and beatific, walking upward to another world. Sasai moved very slowly here, with a delicacy and economy of gesture. The Blanche of the Sasai/Suzuki production was finally so tender, so fragile, as to transubstantiate.

As in kabuki, the audience was always complicitly aware that the character (Blanche) present on stage was the actor (Sasai Eisuke). There was a “capitalization,” to use Ortolani’s description of kabuki onnagata technique, of the constant migration of audience’s attention from performer to character and back. The audience was aware of Sasai as an actor but was nonetheless drawn into the Blanche woman image he

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34Ortolani, The Japanese Theatre, 192.
conveyed. In kabuki, the entire atmosphere, set, tradition, and of course, costuming, support the illusion of the onnagata. Yet, through brilliant acting, Sasai made viewers want to embrace the naturalistic character’s emotional truth and portrayed identity, despite the boldly present and only slightly cross-adorned Sasai before them. A new definition of gendered portrayal was made manifest. This is the real meaning and apex of virtuosity in the neo-onnagata.

To conclude, I pose the question: what has Sasai Eisuke’s work meant for gender examination? The words from his memoir, Boku wa Onnagata, are significant: “Who am I? I am a pure theatre being. I am an actor who is an onnagata. I am a channel for essence (of Woman).” The words “pure,” “channel,” and “essence” stand apart as key aspects of what Sasai represents. His minimalism, the stripping away of cross-dressing conventions of costume, can be read thusly: gender is readily transferable, a construction, a performance not of apparatus, but of the body. In other words, an unadorned male body can be read as “female.” Perhaps a better way of saying it is that what creates “woman-ness” is largely dictated by conventions and constructions. Biological males have access to the traditionally feminine, both onstage and off. Thus, men can enjoy a wider range of social role possibilities. This is the kind of work that Sasai continues. It is of a caliber that has gained him wide respect in the Japanese theatre and a growing recognition from a wider audience, who are beginning to understand the

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35Sasai, Boku wa Onnagata, 91.
concept of the neo-onnagata as offered by Sasai. The theatre, as metaphor of life performance, provides a laboratory for examination of questions on sex-role and gender specificity. Sasai Eisuke’s art points to further evidence of the non-fixity of gender, of femininity, a socially constructed ideocept. In various forms, this is the work of all neo-onnagata.
Chapter 6
Other Crossings

She was not so much a woman as a walking work of art, a compilation of symbols and markers of eroticism, as far removed from a human being as a bonsai is from a natural tree.

Japan scholar Lesley Downer, on first glimpse of a Kyoto maiko (apprentice geisha).¹

Nothing in man [sic]—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men [sic].

Michel Foucault, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”²

The neo-onnagata presented thus far in this study offer very different performances, but they are linked by a professional dedication to a contemporary feminine depiction born of a classical performance base. Sasai Eisuke may be among a coterie of the most artistically “pure” of neo-onnagata representatives. That is to say, he has the specific goal of conveying female roles in the serious contemporary theatre. He continues to grow in reputation and popularity in theatre circles but will probably never achieve the visibility of Miwa Akihiro. Sasai specializes in complex characters and refrains from generally asserting his personality. Sasai’s audience, too, is specific, literate, thirsty for provocative professional theatrical performance. They search beyond the surface for meaning and questions.

Without doubt, Miwa Akihiro is the most well known of contemporary cross-dressers, the Mother of all neo-onnagata to the Japanese public at large. His audience has placed him among the pantheon of media faces in the conservative Japanese


²Foucault “Nietzsche . . .” 153.
entertainment world. With little more to prove (and much indebted to his various media sponsors), Miwa may find that his options for change or alternative exploration are limited by public and corporate expectation.

Sasai and Miwa are the two pillars of the neo-onnagata. One has taken the path of media visibility and of personality-driven celebrity; the other has concentrated on being a serious artist on the professional stage. Their efforts have opened doors for a range of others who explore feminine depiction outside of the kabuki mainstream.

As I have established Miwa Akihiro and Sasai Eisuke as the prototypes for my definition of the neo-onnagata, I look to them to provide the models for all others. From that standpoint, in this chapter, I note two other neo-onnagata that warrant examination. They are actors Furuhashi Teiji, co-founder of the art-performance collective Dumbtype, and Umezawa Tomio, a performer of downtown Tokyo “people’s kabuki.” Both have evoked the feminine image from their professional works. The question arises as to how such disparate players can be unified under the neo-onnagata appellation. Thus, I propose two categories from which to view and evaluate the work of male cross-dressing performers who have influenced contemporary Japanese theatre and performance. These two groupings fall under two rubrics: “popular acclaim,” as Miwa Akihiro has achieved, and “high art,” in the case of Sasai Eisuke. Using these designations, I will analyze each neo-onnagata actor along a popular/high art continuum. I will also attempt to describe each actor’s unique statement. In some cases, I have no more information than a clipping and have not seen their work. Still, they will be mentioned as neo-onnagata who may be doing noteworthy
performances. My intention in this chapter is to show that many performers from different viewpoints can fit under the wide umbrella of the neo-onnagata designation.

While these designations may seem to indicate a hierarchy, I do not view them that way. They are culturally and temporally arbitrary. “High art” is where experiment may be done, serious and complex portrayals undertaken, incisive social critique pointedly given. Popular art bridges a way of gaining acceptance for male cross-dressed actors, and influencing gendered roles in greater society. High art is the area for theory, popular art is the realm of broad practice.

The two areas have their limitations. The serious actor who only engages in esoteric work may find himself a marginal figure, or no influence, speaking to a coterie of like-minded people. The actor who only courts popularity risks banality. Both serious work and public acceptance are necessary for the neo-onnagata performer to make a plausible statement that is artistic, heard and internalized by the audience. Only in that way can the neo-onnagata be a force in influencing gendered society.

I have noted various neo-onnagata performers who have very different agendas and audiences, even different genres of work. A quick recounting reveals a wide range. Internationally, performance artists Ohno Kazuo and Daimon Shiro have captured the attention of theatre-goers and scholars, who see such innovative work as building from a primitive Japanese artistic heritage, the primal origins myths.

Nonagenarian artist Ohno Kazuo was one of the founders of the unique Japanese dance performance butoh, which concerns itself with the themes of birth, sex, and death, in macabre concert with ancient Japanese mythology. Ohno typically wears
the rotting shards of an old dress of his dead mother’s and literally speaks of “channeling” her through his rice-whitened and grotesque butoh body. His evocation of feminine presence depicts Woman as a metaphor of the natural cycles, the progenitor of birth and sexual energies and the gate-keeper of death. Ohno has attracted the fascination of dance and theatre audience and scholars for his artistic vision and purity, but his field has remained highly esoteric. The average Japanese or American does not know his name or his work, though he has greater recognition in Europe. This is not atypical for Japanese artists. For various reasons, the general public of Japan and the United States like “light” theatre, one that does not challenge preconceived values (generally aimed at the least common denominator in experience and attention span). In addition, Japan has often not valued artists working in new areas until after they make a name abroad. Ohno’s work has resisted public attention; it does not translate well to television or corporate sponsorship and generally remains a fascination of the dance and theatre elite. Ohno Kazuo typifies high art performance of the purest caliber.

Another high artist, kabuki and noh fusionist Daimon Shiro, is also more well known outside of Japan. In his Salome Komachi, he appeared in the title role as Salome. Robed only in a loincloth, his revealed male body was said to have been in strange union with his feminine portrayal.\(^3\) Both artists have been active in their long careers, and are much documented. Neither is exclusively dedicated to the female depiction, but both have utilized a feminine embodiment as an on-going theme,

\(^3\)Senelick, Changing 100.
experimenting with the female image in a synthesis of tradition and the avant-garde. Thus, they seem to perform in the neo-onnagata realm.

In fact, there are many Japanese performers who situate themselves somewhere along a gender spectrum, whose image choices may either consciously or unconsciously transgress traditional notions of sex-role coding and gender. Sasai Eisuke has cited actor/singer⁴ “Peter” (reportedly adopted from “Peter Pan”) as being another prominent para-kabuki onnagata. He is a popular cross-dressed male⁵ seen frequently in the Japanese media, primarily on television. International cinema fans may have seen him as the Fool in Kurasawa Akira’s 1985 epic Ran, the award-winning samurai King Lear. Another performer, perennial Rocky Horror Picture Show veteran and gender-fucker “Rollie,” has taken a musical variety act on the road (promoting a new album) with a new soft look, appearing at the jazz venue Liquid Room in Tokyo (Oct. 2001). The aforementioned cross-dressing artists have integrated cross-dressing into their lives and work in complex ways that may function more as personal choices or entertainment distinctions than ongoing quests for new or changed feminine portrayals. Rollie is a popular entertainer who has parleyed his transvestism into a musical and theatre career.

⁴Most performers in Japan are “singers” or incorporate music into their work in some way. Sasai may be one of the few I have known of that is just purely an actor.

⁵He may be a transsexual. The body is deemed as an individual’s private concern and not often openly discussed in Japan. Certainly, Peter looks and acts very much like a chromosomal woman. The voice is the one indicator otherwise. (But, then how about the rumbling tones of Patricia Neal? Sylvia Sidney? Eileen Heckert? Mercedes McCambridge? Shiraishi Kayoko?)
As for Peter, I am intrigued and look to find out more about him in the future. I may discover some serious philosophy and stage work in his resume.

In this chapter on “other crossings,” I would like to examine two performers who fit the criteria I’ve established for neo-onnagata, that is, cross-dressing male actors who do serious work in a contemporary milieu outside of mainstream kabuki. They may utilize classical training or devices, but their works reveal currents apart from established gender conventions. These two performers have widely disparate agendas and audiences, but both have engaged in “low art” for high purpose.

The first, Furuhashi Teiji, of the Dumbtype collective, was a member of the New York drag circuit before becoming a performance artist back in Japan. Various members of Dumbtype hail from around the world but have their roots in Japanese avant-garde tradition. They can be said to continue the spirit of the socially provocative 1960s Fluxus art collective (Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik were well-known members). The second performer of focus is Umezawa Tomio, an onnagata star who is a part of the homegrown and blue-collar taishu engeki (old Japanese “boulevard theatre,” Japanese vaudeville) downtown kabuki tradition. In both cases, I will interrogate the performers’ work by examining their group environments and by posing key questions. What does cross-dressing allow/achieve in each case? What is the function? Who is the audience? What is the final product and what can we learn from it about gender? Finally, how does cross-dressing stretch the status and work of the neo-onnagata?
Dumbtype, an internationally recognized collective of many artists, is based in Kyoto. The group's avant-garde multimedia collaborations are “irreverent takes on popular culture and the rigid stratification of Japanese society.” Co-founder Furuhashi Teiji, now deceased, was a crossed-gendered performer who had lived a number of years in New York. He was active there in the art and drag communities. As a graduate of the Art Department at the Kyoto University of Arts, he created films, music, performances, and experimented with new ways of conducting an examination of the human condition/expression in the 1990s.

Furuhashi co-founded Dumbtype in 1988. The group first emerged as a loosely-bound coalition of artists and performers who conceived new frameworks for revealing inequities of the human condition in the newly popular performance art genre. They placed particular emphasis on the body and cutting-edge sound and light technology. They quickly gained an active presence in museums, performance halls, and biennials all over the world. Although Furuhashi heavily influenced all Dumbtype performances through his music co-compositions, his choreography and conceptual input, Furuhashi explored deeply personal issues with Dumbtype in “S/N.” The well-received performance piece was developed over a three year period, from the time that Furuhashi first informed


Teiji Furuhashi, Dumbtype's artistic director and performer, passed away in Kyoto on 29 October 29, 1995 at 35 years old. The cause of death was HIV-induced septicemia (blood poisoning). A Buddhist funeral service was held on November 2, at the ArtScape creative community center in Kyoto. Sutra chanting was accompanied by Barbra Streisand singing "People," one of Teiji's favorite numbers.
his group that he was HIV+ to his death. S/N brought Dumbtype into an engagement with various provocative ideas and issues, including: the blurring of categories of all kinds, the inadequacies of human designations, gender play, concern about basic human freedoms, and new possibilities in human relations. In particular, Furuhashi and others depict human interactions as a territory full of minute distinctions (like the difference between “sound” and “noise”) but one constrained by blunt categories (“gay,” “male,” “black,” “AIDS victim,” “drag queen,” and others).

When I saw S/N at Spiral Hall in Aoyama (in Tokyo) in 1994, I was struck by how successfully Furuhashi had re-framed notions of femininity by his use of stereotyped feminine artifacts—blond curly wig askew, double rows of long false eyelashes, and draped kimono juxtaposed with his tall flat body and hairy legs. In his monologue, he spoke about “feeling feminine” and what that meant in a homosexual context. Also, he related how gay male femininity coincides with the gender codes of strong female gay icons (Marilyn’s hair and eyelashes, Barbara’s gestures and breast-revealing clothing).

Concurrent to the S/N work, Furuhashi was crafting a solo piece that opened in 1995 (showed June 22-September 12) at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Entitled “Lovers,” it projected the ironic juxtapositioning of highly emotionless couplings onto the conceptual trope of “lovers.” New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) described the piece in this way:

"Lover" is a common word, and lovers are a popular subject in art. As an image, a pair of lovers often suggests a castle of exclusion. With the sexual liberation of the last few decades, the word now has more to do with physical coupling than with the sublimity of "true love." AIDS has added a new dimension of wariness to this pairing.
The life-size dancers in *Lovers* are drained of life. Projected onto the black walls of a square room, the naked figures have a spectral quality. Their movements are simple and repetitive. Back and forth, they walk and run with animal grace. Their actions become familiar over time, so that it is a surprise when two of the translucent bodies come together in a virtual embrace. These ostensible lovers--more overlapping than touching--are not physically entwined.

A disciplined performer, Furuhashi wrote, directed, and appeared in all of his works. Generally, he performed in remnants of female-designated clothing but always with a clear reference to a multi-gendered self within his male body. His virtual femininity rejected an essential quality to gender and emphasized his opposition to the rigid role constructions inherent in all culture, but most importantly the traditional gender assumptions of Japan.

Furuhashi was stricken with HIV-related complications and was unable to join in Dumbtype’s overseas performance tour to Brazil. He died in Japan. The many other collective members took it as their creative mission to continue the work that they had all been doing, without a gap. Dumbtype member Takatani Shiro eulogized Furuhashi with these words:

Teiji, who poured his entire strength into creative expression until the very last, remains an incalculably great presence in our lives; his courage, his power, his love will continue to inspire us.

It remains unclear what direction Furuhashi’s work might have taken given his premature demise, but a consistent thread of gender and sex-role investigation had predominated in

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ARTRLAB and Dumbtype member Takatani Shiro in the museum catalogue for “Lovers.”

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his material for almost a decade (1988 to 1995.) His group members persist in a respected series of artistic expressions along broader spectrums, but including issues of gender and sexuality.

In terms of his contribution to gender discussion, Furuhashi added an expression of the body as sensual, sinewed vessel of desire and cyber-message, multiply-framed and subject to unpredictable slippage between frames. Western academic conception has recently held the view of the body as “text” to be “read.” An alternative view (although not necessarily an exclusionary one), as personified by performers like Furuhashi, is that the body can be experienced and replicated through sensual perception. That is, the body is a container of pheromonic fluid, a domain de-privileged by Western perception.

Social scientist Byron Turner and sociologist/anthropologist Paul Stoller have both advocated the addition of the other sensual markers (deprivileged ones like descriptions of smell, taste, and touch) in referencing the non-Western body. They have seen a burgeoning response to pleas for frank discussions of the traces of the human body itself by critical theorists from the arts and social sciences. Stoller writes:

The body has a secret history in social theory, stemming from Nietzsche's Dionysian diversions into the erotics of the body, the sensuality of dance, and the rapture of ecstacy. In recent developments of social theory, there has been an important reevaluation of the importance of the body, not simply in feminist social theory, but more generally in the analysis of class, culture and consumption.10

On the other hand, Stoller, in his Sensuous Scholarship, bemoans the well-meaning but over-intellectualized (“Foucauldian”), “dis-embodied” language used by

10Paul Stoller in Sensuous Scholarship, discussing Byron Turner’s views, xiv.
scholars. He cites Judith Butler as an example, as demonstrated by the following passage from *Gender Trouble*:

> The boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness . . . The boundary between inner and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the model by which Others become shit. For inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability. This sealing of its surfaces would constitute the seamless boundary of the subject; but this enclosure would invariably be exploded by precisely the excremental filth that it fears.  

Stoller does not refute these views or necessarily their transmission. He recognizes the scholarly need for close readings, dense analysis, and “thick description.” But he advocates, in addition, a toggling between “the analytic and the sensuous.”

It is with this template in mind that we review the Japanese artists at hand. The previously mentioned Dumbtype’s productions have projected experiences of the body that vividly made the viewers aware of viscous corporeality. Furuhashi repeatedly referenced his infected blood and body. He portrayed his body as having a special link with femininity and the sensuous realm, through having contracted a fluid-bourne virus into the vessel of his body though a sexual orifice, the classic fate of venereally infected women though history. Another member of the troupe, Bubu, a self-proclaimed “sex-worker,” in *S/N*, referenced her status as “public vessel” and “citizen of the world” by extracting a mucal string of international flags from her vagina. In tandem with previous

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11Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 133-134.
image of Furuhashi, as a proclamation of gendered agency, her performance of femininity was both sensual and satirical. The question looms: whose depiction of femininity was the more “authentic”? 

Furuhashi used a playful view of his feminine assumption to seriously challenge the established order of gender. Such Joker-play follows an ancient tradition in human performance in which the depiction of femininity within a male-bodied frame has historically moved along a continuum between paradox and parody. Typically, the male body is carefully submerged in the construction to “fool” the audience (aid in the visual collusion of the viewers) or selectively en-gendered with hyperbole, quotations of woman-ness. In the stylized support system of the kabuki stage, we can see both. Because the audience sees thorough the lens of long convention and the eyes of the complicit players, the illusion stands. An intriguing idea is a challenge of the stylized kabuki onnagata by the stripping away of some of these constructed layers (the stage support system, conventional tradition, the feminine body) from the equation and then seeing how the statement of femininity is changed.

An example of such “stripped down” kabuki-themed performance exists in the humble tradition of the waning taishu engeki, or old Japanese vaudeville theatres. From kabuki’s inceptions, it was a theatre of the common people. It did not have the noble lineage of noh or the assured patronage of the ruling elite. In downtown working class Tokyo, neo-onnagata actor Umezawa Tomio embodies the continuance of that heritage.
He is a member of his own dynastic tradition, although not as long or as well accepted as that of the kabuki mainstream. His family decided to entertain the masses, their neighbors in downtown Tokyo. And thus the family enterprise was born.

