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Under the skin : theatrical cross-gender performances of Japan and the west

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UNDER THE SKIN: THEATRICAL CROSS-GENDER PERFORMANCES OF JAPAN
AND THE WEST

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department
of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kathleen Normington

December 2004

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ABSTRACT

UNDER THE SKIN: THEATRICAL CROSS-GENDER PERFORMANCE OF JAPAN AND THE WEST

By Kathleen Normington

The following are the goals of this Master's thesis: to initially investigate assumptions about gender that derive from a social role theory; to consider the historical and social forces that help shape the performances of Japan (Kabuki and Takarazuka) and the West (drag queens and kings); to apply what is learned to the cross-gender performances by means of a critical semiotic framework including performance and gender codes; to re-evaluate these performances in light of the above analysis; finally, to compare how gender is manipulated in both Japanese and western performances. Because there is little substantiation of formal acting techniques of any of the cross-gender performers examined, social role theory creates some structure that can apply to all of the performances. The intent is to look beyond the obvious and the stereotypes to deconstruct and reconfigure gender that will eventually lead to an adjustment of established notions of gender.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine how cross-gender performers mirror and deviate from the assumptions of gender presentation and behavior and how that influences the way spectators view masculine and feminine identities. In examining Japanese cross-gender performers of the traditional Kabuki theatre and more obscure Takarazuka Revue, alongside select Western performances, specific performance codes will be examined. These will illustrate how performers signify the other sex through a series of deliberate choices while also revealing resistance or compliance with the cultural and social expectations of sexuality and gender. Within a semiotic framework a segregation of performance codes and gender codes will be examined. Behavior choices that are the product of socialization are brought to the forefront in performance. These performances allow for a heightened awareness of our own perceptions of gender. Blair alludes to this ability for the performance to enable and encourage alternative evaluations of gender: “Viewing gender as an active construction linked to other sociocultural factors denaturalizes it and makes it possible to see it as a flow of signs, rather than an essential attribute of a character that must be mirrored or duplicated by the performer” (“Not . . .” 292). So while social behavior will be a starting point to this discussion, it is the performances that reveal behavior that is altered or removed to accommodate a new representation of gender.

A variety of performances to be considered include those performances that do not fit into standard performance categories (for example “drag balls” and club

performances). These allow alternative approaches that can be examined on multiple levels: as a reinforcement of gender stereotypes, as a critique of these stereotypes, and finally, as a genuine attempt to pass as the other sex. We live in a world with regulations for behavior and consequences for ignoring those conventions. Senelick maintains that the power of role-playing gender in theatrical performance does “provide the most direct, most graphic, often the most compelling representations of gender; however their form and function are often at odds with the concerns of everyday life and even the common sanctions for society” (Senelick, Changing Room, 6). Nonetheless, the cross-gender performer may be freed from these social obligations but is always beholden to audience expectations. There is also a kind of inherent voyeuristic pleasure that adds complexity to these performances. While this thesis will include phenomenological theory, the focus will remain on the performances and performers.

Why do cross-gender performers continue to fascinate and titillate audiences? Why is a man in “drag,” whether intentionally or not, humorous in both inoffensive and lascivious ways; while a woman in drag is hardly ever considered comical and in fact, often has powerful political or social implications attached to the performance? These questions become central to this discourse on Western and Japanese cross-gender performers. Cultural codes of gender behavior and power status complicate an already complex act. As a result it is necessary to first identify what qualities, behaviors and physical attributes have been accepted as masculine and feminine from a sociological perspective. Next is to identify how specific codes of gender may reveal new meaning or

prompt new confusion for a spectator. This is an opportunity not only to isolate, but also challenge representations of gender that have remained unchallenged within performance discourse. These depictions of gender are based on the contradictory perceptions of masculinity and femininity that create tension within these categories, further complicated by binary gender theories and cultural foundations that also influence gender identity. The integration of gender theory into other discourses creates opportunities to reexamine and develop new relevance of gender in performance. This will present challenges to the authoritativeness of standard male and female gender classifications that often develop into stereotypes.

This thesis will examine cross-gender performances that manipulate gender stereotypes in an effort to move away from those stereotypes to reveal new ways that gender exposes power relations between men and women. It the combination of the performer's ability as well as the spectator's willingness to suspend their disbelief, that bring new insight into the tension that these performances create. Excluded will be performances that draw on what Roger Baker calls "false disguise" in which the performer consciously exploits his or her primary gender identity to undermine the secondary gender (15). Also excluded will be those broad "camp" performances that utilize "subversive politics of irony and parody" (Lilley, 233), as well as other media representations in which the intention of the performance is to deliberately violate the illusion, revealing primary gender identity.¹ There will not be a substantial use of

¹ Western examples are such performers as Divine, Boy George. In Japan there are many examples from stage and television that meet these criteria.

celebrity impersonations because often the personalities of the stars (such as Dustin Hoffman in Tootsie [1982] and Robin Williams in Mrs. Doubtfire [1993]) overpower the performance. A glimpse of a 5 o'clock shadow, unshaven legs or arms or masculine movement or voice in a female impersonation performance; breasts, makeup or feminine technologies of gender in a male drag performance can maximize sexuality but often switches the focus to the primary gender of the actor creating an entirely different experience for the audience. Impersonation performance has often been dismissed as frivolous or thought only as comical, but in the performances examined for this study there is "[This] very sense of playing with thresholds [and] has been a source of controversy since the beginnings of western theater from Plato's condemnation of playing the other (a fear that mimetic freedom was formative, men might tend to become the women they imitate onstage) . . ." (Ferris, 9). Crossing certain thresholds by means of theatrical performance, either as actor or spectator, may reveal aspects of our own identity as male or female that is unsettling and surprising. Blair states and I agree that this can be an uneasy, difficult transition to imagine ourselves as "the unimaginable" ("Not . . ." 298). We see a fractured image of our gendered selves on stage that may offer an opportunity to challenge what we view as male and female. It also offers the opportunity to question why certain characteristics or behaviors are categorized as masculine or feminine and to confiscate our notions of identity to see the possibilities available in our presentation of gender.

CHAPTER ONE

The Changers: Two Identities in One Performer

“Through sheer force of will, appearance can create reality.”

Liza Dalby (*Geisha*, 56)

In the Ginza district of Tokyo, Japan, the shopping mecca for the affluent Japanese, there is among the multitude of shoppers and businessmen, a different type of visitor. Their destination is the Kabuki-za Theater tucked in amongst the modern high-rises. Architecturally, the theatre is dramatically different from the buildings that tower over it. Quaintly ornate, brilliantly colored in reds, greens, and golds the theater was originally built during the Edo era (1603-1868) and rebuilt after the bombing in World War II in 1951. The theatrical productions presented are highly stylized performances whose conventions and dramatic structure have remained unchanged since the early 1700's, considered Kabuki's golden age.¹ Kabuki draws curious tourists and avid fans, young and old, male and female to its sold out performances. The daylong performances start at eleven o'clock in the morning and conclude at eight o'clock in the evening. The language of these plays is an archaic form of Japanese, which is almost a foreign language for the modern Japanese. So both foreigner and Japanese line up before the performance for a headset that provides a simultaneous audio translation of the play. For the performance the author attended in October 1998, the most popular Kabuki actor of the last 20 years, Tamasaburo Bando was featured (see Figure 1). He has achieved an

¹ Kabuki theater has added artificial lights and set changing devices but otherwise remains true to the form of 300 years ago.

unlikely status, for an actor who specializes in traditional theater; he has become something akin to a western pop idol or movie star in Japan, with a particularly strong fan base with young Japanese women.

Tamasaburo's first appearance on stage that afternoon was unexpected for those who have never seen him perform. Invisible stage hands pulled the striped stage curtain to reveal a slender, slope shouldered woman clad in a brilliantly colored kimono and ornate hairstyle. Although heavily made up in stylized white and red Kabuki makeup the face of the performer was unconditionally feminine. The movement of the performer was a graceful, gliding slide of a walk. He simultaneously projected both girlish charm and knowing sensuality. Tamasaburo, this object of feminine idolatry, played a woman to perfection and his credibility as a performer of such skill justified his fame. He did not at any moment reveal his masculine identity but this master female impersonator assumed a kind of complicity with the females in his audience who seem to recognize the respectful manner in which femininity was presented. How does awareness of the performer's original gender create a heightened, unrealistic and perhaps, unreliable presentation than a woman performing the role would?

In another theater in Ginza the audience quietly waited for the performance to begin. The majority of these spectators were females in their twenties and thirties dressed in the drab uniform of the typical modern Japanese woman, a navy blue or gray-green skirt, suit, infrequently pants, paired with a white, gray or off-white blouse,

² Personal e-mail correspondences from German fan, Andrea to the author, April 26, 2001.

Figure 1: Kabuki onnagata Tamasaburo Bando (2003).

sweater, jacket, stockings, low heeled pumps or walking shoes, nothing too colorful or provocative. A petite, older woman took her seat in the third row. She presented a very different physical image from the other spectators. Her hair was boyishly short, dyed a red-orange. She wore a baggy, men's style suit in a gray pinstripe with a large white silk flower pinned to the lapel. This unusual choice of clothing and hairstyle were ignored by the others in the audience. Her obvious deviation from the standard feminine dress code brings up uniqueness to Japanese social life. In Japan there is an old adage that the nail that sticks up must be hammered down, so this woman's appearance is an unusual breach of social dress norms was even more unusual in the lack of acknowledgement. This may be explained by the particular performance these women had come to see, the 80 year old Takarazuka Revue, an all female Las Vegas style musical extravaganza. The main stars of the revue are the female performers who masquerade as men. These stars are the main attraction of the revue and the appearance of the older woman mirrors the attire of the otokoyaku, the female performer of male roles. When the curtain rises and the performance begins, the otokoyaku all sport and masculine clothing similar to that of the older spectator.

The polite, composed behavior of the audience disguises the ardent devotion of the audience, each of whom has paid upwards of 9,000 Yen (approximately \$120 US) for a single ticket. This particular performance was the final Tokyo appearance of a favorite otokoyaku, Aiku Mira or Tamo, her given diminutive, before her retirement from the revue (Figure 2). Tamo looked much like the other otokoyaku in appearance with her

愛華 みれ
MIRE AIKA

Figure 2: Takarazuka otokoyaku Aiku Mira (2001).

short orangish hair and broad shouldered suits but she seemed to radiate a distinct femininity. Since the Takarazuka otokoyaku performers have fairly rigid performance codes imposed by the management of the revue, the obvious femininity in Tamo's performance was unusual. This was acknowledged by a fan in an e-mail correspondence noting that Tamo's voice is "quite high" for an otokoyaku.² During her solo songs Mire strides out onto the "silver bridge", a walkway that curves out from the proscenium, allowing the spectators and the star an opportunity for more intimate contact. When Tamo used this area of the stage she employed subtly erotic, flirtatious gazes and sang portions of her love song to individual bedazzled female fans. This pop star type behavior used overt sexuality to excite the audience. The subdued response to these overtures is in line with socially accepted behavior for Japanese women but the giggles, sighs and rapturous facial expressions undeniably revealed the fan's emotion. In this highly theatrical and stylized performance Tamo, as adroitly as a man, manipulated the emotions of their female fans while maintaining her femininity. For these and all cross-gender performance, "'Reality' is not a fixed state." (Chaikin, 8) and therefore the otokoyaku create a new gender reality based on a multiplicity of gender signs.

At an anonymous, rather run-down club in New York City, a group of men dressed in gowns and wigs delicately wave their hands that include false nails and studiously check their make-up while waiting off-stage to make their entrances (Figure 3). Offstage, however, there was no attempt to hide their masculinity and they slumped

Figure 3: Drag Queen (identity unknown).

against a wall impatiently tugging at a girdle or bra. The transformation happened the moment before they are to go onstage, their bodies become seem to be lighter, more feminine and they appear to glide into the stage light. Some of these drag queens would be passable as women, others less so, a silver lame gown and unnaturally high voice does not disguise the masculinity of one contestant. The “winner” of this beauty contest was the most authentic queen, a vulnerable looking young man who wept when the rhinestone tiara was placed on his head. The all-male audience was hardly respectful or quiet during the performance, they hooted and hollered for their favorites and were dismissive of the less popular performers. The performance simultaneously seemed to both illuminate and censor gender. It was a performance of excess theatricality, sexuality and multiple gender identities that seems inaccessible to the average theatergoer.

Cross-gender performance has enjoyed periodic popularity in the west but has been a constant in eastern theatrical performances (See Baker; Garber; Moore; Pronko; Senelick). In the west many of theatrical cross-gender performances seem to: 1) to support audience expectations of a particular sexual orientation (Bullough and Bullough, 316); 2) to deliberately shock the uninformed or naïve spectators or conservative social groups and sometimes both (an example of number one would be country western singer/songwriter K.D. Lang, who complies with the standard lesbian appearance including cropped hair, no makeup, and boyish costume choices or pop singer, Annie Lennox who consistently exploits gender disguise for theatrical effect in her performances. Madonna has, at times, employed an ambiguous mixing of gender signs

with quasi-masculine costumes that demonstrated her control over not only the hapless dancers in her videos but her audience as well. These performers play with masculine gender identities and yet make sure that the audience is always aware that they are women, while others (like Lang) create a deliberate gender uncertainty. According to Butler, “drag may dramatize, and therefore potentially undo, the signifying gestures through which gender is established . . .” (Gender Trouble, viii) and often celebrity performers can undo gender without consequence. The “undoing” of established gender rules is evident in the performances, but the reality of gender identity as Rimer states, “Since all realities are but copies of their ideas, the correct appearance of reality is produced by approaching as close as possible to the idea” (xxxv). The tension that cross-gender performance creates is part undoing gender reality while questioning that reality.

Performances excluded from this study included many that mainly relied on humor including distortion and ridicule evident in many cross-gender performances. Halberstam notes that, “Drag [in the west] describes discontinuities between gender and sex or appearance and reality but refuses to allow this discontinuity to represent dysfunction” (236). Gender role dysfunction seems to be a focal point in drag performances while it is virtually ignored by Japanese cross-gender performances. The dominant social patriarchal control over women evident in both social systems is reinforced by these false cross-gender performances. Senelick notes that, “Western thought has a tendency to seek the static and constant behind the fluid . . .” (Changing, 5), and is distrustful, even fearful of that which is not easily categorized. Cross-gender

performance and the variety of motives examined in this thesis are deliberately ambiguous, something Japan recognizes and therefore, require alternative methods of interpretation.

Performances in Japan invite fluid, alternative meanings of gender identity that is antithetical to their rigid social order. Male and female are often identified as opposites and Japan and the West have often been identified as opposite (Valentine, 95). In the variety of impersonation performances of Japan, there is a distinct lack of irony (Buruma, 117). Roland Barthes says in Empire of Signs that for the Japanese, “[The] mask is the object of the presentation not what is concealed beneath it” (59). It seems to be a specific cultural attribute of Japan that embraces the duality of sexuality in these performances while the West struggles to balance a subtext of Puritanical condemnation with a modern permissiveness. Perhaps it is this fundamental difference in approaches to performance that creates this gap as, “[The] theater, especially in the west, has historically sought new power and stimulus by continually absorbing the raw material of everyday life” (Carlson, Semiotics, xv). In Japan, however, the performances seem to reimagine reality, including what is considered gender specific reality and produces a new theatrical reality. The West, on the other hand, seems attached to the creation of reality and the need for clarity. How both have presented this onstage will be examined in Chapters Three and Four.

The diverse and sometimes contradictory nomenclature applied to this subject is important to define given the limits of this research. Beginning with an explanation of the primary terminology of this discourse, “gender” and “sex” and other applicable

expressions will be defined. Hotchkiss characterizes gender as “the societal perceptions and expectations for behavior, familial roles, physical and mental abilities and even what extent these differences are considered a natural consequence of biological sex or a response to cultural influences” (8). Eagly and others define sex and gender based on fundamental biological identification, the “sex” of a person is the separation of human beings based on male and female biological differences and “gender” is based on the social roles defined by a society (Eagly, 5-6; also see MaCaulay; Sherman). Jackson and Scott also are in agreement but note that the term “sex” also includes an erotic dimension as an act (14; Bornstein, 27). Doyle and Paludi believe that, “It makes more sense to think of the word *sex* as referring to the reproductive structures, hormones, and physical characters that exist along a continuum ranging from extreme femaleness to extreme maleness, rather than as comprising a set of biological features of strictly either/or and unchangeable kind” (6). There is some disagreement with these definitions, Edward T. Hall notes that, “[In spite of the fact that] cultural systems pattern behavior in radically different ways, they are deeply rooted in biology and physiology” (3). However, the most apt definition is from Kessler and McKenna which designates “gender” as the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness and “sex” as the biological components of maleness and femaleness (7). Sexuality as a component of sex is not considered a primary source of identity but not necessarily true, because homosexuals are often considered to be a different gender (Valentine, 97). These delineations are more complex and not within the scope of this study.

Gender has multiple nuances, Kate Bornstein, self-described as having “all” genders, describes gender as “something that’s done to each of us” (28). Morris also states that, “Gender is done, rather than possessed . . .” (573) and argues that “We’re supposed to believe that our gender stays exactly the same as the day we were born. Our genders never shift we’re told” (1). This rigid view of gender is related to the evidence of power-holders in each society. Just as gender is socially constructed so is the distribution of power according to Henley, it is not biologically patterned but socially patterned (184). If both gender and power are not biological but a social construct then cross-gender performance creates opportunities to change the paradigms of both. Cross-gender performance relies more on the deconstruction, not the partitioning of gender signs and the reconstruction of those signs that creates new meaning. The sociological and anthropological associations are also important; Theresa de Lauretis maintains that “the construction of gender is both a product and process of its representation” (5) but it could also apply to deconstructing gender. It is the deconstructing of an identity that simultaneously represents and questions that identity. What are the gender specific behaviors of masculinity and femininity and how are they dismantled and re-formed in cross-gender public performance? Eagly also references this, “If representation is a lie, then the very structure of the theatrical sign is strangely duplicitous, asserting an identity while manifesting a division” (3 –4). Especially with the cross-gender performer, there is the necessity of both constructing from the outside and acknowledging that the performer is also expressing a point of view. This will be a continuous sequence of thought

throughout this examination. While gender can be categorized by appearance, mannerisms and physical and psychological aspects, these terms can be ambiguous. There is a difference when combining gender with “role” by Bascom as well as Chafetz and the phrase becomes attached to the idea of authority and power. Role is “a cluster of socially or culturally defined expectations that individuals in a given situation are expected to fulfill” (Chafetz, 4). Gender roles are learned behavior and attitudes and therefore can also be unlearned. Learned behavior often involves those in positions of authority dictating what is appropriate behavior to the powerless. It makes sense to combine the term “gender” with “role” because we are looking at the social constructs (rather than biological constructs) that are variable and imprecise despite the fact that there is widespread agreement about what constitutes masculinity and femininity.³

Some terminology associated with these particular performances includes those that may be too narrow for this research, such as “transvestite,” and “camp.” Each of these implies a strong homosexual context that is but one element of this examination but not the primary focus. “Drag” can also carry this subtext but upon more research reveals a performance tradition that is a good comparison to the Japanese performances. This will be the focus of Chapter Four. Hotchkiss states quite accurately that transvestite “generally connotes something more than gender disguise” (4) although the root word “transvest” literally means, “to clothe in other garments” (Hotchkiss, 4). Transvestite is

³ The term sex may be used on occasion for purposes of clarity and because they are intrinsically related.

an often-used label when referring to these performances. First coined by gay pioneer, Magnus Hirschfield (1868-1935) in 1910, the term suggests a fetish that gives temporary sexual gratification by the act of cross-dressing (Senelick, Changing, 6). The term is most often specific to men dressing as women and is associated with the male homosexuals both in performance and real life and therefore is the best term to use here. “Camp” is most often used to describe men performing women and has a negative subtext according to feminist Silverstein, it indicates “a guerilla attack on the whole system of male/female roles” (Lilley, 233). This may be due to the exaggeration of femininity that often borders on misogyny. Camp can be used to describe female to male cross-dressing performers but is almost never perceived as an attack.⁴

When the word “cross” is separated from gender and dressing, multiple shades of meaning emerge that include, “to meet and pass each other,” “to thwart,” “to intersect” and “to interbreed.” When applied to cross-gender performance, these could mean *meeting and passing the opposite gender* or *thwarting the performer’s given, biological gender in favor of the new, assumed gender* or *intersecting and interbreeding with the opposite to form something an identity that includes qualities of both*. These performances reveal all of these variations of the word cross. More importantly, these are non-negative meanings from a term that has often been perceived critically. The

⁴ “Eonism” after French adventurer, Chevalier Charles d’Eon (1728-1810), who openly wore women’s clothes, implies that physical characteristics of both sexes are present implying an androgynous appearance.

development of a theoretical model will include the diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings inherent in the term “cross-gender.”⁵

There are also multiple meanings for the terms “drag” and “impersonation” that should be addressed. Female impersonator, Charles Pierce (1926-1999) made this a distinction on the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transexual and Queer website, “You can call me an impersonator, an impressionist, a mimic, or a comic in a dress. But not a drag queen! A drag queen is someone who dresses up and goes to a ball! I’m an entertainer.” Drag has often been defined as “the wearing of clothes of the opposite sex” (Moore, 1). But it is deeper than that, as Baker acknowledges, “Drag is about many things. It is about clothes and sex. It subverts the dress codes that tell us what men and women should look like in organized society. It creates tension and releases tension, confronts and appeases. It is about role-playing and questions the meaning of both gender and sexual identity.” (18). It must be acknowledged that drag queen performance has been an institutionalized aspect of gay male culture for many years. While drag historically has been associated with the gay male community making it a marginalized type of performance, it is now a term used by women cross-dresses in their performances. While some may doubt the authenticity of drag as a viable comparison for this study, these performances provide an interesting connection to the performances of Japan and will be further considered in Chapter Four. “Impersonation” is an expression that is more inclusive, not only male but

⁵ Both Foucault and Thomas Laqueur have also examined the disparity between the terms.

also female cross-gender performances. While the nature of all theatrical performance could be considered impersonation, the nomenclature applied to these particular performances requires a more nuanced reading. Impersonation can have negative implications, such as to “imposture” or “ape,” while others are more unbiased such as “imitation,” “pretend to be,” “dress up as” or “pass one as.” Throughout this research, male and female performers who dress in the clothing and temporarily assume a physical, emotional and psychological identity of the opposite sex in performance will be identified as “cross-gender” or “cross-dressing” actors.

Performance reality is constructed by the fans, the performers, and the initiators of the performance. This is based on the isolation of performance codes displayed through costume, makeup, wigs, props, and gesture. The conventions recognizable to both audience and performers are an important component to these performances. But there is one way to interpret cross-gender performance, as Ferris notes, “As spectators of transvestite theater we, are the Barthesian ‘producers’ of text extraordinaire. We are forced to concede to multiple meanings, to ambiguities of thought, feeling, categorization, to refuse closure” (8). This can be both frustrating and liberating for human beings who first distinguish ourselves and others as “male” or “female.” According to Freud this is accomplished through physical appearance based on biological organization but also by learned behavior. Evidence seems to suggest that the gender behavior learned in childhood translates if not directly or completely, but significantly to

how gender is done. Performance is collection of conscious and unconscious choices made by a performer in collaboration with a playwright, director, etc. that is assessed by an audience. The spectator brings to the performance another set of historically based codes of gender behavior. While we often segregate behavior as either male or female, within the last fifteen years there is are voices that acknowledge and embrace a chaos of gender with both male and female attributes labeled “genderfuck.” This disruption of the two-gender only system creates an opportunity to explore every possible behavior unhindered by traditional gender roles. Different from the more passive “androgyny” genderfuck is an active approach to gender involving the discarding or disordering of traditional gender attributes or the “intentional crossing, mixing, and blending of gender-specific signals all at once” (Bornstein,19). While genderfuck is mainly associated with an extreme feminist, lesbian perspective, it is an interesting and significant way of thinking about the performances to be examined. It can also define the very act of cross-gender performance in which both the male and female are present. This terminology will be applied in the context of the individual performances.

The fluidity of gender accentuated in these performances invites a semiotic analysis from both theatrical and gender perspectives.⁶ Theater, as opposed to film seems to be ideal for examining these particular performances. Film seems too intimate and unintentionally revealing. If theatrical images are “like” the things they represent” (Carlson, Semiotics, xiv) but minus the truth of the original, then given this, cross-gender

performance presents ample opportunities to confirm this. There is still complexity, as Kowzan notes because, “In the theatre the signs seldom appear in their pure state” (57). Elam also recognizes that the “sign-vehicle” is encumbered with secondary meanings for the audience (10). These secondary meanings, the performer’s own gender in this case, makes deciphering these performances more enigmatic. Each individual spectator brings a unique set of readings to the performance and also, “[Opens] the theatre to infinite signification – parallel to Peirce’s infinite semiosis – since ‘the realization of verbal and nonverbal signifying acts refers always to the shifting universe of action in which author, actors, and spectators are implicated’” (Carlson, Theories, 506). In addition, theater uses both artificial (originated for performance) and secondary natural (everyday behavior) signs, “In an actor’s diction and mime the strictly personal habits go with the voluntarily created shades of meaning, the conscious gestures are intermingled with reflexes.” (Kowzan, 60).⁷ Performance codes are combined with consciously employed gender codes which add multiple, sometimes conflicting signs. The bombardment of signs in any theatrical performance is neither orderly nor sequential; “[theatre] sends out a variety of simultaneous messages (from setting, costume, and lighting as well as the positions, words, and gestures of the actors), some of which remain (static), while others constantly change (words and gesture)” (Carlson, Theories, 491). Theater employs artificial signs

⁶ C.S. Peirce, the founding father of modern semiotics defines “icon” as a quality, person, thing connected by a similarity between sign-vehicle and its signified. (Elam, 21) which is different than a symbol which is the relationship between the sign and the signified that is unmotivated by logic but by association.

⁷ The Prague School of theatrical semiotics presents three performance components including character, actor and stage figure. This will not focus on character or stage figure but what the actor brings to the performance and the elements of costume, etc. that help define that.

derived from natural signs which in performance create a higher level of signification. And some cross-gender performers tend to rely on the theatrical (artificial) signs that signify gender. There are fundamental differences in the language of these signs, for example, when examining Japanese cross-gender performance there is a strong cultural disposition to favor the inferred as opposed to the manifest. The subtlety of reading and receiving signs governs all aspects of Japanese society. In social relationships signs both impart and withhold information for the Japanese. This is not how most western societies communicate. Barthes writes, “Now it happens in this country (Japan) the empire of signifiers is so immense, so in excess of speech, that the exchange of signs remains of a fascinating richness, mobility and subtlety” (Empire of Signs, 9). The difficulty for westerners is to view the “excesses of signs” without being ironic, patronizing or overly reverential. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge, for if theatre is a reflection of social cultural codes then to compare cross-gender performances will require the development of some shared codes of performance and gender without minimizing the culture differences that exist and serve as a foundation for both performer and spectator.

Living and working in Japan for over three years gave me the opportunity to learn about Japanese culture and attend performances that will later be examined. Videotaped theatrical performances will supplement those live performances. Cross-gender performances on film will be used when those performances were not attended live. I will intentionally avoid well-known film cross-gender performances as they tend to

be star- vehicles that do not support this particular subject. The Internet has provided information and connection with Takarazuka fans all over the world. Since the Takarazuka Revue is not as well known outside Japan, these resources have been extremely helpful. The fans of the revue, not only in Japan but globally have a great deal of knowledge and opinion on the subject, significantly on the otokoyaku star performers. Live and filmed drag performances are used as well as internet resources that have also proved valuable in providing vital information of the lesser known drag king performances.

Japanese theater has historically played with ambiguous gender representations, while the west has remained more cautious when exploring gender ambiguities in performance and cross-dressing is most often associated with a homosexual context (Garber, 5). There has not been a significant influence on popular Western performance (with a few exceptions) by Japan's theatrical traditions but Japanese performance has been profoundly influenced by the West. The West has moved away from precise gender role delineations and this is reflected in the confusion evident in these performances, "The transgressive power of masquerade to overthrow socially dictated roles and affect a form of personal liberation" (Senelick, Changing, 4). This is not evident in Japan. Japanese men and women alike learn that "to play the role of one's sex is part of social training in Japan" (Buruma, 118). In Chapters Two and Three there will be an examination of the limited opportunities for women in Japan. So does cross-gender performance offer emancipation for the disenfranchised? It can be appear to be the

ultimate public deliverance from social expectations and limitations but these performances are always entertainment. However, it is important to understand the dominant culture's impact on these performances with a review of the available literature.

