論文

Gender and Body Construction in Edo Period *Kabuki*

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(Sugi Kuhê's [1] advice to Sakata Tôjûrô [2])

There was a famous *kashagata* named Sugi Kuhê. Tôjûrô, when he had turned twenty, went to Kuhê and told him he wanted to study how to act. Kuhê replied, "Since I am a *kashagata*, I have done much imitating of women. You are a *tachiyaku*,[3] so you must imitate men. When one considers present-day *tachiyaku* actors, there do not seem to be many men among them. Nevertheless they are not *onnagata* and there is no reason at all for their lack of masculinity. You go and study how to imitate men!" Tôjûrô said that he followed this advice and learned something of the actor's art. Shortly after the above conversation took place, Kuhê was praised as a master actor unlikely to be equalled in the Three Cities.[4]

This study offers a general view on the processes and mechanisms of gender and body construction in *kabuki* theatre during the early modern period: a topic not thoroughly explored yet. The paper consists of three parts. The first one poses the main research questions and delineates the theoretical framework of the present discussion. The second part argues that *kabuki* was a main site for production of gender in premodern Japan and roughly defines three periods in this process: formative, mature and modern.[5] The third part outlines the specifics of gender construction in Edo period *kabuki*, which, as the Edo urban popular culture per se, had two sides: traditional and carnivalesque.

This article is largely theoretical. Its aim is to contend that *kabuki* is essential for understanding gender construction in premodern Japan and to develop an approach to analysis of *kabuki* from the perspective of contemporary gender, body and performance theories. The topic of gender construction in *kabuki* itself is vast and could not be exhausted in a single paper. This is just the first step of a more detailed study of the ideas introduced herein.

The underlying premise of this study is that the presentation and representation of the body is central to all cultural processes and that performance is central to the formation of culture. The paper looks at *kabuki* as a multi-pronged art in early modern Japan: text, body, image, production, and performance, and searches for answers to the following questions:

- How do cultural ideologies in society shape theatrical performance to create and enforce certain meanings? What power do those produced meanings serve in terms of gender?
- How were the notions of femininity and masculinity and of the female and male body constructed on the stage of *kabuki*?
- What part did *kabuki* play in consolidating or transforming Tokugawa gender hierarchies and norms?
- Were there any significant changes in the representation of gender and the body in *kabuki* culture[6] during the course of the Edo and early Meiji periods and if yes, what are their implications for the

general picture of gender construction in Japan's changing society?

First, briefly outlined are the contemporary conceptualisations of the body, power, gender, and performance that provide the theoretical approach to the present discussion. It is based on the modern understandings of the body not as a purely biological form but as a pre-eminently socio-cultural construct[7] and of power relations in society not as a visibly repressive process but as subtle pervasive mechanisms of both discipline and resistance, which are manifested most concretely at the level of the body.[8] It is grounded as well on a perception of theatre not as a "mirror of reality" for that implies "passivity and non-involvement,"[9] but as a representation underlain by power structures, an active ideological force for production of cultural meanings, especially in terms of gender. Like the body, the categories of gender, sex and eroticism are not seen as innate but as constructs formed to support or subvert the structure of the dominant cultural ideology.

Modern theories no longer regard the body as natural and ahistorical, a raw material to be further polished by culture and civilised but rather as "a political, social, and cultural object par excellence," interwoven with systems of meanings and representations, "bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power."[10] Emphasised is the symbolic significance of the body, its importance in metaphorical discourse, its use as a medium of both social control and resistance. Foucault has been the most influential with his conceptualisations of the body as a primary site of contestation in a series of political, sexual, economic and intellectual struggles, as a surface for the operation of different forms of power. In his understanding, on which this paper is grounded, power is not a possession of individuals nor does it demonstrate itself only under the oppressor/oppressed model. Rather, power presents a dynamic network of subtle, elusive forms of control, normalisation, and of resistance as part of everyday practices or cultural representation. Foucault linked the notions of body, power, knowledge and sexuality, exploring the way in which bodies "are arbitrarily or violently constructed in order to legitimate regimes of domination,"[11] and also to destabilise them, as I seek to explore critically in the present discussion of gender and body construction in *kabuki*.

Two main concepts of the body are of particular significance for the topic examined herein. The first one pertains to the body as a surface for multiple power discourses and "the focal point for struggles over the shape of power;"[12] the second one concerns the body as a "surface of social incision,"[13] an "inscribed surface of events."[14] These two notions are crucial to the understanding that the represented onstage body can be perceived as a locus of struggle for power in society. Simplistically put, in terms of gender, for instance, women ritually lost this struggle over their own corporeal surface by being excluded from the performative space of the classical theatres and replaced by male actors. The two notions can be applied further to an analysis of the way in which the body, more the female than the male one, was symbolically disciplined on the stage of *kabuki*, transformed into a "docile"[15] body and inscribed with the cultural and gender norms of androcentric samurai society. Simultaneously, the focus on the body in *kabuki* and, particularly, its representation as erotic and defiant, subverted the dominant ideology. Consequently, I look at the construction of the body in *kabuki* as "a text which could be read as a cultural statement about gender/ power relations,"[16] a central object through which those relations are both formulated and resisted.