Umezawa Tomio was drafted onto the stage from a young age. Fortunately, he showed great talent for pleasing audiences, the primary goal of the Umezawa family business. Umezawa Tomio found that he best pleased his patrons by dressing as an onnagata. He became so adroit that he made female-role playing his career. He has described his transformation to feminine incarnation in this way:

The curtain opens and closes. One brush has a touch of magic. Body and soul are transforming in dream. When I find a woman in the mirror, everything begins.12

That period of gender lacunae characterizes Umezawa’s technique of entering into a portrayal of Woman, on “finding” his feminine “self” before each performance. As a professional onnagata outside of the recognized dynastic tradition, he nonetheless continues a recognized lineage. Few of the remaining taishu engeki groups in Japan have a history of half a century, but Umezawa Takeo Gekidan (The Umezawa Takeo Company) is the longest-lived of these. The father of the current group directors (director Umezawa Takeo and his brother, vice director Umezawa Tomio) Umezawa Kiyoshi, started the theater company with his wife Tatsuchiyo in 1939. They performed in the family-run Shino-ara Engaijo (a Tokyo neighborhood variety theatre). Kiyoshi was

12Included in program notes for 1999 production.
a male-role star of the taishu engeki world; Tatsuchiyo was a starlet of “musume kabuki (amateur women’s kabuki groups).” The theatre group of the two local performers quickly became successful, popular and renowned among the denizens of the shitamachi (old downtown Tokyo) neighborhoods. Upon inheriting the directorship in 1961, their son Takeo began building a new theater group that went on to exceed the first generation.

American vaudeville variety acts and such “people’s theatre” of the late 19th and early 20th century have received a great deal of historical and critical attention, as have the British pantomimes and pub theatre acts which inspired them. Although there have been a few articles here and there, no one has thus far made a serious study of the taishu engeki theatre tradition, its tropes and unique history, available in English. This history is fascinating and dying quickly. The early days of Japanese radio and television drew inspiration from this performance source. I believe that this is one of the Japanese performance traditions that has escaped notice because it has been dismissed by the Japanese as “colloquial” and “lowlbrow” and “too culture-bound” for wide study. I would argue that the taishu engeki warrants a serious examination. As a tradition with a greater direct link to the original kawaragawa, or “riverbed players,” tradition of actors as social outcasts, a common people’s theatre, I believe that it contains more of the original spirit than the sanitized kabuki one sees in large theatres today. Such a serious investigation would require a researcher with the ability and intellectual curiosity to step off the beaten path of refined tours and incense-fumed teahouses into the ripe back alleys of Asakusa fish vendors and pachinko parlors.
In such a world Umezawa Takeo continued his father’s successful tradition. He has created interesting productions tailored specifically to the “lowbrow” tastes of taishu engeki audiences. They are imaginative visual extravaganzas, always involving the audiences in a continuum between laughter and sentimental tears. Umezawa has succeeded by speaking directly to the interests, limitations, and codes of his audiences.  

The rough-looking members of the shitamachi subculture (or other blue-collar neighborhoods in Japanese urban centers) can be seen anywhere in Japan. They may be in construction trades, venders of festival stalls, small shop workers, and may have some peripheral affiliation with the yakuza, or may be street performers. All are united in a common state of mind, that of a blue-collar earthiness and a devil-may-care attitude about society at large. They are hard-working but nonetheless recall an attitude in a Buddhist society that can lead to the similarly inclined eijanaika phenomenon, the idea that “existence is fleeting, so what the hell!” The shitamachi attitude is not the careful

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13Senelick, The Changing Room, 98. Laurence Senelick describes a most amusing example of deliberate play to the limits and expectations of the taishu engeki viewers with an account of a performance where a knowing glance at the audience substitutes for a culturally taboo potential stage kiss between the lover characters played by cross-dressed Umezawa Tomio and his brother Takeo.

Dr. Wakamatsu Miki, dance history and theory professor at Japan Women’s College of Physical Education has stated that dance fads dance in Japan are often a reaction to “crises,” embodying complex, painful feelings that cannot be expressed verbally. In the case of ethnic dance, a cultural void is filled by incorporating close contact and eroticism that are entirely absent from the classic Japanese movement traditions.

The haramaki is an old-time staple of men’s clothing worn like a flesh-colored, stretchy cummerbund on the outside of the shirt, today associated with the elderly or the very traditional. It is strongly associated with Tora-san, the shitamachi character of the longest-running movie series called Otoko wa Tsurai Yo (It’s Tough to be a Man), as documented in the Guinness Book of World Records.

"Water world," one conclusion to the belief in the Buddhist ukiyo (as in ukiyo-e prints) or “floating existence”- a culture centered around drinking and prostitution.
taishu engeki audiences may feel some yearning for social approval (they are constantly exposed to the supposed joy of middle-class life on television), and the artistry of a self-proclaimed “kabuki star” lends an air of culture to the festive concert events.

The Umezawa productions have been highly acclaimed among taishu engeki professionals and aficionados of cultural performance; they won the coveted Matsuo Geinou Saiyuushuu Prize in 1982. The “All Japan Concert Tour” performed more than two hundred productions a year starting in 1983 and since has established a record for most audience and days of production per year. The troupe plays at such locally famous playhouses and cultural venues as the Meiji-za, Naka-za, Umeda Koma Theater, and Chuunichi Theater. Noting this breakneck schedule, where each production must top itself for a restless and demanding audience, director Umezawa Takeo has remarked:

Fads go around and come back in history in about ten year cycles. Some things I wore ten years ago are becoming fashionable again. Theatre should not be behind such fashions. One thing, at least, should be always new. The audience demands much; the first time they come see a production, they want to be amazed. The second time they come to see it, what they saw the first time has now become their standard. So, every production should be new and better than ever to satisfy the audience. In this method of creation, I learn something new every day.¹⁷

In 1965, Takeo asked his brother Tomio, who had always acted all of his life with the family enterprise but was then practicing to become a professional baseball player, to

¹⁷Umezawa Gekidan program notes for touring review (Ofuna, Yokohama. 2000).
commit himself solely to the theater. Tomio’s baseball fortunes waned, and so he
complied. As soon as he joined the current company, he showed exceptional skill in a
handsome male role. Takeo had a hunch that Tomio would be able to excel in the
demands of a female-role actor and encouraged him to train as an onnagata. Though not
in the same mold as the refined image of his mainstream kabuki counterparts, Tomio
appeared onstage to the delight and approval of the blue-collar audiences. He soon
began to be commodified by the company as the “Shitamachi-no-Tamasaburou (low-
rent Tamasaburou).”¹⁸

In 1982, Tomio appeared on a TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) soap opera,
Sabishii-no wa Omae Dakejanai (You’re not the only lonely one) as a regular cast
member. This new visibility sparked interest in his work all over Japan. He solidified his
position in the cultural media pantheon with a song that became a very popular,
“Yumeshibai (Dream Theater).” Umezawa Tomio, stoutly built, even portly, but with a

¹⁸Tamasaburou Bando is the most popular and well-known kabuki onnagata star in Japan today. It is not an exaggeration to say that his cool, elegant performances have revitalized public interest and perception of the traditional theatre. Thus, he has had the unique clout to engage in a variety of projects outside of the kabuki tradition, including film (Nastasia) and a lovely synthesis of kabuki dance and Bach music by cellist Yo-Yo Ma. But, he is primarily a kabuki onnagata. It is this kind of acceptance and status that Sasai Eisuke has sought. It is a testament to the non-litigious nature of Japanese culture that no one in kabuki sues over the Umezawa use of the Tamasaburou name and image.
sweet and lovely face, specializes in kabuki dances and depictions of supernatural princesses (ice princess, crane girl). His onnagata performances call forth the neo-onnagata appellation precisely because they must be played out of the accepted tradition, both because of birth and his un-kabuki-like fleshy corporeality. Never on the mainstream kabuki stage has the obi\(^{19}\) encased such abundance. Umezawa’s rotundity defies the astonishing bodily transformations of his kabuki counterparts (compressed shoulders, half-crouch, pleated pelvis, scrunch-cupped metatarsals, neck extension, angled stance, etc.),\(^{20}\) and he achieves an artistic feminine projection through his grace and delicacy.

Significantly, Umezawa Tomio is flanked by real females, as well as balloon-boobed, fright-wigged male parodists. Playing along side women sets up Umezawa as a true neo-onnagata, a cross-dresser who is not substituting for the woman-image but who, in fact, expands the term, in an environment antithetical to the support system of the classic kabuki. His talents lie precisely in juxtaposing a feminine face and a projected “femininity” within this stylistically unsupportive, parodic frame. Umezawa achieves this

\(^{19}\)The obi is the broad ornamental sash that secures and molds the non-specific kimono to the individual body.

\(^{20}\)Katherine Mezur details these and others in her writings.
with earnest sincerity, a dignified purity, in direct proportion to the sophomoric foolishness of his fellow performers.

A frank admission of the sensual male body plays into the Umezawa performance. He appears between acts, sweating profusely (“like a man”), and dressing as he goes in a black suit with jacket thrown across his shoulders a la Frank Sinatra. During this time, he shamelessly hawks “Shitamachi no Tamasaburoh” goods from the stage. Inexpensive inscribed fans, business card cases, mirrors, tissue packs, plastic opera glasses, toilet tissue, aburagami (powder-impregnated paper for absorbing excess facial oil)—the list ranges on from tiny toys to autographed bottles of expensive sake. Perhaps the most coveted is his sweat-soaked handkerchief. Fortunately, there is no shortage of admirers who crowd the edge of the stage to buy a handkerchief.

Umezawa Tomio is an example of the performance of another version of femininity from that of rigid sex roles or of classic cross-dressing. He joins the other neo-onnagata in marking an evolution from conflation of Western conceptions of drag and/or traditional Japanese cross-dressing as staid convention and/or devices for female exclusion. Japanese cross-dressed performers on the contemporary stage, the neo-onnagata, are covertly infractionary because the stage yields a multiple set of lenses, constantly subverting, while seemingly reaffirming, the most deep-seated of Japanese assertions of gender essentialism.

For both neo-onnagata, Furuhashi Teiji and Umezawa Tomio, cross-dressing has allowed a rise in social status. It provided an opportunity to perform at the top level of
their social milieus. Furuhashi Teiji was a brilliant drag queen who began to deconstruct the form and entered the company of other transgressive artists and the rarefied circles of performance art. This propelled him well above the gay district club scene. He was successful as neo-onnagata in manipulating cross-dressing conventions by re-framing “an image of the image.” In this way, he could retrieve the mainstreamed, socially appropriated drag conception and engage the spirit of the subversive limen, opening pathways for new discussion on issues gender typing and construction. Umezawa Tomio has, through an unlikely feminine image, made his family enterprise the most well-known of the taishu engeki touring companies. He has attracted attention beyond the blue-collar gaze of the shitamachi, creating a body of work that paradoxically satisfies his audiences while widening their understanding of femininity.[[ These neo-onnagata performers have provided transgressions of both fixed gender-role traditions and the theatrical forms that have emerged as corollary constructions, in images that work as part of a larger network for social change. In this case, that slow revolution would be a much-needed expansion of the perceived possibilities for male (as purveyor of “femininity”) and female (as other than traditional constructions) image in Japanese culture.]]

In the final chapter of this work, Chapter 7-Conclusions (No Re-Dress), I will examine the results and social impact thus far of the work of the neo-onnagata I have reviewed. In doing so, I will highlight the ways that the performers have used cross-dressing, performing Woman, to serve different ends, ones differing greatly from kabuki intentions and contexts. Neo-onnagata, in relation to the traditional, and conservative,
kabuki performance of cross-dressing, contest and build upon classic performance modes. In doing so, they offer new conceptions of Woman and Man, feminine and masculine image, in sum, expansion of gender roles in contemporary Japan.
Chapter 7
Conclusions (No Re-dress)

Garbo got ‘in drag’ whenever she took some heavy glamour part . . .
How resplendent seems the art of acting! It is all impersonation, whether
the sex underneath is true or not.

Parker Tyler, “The Garbo Image,” quoted in *Mother Camp*

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the
line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade.’ My suggestion
is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or
superficial, they are the same thing.

Joan Riviere, in “Womanliness as a Masquerade.”

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of
gender itself—as well as its contingency.

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*

In concluding this study, I wish to examine the social impact of the neo-
onnagata mentioned thus far and discuss the implications that their performances hold
for attitudes in Japanese theatre and society. In doing so I also want to field the wider
transcultural question of what constitutes Woman. This involves an interrogation of
how the male-to-female cross-dresser negotiates that territory. I am interested in how
this has translated to increased opportunities for other neo-onnagata. Finally, how does
the portrayal of Woman on stage reflect and implement shifts in the perception of
gender in Japan? Specifically, this study concludes by suggesting that the work of major
neo-onnagata may have influence on expanding gendered behavior for Japanese men.

Constructed Woman is an exotic performative concoction no matter where
“she” exists. The “mask” of femininity, markers of woman-ness, may be placed on an
ovary-bearing, a penis-bearing, an inanimate (is not a mannequin a golem-manqué¹ of feminine image?), or even a virtual body. I believe that femininity is primarily a cultural performance, scripted by patriarchal directors for an audience of peers.

But discussion of femininity, its representation, and the greater categories of gender is fraught with difficulty. Certainly, there is wide disagreement between essentialists and constructionists, but I have encountered confusion in talking about concepts of gender at the most fundamental level. What does a given person mean by “femininity,” “masculinity,” or “gender?” What about the terms “cross-dresser,” “transvestite,” and “drag queen”? I have concluded that the definitions of these terms are fluid, ascribed by individuals or institutions according to proclivities or agendas.²

Libraries divide the search term “gender” into two categories. The larger part encompasses women’s studies. The lesser part indicates sex--male or female--or sex-role behavior--what constitutes the “feminine” and the “masculine.” There seems to be no clear consensus on how to describe “femininity” and “masculinity” among heterosexuals or other sexualities. As well, terminology broadly groups cross-dressers in designations that are widely confused. “Transvestite” is a clinical designation that carries a homosexual connotation for many people but as a set of behaviors has actually been documented to a greater degree in heterosexuals. “Drag queen” and the lesser used “drag king” have down-market flavors that generally bring to mind a crazed

¹According to Jewish folklore, the golem was a constructed creature magically endowed with life.

²This changeable terminology is itself a model of the fluidity of gender.
There are several ideas as to where the term oyama came from and what it actually meant. The courtesan theory references the known associations of prostitutes and geisha with the kabuki theatre. Samuel Leiter, in his New Kabuki Encyclopedia, cites records from the 1680's that mention a make-up shop run by kabuki female role player Uemura Kichiya, who may have been the founder of the onnagata art. This shop was frequented by many geisha because Uemura was considered to be refined and beautiful. Another train of thought holds that a 1650's bunraku puppet manipulator of female puppets, Oyama Jirôsaburô, gave the term its name. Some have maintained that the term oyama reinforces the female role player/prostitute (both female and male) connection to theatricality, marginal lifestyle, and inability to sustain meaningful relationships. Yet, certain performance artists and cross-dressers have heralded the terms to great effect as satyric voices of the clear-eyed oppressed. Finally, the “cross-dresser” transects a boundary, “crossing” the imaginary and supposedly clear line between binary male and female images and behaviors. “Cross-dressing” is used clinically, as interchangeable with “transvestite,” but theatre studies, fortunately, seem to have effectively reclaimed this term, focusing on the stage trope of “dressing,” putting on a character or image. The “dressing” part can be apprehended visually. It’s the “crossing” aspect that provokes anxiety and confusion. Crossing into new gender territory, as do the neo-onnagata of this study, involves a transgression of culture, including language, that sometimes defies translation.

In particular, when discussing male-to-female cross-dressing, I find the English language to be inadequate for the phenomenon of cross-dressing and its complexity. Spoken Japanese for the performance of the cross-dresser is slightly better, although the general public in Japan confuses the spoken terms okama (feminized homosexual man or drag queen), oyama (the old term for the kabuki onnagata, also the old term for courtesans3), and onnagata. The written Japanese language, using the Chinese-inspired

3There are several ideas as to where the term oyama came from and what it actually meant. The courtesan theory references the known associations of prostitutes and geisha with the kabuki theatre. Samuel Leiter, in his New Kabuki Encyclopedia, cites records from the 1680's that mention a make-up shop run by kabuki female role player Uemura Kichiya, who may have been the founder of the onnagata art. This shop was frequented by many geisha because Uemura was considered to be refined and beautiful. Another train of thought holds that a 1650's bunraku puppet manipulator of female puppets, Oyama Jirôsaburô, gave the term its name. Some have maintained that the term oyama reinforces the female role player/prostitute (both female and male) connection
kanji ideographs, offers greater clarity. Using kanji, we can see a picture of the concept, rather than trying to approximate it with lettered symbols. The word onnagata is traditionally written with the kanji for “woman” (onna) plus “form” or “image” or “way of acting” (the loaded concept of kata4), but as I have stated previously, multiple pronunciations of the various Chinese characters allow for alternate conceptions, as in “woman” (onna) plus “approaching” or “coming toward” (also possibly pronounced as kata but using a different character). Language of a given culture usually specifies that with which it must concern itself (as in the well-known example of the many words for “snow” in Inuit culture). Japan, through the increasing legitimacy of kabuki, has had to concern itself with instituting conventions of cross-dressing. Thus, cross-dressing has been officially sanctioned when confined to the institution of kabuki and deemed a subset of masculinity, and the male domain.