Discourse on the Takarazuka Revue is found in journal articles and theses but a good deal of information is found in anthropologist Jennifer Robertson's book Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan (1998). She focuses on a historical perspective of the revue, emphasizing a patriarchal dominance of the revue's administrative and artistic functions as well as looking at the relationships between the stars and their fans. The result of patriarchal control is according to Robertson in an interview, "[Even] as the directors sought to repress the gendered and sexual subtext generated by the actors, they also exploited it as well" ("Gender Bending," 4). I believe it has less to do with the Revue management and more within the performances themselves. She observes that the performers of both male and female roles in the revue are "the products of a dominant social ideology that privileges masculinity and men". (Robertson, Takarazuka: Sexual Politics, 12) and uses that foundation to explore the "pre- and post-war Japanese public discourse on same-sex desire, lesbian existence, cross-dressing, and gender norms" ("Gender Bending," 1). Robertson raises two key issues about the relationship between the male dominated management and the female actors asking, "Are the actors mere pawns in productions designed to reinforce stereotypical gender patterns? Or are they breaking out of those very patterns?" (Ibid). It is clear that while the otokoyaku employ a variety of both

masculine and feminine gender codes, the musumeyaku or player of female roles, seem to be fulfilling the patriarchal script for femininity. Senelick reinforces the idea that the musumeyaku and the otokoyaku are, “The troupe’s gender divisions are a microcosm of society at large, with the actresses of female roles relegated to second place” (Changing, 342). There is also the element of status and the reality of these performances is that, “for a man to be a woman is a step down, and the reverse is a step up” (Senelick, Changing, 483). This will be a major factor in both female and male cross-gender performance. Yet it seems that the ambiguous gender presented by the otokoyaku to an audience of primarily other women which is orchestrated by a male dominated artistic management has multiple and complex explanations. It would be naïve to identify these performers as mere mannequins that automatically replicate their roles. The otokoyaku are not drawn from gender codes that are purely masculine or feminine but from a fusion of the two that is “ambisextuous” recognition of the simultaneous presence of both male and female with one gender inevitably dominating the other. Minor contributors to the Takarazuka discourse, including Brau, Berlin, and Singer seem to reduce the revue to a performance oddity, a sideshow that is only unique for its spectacle and sustained popularity and the unique fan culture attached to the otokoyaku performers. The focus on the cross-gender performers fails to acknowledge the intricacies involved in the larger gender discourse. The focus is on the specific visual elements of these performances within specific social, historical and political contexts are discussed without a strong gender perspective. Online Takarazuka fan sites have provided interesting perspectives

into the fan culture of the revue, including biographical information such as, nick names, likes and dislikes, and fan encounters, with a particular focus on the otokoyaku performers. One frequently updated site (<http://shoujo.tripod.com/takaraexperience.html>) which includes personal information about the performers, fan responses, photos and details of specific shows including song lyrics and story synopses.

There is an abundance of research on traditional Japanese theater in English (Brandon; Kominz; Earle; Griffiths; Immoos; Keene; Ortolani; Powell and Pronko) compared to the limited sources for Takarazuka. For the most part these focus on historical surveys and detailed analysis of the exotic elements of theatricality that distinguish Japanese theater from Western theater. Pronko has expanded his study to compare how Japanese theatrical aesthetics and forms can be applied to western texts which he condemns “incapable of doing anything but talking” (1). While he obviously is referring to the western reliance on the text, it is clear that the visual theatricality of traditional Japanese theater forms should not be a superficial application (a “Kabuki” Macbeth for example) but rather a deep and precise understanding and practice (5). Among the many books on Kabuki, there is little in English devoted to the onnagata. A chapter of Laurence Kominz’s book on the art of Kabuki acting focuses on the onnagata, specifically the work of Yoshizawa Ayame (1673-1729). Ayame was considered the finest onnagata of his time and wrote a famous treatise on the art of female impersonation that remains the primary discourse on onnagata acting. While this is not intended to be an in depth study of this particular performance, specific elements about onnagata acting

will be a necessary comparison. Some understanding of the history and significance of Japanese Kabuki compared to other cross-gender performances both Japanese and western is essential.

Prior discourse on the variety of cross-gender performance, whether on the stage, film and other performance media has been documented, most significantly by Marjorie Garber and Laurence Senelick. Garber's book, Vested Interests (1992) included live performance, film, music and popular performances. Recently The Changing Room (2000) by Senelick, surveys the history of live cross-gender performances across all media, including the some of the same subjects as Garber but also more obscure and deviant performances. He emphasizes not only the impact that sexual orientation has on these performances but the ability of the performances to give visibility to those marginalized by society. In addition, Senelick and to a lesser degree, Garber explores how these public performance personas relate to the private offstage lives of the cross-gender actors. Both authors focus primarily on female impersonation; they do not however, neglect the female-to-male cross-gender performances, both include chapters on the Takarazuka, Kabuki and select western drag performances. Western discourse on drag tends to focus almost exclusively on female impersonation (Baker; Simpson; Newton; Willard), primarily because of not only the popularity but acceptance in the west of male drag performers regardless of sexual agendas. When male cross-gender performances are written about, it is usually from a strong homosexual identity associated with the performances or an obvious feminist political agenda (See Sue Ellen Case's

writings). Feminist theorists have often used female-to-male impersonation performance to further specific lesbian agendas or to expose the patriarchal dominance evident in most western and non-western history (Blair; Butler; Case; Dolan; Morris; Price and Strickland). Blair notes that, “We use cross-gender performance to challenge traditional representations, to illuminate gender-as-construction, and to provide actors (especially women) with access to a broader range of roles than they would otherwise have” (291). These issues inform in particular the drag king performances that will be examined in Chapter Four but feminism will not be the primary emphasis. However, there are important exceptions including, The Drag King Anthology (2000) and The Drag King Book (1999) that thoughtfully explore “kinging” performance. Leslie Ferris addresses the variety of political and sexual identities within the context of these performances. Ferris regards “transvestite theater” (8) as a powerful opportunity for the spectator to construct multiple interpretations of the human body. There is an uncertainty for the spectator who is given the opportunity to not only read but write his or her own interpretation of the performance (8) based on sexual orientation and gender preconceptions. Ambiguity is often a fallback position for many researchers and I will attempt to avoid this here. Androgyny is one such position that is a vague way of interpreting these performances. Androgyny is often a result of performer and spectator not fully committing to a more troubling subtext that cross-gender brings out.

Gender studies are cross-referenced within the discourse of other disciplines including sociology and anthropology. Judith Butler, a prominent gender theorist and

feminist writer reveals that, “Gender is done rather than possessed, it is a set of acts people mistake for the ‘essence’” (Morris, 573) and that is how the approach to gender is taken here. Gender studies by Doyle and Paludi, Sandra Bem, Deborah Borisoff, Holly DeVor and Teresa De Lauretis. This will help in distinguishing the performative, superficial presentation of gender with what is considered gender legitimacy. Adopting and displaying specific gender attributes contributes to the “essence” that Butler mentions but more is needed. Visual elements of gender include costume, and physicality as well as voice in the performance will be examined as they are recognizable male or female. The attitude of the performer to the gender being portrayed is also a factor. Why certain traits or behavior are categorized into one group or another is still a nonlinear process. Gender studies help in differentiating those characteristics and cross-gender performance shows that there may be less distinct delineations of gender. Henrietta Moore maintains that we are active, rather than passive arbitrators of our own gender, “Deciding on differences is one way of delineating identities” (1).

Anthropological studies as well as sociological studies specific to gender apply, particularly when pertaining to the disparity between women’s issues of the West and Japan. Differences are measured equally with each society assigning distinct values. Questions to be addressed here are: what are the behaviors that set male and female behavior apart and what qualities are shared? While it has been shown that it was once believed that male and females have the same exact physical genitalia but that unlike the male sexual organs, the female genitals resided inside the body, there are other physical

differences that affect gender behavior. Biological gender differences are essential to consider in performance, in which the body is masked and manipulated in order to become the other gender. While attempts to create fewer gender divisions may have weight, for this discourse the differences between male and female will be more defining in performances than the qualities that are shared. Less precise gender characteristics, particularly in Japanese society as opposed to the west is an element that invites comparison, as H. Moore aptly states, “Difference(s) from others are frequently about forming and maintaining group boundaries” (1). So it would appear that clarifying gender distinctions delineates identities and maintains group boundaries culturally, particularly evident in Japanese society. For the westerner creating an individual identity is more important. Connell presents this analysis of upholding gender boundaries, “The effort to sustain gender categories also sustains the relations between them- and therefore sustains the inequalities they produce and the harm they do” (5). This is realized in cross-gender performance which offers an “insider’s” view of the presentation of the other while offering a simultaneous critique of the secondary gender. Cross-gender performance provides a unique opportunity to examine through performance the freedoms and boundaries between male and female within very different cultures.

Cultural studies that relate to the subject include discourse specific to modern Japanese women (Condon; Iwao; and Kondo) that present a range of opinions that avoid or disparage a feminist perspective. Takie Sugiyama Lebra has also written extensively on Japanese women and seems to offer a more unbiased view. Feminism and women’s

rights have had minor impact on modern Japanese women. For women in Japan there are distinct social priorities that define and for the most part are obediently accepted by most women. According to Iwao, the Japanese view of equality is evident in the strong domestic roles assumed by women: “The role of the woman in the home is valued and her self-esteem is high because the management of the family has always been considered central to stability and prosperity in Japanese society” (4). Brinton also acknowledges that even the introduction of education for women during Meiji era (1868-1912), these reforms that offered women an education had the bigger goal of creating superior wives and mothers (Liddle, 40; Brinton, 86). Iwao defends this role for women in Japan by citing statistics that confirm the overall contentment of Japanese women with the status quo. Japanese women have no desire to enjoy the freedoms and social responsibilities of their Western counterparts. Iwao compares those results with similar studies in the U.S. but seems to disregard a fundamental model of Japanese society: *danse joi, josei yui* that means “men superior, women inferior” and rather simplistically determines this as “simply the way it has always been” (19). Liddle present a less positive view of the role of women in Japanese society that is constructed by the state (70). While there will always be conflict in this area, the evidence that supports the power that wives and mothers have domestically is key to understanding female behavior. More support for this is evident in a content analysis done by Yasuko Muramatsue published in Women in a Changing Society: The Japanese Scene (1990), which examined the behaviors, conversations and interactions of four Japanese television

programs that showed the typical female characters were limited to household activities and child rearing while men's conversation and behavior centered on career (103). These perspectives will be examined within the Takarazuka performances of Chapter 3.

The ways of gender identification by sociologists can be a useful starting point or a departure to examining gender in performance. Identification and examination of specific male and female behavior selected by the performers to represent the opposite gender onstage introduced in this chapter will be examined in detail in Chapter Two. Chapter Three will explore the evolution of the onnagata of Kabuki and the otokoyaku of the Takarazuka Revue and the historical and cultural contexts for those performances. Western performances with a focus on drag queen and king performances will then be examined in the following chapter. Historically there have been a range of western cross-gender performance traditions, but none exist today like the Japanese Kabuki theatre. Nonetheless many features of the Elizabethan boy player tradition will serve as a historical touchstone for Western performances. The connection between the onnagata and the boy player has previously been examined by Peter Hyland and James Brandon has written about Shakespeare and Kabuki theatre. There is a historical proximity that offers some interesting parallels and offers some historical comparisons.

Comparing performances from diverse cultures may provide a greater understanding while also revealing deep-seated prejudices. The ability to identify both physically and emotionally with a character far removed from your own experience is a fundamental task for the actor. But actors that specialize (often exclusively) in portraying

the other sex have the opportunity to dismantle preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity while struggling with stereotypes in the attempt to illuminate the original or establish new gender models. As Kate Bornstein states, “[Step] across a generation line, and you’ll get a shade of different meaning for ‘real man’ or ‘real woman.’ Step across subcultures and those terms could shift radically in definition” (22). What is real is the body of the performer, as R.W. Connell notes in Gender and Power, “Gender involves a specific relationship with bodies” (9). However, with cross-gender performance there are two bodies present in one performer. So which one is present in performance and how do we recognize that? There is a sense of mystery within cross-gender performance that is specific to a particular place and time but with deep-rooted kinships between the bodies of the performers and their subjects.

CHAPTER TWO

Shape Shifting: Identifying the Corporeal Signs of the Gendered Body

“If there were no more gender, do you think there’d be any more desire?”
Kate Bornstein (15)

If the body is the primary indicator of gender, then it seems necessary to examine certain aspects of the many multidisciplinary approaches that distinguish male from female behavior. Butler describes the body as a “passive medium” (129) which is evident in the ability of certain cross-gender performers to “pass.” Connell is in agreement suggesting that, “The body without ceasing to be the body is taken in hand and transformed in social practice” (83). The impact of socialization on the body both male and female, Western and Japanese, will be important in examining the gendered body. Biological essentialism may be less important, “My male body does not confer masculinity on me; it receives masculinity as its social definition” (Ibid). Gendered bodies have specific social perceptions that can not be verified, “Although it is women’s bodies which are more often seen as problematic, disruptive, and unruly, both men and women are equally embodied. Men may have historically been privileged as rational actors [. . .]” (Backett-Milburn and McKie, 13). While I am not in complete agreement, there is evidence that women’s bodies carry more ambiguity and can be perceived as “unruly.” The bodies of homosexual men also would be described in the same way. Misconceptions and prejudices for both the male and female body will be explored within well-known gender theories as well as those “outlaw” theories that, if Judith Butler’s assumption is true,

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatized the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (Gender Trouble, 137-138)

There is conflict amongst social anthropologists, feminist theorists, and biological essentialists, including performance theorists about Butler's statement. However, I agree with Backett-Milburn and McKie that, "[...] gendered and sexual bodies cannot and should not, be separated from gendered, sexual, and social selves." (1). The biological assignment of sex is shaped and eventually dominated by societal expectations of appropriate gender behavior reinforced either consciously or unconsciously by the primary people and social structures in an individual's early life. The work of Kessler and McKenna as well as Sandra Bem is important in the discourse of gender construction. Bem maintains that cultural influences inform gender representation as "[...] a text to be read [rather than] a lesson to be taught" (141). This, of course, is the essence of performance which allows a variety of interpretations. Bem also presents culture as a constraint to gender identity (135) that becomes evident when examining how Western focus on individualism conflicts with the Japanese need of social conformity. H. Moore supports Bem, "Ethnographic material suggests that the differences between men and women which people in other cultures naturalize and locate

in the human body and in features of the physical and cosmological environment are not necessarily those which correspond to the constellation of features on which western discourse bases its categorizations” (13). The differences will be essential in organizing and comparing these performances.

The question: “What can both the west and Japan agree are male and female behavior?” leads to a more significant question: “Why do some indicators of gender considered exclusively masculine or feminine and others are not?” The examination of extremist gender theories that emphasize performative aspects of gender rather than the biological or emotional inclination of more popular discourse will be included. The focus will be on the “acting out” of gender through technologies of clothing, physicalization including voice and movement but also emotional identification. First these will be presented in the social, non-theatrical context and then in the theatrical recreation of these behaviors and characteristics by the cross-gender performers. Physicalization will be most important, including nonverbal behaviors such as movement and facial expressions. In this binary model by Borisoff, nonverbal behaviors include; “. . . *presentational* gestures, postures, expressions which one consciously presents to others and *representational* expressions of an individual’s actual inner emotional state. . .” (46). If we are to go beyond the restrictions of an exclusively two gender system, this model will aid in determining meaning when presented with performances that don’t fit the either/or model. This also reinforces what both Bornstein and Butler describe as “doing” or “performing” gender which can be as authentic as biological gender. Gender here

becomes a conscious learned behavior that is present in gestures and body language, voice, and clothing.

While limited to western sources to determine how gender is viewed within Japanese culture and society, it is evident that there are similarities shared by both cultures. Anthropological data suggest similarities of gender behavior across cultural boundaries (Spence, 121). This includes gender-polarizing definitions of male and female that maintains distinct social scripts for men and women. Androcentrism is fundamental for both cultures in forming gender boundaries, especially for women (Bem, 138, 139) but is only one aspect that influences gender. While often attached to feminist readings of gender, this underlying androcentrism within the patriarchal power structures that determine social gender boundaries is important, “The silence of sisters, mothers, and daughters, which was interpreted as tacit confirmation of the male models of the worlds they lived in, can no longer seem as a gesture of affirmation” (Dolan, 201).

So are women who portray men upsetting the male model or unwittingly reinforcing it? While it is true that the cultural accouterments of males and females have varied, there is nevertheless agreement of those characteristics that are essentially male and essentially female. Those essentials are co-opted in cross-gender performance and then re-presented that is both familiar and foreign. Are they presented in performance uncorrupted or have they been compromised in some way? Performance always retains a self-conscious element to the presentation. Therefore, depending on the intent of the performance (and these will vary) there will be variations of gender. What may be

considered gender truth will prove unstable when applied to performance. Other disciplines will provide important information that simultaneously illuminates and obscures the multi messages presented in the cross-gender performances that will be examined later.

Socialization is a cornerstone to our ability to identify with one gender or the other. Holly DeVor in Gender Blending: Confronting the Limits of Duality (1989) states that, “Each individual in social interaction acts, and perceives the actions of others from the perspective of their own gender role values, training, and experience” (57). DeVor’s predominant approach to the subject, called social learning theory utilizes reinforcement or punishment in regard to children’s gender related behavior. Kessler and McKenna observed that girls acting out masculine behavior are rewarded for being cute, while boys are punished for performing feminine behavior (92, see also Bergling, 43 and Doyle and Paludi, 76). Other significant theories are Freud’s psychoanalytical theory which does not identify at all with socialization. Psychoanalytical theory suggests that, “[...] young children come to identify with gender role behavior and attitudes of their same-sex parents” (DeVor, 27) and precludes all social influences. This “nature versus nurture” debate maintains that gender roles are either based solely on genetic, biological and inherited factors or includes social and environmental factors. Neither theory can explain how children can develop a gender identity before they have a clear idea of genital differences (Kessler and McKenna, 97). Sigmund Freud’s theory of “identification” of children with the same-sex parent is acknowledged, we also need to go beyond that

theory. When children or adults of one gender tend to exhibit behavior of the other, there is an unconscious reinforcement of androcentric cultural attitudes. Why is masculinity more accepted and highly valued (DeVor, 59) in women or girls (tomboys) than femininity is in men or boys (sissies)? Bem agrees that, “[American] culture as a whole treats sissies much more harshly than tomboys” (146). In clinical studies boys are found to be more often to not conforming to gender stereotypes than girls (Bem, 109). The conflict between the body, gender and ultimately how society judges the outward appearance and structure of gender is perhaps better understood by the overwhelming research that indicates not only equality in abilities and intelligence (Bem, 102; DeVor, 1; Backett-Milburn and McKie, 5) but psychologically (Connell, 42). However, Bem does note a distinct gender difference in personality type and temperament (102). Bascow notes that male aggression, a classic stereotype, is not as great as is perceived. She differentiates types of aggression by gender with boys utilizing physical, destructive aggression while girls also use aggression but through verbal, disobedient methods (66). Ultimately behavior indicates who has domination and who is impotent. In most cases it is the man who dominates and the woman who is forced to comply. However, as Doyle and Paludi note, “We differentiate power from authority. Women wield considerable power or influence, in decisions of social importance, but authority is usually vested in men” (129). Borisoff agrees that many gender traits are ultimately bound with status and power (53). Connell suggests that while power is a fundamental dimension of gender identity, personal relations including emotional relations also carry some form of power.

Methods of power acquisition by women include the use of negative, male created stereotypes previously outlined. Women use sexuality to secure power, as well as their authority as mothers and occasionally in the role of “iron maiden” having an unnatural (at least to the male point of view) desire for the power that is a perversion of masculinity. These attempts to gain power by women continue to be manipulated by men. Therefore, it is obvious that, “We are all implicated in gender; the extent to which we reinforce or subvert boundaries set up surrounding gender turns on the extent to which we ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ in our own performance” (Koenig, 146). Social learning theorists maintain that children are completely malleable beings that have no predisposition to behave in a specifically gendered way (DeVor, 27; Doyle and Paludi, 76).¹ Deborah Borisoff and Lisa Merrill in The Power to Communicate: Gender Differences as Barriers (1992) maintain that, “The gender differentiated non verbal behaviors that may result from this socialization are learned rather than innate behaviors” (46).² While this may seem extreme, social learning theory seems to be most effective in developing the relationship of gender in everyday existence and cross-gender performance. The extremes of gender classification, labeled “dichotomous gender symbolism” (Connell, 42) or “bi-polar” views of gender (Spence, 3) defines deviations from the accepted male and female scripts as problematic; morally, biologically and psychologically (Bem, 81). These behaviors

¹ DeVor, Bem, and studies by Beverly Fagot all have shown that there is instability of gender roles in children and studies have established that children do not recognize their own gender until 5 – 7 years of age. (DeVor, 43; Bem, 114, 134,).

² Both behaviors may be informed by the differences between boys and girls recognized by Doyle and Paludi in Sex and Gender: The Human Experience (48-55). The conclusion being that boys/men are born with vulnerabilities physically, emotionally and intellectually that life-long and girls do not have these same frailties.

will be obvious in certain performances and creates instability of gender boundaries.

However, before this can be examined, traditional gender roles and behavior followed by an inquiry of more controversial gender applications will be necessary.

Human beings are automatically categorized as either male or female according to their public appearance, both unseen (genitals) and obvious (clothing, hair).

Significantly this division has been thought to maintain social order that historically had not been challenged until the middle of the twentieth century. Instability with femininity or masculinity usually occurs when those physical features associated with one sex appear naturally on the body of the other (facial hair on women or petite men) (Bem, 160). Bem calls this approach “gender traditionalism [. . .], naturalizing what is essentially just conformity to the cultural requirement that the sex of a body match the gender of the psyche” (115; See also Doyle and Paludi, Kessler and McKenna). This maintains a rigid idea that males and females are opposite with exclusive behaviors and attributes. Susan A. Bascow states in her introduction to Gender Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives (1986) that “Masculinity. Femininity. These words engender clear pictures of two opposite sets of behavior and personal attributes.” (vii). This is identified as “gender symbolism”, which according to Connell, “. . . operates in dress, makeup, gesture . . .” (66), usually making it easy for members of a group to quickly identify a person’s gender is not reliable. However, gender attributes while easy to identify, do not always communicate a clear meaning. Kessler and McKenna separate gender from “gender roles” by stating that there are two genders (male and female) with no overlap

and two gender roles (masculine and feminine) with some overlap (22). While this does not account for the presence of the hermaphrodite, it none-the-less is an accurate account of the two-gender perception. Gender roles are the socially constructed outward characteristics, behaviors, and appearance that create a gendered social being. These expectations of behavior become as ingrained as ethnicity or skin color, yet there are many ambiguities. Deviation from agreed upon gender behavior creates negative consequences (Kessler and McKenna, 95) that not only confuse but arouse contempt and fear. This is where performance becomes essential in publicly confronting gender representations that are considered dangerous or lewd.³ This idea of male and female behavior as being “opposite” is a deeply entrenched, socially accepted notion of how gender is assimilated and supports correspondingly the “appropriate” gender behavior in the west (Bem, 103,105, Connell, 86). However, within these polarized views of gender there are some less stable theories that advocate gender choice. Ken Plummer states in his forward to Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex Changing (1996), “Gender in this view is something social achieved, dramatically performed, a set of culturally produced practices of daily life which are open to much change and variability” (Elkins and King, xiv). Bem also stated that gender roles needn’t be “either/or” but individuals can have both feminine and masculine traits (DeVor, 31). With these possibilities there also exists a threat to the moral, social, religious, and sexual foundations of a society. Howard points out that social order is dependent on a “sexual

³ Attempts to quantify gender differences have failed (Doyle and Paludi, 75) as Bornstein states that there’s too much disagreement about what is a ‘real man’ and a ‘real woman’ (3).

order” which relies on a precise and uncompromising physical and psychological delineation of male and female (Ferris, 23). However, performance is not dependent on social order and indeed is often used to mock established social foundations, including gender.

In many western societies, highly valued masculine qualities include aggressiveness, self-confidence, ambition, worldliness, logic, and the ability to remove emotions from ideas (Bascow, 6; DeVor, 32). Wood applies these qualities to identify three institutional male stereotypes: “study oak” a self contained, self sufficient pillar of strength, “fighter” a warrior who employs force and violence to gain dominance and “bread winner” who is the financial support for the family (263). Bem supports Wood when testing for gender attributes masculine points are given to those respondents who “like soldiering, hunting, people with loud voices” (103). Consistent with Wood, Western masculine traits include aggressiveness, independence and non-emotionality and Western feminine traits include positive qualities such as warmth, expressiveness and sociability (Bascow 6, 7; DeVor, 32). For women these stereotypes include, “sex object” focusing on appearance, “mother” as the comforting caregiver, “child” one incapable of decision making, needing protection and “iron maiden” an independent, ambitious woman (Wood, 258). This is consistent with DeVor’s negative feminine traits including talkativeness, childishness and vainness (32).⁴ This constructionist set of gender specific attributes as Tim Bergling claims, “is based on a lifetime of cultural programming, much

⁴ Henley’s research exposes the falsehood embedded in the myth that women talk much more than men with empirical analysis that proves men talk more often and a greater length (74).

of it gained subconsciously” (27). While widely considered incorrect, these are still standards that must be examined in this performance context.

The risk here is parody and exaggeration in performance, which leads to stereotype. Some cross-gender performances present a comic, cartoonish portrayal. Kessler and McKenna define stereotype as “a set of beliefs about the characteristics of the occupants of a role not necessarily based on fact or personal experience” (12). Stereotypes limit a deeper discussion of the central issues including power acquisition and how gender is communicated within a specific culture. Since there are more examples of female impersonation there are more opportunities for exaggeration that perpetuates feminine stereotypes in particular (Henley, 141). This inability to internalize woman results in fetish according to Phelen (in Ferris, 161). While women and their bodies have become objects of worship, this is a co-pathetic relationship, “We women all knew how to play our appropriate identities, and thus we participated in the construction of our gender. In doing so, we inevitably facilitated our own subordination” (Kondo, 297). Who is ultimately responsible for the misrepresentation of gender can be difficult to prove.

Male associated behaviors including aggressiveness, competition, and independence are tolerated but not desired in women. This constraint can result in deviant gender behavior or experimentation. Those who wish to dismantle the two gender system renounce biological gender as the only indication of identity, that there is no possibility of gender transfer, that everyone must be identified and claim membership

in only one gender and finally, that the male/female dichotomy is natural (Kessler and McKenna, 113). Kate Bornstein a proponent of accepting physical and psychological traits of “all” genders, grapples with the complexity that exists for those that claim multiple gender identities. She states, “I live pretty much without a gender, which paradoxically means I can do many genders” (14). DeVor also presents the possibility of multiple gender identities that exist beyond the primary assignments of male and female (33). Butler introduces gender instability as, “[Disciplinary] production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain” (Price and Shildrick, 416). This gender instability which opens the door for Bornstein’s “all-gender, any gender” identification is a result of resistance to male dominance as well as the heterosexual construction of gender which evident in the drag performances examined in Chapter Four.

The disruption of the rigid two gender system creates, either intentionally or not, an opportunity to explore every possible gender related behavior without categorizing it. Bornstein and others label the deconstruction or disordering of traditional gender signs as “genderfuck.” (See Shelia Koenig in The Drag King Anthology; Baker, 240, 255). Defined as the “intentional crossing, mixing, blending of gender-specific signals all at once” (Bornstein, 19), genderfuck is mostly associated with an extreme feminist, lesbian perspective. The term may also apply to drag performances. What distinguishes genderfuck from “androgyny?” Bem defines androgyny as the absence of any concerns

with cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (125) yet often androgyny is associated with the ability to see evidence of both genders simultaneously, a fusion of male and female. Genderfuck, however, allows the performer to deliberately apply male and female traits to create a completely new gender. Senelick supports genderfuck theory when he states that, "Traditional cross-dressing rarely intends fusion [of male and female], the *sine qua non* of androgyny, but rather gender division through choice of one polarity or other" (Changing Room, 2). Androgyny, however, is an individual having both male and female characteristics in equal measure (Bascow, 11). Senelick is aware of the theatricalness of cross-gender performance, "Whereas the ideal androgyne has various methods of coming into existence, the transvestite can do so in only one way, by changing clothes. Anthropological evidence provides any number of reasons why one identifies with the opposite sex by temporarily or permanently donning its clothing: the transfer of experience of the other, the desire to deceive supernatural beings, sexual allure; but in every case a magical symbol is involved" (Changing Room, 2). Genderfuck is a better fit for this research, the application of specific gender choices that display the differences rather than the similarities. However, these performances also display "passing," which implies an attempt by the performer to outwardly appear as the opposite sex. Passing is completely and believably concealing an identity rather than revealing or combining elements of both genders. While passing is certainly a factor in these performances, it will be evident that there is a deliberate creation of new theatrical forms of masculinity and femininity that disrupt gender perceptions.