Next, I outline in brief major feminist performance theories as they give important insight into the mechanisms of cultural representation whereby gender has been constructed on the theatre stage. Feminist performance criticism is a relatively recent phenomenon.[17] It views theatre as a "site of representation, which has historically outlawed or silenced women within its frame"[18] and claims that "the address of the traditional representational theatre apparatus constitutes the subjectivity of male spectators and leaves women unarticulated within its discourse."[19] It also argues that "the female body is imaged within representation only as the site of male desire" and imagination, so woman exists solely "as a representation of her own marginality

from discourse."[20] The issue of women's exclusion from male discourse and the representations in which it is embodied have been generally approached in three different ways by contemporary feminist thought following the three divergent ideologies: liberal, cultural or radical, and materialist feminism.[21] The first one is based on liberal humanism and it maintains that people "should receive equal consideration with no discrimination on the basis of sex."[22] It regards theatre as a universal form of communication and fights mainly for "female visibility" in performance space. For this reason, it has been criticised by other feminists for simply subsuming "the female gender into the (male) generic, or universal, category."[23] On the contrary, the radical or cultural feminist approach reifies sexual difference between genders, celebrates woman's nature and supremacy and accepts theatre "as a mimesis that validates women's identities."[24] In its search for a reversal of gender hierarchy by theorising female biology and values as superior to male ones, cultural feminism makes an active use of empowered feminine archetypes, of women's eroticism and female nudity. While liberal feminism attempts to absorb "women into the male universal" and cultural feminism to overturn "the balance of power in favor of female supremacy," the materialist approach "frames the debate over gender in more gender-neutral terms." It "deconstructs the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations"[25] and as such also sheds light on the mechanisms whereby notions of male gender have been constructed. It could be useful, for instance, for analysing the way in which the urban commoner culture produced through the stage of *kabuki* its definitions of manhood in close relation to the domineering samurai perception of masculinity.

The materialist feminist performance theory[26] explores the ideological uses of performative space and "its implication in structures of power and authority."[27] This critical approach is based on the understanding that representation or "cultural production," as it is also defined, in all its forms such as theatre, performance, dance, visual art, or film, and so on, functions as an active ideological means of producing cultural meanings and preserving the established social and gender arrangements. Michelle Barrett, for instance, defines the relationship between ideology and representation is the following way:

> Ideology is a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed. Since meaning is negotiated primarily through means of communication and signification, it is possible to suggest that cultural production provides an important site for the construction of ideological processes [gender being one of them]⋯ Literature (read "theatre"), for instance can be usefully analysed as a paradigmatic case of ideology in particular social formation.[28]

Ideology, thus, is not visible and imposed from above but "a complex and contradictory system of representations through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live."[29] In other words, in the view of materialist feminist criticism, all cultural products have an implicit ideological nature. Thus, theatre is no longer seen as a "mirror of reality" but as a mechanism for the creation of ideologically based meanings "that have very specific, material consequences,"[30] especially in terms of gender construction. By analysing gender relations as represented in performative space we can trace the way in which societies generate and enforce standards for gendered behaviour that must be followed by their members: a phenomenon particularly well illustrated by *kabuki*. Materialist feminist discourse views the notions of both gender and sex as constructs "enculturated" and "performed,"[31] with a main function to perpetuate the dominant androcentric structure. Similarly, sexuality and the female and the male body are also viewed as socio-cultural constructions.

It is through this theoretical prism that I analyse construction of gender and the body in *kabuki* in the context of Tokugawa Japan. I explore *kabuki* both as an active ideological means of preserving the established

social and gender arrangements and also as an anti-establishment textuality, a site of commoner culture resistance to official samurai doctrine. Simultaneously, I try to avoid an approach that would overemphasise *kabuki* as only ideological by nature. We should not forget that *kabuki* was meant to entertain, it was fun and fantasy. And all these ideological mechanisms I discuss herein were subtle and implicit, which makes them an even more interesting and challenging subject of exploration.