Nonetheless, outside of kabuki, theatrical and artistic freedom exist in Japan within the rigidly circumscribed social and gender code structure, a combination that cultivates the contemporary stage as a creative hothouse for experimental blooms of gender. Paradoxically, this phenomenon occurs because sex-roles are so deeply inscribed that they become tempting to subvert. Japan presents a culture with a very low

through adding the honorific “o” to the word “yama” (mountain), a common symbol on the split curtains (noren) at the doorways of brothels. Extending this idea, it has even been hypothesized that the piled futon (mattresses) of prostitutes resembled a “mountain” of bedding to the patrons used to sleeping on just one. At any rate, they all link back to the prostitute conflation. (Leiter, New Kabuki Encyclopedia, 499)

4In Japanese, “k” generally changes to a “g” sound when preceded by a prefix. The broad rule is that hard consonants convert to softer ones.
glass ceiling for women’s opportunities in almost all public and private venues and yet a
culture where the image of Woman is venerated. Simultaneous to the traditionally
conservative attitudes of the Japanese public, there is a “vested interest” (pace Garber)
in the gray areas of gender, an anxious desire for testing what is thought to be known
about gender in the revelatory lights of the theatrical and media arenas.⁵

I believe that the neo-onnagata provide a conduit for the testing of what
constitutes feminine gender and, by extension, the male in Japanese culture. The
performers that I have mentioned in this study play to different audiences and for
different purposes. But, I see a pattern in the neo-onnagata work. In examining the
work of Umezawa Tomio, I see a representative of past, even pre-modern, Japanese
male-to-female depictions. As promoter of the dying tradition of the traveling taishu
engeki variety show, Umezawa constantly replays and recycles a robust kabuki woman
of the original order, summoning up the raucous, irreverent spirit of the first followers
of Kyoto priestess/dancer Okuni. His role is as outsider (to the mainstream kabuki norm
as well as middle-class society), supported by a maverick family as a commercial
venture for ever smaller, socially marginalized, blue-collar audiences. Despite his
accomplishments, Umezawa is an anomaly in a vaudevillian tradition that was rooted in
the kind of earthy downtown neighborhoods that are almost a memory now in Tokyo
and Osaka. His manner of depicting Woman, as kabuki onnagata in hyperbole, reflects
an adherence to the unsophisticated pleasures of a dispossessed viewership. In a country
where the vast majority are well educated and economically comfortable, Umezawa’s

⁵In just in a casual perusal of Japanese evening television (Fuji Network, October
2, 2001) there was a special featuring fifty transvestites and transsexuals in a television
studio discussing their fashion tastes, lifestyles, and opinions to a rapt audience.
work does not aim to, nor can it hope to, offer wide-ranging social impact on common cultural values of gender. Nonetheless, he focuses the aesthetics of the working class in an other-gendered conception that has few other representatives.

As incarnation of the more recent past, cross-gendered performer Furuhashi Teiji did work of cutting edge variety in the 1990s. I marvel at how long ago that decade seems now, looking from a new millennium perspective. While Furuhashi was indeed examining sex-role depiction and social inequities, he was doing so within the frame of high-tech supported “performance art.” The image of the drag queen in an irreverent, “high art” setting has been thoroughly mined, making social statements that may well have played primarily to elite audiences of like minds. Perhaps it is better that the drag queen image be retired from commercial play. Drag queen personae maintain a cutting and subversive commentary by staying at the margins rather than by being appropriated by the uncomprehending and neutering influence of the larger public. The irony is that witty subversion of gender roles has greatest impact among those who have least investment in the patriarchal order: the gender disenfranchised and their social circles.

Neo-onnagata Furuhashi died with the decadent spirit of the decade, his demise paralleling an implosion of the self-obsessed performance genre in the artistic and performance worlds. His impact on Japanese society, although timely and continued by the ongoing work of the Dumbtype performance collective, was limited and remains a
vagary of the period. Thus, like Umezawa, Furuhashi’s work and influence reflect past ideas and memory.

On the other hand, Miwa Akihiro is rooted firmly in the present. As ubiquitous media personality, his glamorous middle-aged-woman persona, brimming with life energy, has undoubtably had the most impact of all neo-onnagata on the gender role possibilities in contemporary Japanese society. Gay men have gained confidence from Miwa’s social activism, high profile, and vigorous image. Women seek his advice on all manner of social and grooming matters. Some men see in him a possibility for an expanded definition of masculinity, one that incorporates elegance (provided one is wealthy enough to flout convention) and strength. Because Japan is such a culture of conformity, strong personalities are objects of fascination, either rejected or placed in adulation and leadership. Miwa has assumed the latter position, constructing a social impact that cannot be minimized. He has not been reticent about seeking to initiate an expansion of spiritual and aesthetic values in contemporary Japan. In my estimation, Miwa has, very slightly, changed the entertainment and gender landscapes of Japan.

However, it is in the work of Sasai Eisuke that I place the future of cross-dressed depiction and sex role possibilities. He has utilized rigorous kabuki modes of dance and movement, drawing on that which has come before, to continue an investigation into what constitutes an identifiable femininity onstage as enacted by the male-bodied actor. Because Sasai works in the theatre, mainly in smaller venues, rather than in television and film, his name and image are not as well known as Miwa’s. In
addition, his style and personality are much different, quieter, more focused on his work than on his personality and image. He does not use the media as forum for social agenda. Nonetheless, there is a purity and minimalism in his work of stripping down the depiction of femininity to a bare essence that is both true to the historic Japanese aesthetic of wabi (a minimal aesthetic, a re-framing, a distillation) and to the critique of contemporary cross-dressed practices. Sasai’s work, particularly in performances like his recent Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, foreshadows more subtlety and new exploration into the nature of Woman onstage and off. With this kind of example, male performers need no longer rely on the titillating accouterments of traditional feminine portrayal but will have examples of how to “cross” without “dressing.” Sasai’s work demonstrates that, in the neo-onnagata, costume is negotiable. Cross-dressing sans dress yields a complexly transgressive “crossing.”

In a wider context, the scope of the neo-onnagatas’ work may have implications for influence on the sex-role examination and rapid societal changes taking in Japan in 2002. With the collapse of the hyperinflated 1980s “bubble economy,” there has been a reassessment of all aspects of Japanese culture. There is an ongoing cultural conversation over what led to the economic over confidence and collapse, as well as what now constitutes Japanese cultural values and norms in contemporary society. No longer can it be taken for granted that everyone in Japan is of the same mind or in the same socioeconomic situation. A feeling of crisis exists among the older generation as they sense a besieging of long-held roles, customs, and social mores. Many young
people are disheartened and adrift, in an apathetic abyss, with little ability to express ideas and, worse, no ideas to express. However, artists, particularly theatre artists, feel a great sense of opportunity and hope for positive changes in a moribund and rigid society.

How can Japan reeducate itself in regards to its sexist tradition? Can the theatre be an instructive voice? In a recent Japan Times newspaper interview, contemporary theatre playwright and director Hirata Oriza, a leading artist in the new “quiet theatre” movement, has addressed this very point. He has stated that the Japanese people, in the wake of Japan’s recent economic recession, and absence of any all-encompassing national goals, must now find it within themselves to construct their own individual lives and belief systems. He believes that Art can play a significant role for that purpose. By providing an opportunity for people to experience living life in different ways from those simply handed down from past generations and in one closed society, Art expands human possibilities. Furthermore, Hirata places much of the blame for young people’s aimlessness (and past single-minded-ness) on an overly rigid and paternal society, one that fosters dependence and rote imitation. Thus, he says, in all parts of contemporary society the importance of dialogue over superficial conversation is growing. He says,

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6Uranaka “Art Can Lift Japan . . .” 1.

7Examples of such goals are catching up to the modern world of the industrial revolution during the Meiji Restoration, rebuilding Japan after World War II, and cornering the world electronics markets in the 1980s.
“in a mature society where different values must coexist, drama, which developed from
dialogue, has much to offer.”

This study contributes to the ongoing body of theatre research in ways that
present new knowledge and open up possible new inquiries. The neo-onnagata
contribute to the previously mentioned dialogue from onstage through a transgression
of established sex-role rigidity and conventions of cross-dressed portrayal. The
influence on the wider social context may be very small but it is a force that nudges an
expansion of previously constructed norms. In a recent issue of Yale University’s
contemporary theatre journal Theatre, Lani Guinier, a professor of law at Harvard
University suggests that the challenge for theatre to enact social change in modern life is
to “negotiate the tension, or fundamental contradiction “between traditional values and
market economics.” By extension, theatre cannot provoke or question seriously if the
safety of filling theatre houses is always at the fore. Anna Deveare Smith, fellow
panelist, performance artist and founder of the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue,
suggests that keeping theatre at a grass-roots level is preferable and more influential
anyway. Ms. Guinier agrees and suggests that, in small ways, theatre can be a teacher
that can “disrupt habits of thinking, so that people are encouraged to challenge what is
traditionally considered normal or desirable.” She labels the current period a
“postidentity moment” that comes after several identity movements, battling “a sense of
alienation, anger, and despair.” This sentiment echoes the view of many that American
and Japanese theatre have both come to points where “people simply retreat into the
private space of entertainment and spectacle.” Nonetheless, Guinier and Smith reinforce the role of the theatre as more than just a barren site of amusement but as potential platform of revolutionary social change.

Serizawa Takashi, Tokyo architect and director of p3 contemporary art production institute in Tokyo, in his notes for the 2002 Cai Guo Qiang retrospective exhibition, has mentioned that Erich Jantsch, scholar of system evolution theory has mentioned the word shunyata in connection with the Big Bang of the universe. He says that shunyata is a Buddhist word meaning “empty” but does not denote nothingness. Rather, Serizawa describes it as a state of “complete possibility and pure potential.” I want to use the word shunyata to describe the sense that I have of the work of the neo-onnagata, work that could have impact on stage convention and Japanese society, particularly for male actors and men. Previous conventions of cross-dressing have fallen back on trite formulas for either comic, sensational, or specifically stylized effect. The neo-onnagata female-role players, on the other hand, have possibilities of expanding female representation (with a consequent social agenda, expanding male roles). They can do so based on freedom from old restrictions and conventions. Dismissed by many, scorned by some, questioned and lauded by others,


9Cai Guo Qiang is a Chinese “gunpowder artist.” He uses gunpowder in explosive installations of large range with community involvement, much in the same way that the artist Christo “wraps” landmarks.

10In Japanese, pronounced *kuu* (empty) or *sora* (sky).
neo-onnagata and their innovative cross-dressed depictions have offered snapshots of expanded sex-role behavior, and yet another gender. Neo-onnagata establish larger definitions of the term “gender” and the sliding scale along which gender may be conceived.

Such notions of a gender continuum beyond the traditional binary follows the work of Brown University biologist and gender construction theorist Anne Fausto-Sterling, who, in her book *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, argues that the labeling of man or woman is foremost a social decision. She maintains that we may use scientific knowledge to help us make such decisions, but that only the ways we approach gender can determine how we define the “sex” of a person. She further says that the way we think about gender has influence on how we garner scientific knowledge regarding sex and sex-roles in the first place. In general she argues for a reexamination of the “scientific” studies that have “proven” the binary (or certain notions of sexual superiority or other differences) and a wider parameter of the possible genders we recognize. If such researchers in the field of science are calling for theoretical expansion of gender, artists such as the aforementioned neo-onnagata in this work prove to be the embodiments of those expanded categories.

In this study, the work I have presented could essentially be divided into two parts: cultural background (Chapters One, Two, and Three) and neo-onnagata artists (Chapters Four, Five, and Six). In Chapter One, I have contextualized the work of contemporary cross-dressing artists with the customs and traditions of Japanese history
and culture. In addition I have offered a brief overview of the theatre history that led to
the development of cross-dressing in kabuki, court theatre, and folk festivals. Chapter
Two looked at the phallocentric traditions in Japanese society, theatre and folk
practices. Chapter Three focused on works from the electronic and literary media,
examining sex-role models of male and female behavior as well as noting deviations and
areas of gender anxiety. I particularly highlighted ways that cross-dressing was
appropriated as a conservative mode of comic or highly stylized performance,
paradoxically belying the essentialist patriarchal agendas.

In the second half of this study, I presented a cross-section of the performers
that I consider to embody the traits of the neo-onnagata genre as I have defined it. That
is to say, my definition includes serious professional theatre artists in male-to-female
cross-dressed portrayals working outside of the mainstream kabuki traditions. Some of
the artists that I have mentioned have made concerted study of kabuki onnagata dance
and movement. Except for accidents of birth, they might have been performers of the
dynastic kabuki onnagata lines. But, I argue that the actors I have presented are doing
(have done) contemporary work that is of caliber with the deep but proscribed artistry
of the kabuki. The kabuki onnagata may represent the stylized historical acme of male-
to-female cross-dressing, but the neo-onnagata represent the future possibilities of
cross-dressing and gender.

The neo-onnagata constitute another gendered image along the continuum of
possibilities, opposing the traditional binary system. I submit that the Butlerian precept
of “Woman” as a free entity, an assumable identity, finds validation in the neo-onnagata
performance. Of course, the same would hold true for “Man.” I hold that the neo-
**onnagata** truly convey a believable femininity with the male body shining through, or even completely exposed. I have seen such instances enacted onstage and believe that neo-**onnagata** performers are worthy of note and further study. I would suggest that we add the para-kabuki neo-**onnagata** to the “other possibilities of gender” (than the usual male and female) that Katherine Mezur postulates in speaking of the kabuki **onnagata**. The neo-**onnagata** expand gender boundaries by conveying a palpable “feminine essence” that coexists alongside a frank recognition of the underlying phallic body. Furthermore, I have seen evidence in the work of the neo-**onnagata**, that feminine costume and signifiers are negotiable. As credible representatives of new gender conceptions, performers cross-dressing sans dress yield a truly complex and transgressive “crossing.”

Gender is a construction. Theatre is a re-construction. Thus, gender is a form of theatre. The neo-**onnagata** reconstruct fixed notions of cross-gendered portrayal (in contrast to the kabuki onnagata aim and context) and, in doing so, perform a new gender.

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11 Of course, the same effective mechanisms hold sway in the female bodies of the Takarazuka **otokoyaku** (male-role players), perhaps to an even greater degree. In the eyes of their largely female audiences, it is in recognition of and because they are chromosomal females that they can effectively perform the fantasy “male.” In other words, “only a woman could know how to portray the ‘perfect’ man, from the woman’s perspective.”
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Appendix I
The Japanese View: History and Accommodation

Japan is an old country, with an uninterrupted (never invaded, occupied, or displaced) culture of some three thousand years. “Modern Japan” dates back several hundred years to the seeds of contemporary Japanese attitudes, specifically during the “pax Tokugawa,” 1603 to 1868, when Japan’s doors were closed to the world. At that time, native forms of performance--noh, bunraku, kabuki, kyogen, kagura, all manner of festival dance, storytelling (kamishibai), as well as performative popular activity--proliferated essentially without Western influence. The forms intertwined to weave a rich theatrical tapestry. When Admiral Perry’s “black ships” arrived in 1865 to force open the ports to outside trade, a new spirit began to sweep through the country. The Meiji Restoration2 was initiated in the spirit of “catching up” with the rest of the world. To some, this meant that the old forms of arts and industry needed to be discarded and new Western ideas adopted. It was not until later that Japan learned to embrace and synthesize rather than dismiss wholesale. Such social conversion was largely a vast and uncertain experiment in the 19th century.

1Called so because the Tokugawa shogunate relatively quelled centuries of civil war.

2(1868-1912) Specifically, this was the restoration of the Meiji emperor to figurehead position on the Imperial Throne. It was also the beginning of the first of the two most spectacular modern miracles of super industrialization in known history: the first being the unprecedented rapid industrial revolution as the country opened to foreign innovation (industrializing in half the time it had taken England and the rest of Europe), and the second being the phenomenal rise from the ashes of WW II to become the wealthiest lender nation in the world in the 1980’s. The dizzying pace of these economic advances left the perfect platform for postmodern deprivileging of specific hierarchic values, among them static notions of gender in Japan and how it need be played out on the playground of psychic landscapes—the stage.
Around the turn of the twentieth century, when the world witnessed the new realist modes of theatre— that of Stanislavsky, Chekov, Ibsen, and Strindberg, among others—Japan responded with its first Western theatre. There was a rupture with Japanese traditional theatre forms and led to the Japanese contemporary form called shingeki (new theatre). The aim was to produce a Japanese realistic contemporary theatre that would emulate that of the West and therefore bring Japan forward as a modern nation. Sometimes this resulted in a emulation of Europeans and an erasure of the Japanese body onstage in Western plays, even to the wearing of blond wigs and false noses.³

Trying to incorporate traditional kabuki, theatre director Osanai Kaoru tried to “reform” kabuki but finally gave up and, in doing so, founded, in 1924, the nation’s first truly modern theatre free from staid conventions, the Tsukiji Shogekijoh (Tsukiji Little Theatre). This venture was still heavily dependent on Western ideas and origins but Osanai’s words were ones that foreshadowed the concerns of later 1960s theatre artists:

Above all the enemy we must fight against in our effort to establish the national theatre we hold as our ideal is the traditional theatre, that is, kabuki drama . . . . We must first wage war on this tradition. We must destroy kabuki patterns, we must create our own distinct theatre art, new and free.⁴

Later artists based their ideas upon the Osanai notion breaking the stranglehold of outmoded traditions. It has been said that the young 1960s generation felt a need to replace pre-modern theatre forms such as kabuki and noh, and to provide a break with the traditional cosmology of gods and other authoritarian moral figures which pervaded Japanese drama. Even

³Martin, 83.
⁴Osanai, 459.
secular classics like *Chushingura*, said theatre artist Maruya Saiichi, represented “permutations of traditional patterns of belief.”

The 1960s in Japan saw a vibrant revival in the theatre. A series of historical events came together to breathe new life into stultified forms and to create new genres as well. The profound defeat in WWII, the parliamentary ratification of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty of 1960, the death of the Old Left dreams (Sartre was becoming passé by this time), the global students’ revolutionary movement (as exemplified by the squelched student strike in 1968 at the Medical Department of the University of Tokyo) were part of the political picture which provided creative young theatre artists with ample inspiration to build new theatrical models.

An event entitled “Wesker ‘68” brought British playwright Arnold Wesker to a Tokyo symposium in 1968. The topic concerned the situation of theatre in contemporary society and what could be done to change it. Leading groups and theatre voices in Japan at the time were deeply interested in the discussion and what transpired. Wesker was a son of Jewish immigrants from Hungary and Russia who grew up in London’s East end. His plays are marked by a disillusionment with Stalinist communism and a search for a unique path to the New Jerusalem. In some sense, the orientations and attitudes of Wesker found resonance in artistic Japan’s collective mind at this time. There was an atmosphere of moral and intellectual earnestness which pervaded

5Goodman, 5.

6Called *ANPO* by the Japanese, after *Anpo Joyaku*, or “Peacekeeping Treaty.”
the proceedings. Attendees left with the notion that investigation of Japan’s cultural identity was an idea that the theatre was uniquely disposed to address.

In a separate though parallel event, playwright and novelist Mishima Yukio accepted the challenge of radical leftist students to debate them at Tokyo University in May 1969, a few months after the famous expulsion from the clock tower by police at the same university and about a year before his infamous suicide. The author asserted that he agreed with the students’ mistrust of modern values and would have joined them in their protest if only they had exclaimed “Long live the Emperor!” This nationalist comment met with derisive jeers and general laughter by the large crowd assembled there.⁷

As with the political context, the theatre was embroiled in a revolution as well. European avant-gardists like Artaud (Theatre of Cruelty), Brecht (The Epic Theatre), Beckett, Arrabal (Theatre Panique), Grotowski (The Poor Theatre), and Americans Julian Beck and Judith Malina (The Living Theater) were being read and their ideas being discussed. However, mere aping of Western forms went against the spirit of what the sixties theatre artists of Japan were trying to do.