Performance is a collection of conscious and unconscious choices made by the actor in collaboration with a director, costumer, etc. The final assessment of this presentation by an audience is not within the control of the performer. The spectator brings another set of code of behavior, history and emotions to the performance. It is the presentation of the outward visual cues of gender that the audience perceives through their individual lenses and forms a response, further complicates the event, as Senelick states, “The man playing woman and woman playing man are the ultimate tease, being at the same time more and less than what they seem. Actors indulge not in gender crossing but in gender mixing, and offer a polymorphism more desirable than attainable” (Changing Room, 10). These performances examined here create a desirable type of gender that remains within the fantasy performance realm. “Gender is both constructed and lived.” (H. Moore, 49), and this is true to an extent for the performer. The actor lives his/her character for a limited time on stage. Gender is constructed with double the effort for the cross-gender performer who must inhabit a character with a gender that is different.

In order to differentiate masculine and feminine traits and behavior between Japan and the West, we must start with the similarities between them. Both cultures have a history of dominating patriarchal gender models (DeVor, 49). Patriarchy as defined by Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born is “the power of the fathers. . . by force, direct pressure, or though ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play . . .” (40-41).

Within this patriarchal model both share an androcentric social order, with the patriarch defined as the neutral standard (Bem, 2). Bem argues that androcentrism is the “privileging of male experience and the ‘otherizing’ of female experience” (41). This model reinforces the “male as universal” evident in both Japan and the West, societies that have historically isolated women as outsiders on the basis of their gender (Ferris 6; Hotchkiss, 8). Hotchkiss states the obvious, “. there is no doubt that biological distinctions, cultural training, and socially determined roles have separated and categorized men and women in a system that generally values men more highly . . .” (9) which equates, “. . . to be male and masculine is to be best; to be female and masculine is to be second best; to be female and feminine is to be a “good girl”, but to be male and feminine is to be a traitor” (Devor, 59). Tim Bergling in his book on gay men and effeminate behavior Sissyphobia (2001) offers this perspective, “What is it about *society* – and I’m absolutely talking about gay society as well as the outside straight world – that makes effeminate behavior in men so objectionable?” (1). While it can be seen that, “Male drag mirrors women’s socially constructed roles” (Dolan, 6), conversely it can “undermine the authority inherently belonging to the superior sex and place him in a position of shame” (Howard, 25). It is obvious that the “male gaze” is invasive. The complexities of gender within performance make it necessary to separate these subtexts and look at the evidence present in the performance.

Japanese models of gender are more ambiguous than those of the west, “The Japanese apparently recognized two sexes and two genders, but femininity (onnarashisa)

and masculinity (otokorahisa) are not ultimately regarded as the exclusive province of females and males respectively. Although sex and gender sometimes are, in a given context, perceived as irreducibly joined, this remains a situational and not a fixed condition” (Redressing Gender Roles, 3). Barthes reinforces this, “There is meaning, but the meaning does not permit itself to be ‘caught’; it remains fluid, shuddering with a faint ebullition” (Michels, 60). This flexibility of gender embedded in Japanese religious practices, traditional dress, and modern “manga” or comic books informs the interpretation of that culture. However, the lack of restrictions from strict gender expectations also reveals an inherent tension in which gender contradictions co-exist with strict limitations. This tension may be one reason that Japanese women in particular, embrace performances like Takarazuka. Is it a resistance to patriarchal control or an attempt to gain equal footing with men in society? There is also the view that Japanese girls desire to be neither male nor female, rather they wish to be sexless (Buruma, 118) which will also be examined within the social expectations of women in Japan.

In quantitative research done in the late 1970’s in Japan, Fukaya Misashi surveyed 488 housewives in Tokyo to determine how contented and genuinely happy they were with their lives. What emerged was an overall sense of fulfillment with the gender-role division of male and female responsibilities. Two questions asked of the subjects are meaningful. The first question asked of the subjects was which sex they would chose if they could be reborn. The majority of the respondents replied “female” (146). This might suggest a high level of fulfillment felt by the participants or a socially

appropriate programmed response. There is a tendency for the Japanese to provide the least provocative response that is in accordance with expected group response. This same question asked of women in the U.S. found that the respondents were twelve times more likely to have preferred being born a man (DeVor, 32). In Masashi empirical studies, subjects were asked to identify images of masculinity and femininity, “Femininity was considered an amalgam of ‘consideration, kindness, gentleness, and good grooming,’ while masculinity encompassed the same characteristics with the addition of ‘strength.’ That is, to be male is to be gentle as well as strong.” (135). Lebra calls this ideal “yasashii” a man or husband who is tender, thoughtful as well as strong (Japanese Women, 137). While men and women have unequal status in Japan, it is obvious that gender perceptions are more closely aligned than might be expected. It is contrary to what is stated by Bascow, “. . . a person may be ‘feminine’ by exhibiting some but not necessarily all the feminine sex-typed traits” (7). The irony of this model is that if “sissiness” or overt femininity is obvious in either Japanese men or women it is a liability, a highly undesirable trait called “josei-teki” or womanish (Cherry, 32). Lebra also states that the presence of masculine qualities in Japanese women results in a “gender neutralization” (Japanese Women, 45) that again devalues femininity. These perspectives on gender behavior are culturally specific to Japan and not as pronounced in the West.

The Japanese use of language and the way children are taught to use language further define gender in their society. Unlike American English, Japanese lacks

differentiation of male and female, either speaker or subject, past or present tense, singular or plural or person. Jane Condon in A Half Step Behind states, “As early as they learn to speak, boys and girls learn they are different. For instance, men can add a syllable at the end of a sentence (zo or ze) to indicate their definite opinion, whereas women add wa or wa yo to soften what they say and to indicate hesitation or deference” (13; Lebra, 42). Shimoto describes Japanese women’s language as “verbose, repetitive, conservative, trivial, soft and emotional” (30). She goes on to describe the relationship of modern Japanese women in relation to language,

Women’s roles and status in Japanese society are in flux as they are in all modern nations today and it may be anticipated that insofar as language in any way reflects the relationship of individuals to their society and the other individuals within it, women’s speech in Japan is a rich field for delineating what sorts of changes in society . . . how speech functions to signal femininity, power, and the like . . . (48).

Language seems to reinforce stereotypes of male strength and female softness, traits that also correspond with western gender perceptions. However, there are no such differentiations between male and female in the English language.⁵ Doyle and Paludi acknowledge that, “While girls and boys advance in language development at generally the same rate there are observable differences in speech style” (192), the differences seem to be exaggerated by social training, which historically has privileged males over females in both western and Japanese cultures. Language is one way to segregate gender but

⁵ Cherry notes that in Japan that, “The sexes used to write differently in Japan. Women wrote phonetically while men expressed themselves with thousands of ideograms imported from China” (31). Women were mostly uneducated while men learned the vast Chinese alphabet. There are two major alphabets used in the Japanese language, one called *katakana* originally restricted to men (Cherry, 30; Brownmiller, 124) and the

spoken language can be accompanied by “paralanguage” which are the vocalizations that accompany verbalizing (Henley, 70; Wood, 150). These include pitch, variation, volume and inflection. Paralanguage tends to be highly gender-specific. Henley notes that a subordinate employs considerably more hesitant qualifying phrases (69) and also observes the paralinguistic differences between genders, “Males and females talk at greatly different pitches because that is required of their social roles . . .” (75). Women include more “swoops and glissades which seem to beg for affirmation” (Brownmiller, 116). There is also evidence of a full octave difference between male and female vocal pitch (Brownmiller, 106). Language is cultural rooted (Feinbloom, 89), which adds complexity when comparing gender differences between western and Japanese cultures. While the Japanese language has specific word choices that denote male and female speakers, in English the use paralanguage differentiates the speakers and also supports stereotypes, “Men may try to talk as if they are bigger than they actually are, and women may talk as if they are smaller” (116). Both Doyle and Paludi and DeVor note that women use questions to create a less commanding, softer impact (196; 51). Women also do not generally seem comfortable issuing a command using a minimum of words (Brownmiller, 119). Doyle notes that use of qualifiers and fillers by women that soften speech (196). Fisher-Licht states that the decline of the dominance of language over other semiotic systems in the theatre has resulted in an emphasis on the visual, a

phonetic women’s language, hiragana, literally “common, ordinary syllabary” (Cherry, 31). The ideogram for woman onna is often used to build other characters that have negative implications (Cherry 30).

“retheatricalization” of performance (98) which the cross-gender performer as a primary example of theatricalized gender.⁶

Clothing creates gender; it is the public presentation of masculine or feminine identity. Clothing is so closely identified with the body that as Elizabeth Wilson states, “A part of the strangeness of dress is that it links the biological body to the social being, and public to private” (2). If ambiguity is perceived, the viewer begins to consciously search for clues to help identify gender (Kessler and McKenna, viii). As stated previously, we first identify a person by his or her gender. In Wilson’s book Adorned in Dreams (1987); clothing is also an emblem of power remaining unstable because of rapid changes in style. Men’s clothing on the other hand has primarily been designed for practicality and as Brownmiller states, “Feminine clothing has never been designed to be functional, and for that would be a contradiction in terms. Functional clothing is a masculine privilege and practical is a masculine virtue. To be feminine is to accept the handicap of restraint and restriction and to come to adore it” (86).⁷ Ferris acknowledges the importance of clothing, “Dress, as a highly regulated semiotic system, became a primary site where a struggle over the mutability of the social order was conducted” (23). Today while it is acceptable for women to wear men’s clothing, there is a powerful disapproval of men wearing women’s clothing. This perceived double-standard conceals

⁶ Japanese traditional theatre has made language secondary to movement and gesture. Vocals are often performed by separate chanter or chorus in Noh, Bunraku, and Kabuki performances. Vocal believability seems to be secondary to physical believability in both Japanese and western cross-gender performances and can dispel the authenticity of the transformation.

⁷Until the 17th and early 18th centuries there was not a marked difference in men’s and women’s clothing in the west. (Wilson, 117). The state regulated dress according to social status in early modern England.

the unease that femininity arouses as opposed to the acceptability of masculinity. In modern Japan it has become socially acceptable for women to wear what was traditionally men's clothing, i.e. pants, in public. While this has been a more gradual acceptance than in the west, it was the result of social change and is not considered cross-dressing, "When women wear men's clothing they are not striving for a fully 'male' appearance. . ." (Feinbloom, 17). Femininized versions of men's suits and pants rarely present masculinity but confer power to the wearer. It is how an androcentric society dictates dress and deportment according to Howard, "In the *Haec-Vir* tract the mannish woman declares that not nature but custom dictates women's dress and women's subservient place in society . . ." (Ferris, 29). The idea that a man would chose through women's dress to be subservient is unthinkable; however, a woman choosing to gain power through male attire is likely and will be evident in the performances. There are those that consider the idea of women wearing trousers crossing into dangerous "unfeminine" territory. This discomfort with sharing clothing is part of the complexities of cross-gender performance. What unintended messages does clothing project to the spectator? Does uncertainty create misinterpretations of the image presented?

Modern feminine dress at various historical junctures has provided a strong visual indication of women's status and position of respect for that time. For the most part modern clothing design has dictated a certain restriction of movement (high heels, tights skirts, corsets are all examples of this). Restriction of movement means a limitation of freedom, not just physically but psychologically. Victorian and Edwardian clothing for

women concealed the legs with yards of fabric, limiting mobility. Legs or limbs as they were referred to at that time were considered anomalous for female gender (but of course not for men!) (Brownmiller, 83). Modern dress codes include numerous examples of the female body being artificially restrained, most obvious in women's shoe styles. The following description of how spike heel shoes affect the movement of the female body is not only accurate but demeaning, "The cheeks shake, the breasts shake, the body lumbers and hops, the jutting abdomen, the staccato tripping, it is all delightfully feminine" (Brownmiller, 184). The ability of clothing to change the movement of the body is a clear example of how male power structures create false femininity. Spike heel shoes create a physical imbalance and instability for the wearer requiring a man to help the woman negotiate walking. Restriction of physical movement created by clothing that allows for an excessive amount of skin bared is almost never evident in men's clothing (DeVor 52). In particular, the 1950's in America exhibited sexual extremes of masculinity and femininity in the ultrafeminine images of Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield with over-large breasts and tiny waists and the super masculine Burt Lancaster and Robert Mitchum with large shoulders and narrow hips. The high value placed on a woman's physical appearance as Wood explains is, "[A] view of women as decorative objects whose value depends on appearance, clothing is designed to call attention to women's bodies and to make them attractive to viewers" (145). The assumption that these viewers are male is supported by the fact that the purpose of the clothing is for seduction or at the least flirtation. These clothes are not usually worn for chores,

housework, and everyday lives. These are the theatrical clothes of seduction that are the garments of choice for many female impersonators.

Clothing is visual evidence of status, position of power and privilege and yet while women have appeared to accept clothing of restraint, these same articles of dress are also employed to manipulate and seduce, which is a form of control. Clothing as a creative tool for power and control was and continues to be an opportunity for a woman to exercise power over men, as “wily practitioners of the visual arts” (Brownmiller, 79). The idea that femininity is always “drag” for women as well as their impersonators comes back to the idea of the male as universal, “A re-presented woman is always a copy of a copy; the ‘real’ (of) woman cannot be represented precisely because her function is to represent man. She is the mirror and thus is never in it” (162) Therefore, when a man is in drag it is the male ideal of femininity that he has constructed. There is no recourse for women as Brownmiller admits when lamenting her current, less feminine attire, “One cannot take on a new identity by changing trousers” (81). The identities being shaped by clothing seem to have more to do with women’s lack of power as well as the lack of control over how they are viewed. Female impersonators’ manipulation of costume may create alternative meanings because they are “wily” female practitioners of power. Are male impersonators a pathetic attempt to appropriate power through false masculinity, “[Female] masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (Halberstam, 1). With

female drag king performers it seems that the imitation of maleness enables them to deconstruct masculinity and thus experience male power.

It is still a social taboo for Japanese women to wear pants in certain social settings and for female employees in certain business settings. Women still wear the traditional kimono for special occasions, garment of multiple layers of clothing that is almost like being wrapped as a present and severely restrains the ability to move (Dalby, Kimono, 3). Again like previous Western examples, clothing is used to contain another person both physically and emotionally. While there are few precise historical comparisons that can be made, it is clear there are subtleties with both that are similar. In examining western culture Feinbloom states, “In this culture clothing is designated wearable and proper and the rules of dress are arbitrarily applied and enforced” (19). Japanese culture reinforces a strict adherence to traditional, gender-specific clothing. Yet there are many ways in which western women have been restricted by dress that allow for some common ground adding to the discourse which will be reconfigured and displayed by cross-gender performers.

How clothing influences movement is shown in an exercise in which the reader of a men’s magazine is asked to complete several physical challenges that are expected of the average female. Among the “exercises” are trying to sit on the floor wearing a skirt, bending over wearing a tight skirt and low cut blouse and running in a “ladylike” fashion (Henley, 143). The result is demeaning for both performer of the activities and those observing them (Henley, 144). The performer of the action is sublimated but it is

interesting to observe how the act processed by the spectator. This transfer of demeanment from performer to spectator regardless of gender is perhaps a cathartic event for the performer while a disturbing one for the spectator. Would this also be true for cross-gender performances? Perhaps it is a reversal for them, a sense of empowerment tied to the multiple identities involved. In theatrical performances the audience embraces the cross-dressing performer (Feinbloom, 18) and there is no deviant stigma attached. While appearing to be an oversimplification of a complex act, as Marilyn Ivy observes, cross-dressing in a theatrical performance compounds the contradictions for the spectator (232). Senelick also comments that, “. . . theatrical performance of gender, especially when it is cross-dressed, transcends the function of symbology to the act of creating something different from the reality on which it is based” (Changing Room, 7).

When does clothing become costume? Costume is determined by the desire to disguise “true” identity and to publicly display a new identity. Kowzan notes that clothing hides not only gender identity but also social position and profession (68). Clothing has a more practical, functional aspect that also encompasses some of the elements of costume. However, clothing remains a function of the “social” while costume is “theatrical.” Costume indicates an intentional selection intended for others (audience). “When speaking of cross dressing, one must always remember the assumption of setting – a time, a place, and an audience. In various settings the same act can have multiple and different meanings” (Feinbloom, 18). While clothing can also have that function, it is heightened in theatrical performance. The idea that all women

are “female impersonators” comes to mind or as a, “transsexual, a sign forever ‘in process’” (Ferris, 169). Ferris refers to female impersonation performances as using “fetishized” female attributes that reinforces the patriarchal power structure and stereotypes (158). This fetishized female image, which is achieved through costume, make-up and exterior movement choices, is a hyper-erotic substitute for a human being. This is an important element of female impersonation performances that tend to exploit the superficial indicators of femininity. This is not evident in the male-impersonation performances that will be examined.

Cross-dressing both publicly (theatrically) and privately (socially) share some motives. While the theatrical cross-dresser obviously performs for an audience, this is also true, to a degree of the private or social cross-dresser. The difference, however, is that a social display of cross-gender behavior is generally regarded as pathological and asocial (Spence, 11). In most societies, females have the ability to freely employ both male and female physical and emotional gender traits and not be considered socially deviant, while men are not allowed the same fluidity of gender. Male cross-dressers or drag performers often have their sexual orientation implicated in the performance. Yet Connell suggests, and this will be discussed in length later in this chapter, that the cross-dressing male is more difficult to sustain than the “more natural” (76) cross-dressing female. However clothing/costume sometimes defies rigid interpretation, “If the body with its open orifices is itself dangerously ambiguous, then dress, and with it is an extension of the body yet not quite part of it, not only links that body to the social world,

but also more clearly separates the two” (Wilson, 3; see also Bem, 148). This connection between the clothed body both socially and theatrically is essential in understanding cross-gender performance.

Other technologies of gender are combined with clothing to create femininity, including hairstyle and make-up. Cosmetics, hair and jewelry as essential to the presentation of the feminine and is referred to as a “softening effect” which according to Brownmiller, “reduces functionalism, hints at masochism and alters the natural” (95). Cosmetics are embraced by women who want to be transformed or are women choosing to alter their appearance to conform to standards of beauty? There is a certain freedom to change appear, mood or hide flaws with cosmetics that is not available to men. Cosmetics have become a tool of femininity and also of control. Make-up, at times, at times referred to as “war paint” is a weapon of aggression used to seduce and capture men. Make-up and hair in combination with clothing carries multifaceted and contradictory meanings in cross-gender performance. Do the female impersonators use these tools of gender identification to deride femininity or like the women they are imitating, to charm and seduce the audience? In the Takarazuka Revue, for example, these feminine technologies are not only used by the actresses playing women but by the male impersonators creating a very unique vision of masculinity. Volcano and Halberstam describe an Italian Drag King fashion show in which every model had red lipstick “slathered” on (22). For them, “Authenticity was OUT and there was no room to doubt what gender they really belonged to [. . .]” (22). There is this idea that these

performers have an inability to successfully “pass” as a man onstage and so fall back on familiar feminine technologies. Or is it a blatant revolt against the patriarchal management to retain femininity within the performance of masculinity? The simultaneous use of both male and female traits is a unique component of Takarazuka which will be examined in Chapter Three.

How the body is decorated communicates meaning but it is how the body behaves, “...the bodily negotiations that we recognize others through their bodies, that we categorize them [not only] by age, gender, ethnicity –even class- through bodily attributes” (Backett-Milburn and McKie, 9) that completes the representation of gender. Sandy Zeig notes this, “Gestures are material, as material as clothing which one may ‘put on’ and ‘take off.’ Gestures are a concrete means of producing meaning, both gestures that have been assigned to us and those that have not been assigned to us” (Ferris, 13). Bodily movement, facial expression and gesture may or may not be definitive but when attempting to classify gender-specific traits, is magnified onstage and becomes a key communicator of gender. Bodily movement including walking, sitting, and running are considered involuntary functions that all humanity engages in. But gesture, as defined by Birdwhistell, is conventionalized body motions that are closely related to language in that they communicate thoughts and feelings rather being functional movements (Introduction, 6, 7).⁸ Kendon notes that when gesture replaces speech it becomes codified (119; see also Birdwhistell, 6) which results in meaning becoming static and conventionalized, which often becomes stereotype. This creates challenges for actors

performing the other gender in particular. Performers often rely on superficial, stereotypical gestures to create the other gender. Some codification of gesture, in theatrical performance seems unavoidable. Yet is it necessary for performer and spectator to have identical gender maps from which they interpret the performance? Use of feminine or masculine gesture when done by in cross-gender performance becomes even more acutely symbolic, conventional, stylized and yet can convey ambiguous meaning. Gestures in life can be easily ignored or dismissed but “No motion is a thing in itself. It is always a part of a pattern. There is no meaningless motor activity.” (Birdwhistell, 10; see also Feinbloom, 89) and this is especial true of performance. Gesture is also culturally specific evident in the ability of bilingual speakers to completely change their nonverbal behavior when changing from one language to another (Birdwhistell, 6).

The art of acting is dependent on the ability to consciously manipulate the face and body to communicate a particular meaning to an audience. It is not merely reflexive but a conscious manipulation originating from real life (Backett-Milburn and McKie, 12). Gesture and body language can be more meaningful than vocal expression. Bascow notes that non-verbal communication is both more expressive and subtle than verbal communication (59). Non-verbal communication is often less gender specific and more power and status specific (Wood, 139; Bascow, 60). However, since men traditionally have higher status and power, the behavior conveys gender-specific associations. Categories of non-verbal behavior include gesture, eye contact, and body posture will be

⁸ Kendon also regards speech and gesture as “two aspects of a single process” (110).

examined and subsequently applied to performance. The differences between the social physical behavior of men and women as well as Western and Japanese creates a starting point that becomes transformed in cross-gender performance where gesture or body position accordingly generates a heightened meaning for the spectator.

Men and women use space, subsequently referred to as personal space, differently. Personal space is used to exert power over others, signify value and shape interaction (Wood, 146). Women customarily take up less space, especially in patriarchal societies (Bascow, 59; Borisoff, 46; Henley, 36; Senelick, 88; Wood, 142).⁹ Most agree with Borisoff's comment, "Women are taught to take up less space than men. They are taught to sit with their legs together and elbows to their sides and to walk with smaller steps" (47; see also Henley, 135; Brownmiller, 121). Doyle and Paludi note the difference in how males and females use their body in space, "... men tend to sit in a more relaxed way than women. In general, women tend to display a more restricted body posture than men, who seem to have a wider range of possible body positions" (201). There are explicit cues of superiority (head raised, loud speech) and inferiority (head lowered, nervous speech) (Henley, 126). Expansive masculine gestures include leaning back, putting hands behind neck in a relaxed aggressive style and "steepling" or touching fingertips together in a raised position (Henley, 126, 129). Bem also states that,

⁹This invasion of personal space is a deliberate exercise of power and status that is usually done by a male to a female and rarely the other way around (Wood, 147). Henley mentions this example of a male and female couple walking together in which the woman is "steered" by the man to go in the direction he desires (200). However, when a man's personal space is invaded there is a strong negative reaction either physically or emotionally, while the typical female reaction is to physically move away (Wood, 148, Borisoff, 47).

“...females are predisposed to position their bodies in ways that are unthreatening, vulnerable, and accommodating to men rather than in ways that are strong, confident, and interpersonally dominating” (162; see also DeVor, 51; Henley, 34; Eagly, 104). Henley identifies this as avoidance behavior of “stigmatized persons” (10), and this can in part explain how, “Feminine socialization emphasizes building connections with others while masculine socialization stresses independence” (Wood, 142).

When comparing men’s and women’s ability to read body language and non-verbal behavior, women have a greater ability to decode non-verbal messages (Doyle and Paludi, 199; Bascow, 59; Henley, 13). Wood agrees, “Whereas women frequently use non-verbal signals to invite others into conversation, men more frequently use them to sustain control of interaction” (138). Again there is a perception of women nurturing and men controlling. The lack of power and privilege most women experience results in an inward, self-absorbed use of the body that may falsely appear as greater body awareness. This is evident in the physical behavior of women in the presence of men including pulling the body inward, modifying the voice, and muscle tightening in upper back. In addition there are other behaviors that have a sexual intent, such as playing with hair, opening eyes wide and crossing and uncrossing legs (Henley, 138). While many of these behaviors are identified with western women, these also apply to the Japanese women.

In an analysis of non-verbal behavior in interview situations for both men and women in Japan, it was found that women showed more self-manipulation of legs (Bond and Shiraishi, 122) in addition to smiling and talking more when nervous (ibid, 123).

When the interviewers changed posture or added gesture, females responded in kind (ibid, 124). However, part of a Japanese woman's upbringing includes engaging in "femininity training" which teaches restrained, modest, movement including smoothness of gestures and pulling in the body to use up less space (Japanese Social Organization, Lebra, 42-43).¹⁰ This is consistent with western women's non-verbal behavior.

In Japanese society, polite speech and etiquette are highly developed and consequently euphemistic expressions flourish. It is noteworthy to compare gesture as it changes from one culture to another. For example, in the West a common gesture to refer to gay men is a limp wrist, combining notions of effeminacy with a faint put-down: damning with faint gesture. In Japan, the equivalent gesture involves raising the hand to shield the mouth, in a movement similar to that required by Japanese etiquette of women laughing, but when applied to a gay men this gesture is reversed, so that the palm of the hand turns outward instead of inwards- a twisted reversal of feminine modesty (Valentine, 98). Brownmiller also notes the pliant wrist that simultaneously represents grace in a woman and effeminacy in a man (180) and is both an affirmative and damaging trait. The cultural differences of gesture are obvious but what is most important is the replacement of language with gesture in Japanese social training. This is not an ubiquitous model but one with limitations which are the differences between the two cultures, "In the west, the mirror is an essentially narcissistic object; man conceives a mirror only in order to look at himself in it; but in the Orient [Japan], apparently the

¹⁰ Japanese samurai daughters prepared for ritual suicide by binding their legs together so that they would not open in death (Brown, 189), how the men control women's bodies even in death.

mirror is empty, it is the symbol of the very emptiness of symbols” (*Empire*, 79). When behavior is isolated an idealized model evolves. This is evident in the cross-gender performances of Japan in which there is a kind of depersonalization of gender (Buruma, 115). With this deconstruction of gender behavior, it is necessary to identify how it is applied in performance.

Facial expressions indicate emotion but like body expression are socially regulated. For example, western women tend to avert their eyes in order to appear ladylike and modest (Henley, 164). Japanese men and women also avoid direct eye contact because it is considered disrespectful and intrusive. In other cases, studies show that American women, in certain situations, maintain eye contact longer (especially with other women) (Henley, 160). But staring can also be considered as aggressive (Doyle and Paludi, 200; Henley, 53), as well as overtly sexual. In the study of Japanese women mentioned previously, smiling as is typical of women and it is true that smiling and giggling are feminine gestures of appeasement in western cultures (Brownmiller, 175; Henley, 122). Smiling, however, is not always an indicator of pleasure or friendliness. Masculine faces are less likely to smile broadly, “Dominant members of a hierarchy are less likely to smile. They withhold verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotions” (Borisoff, 51). With both eye-contact and smiling, it appears that women utilize facial expressions to project an approachable nuanced awareness of their audience. Showing emotions through facial expressions is often considered weak and tied to feminine behavior. When men do smile, however, they are more likely to show teeth (Henley,

176). This can be interpreted as a grimace or a threat and a smile becomes an aggressive act, displaying power and status rather than revealing emotion.