I look at *kabuki* as a main site for production of gender throughout the early modern period from two perspectives. Firstly, I explore the central role which *kabuki* played in formulating the notions of gender in the context of the emerging commoner urban culture, from the end of the sixteenth, throughout the seventeenth century and up until the end of the Kyôhô era (1716-1735). This was the time when the urban cultural code was being articulated. Borrowing the ideas of *sekai* and *shukô*,[32] I argue that, during this formative epoch, *kabuki* produced what I want to consider a 'sekai' of gender representations that was related to the conventions of the core gender discourse of townsmen culture. The formation process found expression in the development of the main role types (*yakugara*) and acting styles (*kata*): *aragoto, wagoto,* and *onnagata*.[33] It accounts for the actors' role specialisation, for example, since as the patterns had not yet been firmly established, there was still a necessity for different actors to play the different roles. By the beginning of the 1680s, the basic *yakugara* were created: male roles (*tachiyaku*),[34] female roles (*onnagata*)[35] and villains (*katakiyaku*).[36] The evolvement of *kabuki* into a full-fledged dramatic art during the Genroku era gave birth to the various subdivisions of these three major types. For example, in *jidaimono (*period plays) the *tachiyaku* incorporated *aragotoshi*[37](male actor performing in bravura style) and *wakashûgata (*youth role), in *wagoto*[38] pieces: *nimaime (*romantic lead), *wagotoshi (*male actor specialised in gentle, refined manner), *pintokona (*soft, somewhat effeminate lead) and *shimbôtachiyaku (*silent sufferer lead). The *katakiyaku* included *jitsuaku (*power-seeking villain) and *kugeaku* (wicked nobleman). The *onnagata* included *keisei (*high-ranking courtesan), *akahime* (red princess), *musume* (young girl), *sewanyôbô* (commoner's wife), *bukenyôbô* (samurai's wife), *katahazushi* (woman of a high-ranking samurai household), and so on. In summary, a variety of role types were created during this period and, thus, different presentations of masculinity and femininity were produced on the stage. Some of them had their 'reflections' in the developing urban society, others were a mere theatrical fantasy: *aragoto* and *akahime* being the most conspicuous examples.

Accordingly, leading actors of the époque articulated the first narratives to identify and explain the newly founded acting styles. Similar to earlier writings on *Nô* theatre by Zeami, although not so numerous and conscientiously self-legitimising, some of these 'texts' functioned at the outset as secret teachings in the art of *kabuki* and were published in the form of a compilation called "Actors' Analects" *(Yakusha rongo)* much later, in 1776, when the conventions has already been sufficiently well established.[39] Particularly painstaking efforts were made by the female impersonators to create the discourse on their performance of woman-likeness in order to achieve 'verisimilitude' and 'authenticity' onstage. In what follows, I discuss in brief this process as it presents a model of producing a discourse both on art and on female gender construction.[40]

Most instrumental in defining the gender ideology of *onnagata* was Yoshizawa Ayame I (1673-1729), praised as the first true *onnagata*, whose "talks" *geidan* on female role acting, *Ayamegusa* ("Words of Ayame"),[41] were allegedly recorded by Fukuoka Yagoshirô (active fl. 1700-1730), who himself was an actor, but interestingly, of male roles and a playwright. The two main injunctions given by Ayame are that an *onnagata* should at all times make a point of living and behaving like a woman offstage, and must never play both female and male roles onstage.[42] Yoshizawa is known to have unsuccessfully[43] attempted to switch from female to male roles, an act significantly accompanied by a respective change of his stage name from the somewhat effeminate, *Ayame*, written with hiragana,[44] which suggested multiple eroticised meanings[45] to the more masculine one *Gonshichi*, which is a compound of the Chinese characters for "power, authority" *gon* 権 [46] and "seven" *shichi* 七 . In Ayame's

vision, save the changes of stage name[47] and bodily comportment, a thorough psychological transformation from man to woman on the part of the female impersonator is indispensable both for the plausibility of 'her' own acting and for the overall success of the entire spectacle, as the male role actor will be incapable to perform in a truly credible way, if he cannot believe "in the total femininity" of his partner.[48] Intriguingly, the stage performance of *tachiyaku*'s 'natural'[49] masculinity is deemed here as dependent on *onnagata*'s convincing representation of a culturally predetermined notion of femininity. Ayame also postulated that an *onnagata* "should make it a principle not to depart from the conduct of a virtuous woman,"[50] the highest ranking courtesan *keisei* being the ultimate model for desired femininity, an embodiment of softness, sophisticated charm and decorum. This conflating of the 'true' *onnagata* with a "virtuous woman" functioned in two ways. On the one hand, Yoshizawa aspired to elevate and legitimise the emerging art of female impersonation in *kabuki*. His purpose was to disassociate *onnagata* from the prevailing at the time perception of the female role performers as prostitutes, a practice created by *onna* and *wakashû kabuki*. For this reason he advised his young actors: "However popular a play might promise to be, he [the *onnagata*] should refuse to take part in it," if the role is not compatible with "the conduct of a virtuous woman."[51] On the other hand, by instructing *onnagata* to follow "the [moral] standards of a real woman,"[52] Ayame was actively participating in the construction of discourse on female gender and body which was an ongoing process in the Tokugawa society of that time.