The 1960s ushered in a re-examination of every aspect of theatre as it had been practiced and exploration of what it meant to be a modern young Japanese in Japan. This resulted in the rebellion against Western forms and themes found in shingeki. Japanese theatre artist Tsuno Kaitaro conveys this sentiment in his 1965 essay, “The Tradition of Modern Theatre in Japan”:

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⁷Stokes, 1974.
Shingeki has become historical; it has become a tradition in its own right. The problem for the younger generation has been to come to terms with this tradition. For us, modern European drama (which shingeki, for all its ideals, began to emulate) is no longer some golden ideal. It is instead a pernicious, limiting influence. Beneath shingeki’s prosperous exterior there is decadence. It has lost the antithetic élan that characterized its origins. Shingeki no longer maintains the dialectical power to negate and to transcend; rather, it has become an institution that itself demands to be transcended.\(^8\)

In essence, Kaitaro’s words referred to a movement away from a slavish reworking of Western conceptions and toward what Kawamura Takeshi, director of the avant-garde theatre troupe Daisan Erotica, has called “a nostalgia for a pre-modern Japanese world.”\(^9\) The result in the 1960s became known as angura (the syllabic coinage for the Japanese pronunciation of underground—“an\(\text{da} \ gura\text{hwndo}”\)). Here, elements of the traditional forms (like noh and kabuki) were again referenced. Mirroring theatre’s dance counterpart butoh (from ankoku butoh or “dance of utter darkness”), the grotesque and the profane were aestheticized and given new agency as reflections of primitive spirituality and representations of the Japanese sexual/physical body.

In eschewing shingeki, 1960s theatre artists made more than a passing nod to the mythologies of the past. The gods were reinserted into “grotesque abstractions of the subliminal impulses of the modern Japanese imagination.”\(^10\)

\(^8\)Tsuno, 11.
\(^9\)Martin, 109.
\(^10\)Ibid.
Where *shingeki* had sought to replace the old traditions and gods (ironically with Marxism and Christianity), the post-*shingeki* movement set up a dialectical encounter with the pre-modern Japanese popular imagination. This consisted of three elements: a non-tragic, anti-Hegelian dramaturgy that viewed internal apotheosis and political revolution as one; a re-valorizing of the Japanese experience in all its forms, especially aberrant ones, and an emphasis on “movement” in all aspects of the theatrical experience (thus the popular “tent venue”) in order to avoid the stasis which seemed to be the bane of Japanese traditional culture and politics.  

In question as well were matters involving the relation of the stage to the audience, and the hierarchical concepts of relations between playwright, director, and actor. Foremost, the structure of the dramatic text was engaged and challenged, with the most salient common feature of 1960s theatre being a rejection of the linear narrative, with a multiplication of time schemes. 

Direct comparison of time-periods in a performative frame was an innovation that young Japanese saw as paramount. Many of the problems of pre-modern Japan had, in their view, to do with a seeming inability to meld present with past. Thus, the young playwrights sought to infuse their work with multiple points of view. This included ways of mixing desire with memory, present with past, personal memory with historical memory. Against the grain of the national memory there were scattered traumatic scenes of the Rape of Nanjing, the invasion of Manchuria,

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11I am most indebted to Thomas Rimer for his important study of Osanai Kaoru and the modern period of Japanese theatre in *Toward a Modern Japanese Theatre*. (1974). Words in quotes in this section are his or those of the artists he discusses.
the bombing of Hiroshima and the anti-ANPO demonstrations. As reality and fiction were often interchanged, so linguistic style reflected this. Ambiguities and non sequiturs were rife, as were frequent use of quotation and other reflexive devices.

It was from the unstructured veins of wild experimentation in the 1960s that individual artists/collectives and productions could later provoke meaningful interplay between the playful structures of the modern, the *kata* (forms) and myths of classic theatre, and frank new contemplations of sexuality and gender. Such 60s directors-auteurs as Suzuki Tadashi, Ninagawa Yukio, Betsuyaku Minoru, Kara Jûrô, and later, in the 70s and 80s, Noda Hideki, provided vital ground-breaking experimental stage work from which performers could make new statements. In the 90s, along with challenging social commentary, there has been an interesting re-introduction of psychological realism, loosely termed “*shizukana geki* (quiet theatre),” as exemplified by the work of Hirata Oriza (*Tokyo Nôto*- Tokyo Notes, 1995), Iwamatsu Ryô (*Daidokuro no hi*- Kitchen Lights, 1987), and Nagai Ai (*Toki no monooki*- Time’s Storeroom, 1994), among others.
Appendix II

Shinto

In the late 6th century C.E., the name Shinto was created for the native body of beliefs in order to distinguish it from Buddhism and Confucianism, which had been introduced from China. Shinto was rapidly overshadowed by Buddhism, and the native gods were generally regarded as manifestations of Buddha in a previous state of existence. Buddhist priests became the custodians of Shinto shrines and introduced their own ornaments, images, and ritual. At the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 9th centuries, the celebrated Japanese teacher Kukai, (posthumously Kobo Daishi [774-835 C.E.]), established a doctrine uniting Buddhism and Shinto under the name of Ryobu Shinto, or "the Shinto of two kinds." In the new religion, Buddhism dominated Shinto, and elements were also adopted from Confucianism. The ancient practice of Shinto proper virtually disappeared and was maintained only at a few great shrines and in the imperial palace, although the emperors themselves had become Buddhists. The distinctively Shinto priests became diviners and magicians. It could be speculated that they also retained deeply ingrained belief in phallic divinity, albeit modified from ancient times.¹

Moving into the eighteenth century, Shinto was revived as an important national religion through the writings and teachings of a succession of notable scholars, including Mabuchi (1697?-1769), Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), and Hirata Atsutane

¹Busch and Silver,10.
Driven by nationalistic sentiments that were expressed as reverence for Japanese antiquity and hatred for ideas and practices of foreign origin, these men prepared the way for the dismantling of Buddhism and the adoption of Shinto as the state precept. In 1867, the shogunate was overthrown, and the Meiji Emperor was restored to the head of the government. According to revived Shinto doctrine, the sovereignty of the emperor was exercised by divine right through his reputed descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, who is considered the founder of the Japanese nation. Related beliefs included the doctrines that the Japanese were superior to other peoples because of their descent from the gods, and that the emperor was destined to rule over the entire world. Until the defeat of Japan in World War II, these beliefs were extremely important in assuring popular support for the military expansion of the Japanese Empire.

Prior to 1946, Shinto took two forms: State (or Shrine) Shinto, a patriotic nationalistic cult, identified with and financially supported by the imperial government; and Sectarian Shinto, a general term for a number of sects founded by private persons and based on various interpretations of traditional Shinto. State Shinto, as the official government cult, theoretically embodied the religious beliefs of the entire Japanese people, and the number of its adherents was counted as the total population of the empire. The cult centered on an uncountable number of shrines in all parts of the country, ranging from small wayside chapels dedicated to local spirits and families to

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1Earhart, 28.
Statistics are widely variable, especially since the nature and location of small shrines, like localized kami, are elusive. Holtom lists the numbers attached to the government in 1997 as approximately 110,967 shrines, with 15,606 priests.

Great national sanctuaries, such as the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, dedicated to the spirits of soldiers who had died in battle for Japan. In 1946, during the American occupation of Japan following World War II, the cult was completely separated from the state by order of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander for the Allied powers. Government financial support of State Shinto was eliminated, the former practice of teaching cult doctrines in the schools was abolished, and the use of Shinto symbols for nationalistic purposes was forbidden. At the same time the emperor issued a statement renouncing all claims to divinity.

Sectarian Shinto, a religion of the same status as Buddhism and Christianity, was unaffected by these changes. Today, it is made up of thirteen major and numerous minor sects. The principal sects are divided into five main groups: those that continue with little modification the traditions of ancient Shinto; those that emphasize adherence to Confucian ethics; those that are predominantly devoted to faith healing; those that practice the worship of mountains; and those that are primarily devoted to purification rites. In the late 1980s, more than 100 million Japanese participated in the various Shinto sects, but those who professed Shinto as their sole or major religion numbered only about 3.1 million. The Shinto sects have approximately 185,000 priests and teachers and more than 80,000 shrines.

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3 Statistics are widely variable, especially since the nature and location of small shrines, like localized kami, are elusive. Holtom lists the numbers attached to the government in 1997 as approximately 110,967 shrines, with 15,606 priests.
Appendix III

The Order of Procession for the Hounen Festival

Early in the morning on March fifteenth, a crowd gathers for the first ceremony of the Hounen Festival at the time of the Snake, that is, from nine to eleven am, when a lottery is drawn to bring luck for the coming year. After that comes the most important event: the procession of the primary gargantuan phallus from the main shrine to the nearby subsidiary shrine of Aratahime. First, a senior priest scatters purifying salt before the sacred processional, in order that all negative energies and entities be dispelled. He is accompanied by a fierce tengu, or red-faced, phallus-nosed demon, who will fight any who would stand against this mission of divine insemination. The tengu is closely followed by bearers of a branch of sacred sakaki.\(^1\)

This is the precisely ordered first grouping. In the second grouping, a member of the shrine community carries a banner with a large, veiny representation of an erect penis painted on it. It is significant that the parishioner wears pure white robes and is exactly forty-two years old. He has been specially blessed and ritually purified earlier that day because it is believed that the years of niju-go-sai (twenty-five) and yonju-ni-sai (forty-two) are “dangerous” years for men: physically, emotionally and sexually.

Behind him are more community contributors to the shrine coffers and administration, bearing the sacred taiko (drum) and rice cakes for later distribution to the attendant crowd. Many of these are also lay-priests. The third grouping in the

\(^1\)The sakaki is a most auspicious tree in Japan, with holy powers and, as such, a favored home for kami.
procession consists of five shrine-maidens, female parish-women who each wear purple robes and lovingly cradle wooden phalli wrapped in paper. These women are all sanju-san-sai (thirty-three) years old, the uncertain ages for women being that and ju-kyu (nineteen). Continued fertility is the desired result of their participation.

The fourth grouping include the musicians, some mouthing ancient tubular flutes; some with a reedy whistle, some the ubiquitous Japanese bamboo shakuhachi.² There is, in this section, also a sacred gong, sometimes unsheathed and struck rhythmically. The fifth group is made up of twenty drunken forty-two-year-olds who enthusiastically bear the brobdingnagian Takeinadane phallus, a small palanquin astride it, accenting its two-meter (about seven feet) proportions.³

The next contingent wields banners with the holy paulownia leaf emblazoned on them. Next comes a phalanx of the most senior priests. Finally, one more phallus appears heralding a sakaki branch, with a lay-priest and priest casting a cautious eye for evil or negative entities who may trail behind them.

²This, too, is one of the sexual signifiers on this day. Shakuhachi, because of the blowing motion on a long object, is a well-known euphemism for fellatio. This is so much so that one cannot utter the word, however innocently describing the classical musical instrument, in a classroom of high-schoolers without torrents of red-faced laughter.

³A new phallus is carved every year out of a single hinoki (Japanese cedar) tree by skilled shrine carpenters.
According to a Reuters news release in 1994, some priests were angry because the festival had been included in a Taiwanese video as a stop on a “sex tour of erotic rituals.”


The festival is said to be an un-lascivious event . . . a cyosure of Shinto. A priest from the shrine has stated that:

Christianity is a religion of love. Buddhism is a religion of mercy. Shinto is a religion of gratitude--of giving thanks for every day of living. We want people to come to pray with that feeling. When foreigners think of Shinto, they think of Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which enshrines the souls of Japan's war dead, including World War II leaders executed as war criminals. I want them to know Shinto as a happy religion.

He has further speculated that the shrine's "sacred emblem" stands as a symbol of the origin of life itself--and a symbol of the fertilizing power of heaven impregnating the earth with crops. Certainly, the utilization of this phallic symbol may be rooted in the

There are a few moments of rest as the giant phallus is deposited at the smaller shrine. Steps are retraced and the teeming hoard of spectators clamor for the pink and white rice cakes, signifiers of luck and fecundity, are thrown, Mardi Gras-style, from the steps of the original Tagata Shrine. This is significant as well as symbolic.

The pause, as defined by ancient design or subconscious formula, occurs at the juncture between male and female symbols. What actually occurs upon arrival at the subsidiary shrine is a point of confusion. An older explanation has been that the female entity, Tamahine, resides at the smaller shrine and the two consummate their long-awaited union. Shrine spokesmen deny this, saying that the concept helps to further the idea that this is a “sex festival,” bringing in too many of the “wrong kind of tourists.”

4 According to a Reuters news release in 1994, some priests were angry because the festival had been included in a Taiwanese video as a stop on a “sex tour of erotic rituals.”

prehistoric Japanese myth holding everything in the universe as created by the coming together of the sky-sire Izanagi and the earth-mother Izanami. At the Tagata festival, there is no sense of shame or sin, as in the Judeo-Christian original garden saga, rather a suspicion of something deeply disturbing and unknowable having been unearthed.

There are a few other agricultural matsuri which have associated human fertility, and the presence of the phallus, with the ripeness of the harvest. At the Asuka Nimasu Jinja, Nara prefecture, a mating “simulacrum” (pace Baudriallard), is played out each year on the first Sunday in February through public procession, this time to an actual stage. A villager wears the mask of a tengu, or phallus-nosed goblin, and does a stylized imitation of intercourse with an actor wearing the mask of Otafuku, a stupid but fecund country-woman. An old man character, called the Okina, facilitates this symbolic coupling. At last, Otafuku slips a thin paper from her kimono sleeve, wipes her genitals, and throws the paper into the audience. To catch the paper is to ensure fullness in all endeavors.

At the Ogata-jinja at Inuyama-shi, near Komaki, on the same day as the phallus festival, a ritual intercourse simulation takes place in a vaginal cave. Two related festivals, one at Yokote-shi, Ashioka-jinja, Akita prefecture and another at Akita-shi, Akanuma, Miyoshi shrine (both on January seventeenth) involve a crowd of young men who scuffle for control of two bonten, or Phallic poles. Some try to penetrate the shrine with these poles, others try to prevent it. Successful penetration yields an abundant year. Finally, the “Tenteko” Matsuri, at Hachiman Jinja in Niike-cho, Nishio-shi, Aichi Prefecture on January third, places the Phalluses on the backs of six men. Suggestive up–and-down movements give the ritual its onomatopoeic name. Of course, the kami
are appeased/pleased and so all supplicants sing the “Manzai-raku,” a song promising abundance and happiness, and a *taue-uta* (common field song).\(^6\)

\(^6\)Plutschow, 77.
Appendix IV

Suzuki: White Radishes and Borrowed Views

In Japan, what happens in the theatre and also in the home is usually surrounded by nature--we do not put things between the theatre and the outside world--it should be open in all four corners--so that the audience and actors can live with nature as they perform.¹

This is one of the basic tenets of Suzuki Tadashi's “Way of Acting," which led him to leave a successful directing career in Tokyo around 1974 to search for a more integrated environment for his image of the ideal theatre experience, both for actor and audience.² Several years later (1982), he established the Japan Performing Arts Centre at Toga-mura in the hills of Toyama Prefecture in northern Japan. In 1984, he began SCOT, the Suzuki Company of Toga, and initiated his now-famous summer actor training program. Crucial to the heart of Suzuki's philosophy is a very Japanese concept of incorporating nature into an activity or mode of expression and, at the same time, appropriating nature as a human-framed synthesis.³ Suzuki Tadashi has opened the idea up on a much grander scale for production of his Greek dramas, simultaneously binding surrounding community, immediate audience, and the natural environment in the best spirit of 1960s-style activism and vibrant theatre.

¹Slater, 42.

²Some sources say he left Tokyo in 1976. At any rate, he was seeking a suitable location in the countryside, away from Tokyo, during this period.

³Bonsai, the dwarfing of trees for interior gardens, is one example of this. The omnipresent romanticized akafuji (a picture of "red" Mt Fuji), adorning the wall of older Japanese homes, is another.
What led to Suzuki's view of nature, and the sexual signifiers therein, as an integrated theatrical element? To answer this question, we may revisit the previous introduction of Western theater to Japan and how this evolved to influence such 1960s artists as Suzuki.

As previously stated, the early years of the Showa period (1925-1988) had seen a new openness to the ideas from the West which had flooded in after the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the subsequent Taisho Period (from 1912). The Bungei Kyokai (Society for Promotion of the Arts) had made a strong impression on the literary elite but succumbed to government control in the 1920s. Kabuki was very popular and competitive with new hybrid theatrical forms but was seen as old-fashioned among "modern-minded" young people. One well-attended Japanese/western hybrid, shimpa, was a low-brow popular theater, consisting of Western-style sentimental drama. In 1938, the Bungakuza ("literary theatre") began with it's rallying cry- "Art for Art's Sake." The war, of course, brought a cessation of free expression in the arts but, soon after the war, censorship relaxed. Leading groups staged plays by Ibsen, Gogol, Tolstoy, Chekhov and various Japanese writers who drew on the Russian tradition (probably because of the easy proximity to Russian intellectuals to the north.)

Popular Western productions of the 1950s included Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, among many others. For the first time, decent translations of Shakespeare became available and even veteran kabuki stars vied to play *Hamlet*. Rapid and conflicting currents came when the death of the Socialist ideal, brought about by the ratification of renewal of the U.S.- Japan
Mutual Security Treaty (ANPO) in 1960, sparked "a search by young Japanese theater figures for an alternative theater with a radically different ideology (or, more properly, without any ideology) and entirely new methods."  

A new generation of writers emerged: in the forefront were famous novelist and playwright Mishima Yukio (*Five Modern Noh Plays, Madame de Sade*) and writer/director Abe Kobo, with *Tomodachi* (Friends) and *Boh ni Natta Otoko* (The Man Who Turned Into a Stick), as well as Terayama Shuji, with his *Tenjoh Sajiki* (Upper Gallery) group producing *Aomori no Semushiotoko* (The Hunchback of Aomori). It was in the climate of this new *shogekijo* (little theatre) movement— that of new ideals and no ideals— that director Suzuki Tadashi joined forces with writer Betsuyaku Minoru to form the *Waseda Shohgekijoh* (Waseda Little Theatre.) Their first production, in 1966, was *Mon* (The Gate). They had various successful collaborations, but in 1968 they decided to strike out in separate directions. Betsuyaku wanted to function as an independent playwright and not be molded by Suzuki's explorations into acting methodology and the nature of theatrical expression.