Women may be more skilled at decoding non-verbal cues, but there is also evidence that they are equally adept at sending or encoding emotions or feelings non-verbally (Eagly, 103; Doyle and Paludi, 198). There is an appropriate feminine non-verbal vocabulary when hostile or angry (Henley, 146). There are areas of non-verbal communication not allowed for women that result in stereotyping. The use of gestural slang (Henley, 146), which are specific street gestures that usually only men employ, such as “the finger.” Feinbloom calls this “symbolic interaction” which he defines as the shared meanings and symbols which are acquired through socialization (88). Facial expression signals emotion but is also used to make an impression (Henley, 169), but body language is less obvious (Bascow, 59). Similar to spoken language, body language is learned, not intrinsic (Henley, 17). If the theatrical experience is seen through a semiotic lens then, “Every action has an audience either internally or externally. Together the actor and audience form the basic unit of society” (Feinbloom, 88). The ability or inability to contextualize an action or gesture or facial expression in cross-gender performances will be obvious in both performer and spectator.

While certain gender behaviors are widely recognized and accepted, there are deviations that create confusion when an individual chooses behavior of the other sex or a mixture of both. Standards of femininity and masculinity differ from culture to culture as well as historically, however in most societies femininity is predicated on a woman’s

physical attractiveness. Women tend to be judged more harshly for failing to meet the societal standards for physical beauty. “To be insufficiently feminine is viewed as a failure in core sexual identity, or as a failure to care sufficiently about oneself, for a woman found wanting will be appraised (and will appraise herself) as mannish or neutered or simply unattractive as men have defined these terms” (Brownmiller, 15). This clearly indicates that women who do not conform to a society’s standards for feminine attractiveness risk being labeled masculine. This reinforces the divide between masculinity and femininity rather than the shared attributes. Some examples of this are highly semiotic in life, such as the way many American men cross their legs with the ankle or calf over the knee (Wagenvoord, 42). In Europe, men generally cross their legs in the same manner as American females, knee over knee, even at times that the upper legs cross in a full leg cross with feet together (Henley, 135). This is also true of Asian males (Borisoff, 47). This behavior is considered effeminate, causing confusion about masculinity and sexuality. For Japanese women to cross their legs is considered offensive and extremely unfeminine (Japanese Women, Lebra, 42). When applying these western codes of movement as a norm, there is a perception that Asian males are not considered as manly as Western males. This may have more to do with physical traits (Asian men are often physically smaller) and attitude (a more restrained, less macho presence) but again this is an example of the fluidity of gender behavior in Japanese culture and will be a component of the examination of Takarazuka in Chapter Three.

Ultimately these gender polarizations are the organizing models for the both Western and Japanese social life reflected in cross-gender performances. While men and women behave differently undirected by biological essentialism, the intrinsic biological natures of men and women are not essentially different until a culture interprets them.¹¹ There is still ambiguity concerning masculine and feminine behavior, illustrated by the way a person stands and how his or her hands are placed on the hips. If the thumbs are forward it is considered feminine, if the thumbs are back it is masculine (Doyle and Paludi, 201). There is a kinesthetic process when this gesture is performed that creates a feminine or masculine stance. These small adjustments are important when cross-gender performers make decisions on how to interpret gender evident in the heightened atmosphere of performance. While both men and women feel the same emotions, they react differently to certain emotions and should not be limited to a defined set of gender traits. It may be that there are few “opposite” traits that apply only to men or women but more shared traits. Psychological research also concludes that most people use a combination of male and female traits rather than extremes of either sex (Connell, 5). However, cross-gender performance demands a theatricality of gender and sometimes the obvious choices are also the most extreme. This idea of gender adaptability has long been championed by feminists and others who embrace the possibility of multiple genders. It also creates a more interesting context when examining cross-gender performance, as Wilson states,

¹¹ Also Doyle and Paludi (1995) and Kessler and McKenna (1978).

“... exaggerated masculinity or femininity may be less sexy than a sexual presence tinged with ambiguity. This is not the same as androgyny; there is nothing androgynous about Marlene Dietrich or Greta Garbo, for example, it is rather that the mysterious quality of their allure comes in part from a hint of manliness at the very heart of their feminine presence” (120). There are performances in this study that will illustrate both exaggerated masculinity and femininity but also those that play with a more ambiguous gender presence.

Cross-gender performances have been called a demonstration of “the fabulous artifice of gender” (Lilley, 233). Gender is a social construct, more reliant on the technologies of learned behavior rather than the biological physical body. Whether performing your own “biologically” assigned gender or the other or a new variation that contains elements of both, there is an element of deception both for the performer within him or herself and of course with the audience. The notion that gender is “natural” or “essential” is not important for these performances.¹⁴ Gender as a socially structured still needs to be sustained if the universally accepted methods of identifying the essential components that differentiate male and female behaviors and idiosyncrasies are

¹⁴ Evidence supports this theory, Bascow sites studies showing that young female and male children both start out with equally expressive nonverbal behaviors and that males learn to be less expressive through societal expectations of masculinity, as they grow up. Indeed they are learning an important social behavior for males, stoicism (59).

abandoned? Without some archetype of behavior, how is gender self-expression achieved? Human identity relies on sexuality as one of, if not the most crucial component of individuality.¹⁵ Remove that defining component then others such as race, class, and ethnicity, that also form self-identity become unstable and ultimately unreliable. In a society this can be a problem but in theatrical performance it becomes an opportunity to engage in a discourse that has fewer negative implications. This instability of sexuality and gender identity becomes prominent in the performances and an opportunity to reveal unseen conditions that indicate gender.

This research provides a variety of techniques with which to examine these performances with no correct or true course. It is not a stable model but one with limitations. Limitations include evidence that relies on western sources. This restriction is a cultural bias that may inhibit how Japanese performances are considered, as Barthes aptly states, “In the west, the mirror is an essentially narcissistic object; man conceives a mirror only in order to look at himself in it; but in the Orient [Japan], apparently, the mirror is empty, it is the symbol of the very emptiness of symbols . . .” (*Empire*, 79). This lack of depth attributed to the west is not absolute and will be shown through the performance to be unfounded. The danger when separating codes of behavior from the cultural framework is that an idealized model evolves. If the Barthian model is adhered to, there are many inconsistencies that arise including within Japanese cross-gender performance, a depersonalization of gender when idealized gender signs are presented

¹⁵ Most societies classify not only people but objects, and abstract ideas as either male or female.

(Buruma, 115). This chapter has attempted to form a model of gender behavior that can apply to both western and Japanese performances. How gender behavior changes in performance is, according to chronicler of Japanese Noh acting, Zeami, is the difference between “imitation” and “becoming”. Imitation, according to Zeami is the “faithful reproduction of human characteristics” (Rimer, xxxix) and becoming is when the actor “assimilates himself into the character’s emotions” (Rimer, xxxix). Daimon Shiro, a Kabuki actor who mid-career began to develop an onnagata performing style that blended the traditional Kabuki impersonation of women with improvisation to “create new female characters from within myself. Of course I am a man, but inside mentally and then physically I become a woman” (Changing Room, Senelick, 99). Shiro refers to this performance as “possession” (99). Tamasaburo Bando’s cross-gender performances are also referred to as a possession of the feminine so that “... masculine and feminine cease to be tangible entities, become ineffable and are to be distinguished only by mental effort. If other onnagata allude to woman, implying a distance from reality, Tamasaburo incarnates her in his very essence” (Senelick, Changing Room, 98). Barthes’ idea of an empty mirror is reinforced by the aesthetic of the onnagata. The fundamental disparity in approach makes it more difficult to compare the performances. Specific codes of gender can be twisted to present a limited view of the other sex. As Brau observes of the otokoyaku of the Takarazuka Revue, “An otokoyaku distills the masculine portrait in order to present only the part she feels will appeals to her audience; she does not aim at verisimilitude” (86). There are three possibilities of gender presentation: imitation,

becoming, and selective choice, (for want of a better phrase). These will overlap when examined in theatrical performance but how gender is constructed in performance, not why, is the bigger question when examining performance.

CHAPTER THREE

Gender Crossings: The Onnagata and Otokoyaku Performers of Japan

“Art is the search for the truth lost in the chaos of lies. It is born of the (male) patriarchal society” (Pilikan, 76).

The complicated relationship between male and female identities and men and women in Japan can be observed in traditional folk tales of Japan. A fixed convention of Japanese storytelling is a shift in power from the male to the female with the female ultimately determining the fate of her lover. This is an unusual convention in view of the rigidity of male and female gender roles in Japan. Japan maintains a patriarchal power structure in which women hold a subordinate status. In these tales the female characters start out as non-human, supernatural beings that transform into a human female in order to “catch” a man, these women become “vengeful female spirits” (Iwamura, 8) when their love breaks a bond with them and the relationship can turn alternatively delightful or tragic depending on the particular narrative. One of the oldest folk tales, Urashima and the Kingdom Beneath the Sea, centers on Princess Oto as the dynamic initiator while the object of her desire, Urashima takes on the traditional passive female role in the relationship.¹ This transformation of the female is called henshin, which literally means “change body.” While originally used to refer to deities assuming a human form (Pronko, 194; Scott, 17) it seems particularly appropriate in examining cross-gender performances in Japan. First it is necessary to understand the Japanese perspective of gender and sexuality in order to put these performances in context.

In these performances the spectator becomes both witness and admirer to a transformation that, in many ways, is more fantastic than those fictitious supernatural female transformations mentioned previously. Whether men portray women or women portray men on stage in Japan there seems to be an implied understanding that this “harmony of opposites” (Pronko, 194) is not a projection of specific male and female traits but a combination that allows for both to emerge simultaneously:

The Japanese apparently recognize two sexes and two genders, but Femininity (*onnrashisa*) and masculinity (*otokorashisa*) are not ultimately regarded as the exclusive province of females and males respectively. Although sex and gender sometimes are, in a given context, popularly perceived as irreducibly joined, this remains a situational and not a fixed condition (Robertson, Redressing Gender Roles, 3)

Ambiguous femininity is apparent in many iconic representations in Japan and is not considered unusual or abnormal. The Japanese film Shin Dosei Jidai (1997) is a good example of the feminization of male characters. They are all handsome, long-legged non-entities (Shilling 4-5, see also Iwamura). While this can be read as an attempt by women to gain power and control through sissifying their male objects of desire, these men are so feminized as Buruma notes that, “Perhaps the most significant consequence of the male characters emasculation is that when a female and male character make love in a comic, it is difficult to know whom is who . . .” (5).² The Japanese feminist movement has not had the impact that feminism has had in the U.S. so the speculation that the feminized male is a response to the lack of power for women is unsupported. It may

¹ In other stories cats, fish, snakes, birds and foxes (Kawai, 105) transform into beautiful women to gain a man’s love. Marriage is usually disastrous (Kawai, 117) because of a broken promise by the man.

appear that the feminized male is an attempt to flaunt manipulation, it is quite different than the power of the female characters of folk stories. Schilling states about the male characters in Shin Dosei Jidai, “They are little more than dolls the and therefore a man with feminine qualities will also have lower social status. As visual presentation of gender joined to sexuality will be an essential element to these women clothe with their dreams and desires (one is even called Ken)” (4-5).³ This emasculated man reinforces the belief of women as the lower and weaker gender and therefore, drop in status. This will be not necessarily be true for the quasi-male/females interpreted by the otokoyaku in the Takarazuka Revue.

When comparing the many gender possibilities evident in Japan with the tendency that the West has towards realism, Raz notes that, “Every theatre uses duality as its subject matter and technique, but the Japanese theatre has brought it to its highest level of conscious accomplishment. It reverses the conventional concept of the realistic theatre by presenting techniques of mimesis as its subject matter. Metamorphosis, transfiguration, transformation, and translation are shown for their own sake . . .” (257). The west tends to attribute personal transformation to extreme emotion, love, sorrow, or revenge but for the Japanese, the act of transformation itself is the principal source of meaning, not the motives behind it. In one well-known western model of transformation, an ugly duckling suffers many humiliations before becoming a beautiful swan and illustrates fundamental

² In Japan adults read comics geared toward their age group and gender. Young girls read “shoujo manga” (girl’s comics).

³ Male homosexuals or okama are considered, “Not really man, not really woman, they are moreover, not really sexual” (Valentine, 103).

cultural differences. The western model focuses on the ugly duckling's ultimate retribution and the "happily-ever-after" that is the direct result of the transformation from ugly to beautiful. In Japanese folk tales, however, the transformation of the female characters never leads to a happy ending. This diffusing grief seems to explain the underlying sorrow of women long silenced by a restrictive society. Yes, these transformations may be a desperate attempt to gain power but to the Japanese way of thinking, sorrow enhancing the aesthetic response is the more important interpretation, "It is the Japanese cultural paradigm that a woman must disappear in order for sorrow to complete the sense of beauty" (Kawai, 23). In the end the female character motivated by sorrow vanishes. This is also the fate of female performers when banned from public stages and ultimately evidenced when women disappear from public records (K. Coaldrake, 7). To better understand cross-gender performance in Japanese theater, it is first necessary to examine the role of women within that particular culture.

The complexities of gender are bound up in the social, cultural and material foundations of Japanese society. It is embedded in the Confucian and Buddhist religious position that women were inferior (Cherry, 10). In this yin/yang cosmos, *yin* is the earth and *yang* is heaven and women are aligned with earthly passions. Sievers points out that yin is passive and associated with night and darkness (5). She goes on to cite an eighteenth-century document that describes women in this way, "She is foolish [. . .] she is disobedient, slanderous, envious, stupid" (5). This negative description is consistent with women's lowly position in Japanese society. The commencement of the Meiji era,

named for Emperor Meiji (1868 -1912), brought westernization and modernization to the formerly isolated island. While Japan was rapidly evolving from a feudal society to modernity; there was little change for women. The laws that reduced women's status in society from personhood to property of fathers and husbands during the rise of the Samurai class (1392-1573) (Tamanoi, 23)⁴ were little affected by the code of conduct established in 1868 regulating gender and sexuality called Ryosai kenbo or "good wife, wise mother" (K. Coaldrake, 13; Robertson, 14, 145; Schattschneider, 5). This model of ideal womanhood was partially based on western models while maintaining a fragile Confucian male hierarchy that allowed for male control (Cherry, 49; Liddle, 46). A woman's only place of influence was the home; the private area while men remained in control of society at large.⁵ Women who deviated were considered whores, the antithesis of the good, faithful wife and morally upright mother. This is seen in the social codes of conduct for European women during the Renaissance, "The good woman was closed off: silent, chaste, and immured within the home" (Gibson, 26). Senelick notes that, "In any patriarchal society women are accustomed to taking up less space, being less assertive than men are. Deference is built into their deportment" (Changing Room, 88). It is evident from the laws and social structures that women were considered weak physically

⁴ Yet contrary to this status, according to the "bushido" code, "Women were expected to be as heroic as men and were trained [like men] to repress their feelings" (Liddle, 103). Liddle also mentions that samurai women bound their legs before committing ritual suicide (104) showing the patriarchal control of women even in death.

⁵ This restriction of women's roles is not unique to Japanese culture. In ancient Greece it was believed that the basic unit of civilization was the family and that women were commodities. This was illustrated by the male actors who played female roles in theater performances, "The male actor's portrayal of women was said to institutionalize male-originated signs of her appropriate gender behavior and encourage the creation of female roles which lent themselves to generalization and stereotype" (Senelick, Changing Room, 45).

and intellectually and those perceptions were accepted and obeyed and continue to have

some influence today.⁶

In order to understand Japanese society, it is essential to know that there is a prioritization of the needs and interests of the group over the individual. The power that Japanese women hold in private, controlling household finances and children's education is unequal to male control of all social, political and moral governing foundations of Japanese society. Empirically studies from the late 1970's show that most support this model (Akiko, Vogel, Meiko and Masashi, Proceedings of the Tokyo Symposium on Women). Vogel states that being a mother and housewife today is held in higher esteem in Japan than in the U.S. (Proceedings, 155, see also Tamanoi, 19).⁷ Buruma brackets the performances with these expectations, "There are social reasons too for the popularity of transvestite acting [in Japan]. Like everywhere else, learning to play the role of one's sex is part of social training in Japan" (118). Women in Japan learn to "play" their prescribed social role, which has been established by male members of society. While there may be ambiguity in gender representations, there are rigid role delineations for women. In contrast to American women who lead a more autonomous life in contrast, women in Japan are on a socially predetermined course that has less freedom of choice. These social roles for women are important when examining the origins and the reasons behind the formation of both Kabuki and the Takarazuka Revue.

⁶ Women in the U.S. have gained greater equal opportunities in the workplace, the political arena and many other areas than their Japanese counterparts. Women in Japan only acquired the right to vote in 1946 and equal opportunity rights in 1986 (K. Coaldrake, 28).

⁷ Brinton also notes that American women spend a smaller proportion of their lives as wives and mothers than do Japanese women (84).

The unofficial directive for Japanese society is wa, meaning the sacrifice of private interests for public good (Liddle, 103). By maintaining consistent and clear gender identities (as well as class distinctions) this is maintained. The disconnect between the acceptance of gender ambiguity mentioned earlier with these strict social roles for women also seems to allow for performances to emerge that embrace both. The intolerance or compassion that the Japanese have for the odd or different, including homosexuals is an aspect of these performances that is unacknowledged. However, in the documentary film, Shinjuku Boys (1995) the lives of cross-gender female club hosts in Tokyo are examined. These women called onabe, live on the fringes of Japanese society and openly reject women's roles.⁸ Ambiguity is apparent in their views of themselves as gendered beings, "I don't think I am a girl. I don't think I am a boy." (Shinjuku Boys). This refrain will be echoed by drag performances in the west. Yet the onabe are portrayed in the film as soft and feminine and also as an overbearing macho brute, as this female customer remarks, "If you were a woman you would be absolutely detestable, but you're not so I forgive you" (Shinjuku Boys). This combination of femininity and macho ness will be evident in the otokoyaku performers. Onabe are tolerated because their deviant behavior is confined to designated places (the entertainment section of Tokyo, Shinjuku). Cross-gender performance is also accepted for those same reasons. What is acceptable in a theatrical performance creates social disruption in other presentations.

⁸ Male homosexuals are called okama meaning "empty pot and lesbians are onabe: "empty pan." Worthlessness is the result of deviation from accepted sexuality is evident in this nomenclature.

The social role of women are completely upturned by the extravagant and incomparable cross-gender performances that are created by women and about women. While Japan has a long theatrical tradition, starting with the Noh theatre of cross-gender performance, it is the Kabuki actors and the actresses of the Takarazuka Revue that will be the focus here. It is the arrangement and presentation of gender in these particular performances that reveal complexity within the theatricality that creates a new-formed truth that challenges both spectator's and performer's self perception. Arendt claims performance "is safer because the theater provides elements that frame the actor's behavior and separate him from the reality of the audience" (7). It offers an opportunity to reflect and reexamine gender in the safety of the theatrical arena but also permits fantasy gender representations. For example, the onnagata play women that are powerful, independent, and sexually assertive which is removed from women's social roles. In contrast, theatre allows the otokoyaku to select masculine characteristics to display with no need to realistically portray a man. This is evidence that despite Japan's strict social gender roles there is nonconformity and freedom with onstage gender roles. The onnagata may be upholding a patriarchal model of womanhood, but it is far more complicated than that. An anecdote told by one Kabuki actor, tells of an onnagata correcting his own wife on the proper way for a woman to show anger (Nakamura, 94). This illustrates how the line between theatre and reality is blurred and questions what is considered gender reality. Kabuki history begins, not a male performer but a woman who was the originator and first celebrity. Kabuki history is linked to gender power struggles

and the need to reconcile public morality (linked to gender) with theatrical performance. The tension within the onnagata performances from the start is a necessary digression at this point.

Isumo No Okuni (fl. about 1605) is considered to be the originator of Kabuki. She was a shrine dancer or “professional shamaness” (Ortolani, 164)⁹ in a performance in which gender was adaptable on stage. Kabuki was originally a ritual performed to appease revengeful ghosts (Ortolani, 164). Theater and religion had many connections, including some nomenclature. The word used for the Kabuki actor is *yakusha* literally meaning “one who serves the gods” (Nakamura, 157). Okuni performed with both men and women and cross-gender interpretations were standard (Kincaid, 59, Earle, 165).¹⁰ Various descriptions of the performances and performers often describe Okuni’s physical appearance in performance with a sword by her side and dressed in a man’s brilliant multicolored kimono (Brandon, 63, Senelick, 84, Tsubouchi, 35). A description of Okuni has her, “Dressed as a man she sways seductively on center stage with her hair flying wildly and a sword thrown carelessly over her shoulder (Coaldrake, Proceedings, 70). The following is an eyewitness description (from the year 1621) of the often chaotic performances of the mixed gender troupe, “The men wear women’s clothing, the women wear men’s clothing, cut their hair and wear it in a man’s topknot, have swords at their sides and carry purses. They sing base songs and dance vulgar dances; their lewd voices

⁹ There is little factual documentation of Okuni’s life. It is generally agreed that she started dancing religious dances in Kyoto and later altered the nature of her performances with the addition *kyogen* (farical comedies) elements that resulted in vulgarized performances that featured her in the male roles. (Leiter, 146)

are clamorous, like the buzzing of flies and the crying of cicadas. The men and women dance together” (Senelick, Changing Room, 84; see also Kominz, 19). These performers were called kabukimono or “one who goes off the beaten path” (Shoko, 29). The word “ka-bu-ki” literally meaning “song, dance, skill” is derived from an earlier word “ka-bu-ku” which means “to tilt” or “to slant” implying an offbeat quality to the performance (Ortolani, 155; Senelick, 84). It could also mean, “to bend forward” which gives the term a homosexual context (Ortolani, 198) and is often associated with cross-gender performance, particularly in the west as will be seen in Chapter Four. Female Kabuki performers assumed exterior masculine gender signs but also made the more permanent gesture of cutting off their long hair. Hair length was highly symbolic for women in Japan at that time, and cropping it signified to the rest of the community that a woman was officially withdrawing from secular and sexual matters (Coaldrake, 64; Robertson, Doing 179). This bold gesture was prophetic, for the banishment of all women from public performance seemed to anticipate the subsequent diminished public role of women in Japanese society.

Cross-cultural elements added to the gender confusion when, according to several sources, Okuni began wearing a western symbol of Christianity, a cross dangling from her belt (Brandon, 63; Kominz, 19; Nakamura, 22). This mixing of western influences (Portuguese missionaries were in Japan at that time) seems to be a deliberately outlandish addition to an already eccentric performance. Ortolani describes Okuni’s performance

¹⁰ In fact, after she began performing as a man, Okuni began attracting larger crowds (Pronko, 112).

appearance, “She [Okuni] dressed in Portuguese pants, with a foreign style hat, or used men’s clothes, even sometimes wearing a cross hanging from her neck” (166). The combination of both male and female articles of clothing, results in an “off beat” or avant-garde performance was as likely to attract censorship in addition to audiences. Were these choices meant only to attract and titillate audiences or were there more complex motives? There is evidence that Okuni and the other performers may have been involve in prostitution (the theatrical profession seems, at times unjustifiably, fettered with the “world’s oldest profession”),¹¹ but it is not clear that gender swapping was done as a subversive attempt to defy male authority but more of an innovative marketing tool to attract new audiences. It is evident that these performances disrupted standards of social and moral behavior, but was Okuni as extremely subversive as Kawatake describes her, “[as] a butch, man-hating transvestite whore, who phantasised [sic] about being a virgin. She delighted in total sexual reversal, forcing her male actors into playing women, and actresses into playing men” (35). Okuni’s presentation of gender was a “tilt” on normal representations of gender but also a subtle mockery of those standards and the society that created them. Kawatake’s description of Okuni reveals an image of a powerful “she-man” reminiscent of the mythical women of folk legends. Okuni not only performed the male roles but many sources cite that she assumed total leadership of the troupe, including the text, casting (using her power to force gender roles on her actors,

¹¹ Kominz notes that there is no evidence that Okuni was a prostitute (19). One name used to identify this early Kabuki was *Yujo* or prostitutes’ Kabuki (Cavaye, 19; Gunji, 19; Ernst, 165) acknowledging this link. In fact, one account claims that prostitutes started imitating Okuni’s performance and that she was perhaps unfairly blamed for harlotry (Shoko, 31).

mirroring the patriarchal manipulation of women) and financial control. It seems inevitable that the authorities would ban her performances and in 1629 women's kabuki was forbidden.¹² Immorality was given as the explanation but Kabuki scholar Ernst Earle disagrees, "Women's Kabuki was not forbidden because a large number of women were prostitutes: Prostitution was and is accepted as a normal, necessary trade. But the Bafuku [government] saw in this form of theater something new, different and consequently, troubling. The simple dances showed a world of individual passion apart from social duty" (217). The idea that individual expression (especially a woman's) could be at odds with social order was introduced earlier in this chapter. From that point on women were not only banned from public performance but do not appear in any public records for over 200 years. Female performers would not appear on public stages until the early 1900s with the westernization of Japan. These early onna Kabuki performances are important because they illustrate the degree of control that men had but also the fusion of perversion and exoticism that when performed by men became a publicly acceptable, revered entertainment.

While male adult Kabuki troupes appeared as early as 1617 (Earle, 166), after 1629 young boys of 11 to 14 years of age (Ortolani, 167) replaced the female performers. They performed the same dances and subject matter as the women performers did. Called wakashu ("Youth Kabuki") they too were banned from the stage in 1652 for much the same reasons as women's kabuki (Kincaid, 71; Nakamura, 24).

¹² Female kabuki performers were restricted from public performance by law and threatened with arrest and punishment for violation (Ortolani, 167; Gunji, 19).

While there was a tolerance by the ruling samurai of homosexual relationships between men and boys, it was not a moral issue that caused the demise of the *wakashu* Kabuki but the public disruption by the men who fought for the attention of the boy stars (Earle, 217).¹³ Diminishing their sexual appeal, the boy performers were required to cut off their front forelocks and shave their hair in accordance with male styles at the time. (Kominz, 21; Ortolani, 167; Shoko, 31).¹⁴ This created the way for yaro (“shaved head”) Kabuki had adult men taking on the female parts and gender specialization began evolving into the modern *onnagata* (Ortolani, 168).¹⁵ Interestingly, the *wakashu* boy actors never modeled their feminine presentation on actual females but as attendance by women to Kabuki performance rose almost 60% by the end of the Genroku era (1688-1704), it indicated that a more realistic portrayal of women was needed.

The Genroku period marked the evolution of Kabuki into a classical art form and is considered the golden age of Kabuki that established the form and conventions apparent in the art form today. A standard Kabuki vernacular was also established, “*onnagata*” became the designation for the actors who played women’s roles replacing the more derogatory expression, oyama, also applied to courtesans or prostitutes (Leiter, 292). With the elevation of the *onnagata* to a more esteemed status, it was still obvious

¹³ The Meiji restoration with the strong emphasis on Western values attempted to eradicate male homosexuality (Valentine, 97). It ultimately was the breakdown of class distinctions that were the foundation of the social hierarchy of the early seventeen-century. (Earle, 217) that precipitated the end of *wakashu* Kabuki.

¹⁴ These boy actors still performed after 1652, but they were not as appealing. Men took over all roles in Kabuki at this time.

¹⁵ In today’s Kabuki performance, a remnant of the *wakashu* Kabuki remains in the wagoto performer. The *wagoto* usually is the romantic leading man, characterized by a more feminine presentation than the

that the patriarch controlled the public image of women. Arnott rather audaciously states that, “The loss of women was irrelevant. What must have seemed at first as a limitation of the art became one of its greatest strengths” (137). Women as a model of femininity became disposable just as actresses became expendable. In an attempt to control early onnagata performances, the government placed restrictions on how realistic the performance could be. In response, the theater developed a feminine model portrayed by the onnagata that idealized and eventually seemed to trivialize the essence of woman. These conventions of onnagata acting will be examined later in this chapter. What is important is that the onstage model of femininity is not based on a specific kind of woman but a generalized femininity. The art of the onnagata, “is a portrayal by a male with a masculine physique of what, from a male point of view, is the ideal woman” (Seller-Young, 40). The onnagata is perhaps an artifact (Baker, 70) or a relic of a past model of femininity that is primarily male created and not attached to any one woman. Therefore, it might be questionable if the onnagata has significance in this discussion. But the performer reveals necessary issues related to other cross-gender performances in Japan and also is an effective comparison to western performances.