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4Takahashi, 1992, 2. What occurred was a kind of renaissance of complex styles and experiments to "return to the roots of the indigenous sense of corporeality." Suzuki refers to this in his writings when he confirms European views that Japanese bodies looked awkward imitating Western actors and acting styles. He called such imitation a "pathetic attempt to copy completely the surface of things."

5For more on Abe, see Donald Keene's introduction and translation of *Three Plays by Kobo Abe*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

6*Aomori no Semushiotoko* was also notable as being the stage debut of cross-dressing actor Miwa (nee Maruyama) Akihiro.
Suzuki Tadashi went abroad to Paris in 1977, at the invitation of French film director Jean-Louis Barrault, to be a part of the international festival held at the Theatre des Nations. Included in the delegation were actress Shiraishi Kayoko, great noh actor Kanze Hisao, his younger brother Kanze Hideo, celebrated kyogen performer Nomura Masaku, and Tokyo University French professor Watanabe Moriaki. The passionate reception to their demonstrations, in a simple environment, on the theme of gesture and motion, was an apotheosis for Suzuki:

I wanted... to throw out any preconceived notion of what a theatre should be. But I didn't want to replace it with some flashy new concept, the sort that might be created by an architect. I dreamt of making use of a space in which people had actually lived, a space filled with a history of actual human use.7

At this point Suzuki had already been exploring the countryside for a suitable location away from the high cost and "herd-em-in-herd-em-out" mentality of Tokyo theater management. He settled, in line with his new vision, on a farmhouse in the remote village of Toga. Along with other members of his company, he overcame the suspicions of the locals, transformed the immediate area, and stemmed the tide of depopulation which was killing this (and other) rural villages.8 Most importantly, he

7Suzuki, 72.
8This is one of very few success stories in the struggle to fight the crippling hemorrhage of young people and capable businesspeople from the countryside which has become an issue of the 80's and 90's. A small back-to-nature trend has brought about a
began to construct an indigenous theatrical form along contemporary lines, with glances to Japanese and Western antiquity but with solidly Japanese method and values.

Suzuki looked to noh, the "art of walking," to provide "feet" for the modern theater. A basic premise of the Suzuki actor-training method involves his conviction that an actor's character and physicality comes from the feet. As a result, he has all actors perform barefoot or wearing only tabi (split-toed socks.) Actors are given various exercises involving stamping, or more accurately, loosening the pelvic area and then vehemently striking the floor. Breath and energy are a big part of this. Suzuki's idea is to think of the pelvis as the center, reaching upward from it and counterbalancing downward as you establish an organic connection with the earth.

There are four characteristics which Suzuki Tadashi defines as unique to noh theatre. First, from rehearsal period to actual performance, virtually no energy which is not human goes into an artistic creation. Second, noh is non-realistic in expression. Next, the security of the environment, the actor's world, is fixed. Finally, noh ingrains a "do or die" battle mentality in it's participants. Even if an actor were to drop dead on stage, the performance would continue (the kohken, assistant, would replace the shite, the main character.) Avant-garde theater and ancient Greek theater have the first two
points. Only noh has all. Suzuki's vision was to construct a modern counterpart to noh.

On the basis of the natural aesthetic, Suzuki Tadashi incorporated into his early Greek plays (The Trojan Women [1974, 1984], Clytemnestra [1984], The Bacchae [1984]) a humble Japanese vegetable: the *daikon*, or Japanese white radish. Homegrown, ubiquitous and symbolic of Japanese rural life, the daikon can be quite long (two feet or more) and thick as a man's arm, but are invariably white and mild to the taste. They are part of every meal all over Japan. No doubt the countryside of Toyama is filled with them. Suzuki Tadashi describes how they found their way on stage and into his philosophy:

These days we've gotten used to frogs and *daikon*, those long Japanese radishes, in our own rehearsal hall. In fact, they play a crucial role on the stage as well.

The frogs don't actually appear on the stage; the actors seemingly become them. But the *daikon* appear in person. We eat them, quarrel with them, even kill characters with them. The big ones roll around on the stage, hang from the flies. At one point, black ones seemed absolutely essential, so we began to paint the white radishes black, almost 200 of them. Well-shaped ones have something neat and pure about them; they reveal a sense of being that is somehow very touching. But when those pure and touching radishes are painted black, a terrible change comes over them. They appear to be some kind of obscenity constructed from vinyl tubes. Hanging down from the rafters, tied with ropes near the base where the stems and leaves grow out from the root, there seems something weird and uncanny about them; they are almost like creatures from another planet.9

The *daikon* onstage would resonate symbolically in various ways to a Japanese audience. Most commonly, *daikon* are perceived as bland and inoffensive, without strong character of their own, absolutely incapable of hurting or sickening one, as in the

9Suzuki, 117.
expression *daikon yakusha* (unassuming actor, an actor who makes no impression, has no character, nothing to distinguish them). This has generally been a derisive term.

However, Suzuki says:

> If *daikon yakusha* show no special characteristics, they should be praised, not criticized. I'd like the term "radish actor" to become one of approbation. These days we have all too many actors who have so much personality they can make you very ill indeed.\(^{10}\)

In keeping with this line of thought, the late Ryu Chisshu, stone-faced actor of myriad Ozu Yasujiroh films (*Tokyo Monogatari* [Tokyo Story], *Sanma no Aji* [A Taste of Autumn]) was said to be *idai naru daikon yakusha* (a great daikon actor) because he was a stolidly blank male symbol, who could be plugged into any such role and splendidly reflect back the audience's expectation of such a figure.\(^{11}\)

Certainly, there is always the rural association when seeing *daikon*. "*Daikon ashi*" are fat, unshapely, country girl's legs.\(^{12}\) The school cheer of various agricultural schools is called the *daikon odori* (radish dance).\(^{13}\) No doubt, in Suzuki's productions, the use of *daikon* as sword, wand, or cudgel was a nod to the local countryside and to

\(^{10}\)Suzuki, 73.

\(^{11}\)Miura, 1996. Ryu Chisshu was invariably paired with another Ozu favorite, 40's and 50's film star Hara Setsuko. Together, they formed the Japanese standard of stolid responsible older man and girlish sentimental woman: the masculine and feminine ideals.

\(^{12}\)*Newsweek* magazine ungraciously brought up this image a few years ago in reporting about the achievements and popularity of Japanese Olympic skater Ito Midori. Suzuki has been notable in championing consciousness on the beauty of the Japanese mesomorphic body and a turning away from the eurocentric model.

\(^{13}\)Tokyo Nogyo Daigaku (Tokyo Agricultural University), alma mater of infamous former political kingmaker, Kanemaru Shin, uses the *daikon odori* in it's many school activities. Powerful athletic farmboys dressed in *gakuran* (militaristic black school uniforms) grasp and juggle the *daikon* as they lead the cheers with baritone shouts. *Daikon* are used as makeshift drum major batons, as well.
the agrarian roots of all Japanese. Accordingly, the *daikon* is a strong fertility symbol, a mighty phallus, and is often left as offering at small fertility shrines, such as the previously mentioned Tagata Jinja, along with prayers for a male offspring.

The backbone of Suzuki Tadashi's staging-in harmony with nature-lies in his use of *shakke*, or "the borrowed view." The Japanese sense of this is "although I could afford a magnificent garden, it's more aesthetic to 'borrow' a lovely view from Nature as a backdrop to my existence."\(^{14}\) Westerners simply call this "a room with a view." The Japanese conceptualize this as a mild form of appropriation, albeit all the more enjoyable because it incurs no social debt.

Suzuki's grand-scale version of this is exhibited in the removable panels from his Toga Theatre and the lake-side amphitheatre, both with views of the hills encasing the "five valleys" of Toga.\(^{15}\) He recalled the same open principle of the Greek theatre:

> Originally, the Greek theatre was presented out of doors. Theatres like the one at Epidaurus were constructed on the tops of hills. When summer came, people collected in twos and threes to talk and eat in the fields, then watch a play in the open, circular performing space.\(^{16}\)

Suzuki gives this description of the dramatic impact of "accidental" nature:

> Two years ago, we did *The Trojan Women* in the amphitheatre in summer, a storm came-thunder and lightning- all the actors were drenched. . . Even so, not one member of the audience left. . .After the play ended, some audience members responded by saying, "We had no idea that rain falling during a performance could be so theatrical." Others

\(^{14}\)This ties in with the high aesthetics of *wabi* and *sabi*, complex concepts of minimalism or humble simplicity, and the ephanescent beauty of natural decay or patina.

\(^{15}\)Suzuki, 111.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., 79.
said, "The sound of the voices in the rain was so emotionally exciting!" They were not troubled by a fixed response to rain falling or not falling, wind blowing or not blowing during a performance. Rather, they communicated with nature in a very real way... one that had not been determined beforehand.\textsuperscript{17}

Greater still was the theatrical effect of a Toga Theatre winter production:

> At the back of the stage, two doors were thrown open to reveal [the actor] standing against a wall of snow—the dazzling brightness of the snow invaded the dark interior. Such an effect was deeply moving, and unrepeatable...\textsuperscript{18}

As seen from these examples, Suzuki Tadashi has entered into bold experiments in melding the epic and mythic Greek classics with a Japanese organic and nature-centered theatre. Only an artist with an uncompromising vision could have walked away from the sure money and local fame available in Tokyo to risk something more enduring, locally integrated and yet, with wide application.

In 1988, Suzuki invited director Anne Bogart to speak to the Toga International Festival. Peter Zeisler, executive director of Theatre Communication Group, formally introduced the two directors, planting the seeds for their joint endeavor. In sharing ideas the two directors found that their concerns about the state of the theatre worldwide were similar. Both believed in a physical approach to the art of acting as theatre's

\textsuperscript{17}Slater, 43.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
cornerstone, both wanted to battle the corrupt state of the arts under capitalism, and both endorsed theatre's responsibility in larger cultural and political matters.\(^19\)

They consequently collaborated in creating productions Bogart's *Orestes* and Suzuki's bilingual *Dionysus* (1992),\(^20\) and the entity SITI (Saratoga International Theatre Institute), established in Saratoga Springs, New York.\(^21\) In 1996, Suzuki initiated an eight-nation Theatre Olympics ("cross-fertilization of the past with the future"-Suzuki) featuring his contributions, *Dionysus* and *Electra*, performed in the ancient stadium at Delphi, this time borrowing the Greek natural setting.\(^22\)

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\(^{19}\) Lampe, 147.

\(^{20}\) Based on Euripides’ *The Bacchae*.

\(^{21}\) Sara is one way of saying "new" in Japanese. Thus, "New Toga."

\(^{22}\) The Theatre Olympic headquarters were a new four-theatre, Japanese government and corporate-supported complex constructed in Shizuoka Prefecture (near Mount Fuji), conceived and artistically directed by Suzuki.
Appendix V

_Eijanaika: Peasant Uprising as Performance_

In 1866, as the Meiji Restoration began, the Tokugawa shogunate fell due to changing tides of history and, particularly, pressure from foreign governments. The _samurai_ class was being officially abolished and class lines were no longer certain or recognizable. In a land where 85% of the population was of the peasant class, not the lowest but certainly the least privileged,¹ it was they who bore the brunt of shifting allegiances and desperate ploys by the government to extract the manpower and funds necessary to make a country work. Oppression of the recently tenanted farming masses was harsh and peasants no longer had the strength of their _samurai_ and _daimyo_ to enact justice; there was, in fact, a very fuzzy chain of command. Taxes were no longer based on the rice harvest but were fixed, good harvest or no. Merchants, officially lower in status than peasants, had money to buffer their social disparagements but peasants were increasingly pressed to _agaman suru_ (endure) and increase their output for less and less

¹There were four classes, frozen into place by the edicts of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1585, based on degree of productivity. The samurai were the top class with the most privilege but ironically the least opportunities for change within the system. Next were the peasants, farmers who supplied the country with all agricultural needs. The bottom two classes, the _chonin_, were the artisans, who made things to sell, and the merchants, who were despised because they produced nothing but had the opportunity to become wealthy and to be their own bosses. It was a faulty system which was destined to collapse in upon itself with progress and the rise in literacy.
gain. The peasant classes emerged as pawns in the political machinations and were ruthlessly manipulated. Social strictures in an already restrictive culture left the common man with few options and an unbearable psychological pressure.

What occurred in the light of this repressive backdrop was an event which has emerged several times in Japanese history: a mass hysteria in which farmers threw down their tools and rushed as one into the streets. In this case, dancing, laughter, all manner of lewd gesture and lovemaking, Phallic representation (including cross-dressing), and, chanting over and over “eijanaika? eijanaika?! (What the hell!)” created a liminal and carnivalesque atmosphere, a spontaneous matsuri, which was socially subversive and rich in the spontaneous play and trance-like disembodiment which are at the very heart of performative activities and theatre itself.

In addition to the historical record, film director Imamura Shohei’s epic 1981 film on the historical event (Eijanaika) and its ramifications provides text for speculation on the performative elements and implications of the event.

In order to discuss this phenomenon, it is first useful to again step back to examine what we know of the historical records and commentaries. Noted late historian E. H. Norman described the circumstances of the peasantry in Tokugawa Era and the

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2 Among others, the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 understandably contained several instances of mass hysteria in its aftermath. Besides the expected fear and confusion, there were wild rumors about Koreans poisoning the water supply.
ejianaika spectacle as a “phenomenon which would have fascinated Goya.” Of course, he meant not only that Goya lived in a society not unlike feudal Japan but also that it was a time in which the somber and fabulous, superstitious and hysteric, ribald and pretentious all were in juxtaposition as society roiled in flux. The point of his examination was not just the remarkable qualities of this event occurring but the inevitability of its occurrence. The pressured circumstances were of the most oppressive kind. Even the long-suffering Japanese could only take so much when institutions, laws and unjust prohibitions came together to so thoroughly choke the natural spirit of the peasant farmer. The lowly and over-regimented gave themselves a kind of mass permission to throw off social control for a few hours or days.

The opening of Japan in 1864 had wreaked havoc with domestic prices. Importing of cotton and heavy exportation of gold and silver created runaway inflation. The class system had been officially dismantled, but samurai, especially ronin (samurai formally released from service to their lords and, thus, their jobs), who could not readily change with the times were impoverished and bitter. Many were plotting against the shogunate, attacking foreign officials and doing anything to discredit or bring down the government, including spreading all kinds of rumors among the superstitious peasants regarding omens, portents and coming disasters.

In 1866, Nature collaborated. A comet flashed through the skies and a serious crop failure threatened famine. The humiliations of the peasants under generations of feudal bureaucracy were insufferable in the face of a visibly tottering regime. The Tokugawa shogunate could not regain its former nerve or prestige and was recognized by all as having, at worst, been weak in the face of foreign insolence and at, best having “sold out” the country for little gain. For a society with virtually no history of outspoken criticism, widespread condemnation of the government was remarkable and unstinting. One handbill posted on a bridge in Osaka in September of 1866 gave eloquent voice to the disgruntled populace:

Mediocre officials of the Tokugawa government have made the whole nation impoverished and exhausted: they are deaf to the complaints of soldiers and people alike. They torture the common folk⁴ and increase the burden of taxes. . . . It is impossible for people to gain a livelihood and Heaven cries out against such corruption and waste. . . . The very bone and blood of the peasant has been consumed; the hatred of the lower classes has entered their marrow so that they no longer show respect for their superiors but look upon them as their enemies. . . . In view of such conditions, most immediate remedies should be used to lighten those taxes which are levied upon poor or waste land; to repair dams; to exempt the merchants from forced loans; to punish and forbid the luxury of government officials; to cease the wasteful expenditure on warships and to cease copying Western styles; to lighten the burden of the corvée.⁵

⁴Literally, “the dark-necked people”; the common people were not protected from the sun by upper-class fashionable broad-brimmed hats.

⁵Taken from the Secret History of the Tokugawa-Collection of Journals, p. 250-1.
Political activity of the organized type known as *hyakushoh ikki* (peasant’s revolt) peaked in 1866 (there were some thirty-two recorded) but, in the face of apparent inefficacy, dropped to only twelve in 1867. Just as the shogunate was teetering on the brink of a fatal *coup d’etat*, all political activity ceased, in a strange foreboding calm.

Then, like a swelling tide, it began in Edo and spread rapidly along the eastern seaboard highway through Shimane, Yamanashi, and Gumma provinces. Osaka and Kyoto felt the tinges of frenzy as well. Eyewitness accounts of the times corroborate what appeared to be a mass hysteria, a writhing and infectious sea of humanity prompting one another to orgiastic abandon. There was a trance-like quality to the frenzy but, it must be noted that there was a framework which directed the activity, one which created a performance of the festival mode but without apparent preparation or reason. It was a spontaneous burst of transgressive life-energy and rebellion. The diary/memoir of respected interpreter, dramatist, and journalist Fukuchi Genichiro (he was also a peer of Fukuzawa Yukichi), *Kaio Jidan*, details an account of being detained in Nishinomiya while traveling on business in November of 1867:

> People were singing and dancing so madly in the streets that it was impossible to hire even one porter. . . . This dance was celebrating the appearance of placards or *fuda* (talismans) which had fallen out of the skies and were circulated from place to place. . . . The townspeople regarded this as a happy omen of a prosperous year and cried out in
refrain, “eija nai ka? eija nai ka?” and they inserted at random many obscene and coarse lines into the verses and the rhythm of the song was droll and amusing. . . . The young and old, men and women, without distinction, put on gay flower-designed clothes and wandered about in the city streets making a continual uproar. Some people said that the fall of these placards had been managed by the people of Kyoto in order to excite the people’s spirits.7

English diplomat and Japanese scholar Sir Ernest Satow noted in Osaka:

Some difficulty was experienced in making our way through the crowds of people in flaming red garments dancing and shouting over and over “ii ja nai ka.” They were so much taken up with their dancing that we passed along almost unnoticed.8

A Tokugawa commander and diarist named Tsutsumi arrived in Hakone to the following scene:

The people rang bells and beat drums and were going about in strange costumes, crying, “eija nai ka, eija nai ka.” We could not understand what it was all about. Both old and young were dancing: men and women rushing hither and thither. . . . at Kyoto the frenzy was at its worst. There were groups of ten people holding red and white flags and jingling bells and beating drums, and there were even men dressed in women’s clothes and women in men’s clothes. . . . Our group was annoyed by this spectacle. . . . there was no sign of fighting and we were puzzled why everybody was so frenzied. . . .9

6This may be translated as, “Isn’t it good?” or “Who cares?” or “What the hell?” or “Why not?” Social scholar Winston Davis has offered up the whimsical, “Ain’t it hunky-dory?”

7Fukuchi, 1870.


9Ibid.
A letter sent from Ise dated October 27, 1867 remarked:

...people leaped and danced as if crazy and they even went inside their houses shod with geta\(^\text{10}\)...Truly it reveals a strange side of human nature.

There are many other accounts but the picture is clear if the reasons and significances are not.

The question looms: where did all the “inciting” talismans come from?

Politically, if scholars and historians are correct, this may have been one of the most astute uses of group psychology in history. The rebel southern clans of Satsuma, Choshu and Tosa had the benefit of former oligarch Saigo Takamori on their side. It has been speculated, by Norman and others, that Saigo may well have enlisted scores of local headmen and henchmen to disperse the fuda far and wide on an educated hunch that the nervous and shaky populace would go over the edge, providing the social confusion necessary to complete his anti-bakufu\(^\text{11}\) campaign.

These frenzies were certainly not limited to this one time in Japan. Under the rubric of okagemairi or “pilgrimages of grace,” they have occurred in 1705, 1771, and 1830 as well, roughly once a generation. Also called nukemairi (secret pilgrimage), these trance-like processions have had the infectious effect of causing participants to

\(^{10}\)Geta are wooden clogs which, like most other shoes, are left behind when entering a house.

\(^{11}\)The bakufu was the military government, literally, “tent government,” the term for army headquarters in the feudal period; hence, the government of the Shogun.
suddenly leave their homes, drop what they are doing, and embark on a long and unprepared journey to the Ise Shrine. As in the eijanaika phenomenon of 1867, people in the streets “clapped their hands, singing and shouting” and “abandoned themselves to utter madness, as well as ribaldry and horseplay.”

In the 1981 Imamura film, Eijanaika, history is given its due but the circumstances are slightly altered to serve the purpose of the story: in this case the people are led in the frenzied chant and rollicking dance by the “show-people”: in this case, denizens of an erotic sideshow where drunken men can “tickled the goddess” or gawk at geeks eating snakes. Deconstructed Westernesque hoopskirts are lifted to provide plenty of earthy flirtation for the grubby male oglers as the singer/prostitutes lead the seductive song/chant:

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Life is so uncertain these days. . .
Will Tokugawa win? Satsuma and Choshu?
We can’t tell so, who cares?
Both want to reform the world:
Why not? Eijanaika?!
The Ei Ja Nai Ka Can Can!
Paste some paper on your love-pot;
If it’s torn, paste it again.
Love your neighbor; get it wet!
Take your clothes off!
Who cares? Ei ja nai ka?!
Go ahead and do it!
Men and women, have some fun!
Who cares? Ei ja nai ka?!
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12This given by noted Shinto scholar Norinaga Motoori in 1771.

13From Imamura’s film.
Danger? Who cares? *Eijanaika eijanaika*! Don’t cross the bridge! The army’s over there. They won’t shoot us! What the hell! *Eijanaika eijanaika*!

For a time the military is quite confused. But as one might guess, brutality wins in the end and the *bakufu*’s army, with their newly imported guns, mows the crazed bacchants down in a bloodbath.

The film took liberties with history for dramatic effect but the events themselves were remarkable enough. In the *eijanaika* occurrences, color (spectacle), repetition (text/spoken word), and dance (bodies in motion) were spontaneously combined to create a performative event. Audience and performer melded together in a pure mutual ludic spirit; the shogunate was audience as well. In recognizing the *bakufu* as oppressive force, some of this energy was reflected back: “You may tax us into poverty but we can still feel a communal joy.” Gender became a suspended mode and subject to the fluidity of a preconstructed state. There are not so many times when adults can experience such public states. Only a mass delusion or a mentality of upheaval as created by ruptures in the social fabric would be likely to elicit it.
Appendix VI

Jozoku (Lady Thief, Criminal Queen, Criminal Woman)

By Osamu Hashimoto

Based on Kurotokage (Black Lizard), the mystery story, by Edogawa Rampo and Kurotokage, the film, by Mishima Yukio. This one-man show consists of three acts and an epilogue, all written for actor Sasai Eisuke.

(Note: The play was first published in Tokyo in 1998. Artist Okada Yoshio executed a lavish series of illustrations, reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley, to accompany the text. The result was a highly artistic synthesis. It often flows with much art and few words on a given page in order to theatricalize certain descriptions or utterances. This also served to give acting beats and other pauses to the reader where none were otherwise indicated. In the translation of this play, I have tried to reflect those shifts and pauses, Sasai Eisuke’s pace and choices in the production of Jozoku, and Miwa Akihiro’s original rhythms in the film Kurotokage by page space. I have done this either by providing a new line for a given sentence or by skipping lines in order to give a pause for stage directions/changes of scene.

No doubt the English reader will wonder why certain obvious points are repeated or belabored. Culturally reflexive material always is complex and may be different than one’s usual expectations, for several reasons. First, this writing is homage to the mystery/detective prose of Edogawa Rampo, the original author. Second, it recalls the poetic Mishima Yukio, the adapter/author of the script and screenplay of Kurotokage. His florid style was not unlike that of American playwright Tennessee
The period of the reign of the present Emperor of Japan, Akihito,*’s father, Hirohito, who presided over WW II, the American occupation of Japan, and the extraordinary growth of the country since that time. Third, it summons the ever-present originator of the Kurotokage role in the play and film, actor Miwa Akihiro. Miwa imbued the part with camp declamatory excess. Finally, playwright Hashimoto gave actor Sasai Eisuke, for whom *Jozoku* was written, a contemporary commentary on gender, the nature of beauty, death as a metaphor for daily inertia, life, etc. by highlighted repetition, with revealing twists. This was a strategy through which seasoned actor Sasai could deconstruct the previous incarnations through gestural and facial commentary on the lines, through direct appeal to the audience, and through his own theatrical emphasis. Another actor, another director can, of course, find new deliveries and structures. But, it is essential that this play be firmly grounded in reconstitution of the ghosts that it then both recyclces and exorcizes. It has an infamous pedigree, but requires a prior knowledge of its lineage from director, actor and audience in order to mine its pearls. A Western audience would not automatically have attained this. For that reason, I propose that a Western production include either an immediately previous cycle of the Shochiku film, say the week before the play begins its run (tickets price might include both events) or images or snippets of the film be juxtaposed as a Brechtian device, within the production itself.)

*Jozoku*: A Monologue in One Act

**Scene One**

(The time is the present, a time which resembles the beginning of the Showa Era.1 It is Christmas Eve and “phony Oriental Christians” are having wild parties. Late that night,)

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1(1925-1988) The period of the reign of the present Emperor of Japan, Akihito,’s father, Hirohito, who presided over WW II, the American occupation of Japan, and the extraordinary growth of the country since that time.
in the darkness far away from the world of people, a gruesome figure, pale as a doll, points to and invites in a beautiful woman . . . The actor speaks.)

Madam, madam. Everything is ready. A perfect commodity has just arrived. I’m so happy.

(The woman’s red lips move)

Jun-chan, come in. I (boku) wouldn’t hurt you.

What happened? Surprised? This is not some eerie underground with monsters. It’s a real place. Oh, well, there is nobody else who would come here at three o’clock in the morning. It is a morgue in a university hospital. It’s a boring place. Corpses, that have lost their beauty, are floating in a formalin pool. Of course, there are bodies, which were not beautiful to begin with. They were not beautiful.

But, science is wonderful. It is equal to everybody. Even evil old men or unpleasant old women reveal their pretty pink flesh after you skin their dead bodies.

That surprises young medical students.

When they cut into an old woman whose dark skin is all wrinkled with age spots, they see her beautiful pink flesh underneath.

Yes, science is equal to everybody. It is indiscriminate.

Butchers are a little more discriminate. “This is expensive Matsuzaka beef, this is a cheap imported Australian beef…” Poor things, humans and their flesh are not

\[\text{\textsuperscript{\small 2}Hashimoto uses watashi, the polite form of referring to oneself, most of the time, but occasionally boku, the more intimate form, is used. When boku is used, it is mentioned.}\]
discriminately categorized by anybody. They only float in the water, waiting to be used for the development of science.

Yes, this place is where all the corpses are gathered for young medical students to practice autopsies. These dead people are wonderful. They try to be useful even when they are dead. Good work. I don’t have anything to do with you people.

By the way, Jun-chan, why did I bring you here?

I have to tell you how it came about.

You were pathetic, Jun-chan. “I committed a murder,” you said with a pitiful look, “I’m finished.”

How silly! You found your woman with some other man. So you killed both of them.

The woman is a low class bitch with bleached hair and the man is a bowlegged yakuza!

Worst of all, the site of the crime was an old cheap apartment. Oh, what a boring, ordinary, poor bloody Greek tragedy! You shouldn’t have written your own script!

No. When a bad actor tries to write a horrible script, it always ends up a mess. You lost your senses and your life was finished.

You came to me, “Madam, help me.”

You’ve got to be kidding! You are so stupid. You are underestimating what life is about. What a wonderful self-centered self-indulgence!

Everybody is like that nowadays. You are a cheap murderer. We will see your face in the newspaper and on TV. How boring. Look at you. You look so bad.

There is no such a thing as a “beautiful killer,” anymore. Everybody writes his own bad
script and indulges himself in his bad one-man show. So all the audience boos at you.

You’re a pathetic murderer. You are a short-tempered fool without any logic.

But I will help you, as you are good.

You see, Jun-chan, you’re going to die.

You silly. Why are you looking like that? Don’t be overwhelmed by this atmosphere.

This is a place for people who have finished their jobs, a place for the people who have become objects. Objects, things… This is the same kind of place as a warehouse where cup ramen\(^3\), small dried fish, and dried konbu\(^4\) are stored in cardboard boxes. So look around, with your eyes open.

Look, things are floating around…They are just objects, so they are equal.

They are all beautifully pink underneath their skins.

I hate freedom, equality, science, and all those things. Because they are all lies.

There is no such thing as equality. If there is anything like that, it only exists in here.

When the bodies are all obedient and floating in a pool, they become equal. “Look, I’m free!” See, there is no equality. In this world, there is nobody as free as I am!

Equality is all around. All fallen down and floating around.

(Pause) Jun-chan, do you know who I am?

“Vaguely”? That’s pathetic! What do you mean by “vaguely”?

Don’t tell me with your pathetic look, you know “vaguely” who I am!

\(^3\)Inexpensive instant dried Chinese noodles.

\(^4\)A type of long, flat seaweed.
I am nobody.

I am just a woman with a black lizard tattoo on my upper arm.

Who am I?

Am I a rich bored lady of leisure, who would dance naked in front of a crowd on Christmas Eve? Or, a flapper who uses man’s language? Is that it?

You would ask such a woman to clean up after your messy homicide?

Yes, you are a fool who was driven by your passion. As simple as you are, you would do anything without any plans. You are so desperate that you’d do anything.

Just because the woman you love got with another man, you go out of your way to visit her and stab her to death, along with the man. You were great until you killed her.

Your passion crawled out of your body to light up your young face like the highest quality ruby.

But, oh no. That was the end of it. Your wet, greasy hair was shining in your hot sweat, and became beautiful like some beast. Then, it got cold in the chilling December night. Just like some boy who is having a Christmas party listens to a midnight chime of a clock and realizes he is a Buddhist, with no business having anything to do with Christmas. Your passion dies.

After indulging in a passionate act beyond your means, you were just like an old man catching your breath. After the bloody manly act, you hunched your back with your
beautiful wet hair with sweat, hanging like some pathetic drowned body, you hid away to come see me and say to me, with the best possible pretense that you are still cool and collected.

“Madame, madame, I have a favor to ask you. Would you lend me some money?”

I was surprised. I don’t loan anything to a cheap punk like you.

“Would you lend me two million yen? I promise to pay you back. I can’t stay in Japan. I don’t have time. I promise to pay you back.”

I sat back and asked you, “What did you do, Jun-chan?”

As I asked, I was looking at your face like, “Did I ever think this man worth two million yen a night?”

The most would be three hundred thousand. With the look on your face a few minutes ago, it’d be about five thousand. Receiving five thousand yen from a woman, even without being asked to go to bed, aren’t you ashamed?

Listen, I am not trying to be hard on you with the things that have happened in the past. I just want to teach you about the proper prices of things.

Where did you want to go with two million yen? Manila? Bangkok?

Oh, no. I (boku) don’t want to help you to become another rich Japanese with a little money, with your relieved face laying on a deckchair. I don’t want you to think I am a cheap woman to allow such shame.

Come here, Jun-chan.

Here is a new dead body. His age was about the same as yours. He has no family.

Tomorrow, his body will be thrown into this pool to wait for the medical students.
So, let’s just take him. People here don’t care if one human body, which is only good as a thing, gets lost. I do things so that they don’t make a fuss. I’m not just another pretty face. You don’t think some ordinary woman would try a black lizard tattoo on her upper arm just for fashion, do you?

Jun-chan, you committed a murder. Homicide means the death penalty.

Only that stupid crime is punished. People can’t separate the crime from the criminal, so the criminal get punished along with his crime.

But I (will) do better than that. Now, tonight, I will just punish your stupid crime.

Tomorrow is Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we should do something nice and warm.

I’ll tell you how it will work. Take this body out of here. Take it to your room and put on your clothes and push it down from the top of your apartment building. To make the face all crushed, take his ankles and drop him head first.

Yes, you can do it. You used to be a boxer. You have the strength.

Don’t write a will.

You, who kills by passion, should then throw himself passionately from the building.

Then you die. . . .

On this beautiful night, Christmas Eve, the morgue is strangely quiet.

(The woman, as beautiful as a mystery, finally begins explaining the strangely horrifying plan of the crime, while admiring the shining drops of sweat on the murderer’s forehead, as if they were the silver beads of a necklace.)

Say, Jun-chan, you are no longer a man of this world.

You want to know what I want to do?
I (boku) will pity you and I will love you.

So, Jun-chan (pause) I also have a favor to ask.

Have you ever heard the name Iwase Shoibei? He is a famous jewel dealer in Osaka.

What is scary is that he just received a black mail letter.

He has a beautiful daughter. The letter says, “I’ll kidnap her.”

Horrible, isn’t it?

Hahahahahahaha……!

That young lady is very beautiful. She is tall and likes to play tennis, so her thighs are well developed. Her skin is white as snow. The curve of her hips is sensuous and inviting.

The funny thing is that young lady, Sanae-san, thinks that she is a little overweight, and is nearsighted so she wears glasses. In this modern age, when electric waves are sent by satellite, she still speaks the gentle Senba dialect. She is a little embarrassed about it, so she is rather quiet.

It’s funny, Jun-chan. People think that she is just the daughter of a rich man. No one knows that she is beautiful.

When I said to her, “How beautiful you are,” she blushed and moved in a most licentious way, as if I had seen her undressed.

That’s why I decided to steal her from Mr. Iwase. Please help me.

You know, of course, that you are going to die anyway, so you shouldn’t have anything against it.

This dead body here is not as well-built as you are.
Your fingerprints in your room and this man’s fingerprints don’t match.

But the man who killed the man and woman, jumped down from the building and killed himself.

You died, but you are not the one who died. The police are in trouble. The simple crime of passion becomes a unknown bizarre crime.

What would you think if I decorated this morgue, where they keep study materials for young medical students, with gold garlands? What if we saw a line of different flags? That would be eerie, wouldn’t it? It would be the same thing, you see.

Dreary crimes make people ungraceful. Don’t commit dull crimes. Don’t be a criminal of a stupid crime. Don’t disappoint people. Don’t take away people’s dreams.

Come, Jun-chan. I will give you my love.

You are going to die and be born again. You will go away from the democratic world, where every human being is equal, and become my slave.

Don’t be afraid of me. I’m just a woman.

I don’t even have a name. That’s because I was raped by my own father when I was a child.

That was a lie. In fact, I was a girl who suffered poverty.

This is a lie, too. In fact, I am a descendent of a queen of the Mu continent.

It’s true. Ah, there is not anything true anywhere.

Because I am only a woman.
If you are Amamiya Junichi and you are proud of yourself, remember that Amamiya
Junichi is all finished now because you have committed murder. You are nothing but a
worthless, brutal murderer.
Why? Because you are Amamiya Junichi.
But I am just a woman. I am nobody else, a woman without name who has killed many
people to survive.
It’s a lie. I have no identity as I am nobody.
So I have nothing to be afraid of.
So, come. Jun-chan. I will let you lick my feet.
I am a superior woman. I can be as vulgar as I want to be. I don’t care. However
savage you become, I am fine. I will become more and more shameless, and will always
beat you.
Because, I am frigid.
Nothing shocks me.
Come, Jun-chan. You have to learn a little about your master. You will be mine.
Come, Jun-chan.
(Pause) I am scared. Akechi Kogoro is here…
Mr. Iwase has hired Akechi Kogoro as a bodyguard to protect Sanae.
Kogoro Akechi? He’s only the most famous detective there is, sharper and cooler than
anybody else. That man is waiting for me.
Well, of course, he doesn’t know who I am. He probably imagining a crude hairy man because I am a criminal who committed blackmail to kidnap such a beautiful young lady. Akechi, with his cold eyes, is on guard, waiting for me.

I’m just a woman who wants something beautiful, however, the best detective in Japan is blocking my way with his cold eyes. Oooo, when I think of this, I get so thrilled that the blood all over my body gets hot!

Jun-chan, you will protect me, won’t you? You will help me, won’t you?

I will protect you in return.

Look, Jun-chan. . . .

Scene Two

(In the pitch black night, there is a ship floating. In the black night, an invisible white long wake and the horrible crime has already occurred. The beautiful woman has gotten hold of the beautiful girl. There was no justice following the women on this dark night.

The beautiful woman lounges a gorgeous robe and puts on her makeup, held by her beautiful maid. The beautiful girl knocks on the door and timidly walks in.)

The actor speaks: Come in.

Sorry to trouble you to come here, Sanae-san.

I am in the middle of putting on my make-up. Sit down there. I have to fix my hair.

That’s all right.

I’m sorry, you must have been uncomfortable. I didn’t want you to run away from me.

That’s why. But I don’t have to have any rope or gag on you anymore.)
But, I have to lock you in your room. I don’t want you walk around the ship and throw yourself away into the sea.

The reason why I called you in is that I have sad news. There is no one who will protect you anymore. Do you understand? Excuse me for smoking.

I was surprised, Sanae-san.