There is selflessness in onnagata acting and it may well have to do with the earlier tradition of masks in the Noh theatre that is replaced by the elaborate mask-like make-up of Kabuki. But with those very first Kabuki performances of Okuni, the human face was

aragoto. The voice is higher pitched than other male characters to indicate youth and movements are gentle and refined (Cavaye, 46).

presented in public for the first time unmasked (Gunji, 18).¹⁶ Soon the human face would be masked by oshiroi, which is the heavy white foundation worn by the onnagata and other Kabuki actors. This make-up convention erases individuality and personality from the face and conveys a passivity and immobility evident in the femininity of representations of Buddha, who is male but presents both masculine and feminine qualities. White skin called mochi nada or “rice-cake skin” conceals facial defects or in the case of the onnagata hides the markers of masculinity. Barthes suggests that this kind of foundation presents an ambiguous gesture of femininity, not its plagiarism (Empire, 89). This supports the onnagata as a signifier, not the model, of femininity with no original. Modern actor and theorist Tadashi Suzuki takes this idea further, “[All] individuality has been rendered altogether abstract” (44). Abstraction of individuality and personality and especially gender is distinct from stereotyping which is a heightened, sharply focused representation. Make-up creates this abstraction while it can also exemplify stereotyped representations of femininity evident in western impersonations.

Masculine physical traits are difficult to completely conceal in female impersonation performances. The tension created in this struggle to subdue the natural is essential to the Kabuki aesthetic of the onnagata performance. Arnott believes masculinity is never completely obliterated in an onnagata’s performance, “This [an onnagata in the 18th century] did not mean that the actors were effeminate. On the contrary, onnagata roles are physically highly demanding. Sitting close, one is conscious

¹⁶ Theater forms that preceded Kabuki all employed the use of masks; Noh and Kyogen are the two primary examples.

of the strong masculine physique under the women's costumes" (138). The reaction of American expatriate, Alex Kerr is typical when he refers to the onnagata as "ugly, old ladies" compared with the remarkable presentation of physical beauty of Tamasaburo Bando (71). This Kabuki critic agrees, "All other onnagata are men playing women, so there is something grotesque about the result. Even beautifully made-up, there is something unsightly about them that seem pitiful or cruel. But Tamasaburo never lets you feel his physical reality as a man" (Kominz, 252). This is evident in the 1995 film, The Written Face in which Tamasaburo's masculine musculature when offstage preparing to perform but disappears when he is onstage in character. Tamasaburo is unusual in his ability to completely realize femininity and seems to have created an onnagata category of his own. However, Kerr's friend replies that those ugly old ladies represent the true art of onnagata acting while Bando relies on natural physical traits (in addition to an incredible talent and skill). Yet Tamasaburo embodies the onnagata ideal of iroke meaning "charm, grace, or attractiveness" and Ladermiere remarks that "All onnagata characters, young and old, have iroke of one kind or another and every movement and gesture, even the slightest turn of the head or movement of the hands can be said to have iroke" (32). The story of this Kabuki superstar becomes a key to understanding how the traditional and modern onnagata come together.

Tamasburo Bando (b. 1950) was adopted as a child by Kabuki star performer¹⁷, Morita Kanya XIV. His desire to become an onnagata was supported by his birth father, “If I wanted to wear something beautiful, he’d say ‘Bring it,’ and have someone dress me. If I wanted to put make-up on, he’d have someone make me up” (Struggle for Hope 1995). Although he tried both male and female roles as a child, he has said, “[...] I liked beautiful kimonos and onnagata better” (Struggle). In 1967 at the age of 17 years, an extremely young age for a Kabuki performer he achieved a “superstar” status in Japan with his early Kabuki performances. Leiter explains that while young according to the Kabuki aesthetic, “[...] his [Tamasaburo’s] acting shows great compassion and he possesses the quality of boldness” (26). With his remarkable ability and popularity, he has had opportunities to play the star onnagata roles usually earned with maturity. Japanese writer, Mishima Yukio writes this description of Tamasburo, “With a body like the fine edge of a dragonfly’s wing, undulating gracefully on the stage, he overflows with a lyrical beauty accompanied by a sense of danger” (Kominz, 254). The sense of danger, a masculine trait is presented simultaneously with a mastery of femininity, he goes beyond “passing” by presenting his femininity within his masculinity. Interestingly his fans mostly women both young and old treat him as a “pop idol” than reverential (Kerr, 59; Davidson, 87; Kominsz, 253).¹⁸ A 1981 poll named him one of the year’s “sexiest

¹⁷ According to Ronald Cavaye, Zoe Kincaid and others, while Kabuki is an inherited profession (Cavaye, 97; Kincaid, 35), some Kabuki families with no male children adopt another Kabuki actor’s second or third son but in rare cases, such as Tamasaburo, a performer outside of the Kabuki world is adopted. Tamasaburo’s skill at traditional dance as a child led to his adoption (101).

¹⁸ Tamasaburo not only performs in traditional Kabuki but also directs and performs female roles in films, both in Japan and experimental foreign films, and western ballet (Kominz, 251).

stars” (118). Explaining his phenomenal popularity, Kominz observes that it is based on a “seemingly real gender transformation” (253), further complicated by the fact that he often performs female roles alongside actresses in films and contemporary dramas.¹⁹ Tamasaburo goes beyond mimicry, achieving *henshin*, performing with a subtlety and mastery that I had not observed in Western performance. The words of Ayame resonate with Tamasaburo’s transformation, “An *onnagata* should have many male fans, and his goal should be to make them wish they could have a woman like him” (Kominz, 220). While natural physical attributes cannot be overlooked, Tamasaburo and all *onnagatas* rely on a disciplined approach to movement and gesture to create a feminine physical presence.

Kominz notes that early in his career as an *onnagata*, Ayame’s “main appeal still seemed to be his good looks” (188). Certainly feminine physical characteristics aid the *onnagata*. According to Baker, “The [*onnagata*’s] face had to be the right shape: a broad, round face could bar an actor from taking female roles regardless of his other talents” (71). Tamasaburo acknowledges the dichotomy of his masculine/feminine duality, “Of course I assume the form of a woman. But I want people to think ‘A man could be doing this’” (*Struggle*). This tension between masculinity and femininity existing simultaneously in one body for the *onnagata* seems to be an essential component to the performance.

¹⁹ Tamasaburo has portrayed many iconic characters in western dramatic literature including Medea, Juliet and Desdemona. (www.wajda.pl).

Yet there is a believability in Tamasaburo's performances that goes beyond physical attributes. How does he negotiate femininity so convincingly? It may be that, "Women feel an affinity for Tamasaburo because they feel gratified and flattered that a man has taken such pains to understand and take into his own soul the feelings of women" (Kominz, 253). However, Nakamura could be referring to Tamasaburo when he states that, "The ideal of an onnagata became the obliteration of the masculine and the convincing evocation of a soft, cultured, charming ideal of femininity" (88). Masculinity ghosts these performances. There may be a temporary suppression but not an obliteration. Is the transformation suppressing or accommodating masculinity? While it is evident that the masculine is not apparent in some onnagata performances, it is the mastery of gender duality not evident when a female actress plays a female role. Pronko confirms that, "[The onnagata] seems to join two totally different worlds, not only in his double identity as actor and character, but in his dual role of man-woman" (196). Onnagata Nakamura Shibajaku makes a point of saying that he must "switch off your own body" (Portrait of an Onnagata). This compulsion to separate and eliminate masculinity seems to be a compromise to realism, the predominant performance style today. However, Tamasaburo's ability to remove the masculine and present a believable, realistic portrait of femininity is what attracts fans. His awareness of women as indispensable models deviates from the onnagata tradition of idealization, "When a man plays a woman he observes her very exactly, with much closer attention than women do among themselves" (The Written Face). This archaic art form is being altered and influenced by modern

performer and audience expectations. While Tamasaburo does not conform to the historical standard of onnagata performance ²⁰, his appropriation of gender results in a unique, awe-inspiring performance. His mastery of technique includes understanding and applying a rigorous form of physical acting that is the center of these cross-gender performances.

Onnagata acting is based on a system of fixed forms or patterns of performance called kata that include not only performer style but other production elements related to the performer (Cavaye, 73; Leiter, 178). Translated the word means form or pattern or model. Brandon refers to this convention as “patterned acting” (65) stylized acting conventions of voice and movement together with other performance conventions of music, costume and makeup. (Brandon, 65; Cavaye, 61).²¹ Kata can be divided into two general categories: one, overall style of which there are five major components and two, specific performance techniques (Brandon, 66). Kata can be either character specific or gender specific. The examination of kata is important not only for the performance values but also because, as Laderiere points out, these forms of kata, “were created by men and for men, and they emphasize man’s idea of femininity” (31). How the performer enhances or disrupts these forms in performance is essential in this examination.

While all Kabuki actors must master the forms of kata established by previous

²⁰ According to Kominz Tamasaburo did not model his performances after the Edo era onnagatas as do contemporary onnagata. He relied on the teachers and actors that he worked with to inspire him (252).

²¹ Leiter explains that certain kata for particular roles are “owned” by the acting family and that new kata are the result of an actor making changes or variations to the original form (178, Cavaye, 71).

performers of a role, once they have become proficient in a particular role they are able to contribute new kata. This new kata then becomes part of the standard form for a role and it is in this way that the performances evolve. Kata is verbally communicated from one generation to the next. Certain kata are kept within particular Kabuki families as well as certain roles. These acting conventions, which are considered the specialty of a Kabuki family, are passed on from one generation to the next through modeling and imitation (Cavaye, 73; Ortolani, 178).²² Onnagata training begins in childhood when certain children of Kabuki families are selected to be onnagata (Senelick, Changing Room, 88). Early in Kabuki history these children were raised as girls and expected to function as women in all aspects of life when they grew up. They maintained separate dressing rooms and used women's bathing facilities (Cherry, 34, Kominz, 201). Off-stage behavior is thought to influence the performance (or keep the fans interested) and today Tamasaburo's off-stage image is as carefully controlled as his onstage image.²³ Ayame supported offstage behavior that enhances the performance, "If he [the onnagata] does not live life as if he was a woman, it will not be possible for him to be called a skillful onnagata" (Kominz, 200). Kominz explains that this included dressing as a woman, speaking in the polite, deferential language of women, eating the types of food women would eat (200, 202). However, onnagata, Nakamura Shibajaku stresses that technique is more important than feelings (Portrait of an Onnagata). Some modern western acting

²² Actors in traditional theater in Japan rarely wrote down their systems of acting. The onnagata Ayama is the exception as well as the Noh actor, Zeami (Kominz, 182).

methods have also explored the “living” of a character outside of the performance that is similar to the Kabuki approach but with different intents.²⁴ The western actor uses these methods to internalize feeling a unity with a character that is mainly self-beneficial, while in a Kabuki performance, the audience is the primary beneficiary.

Kabuki acting can be considered “extremes of realism and stylization” (Pronko, 118) which the west often regards as empty, meaningless form that is purely theatrical in nature and far from truth. But Pronko offers a deeper view of this, “True stylization [. . .] is not grafted on from the outside; it grows from within” (129). At Kabuki performances I have attended, there has been a blend of style and emotion that is no less meaningful than realism and sometimes more truthful. The argument of some western theorists is that the onnagata “symbolizes” a detached femininity rather than creating truth (Baker, 68). This implies a generalization of femininity that is not evident in the onnagata performances I have seen. Obviously the conventions and style are exotic to western spectators, but the end result is compelling both theatrically and emotionally. Ernst recognizes this, “Although the language in which Kabuki speaks is basically nonrealistic, the emotions aroused are as strong as those provoked in an American by a performance of Death of a Salesman” (193). The nomenclature offers an interesting explanation of the onnagata’s intentions. The suffix in onnagata: “gata” literally means “exemplary model”

²³ In the filmed collaboration with cellist, Yo Yo Ma, Struggle for Hope, Tamasaburo is precise and slightly feminine (touching Yo Yo and using his hands to illustrate salient points) and his clothing seems chosen to remain slightly androgynous.

²⁴ The female players in the Takarazuka revue have used the onnagata as a model for presenting the female onstage. In the 1966 film The Actor’s Revenge we see the central male character in his onnagata role teaching a young woman how to behave in a feminine, graceful manner (Baker, 71).

and is the goal of the performer. The level of skill and the emotional depth in onnagata performances is compared with western cross-gender performances, “In fact, so stylized and refined are the techniques of the Asian theatres that to call their female impersonators ‘drag queens’ does seem inappropriate” (65). Chapter Four will attempt to demonstrate that drag queens share some important qualities with the onnagata. An investigation of the kata or performance codes for the onnagata will reveal aspects of the blending of style and truth.

Prior to examining the kata of onnagata performance, it is important to understand the physical demands required. Predictably, this also raises gender inequalities. There is the notion that, were a woman to perform an onnagata role she would not have the physical stamina to sustain the part in performance (Pronko, 195). This description of onnagata dance positions also illustrates this point, “Onnagata female dances are painful. For onnagata dances one must pose, with legs slightly bent and weight lowered, and all one’s energy goes into the tortuous task of hold these difficult positions” (Nakamura, 92). The power and physical strength to do this involves methodically attempting to reshape the male body into a convincing female form,

Use muscles around the shoulder blade to pull the shoulders back and create a sloping line, which they emphasize by wearing robes slung low around the shoulders. The result is the impression that the actor has small, delicate shoulders, but the masculine squareness of the actor’s own physique can still be detected and contributes to the strong presence that onnagata projects. The softness and delicacy of the actor’s movements are counterbalanced by the extreme muscular tension that is necessary to maintain these positions (Nakamura, 92)

This is also evident in the falsetto vocal quality of the onnagata that requires incredible energy and “masculine” strength to sustain (Nakamura, 93). The duality of femininity and masculinity in the onnagata is a “steel-like power hidden by softness, which is requisite to a successful onnagata creation” (Pronko, 195). It is ironic that male strength is needed to create the softness of femininity. In one all-female Kabuki theatre company, the leader of the troupe observed on the Nagoya Kabuki webpage, “The female roles performed by males could draw feminine gestures, tenderness, motherhood and tender passion more effectively.” She also observed that women playing male roles might emphasize, “male bravery, consideration and toughness.” Chapter Two showed how closely aligned Japanese masculine and feminine qualities can be, including the quality of “consideration,” again reinforcing similarities rather than emphasizing differences. Physical characteristics are important, yet technique is the most essential element in the Kabuki aesthetic.

In Kabuki, movement takes precedence over vocal qualities and of course, influences vocal rhythm (Ernst, 175). An interesting dichotomy emerges, given this Japanese society considers gesture as “uncultivated” (Kendon, 114). In most social interaction between both genders, gesture is limited or restrained to conventional forms. For example, the act of bowing in Japan is gender specific, women bow with hands cupped low in front of the body in a more closed form while the men have arms and hands straight at the sides of the body, more open. Yet movement, in Kabuki is important, often displaces language, (the primary mode of communication for western

performance). Etiquette and deportment are the foundation of movement in Kabuki just like in Japanese social life (Nakamura, 160). One major difference between Kabuki and western performance is that movements are “rarely simultaneous but sequential” in Kabuki (Brandon, 85; Ernst, 171; Gunji, 44). Ernst agrees that Kabuki dance movement is “not a cumulative, symphonic significant tableau” (174). Western realism relies on simultaneous, overlapping the form, but in a single line of progression which at certain intervals solidifies into a physical and the vocal striving to be as literal and close to life as possible. In Kabuki however, “Movement from real life as its point of departure, and Kabuki dance reduces the multiple movements of human existence to their essential forms by narrowing, and thus intensifying, the visual impression of the movement, not by broadening is so that it no longer has precise meaning” (Ernst, 170). Movement is isolated and in Zeami’s treatises on acting there are two categories, shuchi: self-conscious movement and buchi: simply movement beyond consciousness and shuchi is imitation whereas buchi is transformation.²⁵ Kabuki actor, Nakamura points out that movement is not disconnected from the acting but is simultaneously realistic and abstract, “Unlike ballet, we never learn kabuki movement as pure form but as acting. For example, when we practice suriashi instead of learning the walk first and adding characterization later, from the very beginning we learn to walk in the style of a particular role” (137).

²⁵ One reason is that Kabuki has adopted stories and physical actor kata movements from the Bunraku puppet theatre. In Bunraku and in some Kabuki performances, the puppet or actor acts out the movement that is described by a narrator.

Therefore movement is motivated by character and not isolated from the process of acting however stylized it may appear.

Buchi or transformation into the other gender is the ultimate goal of the Kabuki onnagata. The difference is that the Kabuki actor employs deliberate, specific gestures originating from life while many western performers draw inspiration from emotion to replicate realistic movement. The result is an exceptional physical expressiveness, “Since the Kabuki actor is not restricted to realistic gesture and attitude, he can be equally expressive with every part of his body . . . The movement of his feet and legs are as expressive as those of his arms and head” (Ernst, 176; See also Tadashi Suzuki). Japanese performance has traditionally centered on the expressiveness of the performer’s lower body. Suzuki’s modern actor training is also lower body centered, “The actor composes himself on the basis of this sense of contact with the ground, by the way in which the body makes contact with the floor” (8). Onnagata Tamasaburo concurs, “If I keep the tempo with my lower body then I can still express emotion with my upper body” (Struggle). The lower body can be a powerful area of sensuality avoided by most western actors whose performance of desire centers on the face and mouth and upper torso. Semiotics asks that gestures replace words in “signifying a feeling, an emotion” (Kowzan, 64) so the Kabuki focus on the eloquence of the body in presenting gender is an area of further investigation.

Gender differences in movement are obvious when comparing the onnagata with the Kabuki male role type, the aragoto. The aragoto actor employs a “rough style”,

projecting masculine vigor and power (Ernst, 283; Brandon, 68; Kominz, 72). He utilizes “dancing, stomping, and glaring” (Kominz, 75). In Figure 4, the aragoto’s stance is exposed and strong while the onnagata is closed and weak (see Fig. 5). The body’s use of space reinforces assumptions of masculinity and femininity from Chapter Two. In performance, the aragoto “separate their elbows from their bodies, leaving about enough space to insert a baseball between the armpit and the body” (Nakamura, 164) while the onnagata keeps elbows close to the body, holding the fingers together (Nakamura, 164). This supports research previously mentioned on page 61 in Chapter Two that illustrated that women take up less space than men do. This actually helps the onnagata create the illusion of femininity, “The hands play a vital part in onnagata acting. To make them look smaller and more slender, the actor usually keeps his fingers close together, a little on top of one another” (Laderriere, 33; see also Senelick). Nakamura also notes that the onnagata tucks her thumb in the palm to make the hand look small and delicate (138). This is seen in the performances of Tamasaburo in which his fingers are held together (The Written Face and Struggle for Hope). The aragoto gestures with fingers splayed and the palm of the hand flattened (Nakamura, 138).

To create the illusion of a female body, an onnagata bends backwards slightly to suggest a bust and holds the knees together to create a slender appearance. This lower body position is crucial in creating suriashi or sliding step walking motion, (see Suzuki) a convention of Kabuki originating from the Noh theatre. With the knees held together and the feet turned inward and barely lifting the feet off the floor the proper movement is

Figure 4: Kabuki Aragoto stance

Figure 5: Kabuki onnagata stance

achieved. The slightly pigeon-toed walk is standard kata for onnagata and is an example of exaggeration that might have had feminine roots but is today would not be identified as particularly feminine (Nakamura, 159; Suzuki, 19). Onnagata performers take smaller steps than the male players do (Nakamura, 137). Again this restriction of movement demonstrates control that men had both ideologically and physically over women.

Of all the most stylized moments in Kabuki, the mie, a climatic moment in the play that is created by the actor holding a body position that indicates high emotion. It is described as a physicalization of intense emotion (Ortolani, 179), or as Cavaye explains, “Mie crystallize the action into a formal picture” (62). In a typical mie the actor, “rotates his head slowly, gives it a final snap and freezes his expression into an intensely powerful stare, usually with the eyes crossed” (Ortolani, 179; Gunji, 46). This is seen in an ukiyoe (woodblock) print of an Edo era Kabuki actor (see Fig. 6). It is a moment of cathartic emotional release not only for the performer but also for the audience. Movement without words is filled with meaning and emotion is followed by ma representing, “the emptiness of time and space from which the [subsequent] movement appears, and into which it dies” (Ortolani, 179).²⁶ It is not enough for the audience to admire the beauty of the movement but the actor’s mastery of action without words provides meaning that can be read in many different ways. The onnagata employs a convention similar to the mie, called kimari, but the eyes are not crossed and the head rotation is softer and less

²⁶ The importance of the silence that precedes and follows movement is to carry the audience along a specific emotional journey (Kawataki, 19).

Figure 6: Ukiyoe print of a Kabuki actor performing mie (circa 1794) by Sharaku.

vigorous. Though highly stylized and unrealistic, gender expectations are reinforced in an expansive, theatrical moment for the aragoto and a slighter, less flamboyant moment for the onnagata.

Related to movement and specific to gender is how an actor handles props during Kabuki performance. The manipulation of the fan in Kabuki is one important example because it is used by both men and women, “When fanning himself a male character will normally hold his elbow out, while most female characters keep their elbow at their side” (Laderriere, 33). If an onnagata is playing a strong-willed, masculine woman, she would change her hold to be like a man (*ibid*, 33). American Liza Dalby, the only non-Japanese to officially train as a geisha, shares this anecdote in which Tamasaburo corrects her method of holding a fan as too masculine and beautifully demonstrates the proper feminine form (280).²⁷ Movement, reduced to the most insignificant hand motions, signals specific gender qualities that become magnified in a theatrical setting.

Restrained female movement is in part due to the restriction of the kimono which is worn tightly wrapped around the legs (Nakamura, 158). Women’s dress has historically been how men leveraged power over women since the Heian era (794-1185) when it was the fashion for women to wear multiple layers of clothing that severely restricted freedom of movement. The onnagata costume is ideal for the male actor in that it conceals body, gender and even age while, simultaneously forcing feminine movement. The “refined

²⁷ Coaldrake mentions the use of “uninhibited and exaggerated” fan movements by the female musicians of classical court music that clashed with their feminine attire and presented conflicting gender representations to the audience (66).

beauty” of the color and fabric of the garment also helps draw attention away from the masculine physique underneath (Ortolani, 181). The structure of the kimono such as the collar and how it is positioned is important as the nape of the neck is an erotic focus of the female body (Dalby, Kimono, 198). In Portrait of an Onnagata Shibajaku’s collar is set back to reveal more of the nap of the neck and to help create the illusion of desirability and femininity. Elongated sleeves of the kimono hide or diminish large, mannish hands. But while the kimono serves an essential theatrical purpose, it also subtly reinforces a male interpretation of femininity. The kimono is worn by both men and women in Japanese society and therefore, ambiguity aids the performer, and as Dalby comments, “A few unmistakable clothing cues signaled masculinity and femininity, but in the fashion arena, men borrowed styles from women just as women copied fads from men” (Kimono, 275).²⁸ The kimono can simultaneously accommodate the masculine and highlight the feminine in onnagata performance.

Make-up or kesho is an obvious technology in creating femininity onstage (Coaldrake, 65). Stylized Kabuki makeup is a “compromise between the human face and the mask” (Ernst, 195) and like costume is significant in simultaneously suppressing and presenting gender on stage. Like stylized movement, make-up is both abstract and familiar. This is seen in The Written Face, as Tamasaburo both applies and removes his onnagata make-up. As he covers his face and neck with white foundation, his

²⁸ Age, gender, season and formality or occasion regulates the type of kimono worn. The length of sleeve is an example of how gender and character are revealed. For the modern Japanese woman wearing a kimono requires adjusting your figure, using bust suppressers or alternatively padding to fill out deficient parts of the body which creates a streamlined, rather masculine silhouette (Dalby, 121).

masculinity is wiped away and when he removes it, the male face emerges. The neutrality of the onnagata face seems to reveal nothing and is immobile, expressionless. While concealing masculinity, it also seems to be masking personality. The ability of this mask-like makeup to conceal what is necessary creates an empty canvas to apply technologies of femininity. Make-up has and continues to be used as an enhancement of female attractiveness. It has also been used by Japanese men at various times for the same purpose (Cherry, 22). Like clothing, there is a gender borrowing that creates ambiguity that is part of the Japanese aesthetic.²⁹ Every Kabuki role has a fixed make-up style, including eyebrow shapes, lip shapes and eye-line styles (Cavaye, 84). In Figure 7 there is an obvious difference between the eyebrows of the onnagata and those of male characters. The onnagata eyebrows seem passive, emotionless while the male brows reveal a range of emotion from fierceness to surprise. The mouth size and shape (see Fig. 7) are larger for male character than female characters and again, help the onnagata to create believable femininity. While the mouth does not have the same sensuous focus as in the west, it is a key indicator of femininity with the lower lip emphasized, an ideal of Japanese feminine beauty at that time (Cavaye, 84).

While concealment is one purpose of oshoroi make-up, it also can illuminate facial expression as Ernst suggests “thrown into high relief” (196). Aragoto make-up style called kumadori means “following the shadow” (Brandon, 68) while onnagata make-up removes shadow and creates smoothness. There are over 100 different styles of

²⁹ Starring roles in Kabuki have light skin and supporting roles have brown skin. The prized lighter skin indicated the higher social status of those who didn’t work in the sun (Nakamura, 145).

Eyebrow styles for *onnagata** roles. From Kojima, ed., *Kao no Tsukurikata*.

Male-role eyebrow styles. From Kojima, ed., *Kao no Tsukurikata*.

Lip styles. On the left are male styles; on the right, female. From Kojima, ed., *Kao no Tsukurikata*.

Figure 7: Kabuki male and female eyebrow and lip shape (from Leiter)

kumadori (Ortolani, 183) compared with a few styles for onnagata roles. The application of kumadori follows the musculature of the face, in contrast to the obliteration of feature desired in the oshiroi make-up of the onnagata (Brandon, 68; Ortolani, 183). But both the onnagata and the aragoto use color as signifiers of character qualities, for the aragoto, red indicates righteousness and blue signifies fear or evil. Nakamura indicates that red stands for strength, blue for a non-human creature, usually a ghost (145; also Gunji, 39). For the onnagata red is used to ward off evil and the devil cannot enter the body that has the color red on it (Portrait of an Onnagata). It is used around the eyes indicating sorrow and also eroticism (Cherry, 26). Another essential element of onnagata make-up involves blackening of the teeth (originally with a mixture of black sugar and resin) de-emphasizing the mouth. The doll-like, faux-female appearance of the onnagata is supported by the vocal choices made by the performer.

The highly stylized falsetto of the onnagata seems both artificial and stereotypical of feminine voices. Although unnatural, the onnagata falsetto is an accepted convention (Cavaye, 69). Having attended several Kabuki performances, this convention becomes convincingly feminine even to a non-native spectator. According to Laderriere, it is impossible for a man to recreate a realistic female voice, so this semi-falsetto, neither male nor female voice is substituted (34). There is disagreement by others (Cavaye, 69) but this is a challenge in many cross-gender performances and often it is the voice that betrays the male performer. This vocal pitch of the onnagata lends an otherworldly aspect to the performance, and intensifies the “line of detachment between actor and character”

(Ernst, 195) while the non-realistic quality aids the actor. This abstraction of voice is part of the Kabuki aesthetic that creates emptiness with one of the most expressive of human qualities. The creation of character is not conceived internally but through the external technologies of costume and makeup and the disciplined training of body and voice to reproduce inherited patterns of expression. But it is not only technical proficiency but the ability of the performer to convince his audience of his gender authenticity.

Pronko identifies onnagata performance as a “harmony of opposites” (194). This harmony in a male actor becomes an obstacle when actresses once again performed in public. The standard set by the onnagata both restricts and challenges actresses today.³⁰ It is ironic but hardly surprising that when women did return to the public stage they were compelled initially to conform to the onnagata model of femininity, “Reliant on male-created forms, female assumption of male roles could serve neither as a sign of independence nor parody of patriarchal power” (Senelick, Changing Room 340; Cherry, 35). The idea that a woman could not possibly achieve the femininity of the onnagata is observed by Pronko, “Were a woman to attempt to play a Kabuki female role she would have to imitate the men who beautifully incarnated women before her” (195). However, Ernst provides a more balanced view, “In modern times a few actresses have essayed to play Kabuki roles, imitating the manner of speaking of the onnagata and their movement, but they have never achieved success. Both Kabuki audience and actors feel that a woman playing a woman’s role brings the performance too close to reality” (195). There is nothing in Kabuki staging that represents reality, so it seems unnecessary to use

women in the female roles. Maintaining the onnagata convention is, “[The] personification of women by male actors in Kabuki established a pattern for the distillation of female attributes through the specialized role of the onnagata, and the resulting male interpretation of femininity, in time, became the accepted convention” (K. Coaldrake, 13). There is also the justification that, “The extreme stylization of Kabuki is sometimes mentioned as an excuse for men to continue monopolizing all roles in the best Kabuki theatres long after the Shogun’s other decrees had been forgotten” (Cherry, 34). This may certainly be true but I believe that the former justification is more appropriate. Today, an all-female Kabuki company, The Nagoya Musume Kabuki (“Daughters of Kabuki”) (est. 1983) maintains the performance standards of femininity established by the male performers. Actress, Haruko Sugimura states that the onnagata reveals unknown aspects of femininity, “That is why I believe that I have learnt a great deal from man, from onnagatas. It is impossible to act exactly like them” (The Written Face).