I saw you in such good spirits in your room, so I thought there was something wrong with you. But then I realized why. So I hurried and got rid of him. There is no one who will get in my way on this ship anymore. So nobody will save you anymore. You know what I’m talking about. There was a long sofa just minutes ago. The sofa I brought in from your home in Ashiya with you inside. Tatsumura in Kyoto wove the Soushou-in grape pattern and an Italian furniture craftsman made the sofa and upholstered it. Your father was so proud of it. I put you in that sofa and had it carried here. Then I was wondering what to do with it. I thought that it was a shame to waste Tatsumura’s excellent work. I really thought so. But it’s no good anymore. Trying to kidnap you, this sofa got dirty.

My man sneaked in your house and pushed you into the sofa.

He pretended to have been drunk and vomited on it.

The maids hurried and called a cleaner so that we could carry you in the sofa out of the house, which was guarded by Akechi Kogorou. So I had to have the wonderful sofa tainted. It was no good anymore. Such things are not useful anymore. Uselessness is their destiny. The sofa we carried in was infested, with a “rat” in it.

You knew this, didn’t you? Hmm, Sanae-san?
When I called you in, you saw this sofa and you were clearly shocked.

You knew it. You knew that Akechi Kogoro had sneaked on to this ship. So you were fine. You looked at me and weren’t afraid of me. You were just standing there with blank look on your face. You were waiting to be saved by Akechi, weren’t you?

I was looking forward to seeing your beautiful face crashed by fear, but you betrayed my expectation. You looked like some middle-class girl, looking around this ship.

You are so cruel.

It’s because you knew that Akechi was hiding somewhere in this ship.

Yes, I have a tough rival. He was hiding in the same sofa in which we had carried you.

When did you get in there?

My men on the ship said to me, “Master, there is someone hiding in this ship.”

They said there is a ghost. Sailors believe in superstitions. If someone steals food from the kitchen, they think that a ghost did it. Someone who is not supposed to be there doesn’t exist for them. So, they say, “there’s a ghost.” But there existed someone who wasn’t supposed to be there.

My enemy.

The man who tried to take away my precious stolen treasure.

Kogorou Akechi was on this ship.

He is mischievous.

But, so am I.

So I knew it.

And I called him, “Akechi-san,” I called to the sofa.
Oh, no. Sanae-san, there is nobody on this earth that will help you anymore. Akechi Kogorou, who was supposed to rescue you, was thrown into the sea with the sofa that was treasured by your father. When I realized that Akechi was in the sofa, I said,

“Akechi-san, aren’t you scared? See, we are in the middle of the ocean. You have no one on your side. Only my (boku-no) friends are here on this ship. “See, Akechi-san, why are you in such a small place?”

Then I sat on that sofa.

I was excited. I wasn’t scared. I thought, “What a man he is!”

He followed me all by himself.

He sneaked in my ship and hid underneath me, all by himself.

I was thrilled to know that a man was hiding under my own body.

A live man hiding inside of a sofa, feeling the warmth of my body, only a cushion in between us!

That thought thrilled me!

A man who loses himself in love, sneaks into his girlfriend’s house, which is guarded by her strict father. He sneaks in, then is about to be found out, so he runs under the sofa. I was inside of such a fairy tale.

I put my body on the sofa and whispered, “Akechi-san.”

I felt his body heat.

“I finally caught him. What should I do with him now?” That thought made my heart beat faster than ever.
(The two women are on a ship floating on the dark, night ocean. Under the ship is endless dark, night water. The women are crying over a lost man on the swirling dark, foggy ocean. Praising him, hating him, and laughing. The destination of the ship is clear. But the destination of the emotions is unknown.)

(Hating the man who outwitted her, the beautiful woman says to the beautiful girl,)

‘No one has ever done that to me.’

No one could ever outwit me, ever! I wear a black velvet gown and live in the darkness. My job is outwit the world. No one was ever supposed to be able to outwit me. Only one man did this impossible thing.

Akechi Kogorou was there in the sofa.

I was thrilled.

As I sat on the sofa, my men came in my room because I said to them, “Bring me some rope.” My men were waiting for my order. They were waiting for my sign, to point my thumb down like this, without a word.

“Tie the rope around this sofa and throw it down into the sea.”

With this little gesture, they were supposed to throw Akechi Kogorou down to the bottom of the sea. These men, who didn’t know anything, were waiting in silence for my sign.

They were looking at me in silence with looks on their face, as if I, their master, were some crooked woman who would betray them.

“Stupid men,” I thought looking at them.
They do whatever I tell them to do for a little money I give them. They do whatever it takes to get some small attention from me. They think whoever hurts me is their enemy and try to protect me thinking they are my guardians or some such things.

These stupid men surround me and stare with the toughest glares.

Here is one man who tried to outwit me and came to this enemy ship all by himself, but they don’t understand his boldness. Sad slaves, with no such courage or nerve, surround me.

Surrounded by them, my knees shook.

There was a fire in my belly, and the white fat slowly melted in my body because there was a wonderful man hiding underneath me.

Akechi Kogorou . . .

Look, Sanae-san. Have you ever stood in front of wonderful treasures all by yourself at night? Before your eyes there is something like human treasure.

Even when there is no spot light on it, it has light in itself.

It shines as if smiling to attract anyone who would come near.

There are such things in this world. For example, your white beautiful skin.

For example, the largest diamond, the Star of Egypt, which I took from your father using you as a beautiful decoy. Beautiful treasures shine in the night, in the night they shine.

“Take me away from here, release me into the beautiful night,” the wonderful treasure whispers. Have you ever experienced anything like that?

They really do say it. In silence, they speak directly to your heart.
“Come, reach me. I am the most significant thing you know. Reach out your extraordinary arm and catch this beautiful me.”

In the darkness of the night, that beautiful treasure is whispering and shining. This was just like that. In front of me, there was this wonderful treasure. The alarm switch was already turned off. The most magnificent treasure in this world was shaking in fear.

“Please come here,” it whispered.

I just had to reach out. It was just like that. But why?

My reaching fingers didn’t get hot. Only the inside of my body felt this consuming heat. My fingers reaching the wonderful treasure were just like a machine, moving quickly and calmly. I knew it. I knew it and thought, “this is so strange.”

I knew too well the moments when my whole body was chilled and all the heat went to the tip of my fingers to reach proudly shining treasures. But this time my fingers were cold and dry. In my heart, hot emotions were supposed to cry out, “throw this man into the sea.”

But my throat was chilled and frozen. I said again, “Akechi-san.”

My heart was longing to hear his voice.

I wanted a cold wind to blow and gently extinguish the fire burning in my heart. As lovers try to blew hot sighs into each other’s chests, invisible Kogorou Akechi was upsetting me.

“Akechi-san, you’re there, aren’t you?. You’re so bad. How did you follow me?”

I said that to him, so he replied.
“I am always behind you. I am your shadow. I’d never lose the sight of you.
I’m always behind you. You are a bad woman and you are waiting to be caught my me and be destroyed.”

(In the moment) The things he says! In a small sofa, he is saying such smart things as if he were the best kabuki actor. There is a shining stage in the bottom of a valley and the beautiful trained voice flies straight to me. I am a poor girl hiding in the dark upper gallery of the theatre staring at the bright stage. He is hiding in a small sofa, but he is the popular actor who moves every audience packed into the theatre. I couldn’t afford to behave emotionally. In my heart, instead of the burning fire of victory, there were now bubbles of skepticism.

“I may have made some mistakes. Is this treasure in front of me now really going to be mine? The alarm system circuits, which was supposed to be turned off, may be actually still connected, and what if when I reach this treasure, it starts to go off with its terribly irritating noise?” I had all these thoughts.

I was anxious. I didn’t want my men to see that, so I slowly laughed.

Then I gestured with my right hand and said, “Akechi-san, I admire your performance.”

Then I said, “You have my praise.”

While saying this, my thumb pointed down.

Then I was laughing out loud. I don’t know why. But I was laughing out loud.

Upon my sign, the men sneaked like leopards toward the sofa. Their stupid faces made me laugh more. If they are going to jump on it, why don’t they jump on it like crude baboons hiding in a jungle? My heels wanted to stomp the floor with irritation.
(Where did the dawn go? The ship with two women on it floats in the night.

The women’s emotions are moving away from each other with the lost man in the center.)

I was irritated. The men threw their rope around the sofa. It was crawling around the sofa like a snake waking in the rain forest. Strong, robust cords were about to bound the sofa hard and tight. I couldn’t have been angrier.

“Why is he so helpless, being tied down?” How can the man, who can find my shadow in complete darkness, be caught by my stupid men. I lost myself and shouted. With an unwilling shout, I gave an order just like some bitchy leader of thieves:

“Akechi-san, who do you think you are!”

But nobody heard my yell.

My ruffians were binding the beautiful sofa with rope with their clumsy hands.

I was, however, standing there like an inept wild animal trainer in a country circus, and said a requiem for him….

He is a righteous messenger in a safe world.

He is in abundant sunlight, and sometimes misses the dusk in the evening.

He doesn’t initiate. He always waits for the counterpart to begin, while smoking a cigarette. He is right next to crime, but never becomes a criminal.

He quickly scoops up his favorite crime and puts in his drawer, in his study with stained-glass windows.

His beautiful neck, smelling like the blood of a beast, is covered by Calvin Klein.
He drives his prey so close that he can reach it, but he doesn’t touch them and waits for them to ruin themselves. He knows so well the cruelty of that distance, but he hunts them down with a cold sneer.

But, Sanae-san, you know well that what I’m saying is the monologue of a beaten woman.

Sanae-san, aren’t you apprehensive? Aren’t you scared?

There’s nobody who will save you. Akechi Kogorou, who came here to rescue you, is locked inside of the sofa where he hid to save you. His sofa is all tied and thrown deep down to the bottom of the dark ocean. Nobody knows that you are here.

Nobody is going to save you. Nobody is going to follow you.

You understand how fearful and painful I feel now.

Don’t look away.

Some women love their men in this way: a woman like me who can’t succeed in love in any other way than killing the man who came after me.

Why are you laughing? What do you think is funny?

Oh, I see.

You are healthy.

What kind of love have you experienced? Have you ever been in love? Don’t tell me that you were in love with a boy who sat next to you in a classroom in the fourth grade.

Love is dreadful. It is like a plague that slowly eats your body.

People don’t fall in love with something(somebody) beautiful.

People fall in love with something dreadful.
So if you want to be loved, you have to be ugly.

You have to be hideous, dreadful, disgusting, and falling apart to the point that no one would ever love you. Then of course, no one will. Some fool reaches you with pity, and you flatly reject it. Just like the best treasures that reach an extreme height of beauty, one who has become ugly searching for love will never be loved by anyone.

Love is something terrible.

So, I will never let you go.

I tell your father to hand me the Star of Egypt, the largest diamond on earth, in exchange with you, but in fact, I have no intension of sending you home.

Because I love you.

I plunged Akechi Kogoro, who followed me to this ship trying to rescue you, into the depths. But I will never let you go home.

Because I love you.

There are many kinds of love.

What? Oh, I see.

You just said, “You don’t even deserve to love anyone.”

But I am one who chooses to love.

In this world now, there are only two of us and I love you.

Deserving or not deserving is not the matter. I choose to love you!

I simply love you!

I will teach you what affection is about.

Oh, how dreadful and fearful love is.
What a shame! Such a beautiful woman doesn’t know how it feels to be in beautiful love!

She is just healthy and lives by morals and philanthropy. With such a lovely face and beautiful body, you only know charity! A stupid woman raised by an uneducated man and knowing nothing else but just being beautiful! A pitiful woman who has charity for all in her heart instead of having a real heart.

I will teach you. There is red blood underneath that beautiful white skin.

Underneath that, there is beautiful salmon-pink flesh.

Some internal organs are pink and some are white, just like oleander flowers.

You should be afraid of grown-up love.

It cuts your heart into pieces like a butcher knife going into bloody guts.

Do you know what I am about to do with you? You don’t have to know.

I am the one who loves. You don’t have to understand anything.

There are only men on this ship.

Men don’t fall in love.

Men only cut into the flesh of their love and eat them.

Men don’t fall in love. If one does, he is not a man anymore.

So when a man knows about love, he doesn’t approach the woman.

He doesn’t get closer, he only waits for her to walk up to him. Just like a confident detective who has received blackmail from the culprit.

That detective came to this ship full of men who don’t fall in love.
The detective and I are the same magnetic poles, pushing away from each other.

It’s sad. The man who knows how to love didn’t follow me.

He tried to save you and followed you. It’s sad. I was jealous.

He didn’t come to catch me but he came to rescue me.

I am a devil who lives down on the bottom of the sea. You are a beautiful human girl who was possessed and taken away by the devil. One courageous man dove into the deep sea to save you. You are both human so there is a possibility for such a thing as helping each other. What a strange concept that is…to help each other!

But, Sanae-san, I was a human, too.

So I wanted you to understand me.

I thought if you were a woman, you would know what love is.

I wanted to cry on your shoulders.

“No one will save us anymore,” we would cry.

“Our only savior, Akechi-san, was drowned and died a horrible fate. He was suffocated and died in the dark sea.” I wanted to cry with you, saying that

“Poor me, and poor you…”

But everything is over.

Akechi Kogorou is dead.

You are trapped on this ship, sailing in the night to a destination nobody knows. You and I are enemies to each other. I am the devil who trapped you.
You are a simple, pitiful angel, who knows nothing else but neighborly love.
I am a devil. That’s all.

You can go back to your room now.
I just wanted someone to talk to.

Here, somebody, take this girl back to her room!
Lock her in and never let her get out!

(The girl who doesn’t know love is taken back to her confinement, and the beautiful
Jouzoku is nowhere to be seen. Floating in the darkness, in the woman’s heart who tries
not to have any memory, there is an ancient Joruri melody. It was sung in a poem,

*Shoukou’s 14 years in Yousen in Rakuhei-Ken,*

In the past, there was a pond full of water, so clear, rising up to the sky
In an old house, rain keeps falling onto the standing flower

Love is tricky,

In the world…

The valley of indecisiveness…?

Holding back the tears of spring rain…

Here is a keepsake of the man. It’s a stylish gray hat.
In the tears of spring rain, his hat was getting wet.
It was raining on that day, too.

I was in the lobby of the Teito Hotel on the moat of the Imperial Palace with Mr. Iwase. That old man gave me a dirty look.

I thought I could use this, but it took me off guard.

The glass door, the border between inside and the night, opened quickly and a gentleman came in.

He said, “Iwase-san, is everything fine?”

Iwase-san said, “Nothing happened and I was saying to this lady that this blackmail note I received might be a bad prank.”

Then, the man said, “May I be introduced…?” Then he looked at me (boku) with his alert, clear black eyes as cool as onyx.

I answered him, “My name is Midorikawa. I am a friend of Iwase-san in Tokyo.”

“Oh, Midorikawa-san.”

He had a look as if saying, “everything is not fine,” and stared at me.

“Who I am, is…”

“This is so terrible… You are..Akechi-san? I heard a lot about you from Iwase-san.”

“You seem to know everything. But, Midorikawa-san, this is not something that a lady should be involved in.”

“Oh, why not?”

“The enemy is nobody to underestimate.”
This was the first compliment he gave me.

It brings to mind this old *waka* poem:

*In Saga, Omuro is full of flowers. A flirty butterfly is collecting love.*

Oh, I shouldn’t say anything more . . .

*Arashiyama is totally extraordinary. He remembered this and wore a hakama dyed in a spring fog color.*

Outside there is a fine Spring rain. Through the glass door, now . . . I wanted go into the night with him, just the two of us . . .

“*Akechi-san, how would you protect Sanae-san from such a smart enemy?*”

He doesn’t give any answer to this one.

(The memory from the far spring is erased by the flow of water in the fog. The woman was alone and quiet in the ship sailing in the night. After the women left, there were two shadows moving around quietly in the cabin, where no one is supposed to be.)

*In the foggy mountain clouded by afterthought.*

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5Wide split half-kimono, tied at the waist over full kimono. Often used to be worn by upper-class men, sometimes women, for certain kinds of occasions. Now only worn for traditional sporting events, graduations, weddings, or by very traditional older men (as in this case).
In the tears of spring rain are held back, I hide under my umbrella to go in.

-----Transition to new setting------

(Jozoku’s ship leaves memory behind and moves ahead toward the East on the dark ocean before dawn, as if knowing there is a “catch” to be had in that direction. From night into the darkness, the woman and her men arrive at the strange destination. It is a strange underground space, with a gorgeous painted screen there. Young beautiful men are bringing out rubber boots, aprons, white plastic bags, and cheap clothing. The young girl looks blankly at them.)

Sanae-san, would you wait for a while? I will take you to a wonderful place.

But first, I have to change. There is no woman who would come back to her own castle in such a strange outfit.

(From some construction site, a cooking woman with apron on appeared and came back with a plastic bag. Where did she come from and where is she going? After her, there is a man in his work jumper carrying a large bag. What is he carrying and where is he going?)

You at least understand that we are somewhere in Tokyo Bay.

Yes, we are standing where Toshi-Haku was going to be held. The Yurikamome train line runs over here but nobody is seen at night here on the landfill.

(The wind blows and there is nobody to be seen. On the landfill where only beautiful frames of buildings like skeletons stand, a cooking woman walks. Nobody sees her.)
Many corporate pavilions were going to be built here. On the leveled land, there are now only weeds. No one knows that my strange pavilion is underneath this ground.

Thank you for waiting, Sanae-san. We shall go now.

(The eerie underground space is the beautiful woman’s strange museum. The beautiful Jouzoku invites the young kidnapped girl into the mysterious hallway.)

Here, Sanae-san, come.

Jun-chan, you come here, too.

I (boku) don’t want this girl to get too excited after seeing my marvelous museum.

Sanae-san, do you know this man?

He is the quiet man with a beard who took care of you on the ship. Yes, the bearded face is creepy. But don’t worry. It’s fake. If he takes it off, you will see that he is a young man with a sweet face. Jun-chan, take off that beard and show her your face.

What’s wrong? Oh, he is shy.

Sanae-san, he is only a shy boy. Don’t worry. He is only a shy, violent murderer. Yes, he is a murderer, a heartless murderer. In this underground pavilion, a shine of dark passion is necessary to light the space.

You’re still scared of me, aren’t you? I won’t do anything to you. I just want to treasure you. I really want to take care of you and save your wonderful youth forever.

Come here, this is going to be your home from now on.

Such a beautiful place.
A beautiful place perfect for a beautiful woman like you.

Look, see the small lights shining in the dark?

My jewels are welcoming your arrival as well.

Look, this is my forest of jewels

They look like mists that have landed on the tree branches and grass shining with the moon light. But they are all jewels. The quietly breathing ones are agate, sapphire, and amethyst. Shining like eyes of animals awakened in the deep forest are ruby, opal, and emerald. The diamonds strongly shine like fallen stars in the night sky. On leaves of silver and gold, lapis lazuli and black pearls send secret codes like whispering buds of flower.

Humans have always liked things that shine.

They like daylight, sunshine, and they love stars at night.

This is my museum.

And this is the Star of Egypt that I stole from your father.

See how it sparkles! The Star of Egypt. . . .

In the hot desert country, is not the Sun which always shines on the top of blue sky, never covered by clouds, beautiful? It must be harsh.

It shines forever and can never be owned by a human.

It burns the body of those who want to own it. It brings perpetual daytime darkness to the eyes of those who want to keep looking at it.

That’s why night is tender.

Hot, seductive night spreads like the ocean over the snow-like desert.
In the center of the night sky, the star of Egypt shines.

Where should I place this extraordinary diamond I stole from your father?

Should I pull the starlight to the center of the night sky? It doesn’t shine by itself.

Poor unfortunate light, trying to peer into the transparent stone and then slips into the stone, only to be locked in. It is a magic stone that takes in the light that comes in and traps it in a maze made of hard crystal. It doesn’t shine in the darkness of the night, but as soon as the least light comes close, it captures it and takes it in. This beautiful stone should be given some different space to shine.

Come, Sanae-san.

These are not my only treasures.

This is the statue of Asura from Kofuku Temple. How beautiful it is! You have seen it before, haven’t you? It is a magical creature shaped like a boy. An agonized boy with three faces and six arms. The raging boy was locked up in the lacquered sculpture with eternally unhealed pain. With his thin arms like those of a spider, what is he trying to protect?

Does he still have something that he want to protect?

The Statue of Asura…You have seen it at the temple in Nara?

But that is a copy. This one is the real one. I stole the statue from Kofuku-ji and replaced it with a well-made fake. They may know it. As well-made as it is, a fake is a fake. If some familiar object you look at everyday changes even a little bit, you would know. Some people know it. But some people don’t. If there is something which looks like the famous Asura statue, that is all right. It doesn’t benefit them at all to make a
fuss about it being stolen by someone. That’s why they present the fake, pretending nothing is wrong with it.

And this is the authentic piece.

Which statue did you see?

Look, this is also very beautiful.

The Miroku Bosatsu of Chuguji. Shining black in the darkness, see how sensual it is!

With her quiet smile, I wonder what she is thinking, eternally thinking. After five billion six hundred seventy million years, she will shine her smooth, sensual black lacquer skin and still be thinking about something. Of course, this one is also authentic. Tourists make lines and look at the fake. The original is beautiful, isn’t it, Sanae-san? You can get close and look at it. You will see that the smooth beautiful skin of Miroku Bosatsu is actually made of rough wood. You will see it. How sad. Even though she is so sensual and beautiful. A slender boy’s body was turned into a skin of rough wood, crying in his frozen body, crying, “let me get out of this body.” In this wooden skin, the heart of the snake-boy is locked in. Listen, can’t you hear his voice?

Sanae-san. Please come here.

In my beautiful museum, I have more than jewels and Buddhist sculptures. There are some paintings, and authentic Renaissance sculptures sculpted from wet shining marble.

But, look, I really want to show you these.

See…aren’t they beautiful?

You must be surprised to see naked men.
(In a mysterious underground museum. In the direction where the beautiful Jozoku
points, there is a mysterious light. There are a group of naked men which look so alive,
somewhat dreadful, rather than beautiful.)

Look, Sanae-san. They are real humans. After all, real human bodies are the most alive
and beautiful. Stars shining in the night sky are wonderful. But they are stars after all
and you cannot reach them. Beautifully shining jewels are marvelous. But they are like
philosophers who say all kinds of wonderful things; shining stones are stones after all.
People think counterfeits are beautiful. Beautiful counterfeits are art works.
What is the source of beauty shining in the center of something fake?
Humans. They create something counterfeit, and then join it and make it shine with life.
They look so real, don’t they?
Sanae-san, come close and look at them.
Reproductions can’t be like these. Little irregular eyelashes and wrinkles under the eyes.
Look at this short hair just outside of his nipple. Who would put such a thing onto a
doll?
Look at the pores. They are not dolls. Nobody would make such a defective thing into a
doll. This defection makes them human. They are human, not artworks, strange creature
that sustain their defects and make others see them as beautiful. That is human.
This is a real human. That surprised you, because they are nothing but real after all.
Real things infinitely attract the viewer’s eyes. (The viewer) “Oh, its made of wood”
“Oh, its painted!” A human who is absorbed by beauty thinks like this and then tries to
stop the fatal attraction before he is destroyed. He stops and watches with ease, just like a well-mannered tourist who watches it from behind bars that hold a sign saying “Off Limits.”

“I see that this is a masterpiece. This is a wonderful art piece.” he says. That’s why artworks are safe.

However, humans are different. You can not guess how close you can step to them with safety. Humans are ultimately real.

There is a line between beauty and ugliness however there is no border between genuine objects and fakes. That’s why humans wear clothes. “Go ahead, remove this falsity. Take my real self out of these clothes.” Humans wear clothes in order to say this.

Clothes are safe fabrications. But the human bodies underneath the clothes are dangerously real objects with which you can never judge the extent you may get involved. That’s why you were startled. Because the real objects standing in front of you, these naked men here, are all real.

How could they endure it? They don’t move at all. They don’t even let the tip of their fingers twitch, even a little bit. They don’t even blink. Don’t you think there are no humans who can stay in one position being told “don’t blink your eyes.” But all of them here are real humans. Are they put to sleep with some drug? No.

I said they are real humans but I never said they are alive. They are stuffed humans.

They were killed when they were beautiful and they stay killed here. Aren’t they beautiful?
They’re beautiful to the extent that they are dreadful. Even when you try to deny that they are beautiful, they still are beautiful because they are all dead.

I kill them. When I, who kill them, come here and stand in front of them, the dreadful memory left on their skins starts shining and twitching, just like the glittering jewel woods you saw.

Living humans are beautiful. They are selfishly beautiful. They live by ignoring a hierarchy of what is beautiful and what is not. When their cheeks should blush with shame they blaze with anger. There is no painter who likes it when the color rose is switched to crimson. But, humans are all selfish. They keep putting wrong colors on their own bodies. That makes me very angry. Why don’t beautiful men stay beautiful? That’s why I decide to make them stay beautiful. Look at them. They are real humans. That’s why it’s a little bit sad. Even though they are this beautiful, they were still tricked and got killed by me. They are this beautiful yet they can’t move at all and soon they let the dust accumulate on their bodies.

“You fools!” I think as I walk toward then and then these men recall their memories of them they were alive and try to be beautiful masculine humans.

Get closer. Listen. You can hear the faint sound of stringed instruments from far away. That is the life memory from the time these men were alive. On the skins of men there are countless memories left and when it touches the human gaze it starts playing sad music for us.
Come here, Sanae-san. I will give you the privilege of being exhibited here. It’s too sad to have only men. I need a real once-live and shining female body. a young female body that is like a spring mountain that keeps spreading unlimited sensual petals.

Men are marble. They are frozen while alive. However, women are rich petals springing out. I want you to be here forever. The spring music your skin will play will trigger the memories of these men. I want to listen to that life music.

Look over there. You see a big cage, don’t you? I have some live humans here too. He is a very beautiful boy. I kidnapped him because he is very beautiful. I kept him alive and I undressed him and kept him around. Then, guess what happened? One of my henchmen got involved with him. He was too beautiful so his keeper got involved and raped him. A Strange thing happened next. I thought a beautiful boy who was raped by a crude man would become even more sensual and more beautiful. But he didn’t. He was raped by a man and his pride as a man which was underneath his consciousness was awakened. When the rapist, with a vulgar leer, comes close to the cage where the boy is kept naked, the boy gets really angry. The barely fifteen year old boy gets crazy and barks and wastes the beauty he has. That’s horrible.

So, I had an idea. Hee, hee. Jun-chan, hold that girl tightly.

(Stage direction- The museum that was built underneath reclaimed landfill in metropolitan Tokyo is a dreadful museum of beauty. The young woman who was kidnapped was forced to reveal her deepest thoughts while being made to listen to a horrific plan by the beautiful criminal boss, Jozoku)
Sanae-san, I threw a naked woman into the cage of that beautiful boy. And, can you guess what happened? What do you think? No crude man would rape a woman as indecently as he did. He acted like a pig. His gross nature was revealed and he pushed the woman down. I wondered how such vulgarity could dwell beneath such a beautiful thin body as his.

Have you ever seen how a beautiful carnivore tears into his kill?

Have you ever seen beautiful beasts who represent flexibility and elegance like leopards and lions, how disgustingly they eat? The poor victim gave up her resistance long before, turning up her soft white belly to the predator. However, the beautiful masculine carnivore revealed his bestiality and kept eating. That’s what happened. I’ve never seen a man rape a woman with such coarseness.

Women are men’s feed. Men, as weak as they look, devour when they have to.

“I’m not a woman. I’m a man.”

He wanted to prove it, so this lovely fifteen-year-old raped a woman. Just like a carnivore who devoured food, he lifted his beautiful elegant face with pride. After a fight, a brave man slowly rises to his feet to assume a dramatic pose, like a statue. Recovering his damaged pride, the boy was beautiful, to my amazement, yet crazy. While in the throes of his insanity he retained his beauty, as if he were already a stuffed human.

The raped woman, however, was another story. She never went insane and just became a woman. I suppose she thought “anything can go in here” and she became shameless.
She tried to touch the nape of the demented boy’s neck. What a shame. In a cage of a naked man and women she dares to ask for affection! She acted as if it was a private space, a room of a one-room studio apartment protected by an automatic lock and tried to imitate some insipid marriage. She tried to protect the boy from the gaze of the other men, who were trying to look into the cage.

The way she looked at me was the way a daughter-in-law would look at a mother who had trained her son to have an Oedipus complex. Her breasts were shabby and sagging and her nipples were darkened and swollen. Her waist was small and she was still young but her skin was drooping and withered. If I was the mother of the boy, I would have thought “I cannot give my son to this pitiful woman.”

It wasn’t just her. Woman after woman, all the women I’ve thrown into this cage have turned out that way.

Sanae-san, you don’t believe in such a thing as love, do you?

You would never possibly feel some misconceived notion as love when a man fondled your body, would you?

Isn’t it like this is one thing and that is another? Your body likes it and it makes your body beautiful but that is just that. You are a beautiful young daughter of a millionaire who has had every advantage. You are better than confusing lust for love.

I know your body very well. I saw you in the shower room of a tennis club in Seijo. Your skin was repelling the water that tried to stick to it. Your nipples are perfectly pink and they want to stick out because they are proud, not because they present
themselves to be sucked. You have had everything so you must be able to indulge in sensuality with luxury.

Be still! Don’t pretend you are so innocent.

Jun-chan, hold on to her body. Don’t let her go!

Sanae-san, I want you to be the spring music. The darkness of the night and the coldness of men will surround you, however, you are a lush and obscene spring light.

From the wet tropical grass a flower bud begins to glow. You are a goddess of spring and men are cold clear winter stars shining around you. Let me place the Star of Egypt on your palm. What kind of light does the jewel emit? What kind of obscene flower would grow on your skin?

The world’s number one diamond shines in your hand, sucking up your rotten, obscene sensuality.

The decadence of the organic and the sharpness of the inorganic combine to create a wonderful luminous glow.

Sshh, not so loud! No one will come and save you now. You do know that, don’t you? Jun-chan, strip this woman naked. She is a virgin. She knows only half of the wisdom in this world and still talks about silly things like love. Love is swishing seaweed in the sea of the heart. Its swaying stops anyone who tries to wade through it.

You don’t know the suffering of a person who has been stabbed and in agony.
Jun-chan, what are you doing? Hurry up and peel that woman naked! Strip her naked and throw her in the cage where that glorious young beast dwells.

(At that time the lights in the underground museum go out. The blunt intermission of science called a “blackout” robs the joy of announcing glorious ideas from the supreme directress of the horrible, fabulous museum in the bowels of underground metropolitan Tokyo.)


What happened? I can hear only the sound of water. Sometimes I feel like there is nobody else in here. . . . I can only hear the sounds of dripping water.

I feel as I were alone in this midnight morgue. I am surrounded by the ugly dead. I feel like I am doing a one-woman show in this cold morgue.

I sometimes wonder if anybody at all is watching me.

(The lights go back on, as if memory has returned. Jozoku is alone. She doesn’t understand what’s happening. There are colorful evening newspapers on the floor just like trash dancing on the gorgeous empty reclaimed land from the sea.)
What is this? Am I supposed to pick up this garbage. What is this? Is there anyone here?

(She reads) “The beautiful young woman safely returns” What is this? “The kidnaping of daughter of Osaka jewel trader Mr. Iwase Shobei, 56, was settled yesterday, the 17th” What is this? “Mr. Iwase and Sanae-san Overjoyed by Safe Return” What is this picture? Who did this? Jun-chan, what are you doing? What happened to Sanae? What was this blackout? What is this newspaper? Who are you? Aren’t you Jun-chan? What is this? Who dressed my beautiful dolls in such tasteless clothes? Who did such a tasteless thing in such a short blackout? Jun-chan, is that you? Say something! Who are you? You aren’t Jun-chan, are you? What is so funny? Why are you laughing? You’re laughing at me while I’m thinking that you aren’t Jun-ichi Amemiya at all! Who is it that laughs with contempt while I am so upset! Oh, oh, there is only one person who could do such a horrible thing! Who are you! The is only one person you could be. Akechi-san, you survived!

I went out of my way to drown you at the bottom of the sea but you dared to survive. Kogoro Akechi is alive! How wonderful! What a pity! He is the enemy who chases me to the end of the world. How did you get out of that couch? Oh, no! I don’t want to know the secrets of silly magic tricks. I think I can guess how you did it, anyway. The
Sanae-san I had with me wasn’t real, was she? You switched them somewhere. That’s why the newspaper said such a foolish thing as “beautiful young woman safely returns.” You changed a beautiful crime into the most mundane kidnaping. This picture (in newspaper)...what an un-beautiful “beauty!” Is this what I wanted? Silly me! I have been forcing long, senseless lectures on the fake Sanae-san that I kidnapped and you were laughing at me and listening while disguised as Jun-chan.

What a fool I was! I want to pull out a bow and arrow and shoot you dead right now. You must have thought it was very funny. A silly woman talking nonsense. You listened and probably were laughing inside. But now I know. You are a gentleman but what a disgraceful gentleman you are!

When I told you to strip her naked, the tip of your finger shook slightly. You were disguised as one of my men and yet you hesitated to strip the counterfeit Sanae-san who you had sent. You couldn’t even do such a small thing and poor you! You had to turn off the light!

When I said hold her tight, you pretended to hold her back. What did you whisper into that woman’s ear? I guess you were whispering some soap opera line like, “it’s ok, I came to rescue you.” How disgraceful? What a disgraceful “gentleman” you are? “I
came to rescue you.” Ha! How jealous it makes me feel! That you would save this woman.

You are always the hero and you never die. You always side with the weak, innocent woman. Sinful women are much more interesting. However, you are always on the side of innocent weak women. Like there is such a thing as an innocent woman in this world!

However, you are quietly smiling and only thinking of catching me as if you are a boy holding a butterfly net. You never respond to me and you are always thinking of deceiving me. You are trying to capture me but you never love me at all. Foolish me! I should not have thought of drowning you in the sea. I should not have thought about stripping the stupid woman naked and displaying her with the diamond. Instead, I should have cut your heart out and kept it forever, alive, and decorated it. The beating heart of Kogoro Akechi: that is the most suitable setting for the Star of Egypt!

Is your heart red? Or is it hard and transparent and shiny like diamonds? As a weapon is pointed at you, you are only thinking about how to get away from me. Here, Akechi-san, prepare yourself.
The man has a gun pointed at him, however, he doesn’t move at all. The man stands calmly. When the woman is about to shoot him, the police come in and shoot the woman in her chest.

Akechi-san, you’re . . . you’re terrible! Why would you thoughtlessly invite this crude person here during our secret date?! But . . . Akechi-san, I’m glad that you are alive. I wanted someone to watch over me.

(Jozoku throws her head back and is dying. We see the shadow of a man who is quietly the sight of death. The story is over. We await another story to begin. The beautiful woman again begins talking, this time to a small shadow of a figure, like a doll.)

The show is over. Where should I go? I don’t feel empty (sad) because even though everything is over, my passion is still alive. Wait. Where should I go? Akechi Kogoro is still alive. If I blackmail somebody, he surely will hear about it . . . because he is bored to death. He cannot express his passion unless he gets involved in some crime. Akechi Kogoro is waiting for me. I am happy. That man is always watching me and waiting for me to make a move again. I will not lose the game this time. I’m so happy!

(To audience) Hey you . . . There is always an audience watching us in this world. Where should we go? I want to have something hot . . . I want something that makes my red blood pump. A drop of blood in the snow will melt the bright white flakes of snow. Where should I go? Maybe I should go to a snow-white northern land and be a red ruby in the North. There is a large, red Romanoff ruby in the safe of the hermitage.
Maybe I should go steal it. Yes, that’s a good idea. It could be just one jewel . . . I want a jewel that has the same heat as my beating heart. Let’s go to the North! I want the passion to live so I shall go North, where my hearts blood will start beating. It’s too cold in here . .

(The train of Jozoku’s dress, as she slowly walks away, extends behind her like the mist before dawn.)
Vita

Hamilton Armstrong was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana but grew up in New Orleans. It was there that he discovered theatre at the oldest community theater in the United States, Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, in the heart of the French Quarter. He decided to conduct a more formal study of acting and directing when he was invited to join the Resident Acting Company of the University of New Orleans. With a Master of Fine Arts degree in hand, Hamilton was selected by the Japanese Ministry of Education to consult with Gifu Prefecture public school teachers regarding educational drama and role-play in the English classroom. While living in Japan, he discovered engeki, Japanese theatre. Like Jean-Louis Barrault, Tennessee Williams, Bertolt Brecht, and many others, he was entranced by the artistry, variety, and discipline to be seen on Japanese classical and contemporary stages, as well as the rich performativity of the regional festivals. Moving to Tokyo, Hamilton began to attend and study Japanese theatre whenever possible. Soon, he determined to learn even more about the texts, theory, and history of world theatre. In 1996, he began studies in the Department of Theatre at Louisiana State University as a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. Concurrent to the completion of his dissertation (May 2002), Hamilton began post-doctoral research on contemporary onnagata at the Arts School of Nihon University in Tokyo under the guidance of kabuki professor Dr. Hara Ippei.