Today in Japan, actresses play female roles in contemporary theater and film, however, the onnagata convention remains in modern Kabuki performances.³¹ Pronko reasons that, “Since the theater is art and not life, an Oriental might argue, there is no reason to require men in male and women in female roles” (194). This may be an oversimplification of the cultural influences but also disregards the impact of Western realism on all performance in Japan. Theatrical convention facilitates understanding of a culture and a performance that is quite removed from western conventions. This also

³⁰ While there are female Kabuki actors, none perform professionally or are from a Kabuki family.

³¹ The use of male performers is standard in all traditional theater in Japan.

acknowledges the multiple meanings or no meaning that is a core component in the Japanese belief system. Barthes has extensively explored the deprecation or loss of meaning to onnagata actors:

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 virility of the support, as in Western drag shows [. . .] simply absented; the actor, in his face, does not play the woman or copy her, but only signifies her
(*Empire*, 89)

Barthes disregards the fact that femininity was usurped by men in performance and codified to the point of stylization which is what gives the performance a detached quality that Barthes identifies as signifying the essence but not the reality. According to Barthes, the performer's personality is overwhelmed by the character. As this writer has also stated, "The impersonal East has had much to do with the actor's power to efface himself, and his lack of concern for self is one of his distinguishing qualities" (Kincaid, 37). The onnagata captures an audience not by mere technical proficiency, but by modestly creating the art form idea of gender truth on stage. This is a sense of truth and believability seen through a historical lens that makes it an interesting comparison to the realistic performances of gender to be considered later. This is a testimony to the mastery of femininity by the onnagata and therefore, should not be the primary motive for explaining how women were removed from the creation of their own image in performance. Rather, it is the social order and power structures that define women's roles in life and on stage.

The flamboyant Takarazuka Revue shares a common cultural heritage with Kabuki. What differentiates them is the obvious, Takarazuka is a modern performance that borrows liberally from Western performances and texts but more importantly is the evidence of subtle resistance of the cross-gender Takarazuka actors against institutionalized restrictions for women.³² Each shares a heightened, expansive reality (Berlin, 7) evident use of stylization unique to each. Takarazuka creates a reality that serves the world of their production which though inspired by western texts is far removed from Western realism. Even when the Takarazuka Revue presents western texts called akagemono or “red haired pieces” (the otokoyaku often bleach their hair to emulate a Caucasian appearance), the Takarazuka performers do not desire and are not able to recreate what they emulate. This ability to create new forms from borrowing from other cultures and in this case the other gender is uniquely Japanese and exploited by the Takarazuka performers.

Potential Takarazuka performers must first be accepted into the official training academy. The rigorous two-year curriculum focuses on Japanese and Western performing arts and is the only way to become a member of one of the six companies. Admission is highly competitive, in 1993 there were 1,839 applicants for 40 openings (Robertson, Takarazuka 9,10). Most students are between 15 to 24 years of age and upon graduation become full-fledged company members (Ibid.). The academy and revue were started by Kobayashi Ichizo (1873-1957) as a solution to financial difficulties with his

³² Takarazuka borrows such staging devices as the hanamichi, and stylized fight movements. (Berlin, 20-21).

faltering railway (Atkins, 2; Robertson, Doing 169) and as a family friendly entertainment that targeted under, pre-marriage girls (Mochizuka, 168). Kobayashi wrote of the early success of the revue, “What is the reason for this success? We can enjoy these performances with all of the family while other shows are sensually grotesque” (Berlin, 94). What are these other shows? It is not clear but perhaps he is referring to Kabuki or other, more risqué revues that are modeled on Takarazuka. Subtexts of the revue included promotion of nationalism and maintaining patriarchal power structure. Kobayashi stated that this new performance would, “[...] infuse ‘superior’ Japanese spirit into western theater form [...]” (Senelick, Changing 341) and it is evident in the revue motto “Purely, Rightly, Beautifully” (Atkins, 4; Robertson, Doing 180) introduced in 1933 as an attempt to control the performer’s offstage activities. This also supported the state mandate of “good wife, wise mother.” Performers were to remain unmarried during their employment with the revue and were also to refrain from any romantic relationships. Romantic relationships also included homosexual relationships. The strong homosexual subtext of the revue would suggest compliance by the management. But there is little strong evidence that the management ever directly addressed the possibility of homosexual relationships within the organization or between fans and performers, however, there were documented some isolated incidents (see Robertson). Before Japan was opened the country, homosexuality was an accepted part of society. Homosexuality persisted as subtext of the revue. Professor Mochizuka reasons that this may be a reason the performers are required to remain single, “A star should be an

unmarried girl. If she gets married, she cannot be a star because it is clear [...] the star-fan relationship is based on latent homosexual interest” (172). While there is an extreme level of fan devotion to the otokoyaku, in particular, assuming that star-fan relationships are based on a homoerotic attraction is unsupported. The fans show a more of a reverential attitude while acknowledging the attraction, “For a brief moment I admit – I wondered . . . this couldn’t be a crush, could it? But thinking about it for a few seconds, I concluded that, no this was not koi [romantic love] or ai [deep love]. This was definitely akogare [admiration]”(Takarazuka Online posting). Fans of the otokoyaku are very open about their admiration for star performers both for their physical attractiveness (as men) and talent, there is little open discussion of homosexuality. Unlike male homosexuality, female homosexuality is not tolerated in Japan. Evident is the omission of a Japanese word for lesbian love, while there are numerous terms for “male charms” nanshoku (homosexual love) and heterosexual love, joshoku or “female charms” (Cherry, 116). While sexuality is denied for the performers, the revue seems to exploit fan/star relationships by creating a sexual charged performance that invites the spectator to imagine themselves in that onstage dream world.

The attempts for the patriarchal management to maintain a cloistered, asexual domain have often been undermined by the popularity of the otokoyaku performers. The apparent “asexuality” creates a reserve that seems to fuel the creation of masculinity as well as idolization of the performer. While conforming to management directives the performer contributes in numerous ways to her masculine persona, “An otokoyaku distills

the masculine portrait in order to present only the part she feels will appeal to her audience” (Brau, 86). The directorship has often recognized the sexual attraction for the otokoyaku,³³ “But even as the directors sought to repress the gendered and sexual subtext generated by the actors, they also exploited it as well. [This] kind of transgressive/repressive dynamic is manipulated by the Revue’s management” (Robertson, Sojourner 4). This tension between a performer’s onstage sexuality and an offstage pureness is most obvious when examining the secondary roles of the musumeyaku.³⁴ Attempts to maintain the image of virginal purity included a quasi-father/daughter kinship that required the Takarasiennes (as the performers were called after the fad in the 1930’s of Parisian influence) to address Kobayashi as otosan or father (Robertson, Doing 171). Management control of the performer’s offstage lives require that otokoyaku never appear in public or in publicity photos in a skirt (Berlin, 29) and “chaperons” are always present during performer interviews (Robertson, Takarazuka, 162). Typical performer interviews perpetuate the fantasy world of the revue while offering little about the personal life of the actor. In this interview from a Takarazuka publication, otokoyaku are asked to respond to the following questions: If you were to build a castle, what kind of castle would it be and how do you like to spend cold nights? (Takarazuka Flower Troupe Stage Album 1999). The first question seems to address the revue myth of the onstage fantasy world but the second is much more personal. It reveals

³³ Audiences in the 1920’s and 1930’s were more integrated with more male spectators (Senelick, Changing, 341).

the erotic subtext of these performances that could be misread as homosexual but in fact, maintain the male/female relationship of the otokoyaku and the fans.³⁵

Kobayashi's desire was to present the otokoyaku as the "glorification" of masculinity, more "[...] suave, more affectionate, more courageous, more charming, more handsome, and more fascinating than a real male" (Robertson, *Takarazuka* 17; Senelick, 342). This also reveals a conflict between "real masculinity" and the "hyper-masculinity" of the otokoyaku with the subtext that it takes a woman to fully realize the "ideal" male and interesting when compared to the onnagata as a more "womanly woman" than a real thing. The success of the modern Takarazuka productions is dependent on the fans' belief in the superior qualities of the hyper-masculine otokoyaku. These "new men" have become more powerful than "real men" as this fan discloses, "They [the otokoyaku] are the ideal man. They don't have coarseness" (*Dreamgirls*). Another fan concurs, "If the actors were real men, the result would be coarse" (*Ibid.*).³⁶ The idea of the otokoyaku as "curiously sexless" (Schilling, 251) also is apparent. Fans struggle with this conflict, as Andrea writes of her favorite otokoyaku, Tamo, "What do I like about her? It is difficult to say. I don't admire her. I admire f.e. [for example] Misuki Oura or Kaoru Hyuga because I want to be like them. Tamo is different from them. When

³⁴ Robertson also confirms that attempts to control the sexual ambiguity of the performers resulted, in 1940, in the removal of the "shojo" from the name of the revue (173). Shojo means 'a not- quite female' female and is often used when referring to a teenage girl (Robertson, *Doing*, 173 and *Takarazuka*, 160).

³⁵ Male managers oversee each of the six companies and men continue to control most of the artistic positions within the organization. By the late 1960's 95% of the audience was female and the revue had been in existence for over 50 years.³⁵ Yet still women were not included in the revue's management structure. With few exceptions this is true today.

³⁶ In 1919 Kobayashi unsuccessfully introduced male performers onstage (Berlin, 33; Robertson, 168).

I would know her better I wouldn't hesitate to say that I love her." She continues to enumerate Tamo's feminine physical qualities as well as her "cute" behavior, "[...] her big brown Bambi eyes, her cute nose, her charming smile, her way to behave when she is in public (too cute) [...]" Another fan, Neko writes online about otokoyaku, Shizuki Asato, "Is it even possible to have this incredible super intense feeling for an otokoyaku?! She is the only girl I think about 24/7 . . ." is a typical response that somehow manages to negotiate between the male character and the female performer. There is an inherent conflict between male performance persona and the performer's feminine qualities evident in the use of the adjective: cute. This is not an expression used with men, obvious in this observation about an onabe in Shinjuku Boys, "You look like a man. You are not cute." But cute is highly desirable for an otokoyaku. Women who are taught to maintain a childish cuteness seem to desire that quality in these performers while simultaneously believing in the performer as male. There are many complex gender and sexual issues which are further complicated this online observation, "I don't see a man in her like most of the Japanese (sic) women. I see a woman in her, on and off stage." The ability of fans to recognize both within a single performer and to identify their preference is a sophisticated reading on these performances. Unlike the masculinity of the Kabuki onnagata, it will be obvious that the female is not obliterated but exploited in the otokoyaku performers. In these reactions Genevieve claims that a certain performer is "soooo cute . . . So feminine, I was surprised!" and another as, "She's everything a top star should be – romantic, funny, sexy . . ." The star's sexuality reveals both masculine

and feminine forms and seems to no longer be under the control of the patriarchal management.

The revue is “selling dreams” to women young and old that are not available in the course of daily life. The manipulation of the spectator’s emotions by the otokoyaku sustains an erotic fantasy in which the culmination of passion is impossible or even undesired. Yet Japanese women are invited into this dream world to escape their responsibilities of “good wife, wise mother,” “[...] the young girls’ dream, then is to go as far away as possible, sexually, emotionally, geographically from everyday reality [...]” (Brau, 6). This seems to be a simplistic conclusion but includes the thrill of watching a woman publicly flaunt the privileges of masculinity. The otokoyaku, demonstrates to the audience that the male power that seduces, controls, and eventually subdues women, (in this case the female characters in the Revue, the musumeyaku) is available to women. The powerlessness felt by both female spectator and performer is observed by this observation by a student enrolled in the academy because, “despite her female body, she could assume a masculine persona.” (Robertson, Doing, 184). On the other hand, top otokoyaku star, Tamo enrolled because of her boyish appearance (Stage Album 1999). Like the onnagata tradition, some otokoyaku maintain their onstage identity when not performing, one referred to herself in the first person masculine form of boku (Robertson, Doing, 184). Boku has become a popular term among young women between the ages of 12 and 25 years of age (Cherry, 38) and is a rather timid attempt to rebel that has little

impact. The performance skills needed to successfully create a fantasy male is more of the focus for the fans.

The duality of a perfect, beautiful, dream man played by a woman who is unattainable, seems to be a self-affirming experience for the Takarazuka audience. While most fans of the otokoyaku are young women, the surprising fact is that there are a substantial number that are married women between 30 – 50 years of age.³⁷ The older fans share much the same feelings as the younger ones, as this 52-year old housewife remarks, “I wish the Japanese men could be as passionate as the otokoyaku. The otokoyaku are so much cooler and more manly” (*Variety*, 100). While they may not be as susceptible to the same fantasies as young, immature girls, evidence from the film *Dream Girls* and Takarazuka websites indicate that both share a similar adolescent-type feelings for the otokoyaku. In *Dream Girls* two middle – aged housewives describe how they hide their feelings about the otokoyaku from their husbands, one claiming, “The men on stage are endlessly kind to their women.” According to another 45 year – old housewife, “Takarazuka is the place of dreams and drama, and it is also a place where I can forget the world” (*Variety*, 2). For these women the otokoyaku allows them a break from their everyday lives.

With the popularity of the otokoyaku as the object of desire for fans of all ages, the performer of female roles, the *musumeyaku* takes on the secondary status as “daughter” in the revue. Robertson notes that “Musume means ‘daughter’ with all of its

³⁷ In my own experience, the audience was made up of 60% women in their 20’s or less and 40% older women.

attendant associations – innocent, virginal, naïve, artless. The directors felt that playing the part of a charismatic or sexually aggressive woman would ‘soil’ the pristine image of the musumeyaku especially the leading ones” (Thrupkaew, 3).³⁸ In most of the performance texts, the musumeyaku is dependent on the otokoyaku for protection and guidance. This is carried over into the performer’s offstage life, as one musumeyaku observes in Dreamgirls, “We must do whatever the male players say but above all we must make the male players look good.” The musumeyaku is expected, as all Japanese women are, to support the man. This spectator observation is revealing about the musumeyaku, “Next the lead musumeyaku came out, singing first together and then in solos. This was also an initially disturbing experience, in that almost all of them where (sic) dressed exactly the same (but color coded), with the exact same hairstyle, and the same high-pitched voices” (Genevieve “Adieu Takarazuka”). The writer goes on to comment that she could not tell them apart because of the identical costumes and performance creating the impression that the musumeyaku is interchangeable, trivializing the role of women. Even when no “real” man is present the patriarchal authority is maintained.

The “hyper-femininity” of the musumeyaku, however is necessary to create a manlier and believable otokoyaku (Thrupkaew, 4). This comment from Robertson acknowledges the fundamental inequalities between the two Takarazuka performers,

³⁸ Robertson also points out that musumeyaku did not use the prefix “onna” or woman, reinforcing a dependent status (Takarazuka, 14).

The representational inequality between the Kabuki onnagata and the Takarazuka otokoyaku is paralleled by the inequality between the otokoyaku and musumeyaku. The naïve and compliant daughter represents not only femininity but also the female subject in a patriarchal society who is excluded from participating in discourses about female gender and sexuality (Doing 172).

Robertson tends to de-emphasize the ability and even the desire of the performers to transcend dominant patriarchal social ideology (Takarazuka 12). It is too easy to conclude that the musumeyaku has little opportunity to contribute when it is the relationship between her and the otokoyaku that is essential in creating desire for the otokoyaku in the spectator. Without the presence of the musumeyaku, the manly appeal and eroticism of the otokoyaku would not be nearly as powerful. In Figure 8, the otokoyaku are dressed identically, looking like an asexual chorus line. In contrast is Figure 9, showing an otokoyaku and musumeyaku in an embrace, the otokoyaku gains a more compelling masculinity when placed with the ultra – femininity of the musumeyaku. In Dreamgirls, the most powerful and sexually charged moments occur when the otokoyaku and musumeyaku perform together. In one musical sequence, the otokoyaku is fondling the musumeyaku's legs and breasts while she strikes devotional poses giving the focus to the otokoyaku. In most narrative revue shows, the otokoyaku and his love have,

Departure scenes are another staple of these plays. The trauma of separation is frequently depicted with the woman [musumeyaku] on her knees or even prostrate at the feet of the man who is leaving. If the partners are forced apart, the man may soon be on his knees beside his loved one. But if the break-up is bitter, the man will shortly be brusquely brushing aside the groping hands of the tearful woman on the floor (Berlin,18).

Figure 8: Otokoyaku in performance.

Figure 9: Otokoyaku and musumeyaku

the body positions of the male and female characters exposes not only the inferior status of female characters but reinforces macho male stereotypes.

Like the Kabuki acting system, all Takarazuka performers learn their roles according to kata that is passed down from the older performers to the younger ones, “A series of formalized masculine postures is rehearsed over and over again until the girls get it just right. The older girls act as models and drill instructors for the younger ones” (Buruma, 114). Kata determines how gender is presented and includes voice, movement, costume and makeup. Performers are assigned their on-stage gender early in their training, based on height, physique, voice, face shape, and personality (Robertson, Doing 167).³⁹ Ideally, otokoyaku should be taller than the musumeyaku, with a more rectangular face shape with darker skin and a higher bridged nose with narrow hips and a lower voice (sometimes developed by smoking and deliberately “crushing” the voice). In addition the otokoyaku must also possess kosei or charisma (Senelick, 342; Robertson, Doing 167), a trait that is undesirable in the musumeyaku. Strong, overtly sexual female roles, such as Scarlett O’Hara in Gone with the Wind, are never assigned to the musumeyaku but to top otokoyaku stars. Charisma and sexuality essential for these female characters are highly inappropriate for the musumeyaku. This cross-cross gender casting created discomfort not only for the otokoyaku who identified primarily with their masculine performance identity (Thrupkaew, 3) but was protested by fans (“They’ve

³⁹ As stated previously, Kobayashi tried to bring male performers into the revue but failed when the female performers refused to perform with them (Robertson, Takarazuka 168). In the 1960’s, the directors attempt to feminize the otokoyaku by having them wear pastel colored make-up, soft hair styles and frilly costumes is unsuccessful (Thrupkaew, 3).

turned Mari into a woman!") as well as the performers (Iwamura, 7; Buruma, 114; Robertson, Takarazuka 79). The adjustments that the otokoyaku had to make to portray femininity was overwhelming, as one otokoyaku, after 10 years of performing male, discovered that she was unable to adequately perform female roles, "Even though I am female, the thing called 'female' just won't emerge at all." (Robertson, Doing 183). This appears to be more than a resistance to playing a woman than a loss of power. While rare, there are otokoyaku who have permanently switched to women's roles. It is not known why this decision was made. The musumeyaku in contrast, have never been assigned or allowed to play male roles.⁴⁰

Hair, costume and make-up enable the gender transformation for the otokoyaku and define the feminine for the musumeyaku. For the otokoyaku, since 1932, hair has been worn short and often dyed red or blond for the western musicals that are most often produced. By the end of their first semester at the academy students assigned to the male gender are required to cut their hair. Length and color are negotiable but seem to follow a standard style depending on the time period. Facial hair has been experimented with for particular roles, usually with minor characters. In the 1977 production of Gone With

⁴⁰ The otokoyaku return to a feminine persona upon retirement from the revue. For some it is difficult to discard their performance gender, evident here, "What was unique and touching is that [otokoyaku] Aika Mire was the one who walked Midori [a nickname for musumeyaku, Ootori Rei] down the aisle and gave her away to the groom. Tamo [Mire's nick name] said for this special day she put on her otokoyaku-days clothes once more and trimmed her long hair a bit" (Cindy "Ootori Rei's wedding"). In a video celebrating the revue's 85 year history, many former otokoyaku still tend to dress and wear their hair in a modified, yet identifiable otokoyaku style. Even in retirement, some otokoyaku are careful to conceal their married lives as evident in that same video when former otokoyaku, Shizuki Asato shows her home but her husband is not introduced. It would seem that remnants of the secondary gender remain seem to cling to the performers beyond their time in the revue.

the Wind, Haruna Yuri who was playing Rhett Butler wore her mustache for the role offstage, presumably in order to more fully identify with the character. Fans were violently opposed (Senelick, 343; Robertson, Takarazuka, 13) and today it is rare for top otokoyaku stars to use facial hair. While facial hair is associated with male reality, the otokoyaku is presenting a fantasy male and therefore, it is not a necessary technology of gender for them but this will be different for the drag kings of the west.

When the traditional oshiroi or whiteface make-up was abandoned in 1930, the result was a more masculine visual image. Robertson notes that the more natural make-up emphasized the otokoyaku performer's features, which helped create a more real, believable man on stage (Takarazuka 191). If white foundation wipes out features as mentioned in the examination of onnagata make-up kata, skin-tone greasepaint together with shadowing highlights or creates angles and strength in a face. The specific color for foundation is codified, brownish pink for the otokoyaku and whitish pink for the musumeyaku. It is evident in this photo both otokoyaku and musumeyaku share highly stylized eye and lip make-up. This is again an example of gender fluidity that combines technologies of both in one body. The heavy eye makeup for both includes false eyelashes and the lips are emphasized with brilliant red lipstick. (see Figures 10 and 11). Otokoyaku performers differentiate themselves as more masculine with heavier eyebrows. Exaggerated make-up is necessary when performing in an over 3,000 seat theater, but has become an important gender convention for the otokoyaku.

Figure 10: Otokoyaku and musumeyaku in performance.

Figure 11: Publicity photo of otokoyaku and one musumeyaku (2001).

Costume colors are highly gender specific. Appropriate colors for male characters are green, yellow, blue, brown and black, while for female characters pink is a dominant color. White is a color used for top stars both male and female. In Japanese culture pink is a color that only children and teenagers can wear and is not appropriate for adult women. One fan's shock in seeing her favorite otokoyaku wearing pink clothing for a publicity photo is again revealing of the semiotic reaction to color and how it relates to gender. This unusual color choice for an otokoyaku deliberately upsets the male performance kata. Figure 12 shows that in publicity photos the use of color to denote gender is evident. The otokoyaku continues the masquerade off stage in their choice of clothing, which includes wearing slacks and loose - fitting shirts that maintain the masculine persona. The deliberate blurring of on and off-stage realities seems premeditated manipulation by the management of a false off stage illusion to maintain fan interest. Indeed, the fans seek out the masculine even in off-stage photos of the performers evident in this reaction to otokoyaku, Aki Mire's photobook, "There's one picture we all agreed that we liked a lot though. It's a B&W shot where Mire is sitting in a chair and really looks like a guy" (Leiji "1000 days and books"). The combining of masculine and feminine technologies of gender is obvious when the otokoyaku wear a man's tuxedo, it is sometimes adorned with sequins and feathers that soften and femininize the masculine image. This is also seen in the high-heeled boots that give the otokoyaku the necessary height. Heels change the performer's balance and movement

Figure12: Publicity photos of otokoyaku (Yu Todoroki) and musumeyaku (Yuri Hoshina).

but in this case create believable masculinity. They lengthen the legs, creating less emphasis in the lower part of the performer's body and reducing a performer's ability to use that area of sensuality.⁴¹ Height has traditionally signified power both physically and psychologically. Other costume choices that deviate from male reality and the choices of other male impersonators is that the otokoyaku trousers do not have a front fly. Perhaps this fantasy man is unable or unwilling to consummate his desires or his spectator's desires or perhaps this is a tease, desire is unbound and then thwarted, a rejection of their fans. While the success of the otokoyaku seems to depend on the ability to seduce his audience, yet there is no attempt to create reality. Costume together with make-up kata creates a "new man" that claims technologies of both genders.

While otokoyaku are encouraged to study real life models of masculinity, it is quite different for the musumeyaku. She becomes her own model based on a male-created feminine ideal not reliant on any realistic archetype (Robertson, The Magic If, 51) which is similar to the Kabuki onnagata. Interestingly, some musumeyaku have used the Kabuki onnagata as a model of femininity, which is a duplicated reinforcement of male control. The otokoyaku have modeled their performances on popular American celebrities including Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Sean Connery, Jack Nicholson and more recently Kevin Costner to name a few (Robertson, Takarazuka 12-14; Buruma, 114; Senelick, Changing 343; Davidson, 89). Buruma notes that many of "formalized postures" were codified in the 1950s which explains the predominance of older American film stars in the list above (114). The 1950s was also a period in

⁴¹ Onnagata Tamasaburo Bando acknowledges that he is too tall to play women (The Written Face).

Japanese history when American culture overshadowed their native culture. However, the performers weren't merely aping their models but selecting behavior and modifying it, "Performers say they seek to capture the essence of a man rather than the reality of his behavior" (Berlin, 27). Brau agrees, "An otokoyaku distills the masculine portrait in order to present only the part she feels will appeal to her audience. She does not aim toward verisimilitude" (86). An external, physical reproduction of masculinity is extracted and the personality of the performer as well as any psychological complexity become less important. A male ideal emerges that is recognizably masculine, yet clinging to certain feminine technologies of gender and indeed, seems as fragile as the feminine ideal.

Models for the otokoyaku are not restricted to male celebrities as American Cathy Davidson experiences during a train ride near Takarazuka City, where she was intently studied by a well-known otokoyaku (89). Male behavior is modeled from western women, as this former otokoyaku observes, "We often watch western women to understand better how to act like a man" (Ibid). Cultural biases creep in with the perception that American women are more masculine than Japanese women. Western female celebrities studied include Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Bette Davis, all women that exhibit in their film work distinct masculine characteristics and independent spirits. It is interesting to note that Tamasaburo also mentions both Garbo and Dietrich as his models of femininity (The Written Face). The androgynous film personalities of both women have been well documented and their images can be read either as intensely

masculine or intensely feminine. Vague ideas about the meaning of “being western” are evident in this comment by an otokoyaku to another performer, “You’re not western enough, you’re too Japanese” (Dreamgirls).⁴² While Brau states that some Japanese women consider the revue a “symbol of capitulation” (80) meaning, I assume, that it perpetuates stereotypes of femininity but also perhaps a reference to the overwhelming influence of western culture. However, this masculine model includes some familiar western characteristics but ultimately is a unique model of masculinity that is both Western and Japanese and masculine and feminine.

Otokoyaku movement is purposeful, sharply expressed, in contrast to the fluttery, tentative movement of the musumeyaku. According to this otokoyaku, “I walk a wide stride, sit like a man, even my thinking is like a man. But we aren’t men. We are women being men. We have a sexiness that men don’t have” (Senelick, Changing 343) both acknowledges women’s limitations or perceived limitations. Movement kata is very specific as described by Robertson, “A player of men’s roles, for example must stride forthrightly across the stage, her arms held stiffly away from her body, her fingers curled around her thumbs to form a fist [...]” (Takarazuka 12). Male posture has the pelvis thrust forward and the legs generally spread apart. Keiki Mori in Dream Girls executes this posture, adding a limp wrist, reminiscent of the distinct movement of Elvis Presley. A less stylized version of this is seen off stage, in Dreamgirls, the otokoyaku sits with

⁴² It has been theorized that the continued popularity of Takarazuka is the result of the westernization of Japan (Mochizuki, 165) while others have indicated a Japanese ethnocentrism that historically places blame on the introduction of western entertainments for the perceived masculinization of Japanese girls (Robertson, Doing 178, Takarazuka 156).

legs spread and in an expansive and relaxed way. Hands are open to create size and the head is held cocked to side, chin up. There are gestures that seem to be part of the otokoyaku kata, though there is no record of it, including holding the lapel of the jacket and slicking back their hair. The variety and freedom of otokoyaku movement is in contrast to the posture and movement of the musumeyaku who “pivots her forearms from the elbows, which are kept pinned to her side, constraining her freedom of movement and consequently making her appear more ‘feminine’” (Robertson, Takarazuka, 12) and like the onnagata is closed. While the otokoyaku have their feet firmly planted, the musumeyaku is in an almost constant state of movement often on tiptoe. They are required to portray femininity with restriction of the upper body together with the constant motions of the lower body presenting a disjointed, almost unrecognizable woman.

The highly stylized movement between the otokoyaku and musumeyaku is surprisingly sexual, for a show that is advertised to be “family entertainment.” Senelick claims that, “[...] there is a Japanese reticence in the conveyance of eroticism. The shows remained devoid of nudity or overt sex” (Changing 341). While there is no nudity, the performances are highly erotic at times. In Dream Girls there is an explicit sequence in which specific sexual gestures are made by the otokoyaku to the musumeyaku and not reciprocated. The musumeyaku remains the receiver of the gestures of desire and rarely acknowledges how it is affecting her. This includes on stage kissing which is part illusion and part deception, “She’s [musumeyaku, Emi Kurara] a good team with Rika-

san, and they seem comfortable together. Sometimes they even push the Takarazuka envelope. Their kiss (sic) scenes look very genuine – although they still do the official Takarazuka ‘turn away from the audience so they can’t see your lips,’ they get so close that I can’t believe their lips aren’t actually touching.” (Aitoshinorondo “Rika”). Like Kabuki convention in which the onnagata never engages in realistic kissing on stage, the otokoyaku has also stylized kissing (see Figure 13) but created a more realistic and more provocative moment for their audience.⁴³

Both Kabuki and Takarazuka offer presentations of gender that borrow from original models creating new gender reproductions. It would be incorrect to assume that the onnagata is merely a vessel for an archaic form of femininity just as it would that the otokoyaku is creating a presentation of masculinity wholly controlled by a patriarchal management. However that is not within the scope of this study.⁴⁴ Live performance always has an “additional layer of potential displacement to the varieties of representation onstage” (Ivy, 216), and this is apparent in the performances here. This attempt to categorize gender and its presentation also acknowledges an inherent chaos,

Configurations of surprise – what Peter Brook refers to as the melodramatic ‘aesthetics of astonishment’ – [. . .] are further amplified by the exhaustive transformations of gender roles onstage. Men dress as women, women dress as men, men playing women playing men, women playing men playing women: almost every conceivable variation on gender roles is carried out.

(Ivy, 216)

⁴³ Star couples called “golden combinations” become a pair early on in their careers and retire at the same time. The performance relationship is perpetuated by the Revue public relations into their offstage lives to fulfill fan expectations.

⁴⁴ Former performers have limited involvement in minor directing and other non-performer functions within the revue organization.

Figure13: Stylized onstage kiss between otokoyaku and musumeyaku.

Displacement and reconfiguration of what is considered masculine and feminine alluded to in Chapter Two, is pronounced in the performances of Japan. Chapter Four will examine how drag kings and queens are both similar and different in motives and constructions of gender within a different social construct with different performance results.

CHAPTER FOUR

Synthetic Identities: Drag Queens and Kings and “The Stage’s Jewel” the Elizabethan Boy Player

“I could never say how a woman feels. I can only say how a man who acts like a woman, or dresses like a woman feels.” Pepper La Beija, Paris is Burning

This chapter will explore how western drag performers, historically disregarded as a serious kind of cross-gender performance, reveal resistance to a patriarchal power structure that has minimized both the female performer and the representation of femininity. To serve as a comparable historical context to the Kabuki theatre, the Elizabethan boy player will also be examined. This creates a workable framework to later compare to the Japanese performances from the previous chapter. It produces opportunities to examine multiple methods of the creation of gender in performance and why these choices are made. Male cross-dressing in the west “remains largely in the domain of psychology and social anthropology where it is studied as a cultural or psychological variant” (Ibid.) which is far removed from the Kabuki onnagata. The performance of gender has typically been politically charged with a sexual subtext that, at times, includes western morality, gay and lesbian readings and feminist ideology. There is an obvious sexual subtext in Japanese performances but little evidence to support some of the other subtexts for western performance. Atkins acknowledges this cultural difference of a stronger homosexual context associated with many cross-gender performances (5). In addition to this, performance technique in the West seems more unstructured and less disciplined than the Japanese performances because in part, of a

lack of a sustained tradition and also because of the lack of mainstream popularity of drag performances (with some exceptions of course, celebrity impersonators, drag queen, Ru Paul and others all represent “approved” drag performances). The improvisational nature of drag gives an edge to these performances, not evident in the precision of Kabuki and Takarazuka. This is not to say that drag performances lack a system or technique but they approach the challenges of doing the other gender in ways that emphasize kinship and sometimes competition rather than pure entertainment. First will be a comparison of the Elizabethan boy player convention with the Kabuki onnagata. This is an appropriate comparison given the similarities between the two performance traditions and puts western cross-gender performance within some sort of historical context.

By the time of the reign of Elizabeth I (1558- 1603) the convention of boy actors playing female roles on stage was an old one, having been a common practice in town pageants since the 13th century (Bentley, 116). Other writer have examined the onnagata and the boy player (Pronko, Hyland, Brandon) and this will not be a comprehensive survey but will focus on those aspects that add to this topic. Briefly, the following was true for both Japan and Elizabethan England: the female impersonator was an accepted convention and each had strict laws forbidding women to perform in public and an acceptance of less-defined representations of gender that did not diminish the sexual impact of these performances (Senelick, Changing, 130; Soule, 136).⁴⁹ Hyland also recognizes that there must have been a degree of formalization and artificiality in the

⁴⁹ Senelick cites many scholarly interpretations of the supposed detachment of the boy player with any sexual ambivalence (Changing, 130)

performance similar to the onnagata conventions (1, 3) but as evidence will show this is also open to interpretation.

There is more specific evidence of similarities between these performances. One major difference is that the Elizabethan Theater used boy actors⁵⁰ and Kabuki used and continues to use adult male actors.⁵¹ This presents distinct challenges for each for the Kabuki actor had overcome an adult male physique in order to present a believable femininity, while the Elizabethan boy player used his youth to aid in creation of a woman onstage. However, the boy player lacked the complexity and emotional maturity that gave the onnagata an ability to understand and therefore, incorporate female behavior in performance. There is evidence to suggest that the Elizabethan acting style, like Kabuki, was presentational and stylized, although perhaps not as quite as rigid and formal as Kabuki (Joseph, p. B).

According to Senelick, “The kabuki onnagata was doubly desirable because he could project a spectrum of gender attractions, a synthesis not to be encountered in reality” (*Changing*, 133). This could also apply to the boy player, although much is speculation about whether the actor’s male identity was entirely suppressed when portraying the female. Senelick presumes that the boy players did not model their performances on “real” women (*The Changing Room*, 147), therefore, like the onnagata, the boy players signified woman utilizing an ambiguous sexuality to create plausible

⁵⁰ Bentley maintains that there is no evidence of adult male actor ever playing any women’s roles (113). Senelick also bring up the size of the acting troupe with an average of 9 men and 3 boys as evidence of this (*Changing*, 131).

female characters (The Changing Room, 132). This is not a presumption of personal effeminacy, as seen in analysis of the onnagata in Chapter Three and affirming this statement, “On the contrary, onnagata roles are physically highly demanding. Sitting close, one is conscious of the strong masculine physique under the woman’s costumes” (Arnott, 138). These same vocal and physical demands also apply to the Elizabethan boy player, who also needed endurance, strength and a certain intellectual maturity to successfully portray a woman. However, the performer’s youth was exploited, according to the Actors Remonstrance of 1643, a treatise on acting, primary qualifications for the boy player were good looks, small stature and a youthful (unbroken) voice (Senelick, The Changing Room, 133, Hyland, 2). Pronko notes that both Kabuki and Elizabethan actors were highly skilled performers, with dancing and acrobatic skills (“Kabuki and Elizabethan Theater, 332). First vocal and then the physical demands of the actors will be examined.

Joy Leslie Gibson in Squeaking Cleopatras: The Elizabethan Boy Player (2000) observes that vocal demands needed in the open air Elizabethan theater illustrated the extraordinary abilities of the actors, “The boys had to learn to be both intimate and muscular in their speaking” (66). This required masculine muscularity as well as vocal subtlety for Elizabethans went to “hear” not “see” a play. Elizabethan schoolboys were taught to speak in a “lively and natural” manner (Joseph, 26) which supports the need for vocal expressiveness. Many sources note that boys’ voices broke later in the 1560’s with

⁵¹ It is interesting to note that out of the 1,000 plus professional players in England from 1590-1642 only 35 boy actors went on to continue acting as adults graduating to male roles (Bentley, 135).

the onset of puberty at about around age of 15 or 16 (Gibson, 66, Hyland 2-3, Senelick, 135). Senelick also observed that unlike the stylized, unrealistically falsetto of the onnagata, the boy player most likely relied on his natural voice with no conscious attempt to change the pitch (Changing, 135). Hyland suggests that perhaps the boy player affected a high pitched voice in performance (4) similar to the onnagata. But Gibson contends that the boy player must have had "... exceptional powers of observation to portray women's roles convincingly, and he would have had to appreciate the truth of the words he was saying by using his imagination" (67). While Senelick's boy player used his own ambiguous being to portray a woman, it would seem necessary that there must be some truth in these characterizations as maintained by Gibson.⁵²

The stage kiss is one major performance action that has dangerous double meanings both for the boy player. The kiss becomes more intensely charged in cross-gender performances and the way it is performed is often revealing not just for the performance values but the cultural values. Kissing for an Elizabethan was an accepted public act between both men and women and women and women according to courtly etiquette behaviors of the Renaissance (Senelick, The Changing Room, 146).

Conversely, it is a behavior that was and still remains intensely private for the Japanese. Therefore the onnagata is upholding public social values and audience expectations by not presenting a realistic kissing (Portrait of an Onnagata). Instead there is a series of

⁵² Like the Kabuki tradition of son apprenticing with father, the boy player was also apprenticed at around 10 years to 13 years old (Bentley, 120; Senelick, 133) to established actors who as "sharers" in the acting company served as father/mentor figures for the boy actors.

stylized actions that signify love with little or no physical contact. These love scenes called nureba, are performed with heightened formality that for the Japanese aesthetic creates “believable beauty” of the emotions portrayed (Yoshida and Toita, 24, see also Leiter). Interestingly, in playing love scenes, the onnagata takes on the role of aggressor and the male character remains passive (Leiter, Kabuki Encyclopedia, 219). There can be some physical contact such as touching and embracing by the onnagata, but the object of her desire does nothing in reciprocation (see Laderriere, 34). As Leiter states, “[The] passion of the characters is conveyed more through suggestion than actual representation” (219).⁵³

For the Elizabethan boy player Shakespeare and his contemporaries frequently embedded in their dialogue onstage kissing between male and female characters. The boy players must have bestowed a kiss in a realistic fashion for two major reasons: one is that with the Elizabethan playhouse structure, the audience was close to the performers and two because kissing was an accepted custom.⁵⁴ For modern audiences realism is more desired but from the Kabuki performances I have seen and observations from other playgoers, the stylized exchange of love can be as emotionally and sensually charged as more a realistic depiction of love. These displays of intimacy between male and female

⁵³ One example of a Kabuki love scene is the kamisuki, a hair combing scene that is a Kabuki convention indicating love (Leiter, 166).

⁵⁴ Other onstage actions (dying for example) necessitated a more stylized presentation while kissing did not require a non-realistic approach even though both actors were male.

characters acted by two male actors, who regardless of the methods adhere to social and theatrical conventions to convincingly, portray heightened emotion.

For the Japanese performers “gestures are supraconventional signs: carefully codified and transmitted from generation to generation...” (65) and this is also true of the Elizabethan boy player. There is some reliable evidence of acting methods and conventions from the diary of onnagata, Ayame⁵⁵, as well as the oral teaching tradition of Kabuki and the written accounts of Noh acting conventions (which Kabuki theatre often borrowed from). However, there are less dependable records on the techniques of the Elizabethan actor. Both employed some kind of systematic approach that included some codification of gesture and movement. John Bulwer’s treatise on gesture confirms this. Chironomia and Chirologia (1644) examine conventions of gesture employed by rhetoricians to express specific emotions (See Figure 12). Bulwer separates the gesture from the emotion it represents (Cleary, 20) which is also how Kabuki actors present powerful moments on stage. Gesture and language are “two aspects of a single process” (Kendon, 110) and yet these cross-gender performers deliberately defy this in performance. Does it somehow create a comfort level for these performers in order to present femininity? Bulwer’s gesture of ploro or “to weep” is triggered by the emotion of grief and that causes the action of “hard wringing of the hands” (Roach, 34, Cleary, 32). But Noh actor and theorist Zeami (1363 – 1443) indicates that action creating emotion. The audience must first hear the word “weeping,” then observe the actor execute the

⁵⁵ Ayame’s diary and advice to actors was translated into English by Charles J. Dunn and Bunzo Torigoe in 1969.

C *Ploro* .

FIGURE 4. Chirogram (detail). *Ploro*. (Courtesy of P. M. Arnold Semeiology Collections, Washington University Libraries.)

Figure 14: Bulwer's gesture of "weeping" from Chironomia and Chirolugia
(1644).

prescribed gesture of bringing the sleeve of his kimono up to his face (Yamazaki, 76, Gunji, 44). Kabuki actor, Nakamura describes this gesture, “[The] actor bows his head slightly and raises his hand to a position in front of his eyes. He never snuffles or trembles as in realistic crying” (227). Both Bulwer and Zeami create presentational symbols of the emotion but differ in procedure. It is a cultural difference but also show the different expectations for the actor. Perhaps there was less formality and more plasticity to Elizabethan acting. It would appear from the evidence that the acting style was a combination of stylized form with perhaps more naturalistic goals.⁵⁶ Hyland supposes that the boy actors most likely used symbolic rather than realistic gestures (5).⁵⁷ In stylizing their outward form, the boys were given conventions to help them access emotions and convince an audience of their authenticity as a woman just like the onnagata. The major difference between western and eastern approaches to acting is that the western actor hopes to be inspired, while the Kabuki actor requires the audience to be inspired. The onnagata strives for purity and clarity in gesture and movement cultivated by years of disciplined practice to present effortless beauty. On the other hand, the boy player seemed to rely more on his natural abilities and youthful attributes and perhaps inspiration to achieve a similar transformation.

Clothing influenced gesture and movement for the onnagata and the boy player.

The Elizabethan actor relied on the charity of their wealthy patrons in obtaining cast-off

⁵⁶The boy players had the tools that the playwright embedded including heightened language, use of imagery and rhetoric to express stylized love instead of using “carnal words” (Gibson, 142).

⁵⁷ Soule notes, however that the very conventions of performance at that time (daylight and little make-up) makes it clear that the actor was a boy (135).

clothing to be used as costumes. Individuals at this time were guided by strict rules on what could or could not be worn in public. The Sumptuary Laws of 1580 determined according to one's status, what colors and types of clothing could be worn. The typical women's dress of that time included the farthingale, multiple petticoats and large sleeves (Gibson, 55). Colors were also highly regulated with reds, crimsons, gold allowed only for upper class or nobility (Gibson, 60, Pronko, "Kabuki and the Elizabethan Theater," 333) and drabber colors for lower classes. These strict regulations of dress aided the boy player, who could exploit the lushness of the crimsons, gold braid, velvets and furs to dazzle the audience and consequently detract from the boyish qualities. One fashion of the day for women, a starched bodice (See Gibson, Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of clothing) created a flat chest which created less distinction between male and female forms and again, helped the boy player in his disguise. Clothing was also highly regulated in Japan along with make-up and wigs (Leiter, 43; Pronko "Kabuki and the Elizabethan Theater," 335). Each role had a specific costume kata; color was also highly classified.⁵⁸ Color was and still is an important indicator of social and marital status as well as gender in Japan. Unmarried women and children could wear brilliant colors while men and married women wore drabber colors (Dalby, Kimono, 168). The most obvious similarity between the two cultures is a strong "unisex" look to clothing. Elizabethan fashion had both men and women sharing certain apparel items such as hats,

⁵⁸ One example is the akahime (princess role) who is always dressed in a red kimono (Leiter, 43).

ruffs and doublets that undoubtedly created a visual gender ambiguity (Senelick, 137).⁵⁹ Similarly men's and women's kimono are similar in structure and style and it was not until the introduction of western dress that clothing was more gender specific (Dalby, *Kimono Mind*, 54).⁶⁰ It would seem that this also helped the performer.

How the actor wears a costume adds to the feminine illusion. Elizabethan costume created movement challenges but also aided the actor. The oversized balloon-like sleeves of Elizabethan public dress like the sleeves of the kimono were exaggerated and stylized to identify the wearer by age and gender (Dalby, 63) and in turn created the illusion of small hands for the boy player. Negotiating the long, floor-length sleeves of a courtesan role in Kabuki required stylized gestures and these stiff sleeves also required economy of movement. Gesture was affected by flow of the kimono just as the rigidity of the English female dress necessitated a different kind of movement. The arm and hand gestures of the onnagata are therefore more fluid while the boy player must have relied on stillness and precise hand and arm positions to indicate femininity within the confines of Elizabethan dress. This was the behavior advocated for all women during that time, "simple and natural gestures" (Gibson, 45).⁶¹ The boy player's goal was to create an unselfconscious artlessness (Gibson, 46) with movement designed to highlight lovely features and downplay unattractive or highly masculine traits. The onnagata had more to

⁵⁹ According to Gibson, all Elizabethan children, female and male wore skirts up until the age of seven. At that time the boys were "breeched" and considered responsible persons (20).

⁶⁰ Japanese Genroku culture produced a fusion of male and female elements and according to Dalby men and women borrowed styles (*Kimono*, 275).

⁶¹ The multiple layers of robes common in the Heian era in Japan made a woman "a virtual prisoner of her own finery" (Fischer, 105).

conceal, including large hands, beard stubble and more defined musculature. The theatrical kimono was created with longer sleeves to conceal the hands and the actor held the sleeves with the tips of his fingers especially when the hands were near the face. While costume forced both the onnagata and boy player into restrained posture and gesture, this was a big part in creating authenticity.⁶²

There is little evidence regarding the use of make-up, however we do know that upper class Elizabethan women wore some make-up. It is uncertain if or how much the boy player wore in their portrayals. Castiglione in his advice to women expressed that a woman should not be heavily made up (Gibson, 45). Soule notes the limitations of that time including daylight and rudimentary make-up (135) together did not help the Elizabethan boy player in his gender impersonation so he must have relied on the elements of performance noted previously.⁶³ The onnagata, on the other hand relied on cosmetics as a concealment of masculinity and creating a blank face to create femininity.

This seems to show that the onnagata relied on complex costume, cosmetic, vocal and physical conventions to create femininity, while the Elizabethan boy-player depended on a prepubescent softness (along with costume, movement and voice) to win over the audience.⁶⁴ Echoing the arguments that maintained women unable to play onnagata roles, Dusinberre acknowledges that today “Actresses tend to play

⁶² Hyland notes that both the kimono and Elizabethan women’s clothing to effectively hide masculinity (4).

⁶³ There is evidence of cosmetic use in later portraits of Elizabeth I, in which it is obvious she wore a heavy foundation and other cosmetics. Compared to the fresh-faced appearance in earlier portraits her attempts to hide here imperfections and age with cosmetics create a mask-like appearance.

⁶⁴ Kincaid mentions a female student of Kabuki actor; Danjuro IX (1839-1903) named Ichikawa Kumehachi who formed an all-women Kabuki company who acting of male roles Danjuro said, “If she had been a man her acting would have surpassed mine.” (354).

Shakespeare's heroines too feminine" (252). The onnagata and the boy player were for their audiences more successful than a real woman could be in those roles. The boy player became "the stage's jewel" using conventions of costume, voice and gesture to create an illusion of femininity for the audience to believe in without letting them forget, that as Soule reminds us that the Elizabethan audiences were never entirely convinced and could readily see the boy in the performance of a woman (137). For modern drag performers, the outward illusion is essential in creating authenticity.

Drag has existed in numerous performance forms including burlesque and musical before the so-called "comeback" years of the 1960's (Baker, 2). Since drag and cross-dressing is often associated with homosexual subcultures in the west, the rise of gay rights activism in the 1960's ushered in a new openness to drag both onstage and off. However, drag is not just a performance of gay men and women, there are complex motives and presentation of gender, "At its most complex [drag] is a double inversion that says 'appearance is an illusion.' Drag says 'my outside appearance is feminine, but my essence inside is masculine. At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion, 'my appearance outside is masculine but my essence inside is feminine'" (Newton, 69). Mark Simpson in Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity (1994), states that drag sometimes "[Draws] attention to the concealment of manhood by its crudeness or its exaggeration to make sure it is a concealment and not despoilment" (179). This idea of true femininity as a threat to masculinity has been shown in Chapter Two and exists in some drag queen performances.

The documentary film, The Queen (1968) follows a group of men who compete in a drag queen beauty pageant in New York. This film presents the subject in a sensitive, non-judgmental manner, acknowledging the homosexual subtext without descending into gay or drag stereotypes. What motivates each man to participate in drag performance varies, but there is a persistent need among them for, “All drag queens want love and they try to get love by being sexy and beautiful” (The Queen). Ironically, the idea that love can be secured through an attractive physical appearance mirrors how women seek to gain approval and love from a man. A woman is encouraged to dress in provocative clothing including makeup usually emphasizing lips and eyes and hairstyle. This is mirrored in the choices made by drag queens. The transformation is incomplete, in the musical Hedwig and the Angry Inch (2001) Hedwig sings, “Suddenly I’m Miss Farrah Fawcett from TV until I wake up and turn back into myself.” Hedwig’s yearn to achieve this image of a woman makes him more exhilarating and desirable and in a way, more real than he could ever be as a man. These familiar technologies of femininity, which have been shown to often be as unnatural to women as they are to men, remain the standard for the drag queen. Yet there is a constant struggle in the attempt to erase the primary gender.

The strain between two identities striving to dominate one body discloses truth in the attempt to conceal truth. Both identities contribute to the performances but as Butler states, “The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual stylization of butch/femme

Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture “Humphries, who is heterosexual, distances himself from the notion that playing Everage is playing drag, yet he consciously performs her role with a campy excess and sensitively cultivates a gay and lesbian following.” (www.glbtc.com/arts/humphries_b.html). It is difficult to accept his portrayal of women as merely “campy excess.” His cutting performance and others of that sort are not within the scope of this study. The dominance of the male view is obvious and Baker seems to explain it best, “a man impersonating a man impersonating a woman who has her own reality” (215). This reality distances the actor from the character and therefore, do not broaden this analysis of drag performance but instead creates barriers that cannot be addressed at this time.

The drag queens easily overcome the awkwardness of their new identity without resorting to the methods of Dame Edna and others. This is seen in The Queen, in which the performers are seen waiting offstage, awkward and uncomfortable in their female attire but once their cue is called, the effect a transformation as they walk on stage, immediately becoming relaxed, graceful and fully in command of the clothing of their feminine identity. There is a substantial effort that this kind of performance requires. Audiences conditioned by more predictable celebrity cross-dressing performances that call attention to male and female differences rather than the shared qualities, may be uncomfortable with the fluidity of these transformations, it simply looks too natural. Kerr’s observation about onnagata Tamasaburo’s backstage behavior and transformation supports this, “Tamasaburo was chatting casually and was not the least bit feminine –

very much an average man, although he was in full costume. When the time came for his entrance, he stood up, laughed, said, ‘OK, here I go!’[. . .] He adjusted his robe, flung open the *fusuma* [sliding stage doors], and in that instant was transformed into a beauty straight out of an Ukiyoe print” (62). However, in the film, Struggle for Hope (1995) Tamasaburo, appears as himself discussing his performance and also in performance. He appears slightly effeminate in his behavior and interactions with others. Tamasaburo touches cellist Yo Yo Ma frequently in the film and at one point girlishly raises his eyes to the ceiling to gather his thoughts. Later he clasps his hands to his chest, all gestures and attitudes that are not typically masculine for either a Japanese man or a western man. In performance Tamasaburo’s graceful, fluid choreography also includes touching Ma again but now in a more direct sexually dominating way. The off stage Tamasaburo is almost girlishly coquettish, he creates an aggressive female predator in the dance. While there are two conflicting descriptions of Tamasaburo’s real behavior, it also reinforces the fluidity of behavior and how behavior inside and outside of performance can be unreliable and in that way, highly theatrical.

The homosexual cross-dresser reminds the spectator that, “the queen is male” (Feinbloom, 20), with an acknowledgement of their masculine identity. This is achieved through a combination of ultra-feminine glamour that seems to reveal both the “fear and fascination of the feminine with the male body” (Simpson, 178). These performances maintain that the goal of drag is that “manhood is concealed but not despoiled: the castration is visual” (Simpson, 179). This “pretend” castration is part of the fascination

with these performances for an audience that is “in” on the secret. These performances create insecurity in ownership of gender and keep us simultaneously enthralled and repulsed. It has also made these performances sexually charged and morally deviant keeping them on the fringes of mainstream performance.

There has not always been a divide between drag and more serious impersonation performances. In the 19th century both British music halls and American vaudeville had numerous examples of female impersonators that did not ridicule femininity and womanhood but honored it, “Their performances were serious even reverential; they celebrated femaleness rather than mocking it” (Hamilton, 110). This description of British female impersonator, Dan Leno is clearly more respectful in tone, “It never strikes us that he is a man imitating a woman. It is a woman who stands before us, the veritable Mr. Kelly, not a burlesque of the sex, but the actual thing. (Bullough and Bullough, 233). This deferential interpretation of women was evident with female impersonator, Jim Bailey, who in the 1960s and 1970s impersonated iconic celebrities such as Barbra Streisand and Judy Garland. His slight physique and feminine features help in his impersonations. He does not consider himself a drag queen however, according to Baker, Bailey think of himself as an “illusionist” and like Charles Pierce, he considers himself an actor who is best at playing women (218).

However, it was an early 20th century performer who was one of the first to exemplify impersonation as a serious performance. American female impersonator, Julian Eltinge (1883 –1947) described as “the manliest man off-stage and the girliest girl

on-stage” (Senelick, The Changing Room, 311); he was a large man, “as virile as anybody virile” (H. Moore, 95) who first appeared as a woman in vaudeville and musical comedies in the early 1900’s. He created an extraordinarily convincing woman for that time while maintaining a vigorous masculine identity offstage which diffused any speculation of abnormality (Ibid, 310). According to Senelick, his performances were unique for being entirely “free from parody” (Gender in Performance, 235). Eltinge’s success as a female impersonator and his celebrity status brought him mostly female fans, which was the majority of his audience. His popularity both as a woman in performance and a man in real life was capitalized in his own magazine, The Julian Eltinge Magazine and Beauty Hints. The magazine published pictures of Eltinge both in and out of drag and made a point to emphasize his masculinity when not performing (Senelick, Gender in Performance, 27). The magazine targeted women with articles on appearance including clothing, hairstyles and make-up as well as advice on learning to box (Senelick, The Changing Room, 307). Eltinge’s own impersonation make-up routine is especially illuminating,

Before his performances, he spent an hour and a half in preparation. He would shave, apply flesh-tone greasepaints to his face, and powder his complexion. He accented his eyelids with blue, built up the eyelashes in black, and formed his eyes into almond shapes. . . Eltinge used a white liquid concoction on his shoulders and arms, then powdered over it to achieve a soft white effect. In order to make his hands appear smaller and delicate; he powdered his hands white and rouged his fingers from the second knuckle to the tips. Lastly, he put blue pencil lines on the backside of his hands, making them appear slender. His advice to women was ‘never to hold the breadth of the hand toward the viewer.’ (H. Moore, 100)

Compare that to the make-up routine of the Kabuki onnagata observed in Portrait of an Onnagata in which he also applies white foundation to the face, neck, shoulders and hands of the onnagata followed by powder creates an illusion of softness and smaller size. The use of red on the outside edges of the onnagata eyes creates the almond shape that Eltinge was also attempting in his make-up application. His advice on how to hold the hands also mirrors the onnagata in which the fingers are held together to create a more convincing feminine hand.⁶⁵ The drag film Paris is Burning also shows a “kabuki-like” make-up application of drag queen, Dorian Corey. In the film we see Corey put on a cap which raises the eyebrows and painstakingly applies false eyelashes, foundation and eye makeup. The rituals as well as the importance of make-up for both the onnagata and the drag queen magnify the high expectations for femininity and beauty for women in society. It is an important tool for these performers and together with costume creates a viable feminine reality that women recognize even if they do not choose to participate in those gender technologies.

Clothing and how it is manipulated is essential in drag performances. Paris is Burning shows a stylized removal of clothing revealing another character, which is very similar to the onnagata convention of hikinuki. Hikinuki is the elimination of one costume by rigging the outer kimono to be removed by stage assistants revealing an inner costume that shows the character’s true qualities, reflecting a change in personality or as and precise as hikinuki, showing the same kind of detachment from the outer

⁶⁵ Eltinge employed a male Japanese dresser, Shima (Moore, 95) it is not known if he was aware of the onnagata tradition.

technologies of gender and the revealing of a new vision of gender. The theatricality of the drag balls involve strong elements of music, movement and dance but no narrative form. The balls are a performance competition that incorporate a multitude of styles and indeed are all about style. A dance form called “voguing” first became popular with the drag balls. Vogueing involves sequential model-like poses in which two performers try to out pose each other. The use of stereotypical feminine behavior in “pantomime vogue,” has performers present stylized versions of looking in a mirror, using a compact or applying lipstick. There is a strong connection between performer and audience also apparent in Kabuki performance when a performer creates mie poses. These are greeted by audience shouts of encouragement and admiration. Both Kabuki and drag, despite differences in culture and social attitudes, create femininity on-stage that is a highly stylized and theatrical recreation of stereotypical behavior that somehow is not offensive to their audience.

In both Paris is Burning and The Queen, the performers behave in a recognizable masculine way offstage in both attire and attitude. There are a few exceptions, men who come to these performances with a complete mastery of femininity that is also evident off stage. One is Richard or “Miss Harlow,” as he is known in the drag world. Richard has naturally feminine characteristics including a petit build, large eyes and full lips. He enhances the illusion by wearing his hair long and androgynous street clothes. The other performers reveal the telltale signs of masculinity in costume, including broad shoulders, defined muscularity and buttocks that are too high and flat (Brownmiller, 175) but

Richard passes. More important for this thesis is that Richard projects a vulnerable quality both on and off stage. His eyes and lips are essential in projecting femininity. This is seen when he is performing keeping his mouth slightly open. His decidedly feminine response to being crowned “the Queen” is to weep. The only time that Richard’s masculinity becomes obvious is when he is genuinely angry and that emotion swiftly transforms him. This kind of complete acquisition of femininity is also seen in Hedwig and the Angry Inch (2001) in which a “slip of a girlie-boy from Communist East Berlin” struggles to gain acceptance and love by becoming a woman. Like Miss Harlow the actor playing Hedwig, John Cameran Mitchell, is petite and has feminine qualities. Mitchell is most believable in his feminine identity without make-up. The usual technologies of femininity are not employed; here the performer accomplishes the transformation through gesture and attitude. Like Miss Harlow, the only time masculinity is revealed is in moments of anger. Anger, shown in Chapter Two to be considered a more masculine trait also masculinizes women. This will be a tool of the drag king in performing masculinity. These consistencies help create a complete picture of how prevailing views on gender are reinforced in these performances.

While this study is not focused on the homosexual cross-gender performer, there are some matters that inform this discussion. The combination of feminine characteristics with the male identity is seen in many gay performers, either unconsciously or consciously. There are connection between the experiences of a gay man and those of women, “When you’re gay you monitor how you dress, how you talk,

how you act” (Paris is Burning). This idea is not necessarily embraced by everyone, this comment from the drag group, the Rad Fems states that, “We don’t want to discard the male role just to take on the female one . . . There were now two options open to a drag queen ‘to pass or not to pass’” (Baker, 240). In this way the drag queen has more options than the woman she is representing, because women are most often required to “pass” as women. Chapter Two examined social expectations for women that included an ideology of conformity to a feminine physical appearance as well as behaviors. So why would a drag queen desire to “become” a woman when they have more options? Pepper LaBeija in Paris Is Burning observes, “I’ve been a man, I’ve been a man who emulated a woman, I’ve never been a woman.” It is obvious that sexual orientation plays little part in the behavior and attitudes of the performers, rather it is the restrictions of femininity that are both desired and unnecessary. Simpson recognizes how astute these men are to the restrictions applied to gender, “The images presented to me at that time were of gay men playing parts. Some were active, others passive, just like men and women. If you were labeled ‘butch’ you were expected to be the boyfriend or the husband in the relationship. If you were the passive partner, you were seen as the girlfriend or wife” (IV). When examining drag king performers, there is a different motive present, these performers “seek refuge rather than stand and fight” (Bell-Meterau, 22). These impersonations offer sanctuary rather than exhibition. It also reinforces female passiveness that is displayed by the passive/aggressive voguing competitions at the drag balls in which contestants

“battle” using movement that emulate fashion models.⁶⁶ Drag kings manipulate gender in similar ways but it is independent of the drag queen model.

The appearance of women in men’s clothing can be seen both as a female-as-male hybrid or as extreme and unambiguous. Male impersonator, Dred maintains the more hybrid stance, “I am not butch or femme, just whatever I’m feeling right then” (Bullough and Bullough, 263). Another male impersonator also maintains, “Sometimes I’m very masculine, sometimes very feminine depending on my situation. I go back and forth all the time” (Halberstam, 263). This lack of commitment to either their secondary or primary gender, is evident in their performance choices which will be examined later. Most drag kings, however, seek to accurately physicalize masculinity. There is a stability and realness of the male body as opposed to the female body (Halberstam, 234). Halberstam maintains that male impersonators “produce a plausible performance of maleness” while drag performers “makes the exposure of the theatricality of masculinity into the mainstream of her act” (232). This distinction is not evident in the performances examined here. However, it is obvious that a drag king employs the technologies of masculinity in a realistic way to entertain an audience and to communicate a point of view on the subject. Straub points out that, “To masquerade as a man, and to do it well, is to enter a no-woman’s-land ‘beyond’ femininity, to exceed the limits of delicacy” (427). To enter the male world requires technologies of gender as complex as female cross-gender performers. Yet Volcano and Halberstam comment on the

⁶⁶ In *Paris is Burning* a drag queen is seen teaching female models how to walk the catwalk in a fashion show (Halberstam, 239).

“untheatricalness” of masculinity and that the performers do not verge on “camp” (35).

There is theatricalness obvious in director Tommy Tune’s advice to his actresses performing turn of the century dandies in Eve Merriam’s The Club, “to imagine they had something dangling between their legs” (Brownmiller, 174). The male crotch area has defined even the most superficial male-impersonation performances, such as Madonna’s performance in her video, “Express Yourself” (1989) but will be a more substantial aspect in drag king performance. Garber implied that the outrage over Madonna’s crotch grabbing was, “squeezing what she hasn’t got (or *had* she?)” (127). She then proceeds to question the power that is gained and whether Madonna’s obvious critique of male power structure is achieved through the gesture. On the other hand, many drag kings do not merely grab at non-existent genetalia but create a temporary physical reality with false genitals. Amy Linn describes the various apparatuses used for creating artificial penises and balls including condoms filled with hair gel, rubber toy balls or dildoes (1).

Obviously the intent is to create a realistic imitation which seems to help the performers achieve a feeling of realism just as falsies do for the drag queen. A flyer for one drag king show admonishes the participants to “Be a dude, or just look like one. Pack a big one, draw on a mustache and march right down [. . .] (Linn, 1). Rosenfeld maintains, “Women who feel powerful when they pack a dildo and strut out into the evening, and women who lust after them, both manifest this desire [for a penis]” (Troka, et al, 208).

Drag King Maureen Fischer notices the difference in stance in a commentary on Lauren Hasten’s Gender Pretenders webpage, “Okay, a man – when you wear a dildo, it’s like, I

can't help but sit with my legs like this {plants her feet far apart}. And you're futzing, and you're fixing, and you're constantly – all your energy is here {at the crotch}.”

However, there is also a flippant attitude that has some sense of the ridiculousness of their gender performance or might it be that the object of their performance is being ridiculed? Drag king performers are not above poking fun at the ridiculousness of their gender performance, as Dred, a Haitian-American actress, singer and “illusioning WoMan” (see Figure 15) does in God Shave the Queen (1998). Dred performs a strip tease that culminates with her pulling an apple and banana out of her pants. The question remains: is gender nothing more than a few well place props? ⁶⁷

There is the necessity for the drag king to disguise the most feminine of all body parts, the breasts, also must be artificially created by the drag queen. Some drag kings bind their breasts to achieve the appropriate male silhouette. However, for the drag queen, female breasts seem more problematic. False breasts in many drag queen performances become a comical accessory. There is the belief that breasts are also “displaced” on women’s bodies (Simpson, 179) which supports breasts as unnatural and therefore, rather ludicrous sexual body parts. Breasts have been on display in a variety of ways, depending on the style of the time, in the 1950’s breasts were bullet-like weapons while today, breasts are augmented to unnatural proportions and often prominently displayed in revealing clothing. Kate Bornstein brings an interesting perspective to this subject, “I think we construct ourselves into an identity that attracts

⁶⁷ Drag queen also must content with their genitalia, especially in “glamour drag” made famous by Ru Paul and others, the nature of some of the costumes requires tight groin tucks.

Figure 15: Drag King Mildred "DRED" Gerestant

what we desire. As our desires change, or as our perceptions of our desires change, our identity shifts” (102). Breasts are desired by both male and female and therefore, what is considered feminine becomes an area of ambiguity. Man desires a woman’s breasts while a woman desires to have the kind of breasts that are considered attractive to a man. The drag queen must deal with the feminine perspective while also having been socialized as a man. For the drag kings it seems to depend on the individual performer. For all cross-gendered bodies costume is essential in portraying their performance gender.

The choices of costume in drag queen performances emphasize, like the Takarazuka Revue, fantasy clothing of femininity, gowns, glitter, feathers and high glamour clothing. While these choices are regressive and far from reality, employing a stereotype of heightened glamour creates a recognizable illusion of femininity. The drag king, like men, has more limited clothing options that are less ostentatious. It allows an entry point for the spectator into the performance. Men’s clothing is unambiguous and easily identified. Also a man’s business suit is also able to successfully conceal the female body without adding other technologies of gender. While women’s clothing often reveals, men’s conceals and allows a freedom of movement and confidence in the drag king. The drag kings no longer have to negotiate the world in high heels and restrictive clothing, they are free to behave like a man.

At Club Casanova, a drag king club in New York, the crowd is mostly women, many wearing neatly manicured goatees, and sideburns or 5 o’clock shadow (The New

York Times, April 5, 1998). In San Francisco there are both men and women at a drag king club, the women are “doing the macho thing: leaning on walls, interrupting people, standing with their feet spread wide, belching beer vapors. They keep a hand in one pocket to jangle coins or check their bulges while the girls in the crowd --drag queens – flutter fake lashes as if batting aggressive gnats” (Linn, 1). Schacht also reinforces this, “Broad, almost swaggering, steps are taken when walking, legs are never crossed but instead comfortably spread apart when seated, and by far the most popular beverage is beer drunk out of a long necked bottle” (Troka, et al, 82). Hair is important in creating this male reality as seen in Figure 16 and this is the element that distinguishes drag king performance from Japanese male impersonations. As one performer states, “When you’re up there with a mustache, you’re not just a guy, you’re the guy” (Linn, 5). The drag kings do not generalize masculinity but apply precise, creative male technologies that are authentic. It could be said that the drag king is merely upholding the patriarchal model but also may “not simply [be] deconstructing gender, but opening up gender to all sorts of variants” (Linn, 4). The same could be said of the otokoyaku and yet while drag queens are upholding male-created notions of femininity, there is little variation in presenting feminine identity. Therefore, male impersonation remains ambiguous even within so-called authentic imitations of masculinity.

A drag king is defined on website, www.pipeline.com, “Some say it’s a contradiction in terms, that to imitate a man accurately, one must be not a king but a thug, a brute, a mindless massive pile of anger and ego. Although these fine strapping lads are

Figure 16: Drag King Mo B Dick

right on for accuracy, they go beyond just mocking the macho. These boys have savoir faire (not to mention huevos grandes) that drives the ladies hog wild!” This reveals that it is not just the physical representation of masculinity but are an open indictment on how men play themselves. While it may seem that the drag kings are “more serious or earnest” about the impersonation than the drag queens, according to Halberstam, “This is one part of what I call kinging: where all the emphasis is on a reluctant and withholding kind of performance” (239). This radically different performance approach deemphasizes theatricality, which drives most drag queen performances. One example is this description of rock band, The B52s performed by drag queens and kings, “While the drag queens bounced and bobbed, stumbled and slipped around the small stage, they almost blocked out the more understated drag kings” (Halberstam, 238). Female gender is trivialized so that it is rendered unreadable (Halberstam, 239) while male gender is subdued, even unnoticeable. Koenig calls drag king performance a “stripping down” (151) and Rosenfeld refers to the tendency “to perform subtle reconfigurations of maleness” (Troka, et al, 206) which would involve a deletion of feminine technologies, a removal of the make-up and frills. This is why “camp” does not really apply to the drag king but can for drag queen performances, as it “tends to be a genre for an outrageous performance of femininity” (Halberstam, 238). The drag king, like their model, can underplay and pretend disinterest and still be authentically male while the drag queen works hard to create a feminine illusion that is larger than life and requires much effort on the performer’s part.

Male impersonation may appear more complex and unreadable than many drag queen performances, because it is “a theatrical tradition [extending] back to the restoration stage, but more often than not, the trouser male was used to emphasize femininity rather than to mimic maleness” (Halberstam, 233). In a Jewel Box Revue (1955-1969) show in New York a drag queen performance was MCed by drag king, Storme DeLarverie. The focus on the queens meant that DeLarverie’s performance was seldom mentioned in reviews except to note her “too masculine” appearance (Ferris, 133).⁶⁸ This is both a critique and a compliment that acknowledges the realism of drag king performance that is not evident in drag queen performances.

The divide between “drag kings,” referred to as parody masculinity and “male impersonators,” a theatrical convention that attempts to produce a plausible performance of a man (Halberstam, 232, see also Troka, 41) does have those clear distinctions given the evidence presented here. While drag kings and queens are sometimes identified with the gay community, the evidence from the performances reveals a larger audience. It is important “that male drag isn’t typecast as a ‘lesbian thing’” (Linn, 4), nevertheless has been closely associated with the gay subculture. Perhaps the acquisition of masculinity allows women to claim their natural responses as women without the constructs of a male created woman. In God Shave the Queen there are several examples of drag queen and drag king behavior that is significant. The narrator of the film is a large, extreme drag queen, Sherry Vine, who speaks in a sing-songy voice and wears heavy, exaggerated

⁶⁸ Please see Schacht’s description of the gay and lesbian drag king and queen International Court System and especially the hierarchal order of kings and queens (The Drag King Anthology 81-82).

make-up, portraying a housewife who spends her day watching TV and eating. The television program she is watching stars drag king, Dred (aka Mildred Gerestant) who portrays a black urban circa 1970's pimp in a realistic, relaxed and natural manner. Both performers employ easily recognizable constructs of their secondary gender and yet each approach is radically different. Sherry Vine comes across, because of the performer choices, as a rather misogynistic, overdone performance of femininity, while Dred's more subtle and realistic portray is less defined and therefore, not as easily classified. Perhaps it is, as Delaverie has implied on the GLBTQ web site, that "it is harder to impersonate men than women since the impersonation of femininity entails the addition of things while the impersonation of masculinity can only be achieved by paring down."

While many drag king performers have some masculine traits that may enhance the impersonation, there is no evidence of any contempt for their subject. DeLarverie maintains that maleness is present in the deconstructed female body, "All I did was cut my hair and change. I walk the same, I talk the same" (Ferris, 128). Dred also states that she is not "making fun" of her male subjects and her performances reveal more of her female identity within the male impersonation. Her male-to-female strip tease (Figure 17) reveals that "masculinity and feminine gender cannot be neutrally attributed to bodies of either sex" (Pauliny, The Drag King Anthology, 244). Yet another drag king admits to feeling restricted performing femininity and a naturalness to her new masculine identity (Volcano and Halberstam, 20). The ability of these female performers to identify the closeness to masculinity is quite different than the effort it takes for men to perform

Figure 17: DRED man and woman

femininity.

Like the otokoyaku performers, some drag kings use masculine models (Dred channels Shaft, Michael Jackson and P Diddy as well as masculinized female models such as Grace Jones), but modern male stars which might serve as models of masculinity, such as Mel Gibson, Tom Cruise or Brad Pitt are problematic because they effect a naturalness that eludes imitation. (<www.glbq.com/arts/drag_kings,2.html>). The smallness of these personalities creates little opportunity to explore masculinity, although all of these stars would be considered very masculine. In both Paris is Burning and The Queen there is evidence that there is evidence of a tradition being formed and passed down from performer to performer. But the drag kings have had little formal training, which is quite removed from intensity of the Takarazuka school.⁶⁹ There is evidence that both drag queens and kings rely on a tradition of mentor/ novice oral transmission of performance skills like the Kabuki onnagata and that allows for some structure and form.

DeVor states that when there is ambiguity about a person's gender, there is a tendency to see maleness (49). When Ferris claims that the Shakespearean boy player "is closer to the woman than to the man" she is reminding us "of the absence of the female rather than of her presence" (157). When drag kings and queens perform together we watch to see how they measure up, how well they reproduce the other. There is bravery in these performers sharing the stage that is not seen in the Japanese cross gender performances examined. But what about the simultaneous, yet distinct representation of

⁶⁹ Diane Torres teaches a workshop (started in 1998) on how to pass as a man. Her students are mostly heterosexual women who just want to experience maleness.

masculinity and femininity in one performer body, such as Dred's strip tease? What is that telling us about our preconceptions of gender? Is it merely keeping stability as Drorbaugh observes in a review of DeLaviere's performance, "What the men added, she took away, that the impersonation and play with sex and gender norms was 'just' performance" (139). Evidence from drag performance offers irony, not evident in Japanese performances, that attempts to either simulate power or ridicule those with power. Maybe it is the discovery of two halves of a whole, as Hedwig says in Hedwig and the Angry Inch, "It is clear I must find my other half but is it a he or a she?"

CHAPTER FIVE

Girl Meets Girl, Boy Meets Boy: The Reconfigured Performance Body

The first goal of this thesis was to identify how the body in cross-gender performance is not only deconstructed but then reconfigured. The information necessary to begin this analysis included organizing masculine and feminine gender technologies that are considered universal and determining how the performer adhered or deviated from these categories in performance. The technologies of gender included the physical, vocal and kinesthetic characteristics that define humanness and character. It was also crucial to define those performance codes of costume, make-up, and hair that are compulsory elements in cross-gender performances. This study focused less on the individual actor's skill in creating believability in the performance of gender and relied more on external performance codes and what was necessary for the actor in this kind of performance. The otokoyaku, the onnagata and the drag performances revealed that these codes were constantly disordered, for example when Drag King, Dred performs a strip tease that leaves no doubt as to her femaleness or in the make-up of the otokoyaku, utilizing tools of femininity, heavy eye and lip make-up. Rarely did these performances allow for the primary gender to interfere. This is why I prefer to use "reconfigured" and not "reconstructed." Reconstruction implies duplication, which is would factor in transgender performers. Reconfiguration allows for multiple interpretations and the acknowledgement that there is no one right to present masculinity or femininity. This also acknowledges that gender can be unstable and the outcomes less predictable.

Not surprisingly, research showed that most gender behavior supported gender stereotypes. Social learning theory is the ability to identify with one gender or the other by socialization which also acknowledges Freud's theory of same-sex identification. These are learned rather than innate behaviors. While there was substantial evidence that demonstrated that masculinity and femininity are polarized opposites, each with exclusive patterns of behavior, there was also evidence that they shared many qualities. This was particularly true for the Japanese. However, masculine and feminine traits apparent simultaneously in one body created gender confusion acknowledged most Western theorists. For the Japanese, ambiguity of gender is embedded in their spiritual, social and cultural way of thinking. Blair suggests that social gender constructs allow a comfortable structure but also opens up the discussion to not only "who we are" but also to "who-we-are-not" (R. Blair, 297). Cross-gender performance is not just the physical imitation of masculinity or femininity in the other's body, but it becomes an opportunity to apply imperfections of gender in performance.

Femininity can either be perceived as an opportunity to display an extensive array of gender technologies, or as limited, because these were often created by men to physically and emotionally control women. Femininity has been shown to be a fantasy based on a masculine construction, "The fantasy generated is a fantasy exchange between men and about women" (Phelan, 158). With this in mind, the drag queen and the onnagata performances become more interesting, here is a man performing a male construct of femininity. But neither use the performance to voice agreement or dissent.

There is no evidence to support that these performers even acknowledge this dichotomy in their performance. The drag king and the otokoyaku might be perceived as having a more uncomplicated task. Their performance was also a critique of their subject. Both take their performance to the edge of caricature. But the otokoyaku presents a heroic fantasy, male image done partially via their femininity. The drag king is less theatrical but often explores the undesirable qualities of macho western men. These are examples of the instability of femininity that is evident in all of the performances examined here. Femininity remains evident in all of these performances. On the other hand, while masculinity is considered more stable and highly valued, the performers chose not to adhere to stable models of maleness. The performers sought not only to authentically imitate masculinity and femininity, but often chose technologies of gender that deviated from the authentic. These deviations are what set these particular performances apart from other cross-gender performances and demonstrate how they enlarge the discourse of cross-gender performance.

Typically an actor “constructs” or builds his or her character based on information from the script and the accepted conventions of male or female behavior. This is achieved through a series of deliberate choices including posture, movement, voice, costume, makeup and hair. The cross-gender performer, however, must physically dismantle his or her primary gender in readiness for assumption of the new gender. This is neither a linear or sequential process. Deconstruction happens prior to and during the reconfiguring of gender in performance. If gender is one way to assign meaning, value,

and prestige to individuals in a society, then this is also present in these performances. The otokoyaku conveys an attitude of super-masculinity (in Dreamgirls, one otokoyaku dismissively pushes his lover away and later proceeds to maul/fondle her) but by employing those hyper-feminine traits previously mentioned. But the drag queen reverses his status by taking on feminine technologies of physical constraint such as high heels, nylon stockings, heavy make-up, tight fitting gowns, and restrictive undergarments. If gender both hides and reveals, the methods applied can become highly transformative for the performer. The drag queen, however, employs technologies liable to reveal more than conceal and therefore create obstructions to the performance. Maleness is apt to be exposed. These gender scripts that men and women fulfill in life, adjusting their behavior accordingly are no different for cross-gender performers. Yet performance allows for deviation from social codes of behavior and this is exploited by the impersonators.

The reliance on the remnants of femininity in the otokoyaku and drag king performances are examples of the disorder evident. As I said earlier, the otokoyaku employs make-up choices that are decided feminine (heavy eye make-up and bold red lips) while the drag king creates disorder with a plausible physical masculinity but no attempt to recreate the believable male voice. Cultural influences affect some gender choices. For example, the otokoyaku avoid using facial hair while the drag king relies on that in presenting maleness. Facial hair is not a major indicator of maleness in the Japanese culture so it enables the otokoyaku to make different choices in their

impersonation of western males and allows for femininity to be revealed. While the application of facial hair is one key element of the drag king masculine persona, she will attempt to replicate the male body. While the trousers of the otokoyaku costume do not have a fly, the drag king often uses dildoes and other “props” to create a facsimile of male sexual organs. Both drag king performer and spectator seem to require some representation of this part of the male body, which is an emblem of power over women. This also creates sexual tension in the performance that is quite different than the eroticism of the otokoyaku. The drag king teases her audiences with a provisional masculinity that mocks their audience but simultaneously creates desire for something that they may not want. The otokoyaku satisfies the fans by flirting and singing to individual audience members during parts of the performance in which the house lights are raised and the performers can see individual audience members. Both use fantasy to lure their spectators into their world.

Performance, as has been shown, allows gender to be bent, twisted, and reimagined. Cross-gender performances reveal an overwhelming “fantasy of dispossession” (Halberstam, 102), that acknowledges how the performers own lack of authentic femininity or masculinity, is used in their transformations. These are traits that normally are concealed, sometimes with great effort. But in cross-gender performance the feminine man and the masculine women is able to complete the transformation without reprisal from a society in which adherence to masculine and feminine constructs is required. This is evident with the exception of some drag queen performers, who

appear thoroughly masculine off stage. Through performance we can study ourselves in a mirror that reflects a recognizable gender image but when considering cross-gender performers, a fractured image representing a multiplicity of desires.

The differences in performance motives are culturally specific. For the Japanese cross-gender performers, their feelings of *akogare* meaning yearning or longing (Buruma, 121; Singer, 179) seem to reveal hidden yearnings of a different world. Onnagata, Tamasaburo also uses that word when asked why he chose to be an onnagata, “Because I longed for a world of beauty beyond my reach” (Kerr, 62). Buruma recounts that, “I once asked a Takarazuka actress what had attracted her to this type of theatre. *Akogare*, she replied” (121). Western performances are far more pragmatic, according to drag king, Dred, “I’m not butch of femme, just whatever I feel right then. I do have a lot of masculine energy, but I like people knowing I am a woman in drag” (Halberstam, 263). There is less a sense of “losing themselves” in the performance and more about finding an essential element of their nature. Western drag becomes less a fantasy and more a sense of a new life being lived through impersonation. Sabrina in *The Queen*, when asked about his life before becoming a drag queen, “Yeah but what was your name before? And the Queen will look you straight in the eye and say ‘There was no before.’” The disownment of their own gender identity is a powerful statement on the commitment to their new gender. Gay and lesbian politics can not be ignored in western drag performance and seems to be one motive behind the hyper-femininity of the drag queen and the hyper-masculinity of the drag king. The drag performances examined here are

often relegated to the fringes of performance. This is a contrast to the lack of these kind of politics in Japanese theatre, and the mainstream popularity of the performances.

The research showed that these performances seem to reveal more about the constructions of femininity than masculinity. Perhaps it is the dominating male power structures that often suppress women or seek to regulate the unruliness of femininity. It may also be a consequence of the cultural practice of watching women's bodies. Women have been on stage all of their lives and have learned to live within that structure. The struggle evident in cross-gender performers is seen in the external persona but is influenced by the internal conflict. This revolves around the idea that women (in the Bible, created from the rib of a man) are "*anima muliebris in virili corpore inclusa*" – their souls trapped in a man's body. This is echoed by Jackie Beat, a drag king, "Maybe I got a man trapped inside of me" (God Shave the Queen). But the performances never focus on this tension. It is more the tension evident in transgendered persons. The otokoyaku does not have the same struggle. That doesn't mean that there is not a political stance evident in her performance. The redefining of masculinity, which is not just a collection of specific traits is deconstructed and redefined by the performer's bold new rules. There is a confidence and authority in the otokoyaku which is not as evident in drag performances. Jennifer Robertson offers this anecdotal evidence, "I couldn't help but stare – especially at the otokoyaku, who, in spite of the unreal swaggering figures they depicted, seemed to relish a kind of gender freedom I had not often witnessed in Japan" (Thrupkaew, 1). Authority is also projected by the drag king, who is free from

male control or direction. The otokoyaku and the drag king illustrate how women have been able to play with their image within the cross-gender performance, within a male power system and outside of it. These impersonators of men are temporarily liberated from having to continue impersonating a woman. In fact, the hyper-femininity of the musumeyaku is less convincing in her “impersonation” of a woman than the otokoyaku is as a man. This freedom from social constructs is evident in their performances, while the onnagata and the drag queen seem tied down to archaic models of femininity. If we use Zeami’s model introduced on page 70, the onnagata and the drag queen limit their performance to imitation, a faithful reproduction of human characteristics. The stylized femininity of the onnagata is performed with a sense of respect and admiration for the subject. On the other hand, the otokoyaku and the drag king venture into Zeami’s definition of “becoming” which is assimilation into the character. These performers are in possession of the man but the female impersonators seem to merely reflect their subject. In the Japanese comic performances of Taishu Engeki (poor man’s Kabuki) female fans will often throw out a long streamer to their favorite onnagata, who holds one end while the fan clings to the other (Ivey, 227). This need to connect, woman to woman, woman to man is also reflected in the many otokoyaku fans that wait patiently after each performance with gifts for their favorite stars. These cross-gender performers are courted as if they were women and men and by the transformation of gender, they have convinced themselves and their audience that they are indeed “the real thing.”

There are many areas still to be explored. A thoroughly researched and detailed examination of the methods and history of the Kabuki onnagata and the Takarazuka otokoyaku is needed. There is an amazing tradition of cross-gender performance in much of Japanese theatre that is also not well-documented in English. With the exception of translations of Zeami's systems of acting and some material translated of Kabuki acting methods, there is little detailed information about the complexities of Kabuki acting aesthetics. There is even less information on Takarazuka, which may change given the increasing popularity of the Revue outside of Japan. The lack of scholarly research on drag and other cross-gender performances is evident. Within western discourse there are many areas of cross-gender performance introduced in this thesis that require more investigation by way of the performances themselves.

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