The ideology of female impersonation was further developed in *Onnagata hiden* ("Secrets of the Onnagata") authored by another famous female role actor, Segawa Kikunojô I (1693-1749), a younger contemporary of Ayame. This narrative presents the practical aspects of an *onnagata*'s performance, describing in detail acting techniques related to the corporeal and facial construction, to the manipulation of gestures, costumes and props, and to the specific representation of different role types. While reiterating Ayame's obsession with the idea that a female impersonator must strive to be perceived by the audience solely as a 'woman,' Kikunojô I focuses not so much on *onnagata*'s internalising of 'female naturalness' but on the external mechanisms whereby an actor can skillfully manipulate both the female and male spectators' gaze and sentiments. One of Kikunojô's advices concerns the careful cultivation of patrons as a means to maintain and reinforce the fiction of *onnagata*'s 'womanliness' on and off stage:

> It is bad for an *onnagata* to have female fans. It would be inconvenient if one wanted to marry him. He should have many male fans who wish there were a woman like him. If he is going to receive female support, he should work to get them to admire the kinds of hair ornaments, combs, headdresses, and so forth, that he likes and that palace maids, prostitutes, and city girls will emulate. He should be setting his sights on making fans of those women who see in him a woman like themselves.[53]

In addition to a careful crafting of the discourse on *onnagata* as a 'true' woman, there are further implications for the construction of female gender in this advice. First, there is a performance of femaleness contradictorily presented, on the one hand, as 'natural' to "those women who see in him a woman like themselves" and at the same time constructed as fictional for the "many male fans who wish there were a woman like him." This paradox lies in the basis of the conception of *onnagata* as a symbol of 'ideal' femininity, which actual women were encouraged to emulate but, paradoxically, never considered capable to attain in reality.[54] Kikunojô's statement also gives us insight into the nuances of spectators' response to the gender of *onnagata*. The male reception of an *onnagata*'s 'femininity' is identified as more or less unambiguous, for, as expectedly, men would not set out to imitate it. They simply desire the female impersonator whose acting, however, should be convincing enough so men would desire 'him' as a woman not as *wakashû*, which seems to be a very important point in the formulation of *onnagata* discourse. Female audience reaction is presented as more complex. It is

clear that there were women spectators who showed sexual interest in *onnagata* and Kikunojô regards this kind of fan as problematic.[55] Instead, he recommends a cultivation of female aficionados who could be easily manipulated to '<u>buy</u>' this constructed notion of femaleness, both in the sense to believe in and identify with it, and to literally purchase the commodities that comprise its external decoration: "hair ornaments, combs, headdresses and so forth."[56] This target group is symbolised by a class of women such as "palace maids, prostitutes, and city girls," who are supposedly lacking in sophisticated education and elevated status and, therefore, readily prone to emulate. It could be argued that, in the Kikunojô's *geidan*, a shift in the power relations between actors and audience is discernible. The former did not need to behave any longer as 'natural' women in order to convince the latter in the verisimilitude of their art. If an *onnagata* actor has perfected the details of 'his' art, he would be able to skillfully influence his audience's perceptions and tastes. There is already a shift of emphasis from 'being a female' to 'playing a female,' which is an early expression of the play with gender constructs that would become a major *kabuki* feature in the periods to follow.

Nonetheless, in an early effort to achieve credibility and define their art, both Ayame and Kikunojô were very persistent in fixing the gender of *onnagata* strictly and solely to the female pole of the binary opposition.[57] In this formative phase of *kabuki*'s female impersonation, at least the verbal discourse did not allow for any gender blending, perhaps as a way to uphold its self-identity against the actual situation in a society characterised by fascination with androgyny and boy-prostitutes. The visual representation of *onnagata* during this early era reveals its continuing close association with *nanshoku* aesthetics, from which it originated and which remained present in *onnagata*'s performance of femininity, bringing about the peculiar eroticism of 'women' in kabuki.[58]

During this formative period, a set of key differences in gender construction were established: first, between the two cultural centres, Kamigata (Osaka and Kyoto) and Edo, and, second, between the two major forms of popular theatre – *kabuki* and *jôruri*. *Kabuki* developed from within a long tradition of popular female dance performances. It emerged in the old capital of Kyoto and as such was a product of the cultural ideology of Kamigata, itself a complex symbiosis of the long medieval tradition of storytelling and popular entertainment, the emerging merchant class culture and the classical aristocratic tradition. The original representation of gender and the body in *kabuki* reflects the pervading atmosphere of Kamigata: effeminate, soft, and sophisticated, its fascination with the brothel culture and the erotic. The basic type of skits performed in early *kabuki* and believed to have been set by Okuni herself, was the so-called *keiseikai*, "buying a courtesan." It provided "one of the most important patterns for plays during the golden age of Genroku."[59] Accordingly, the very first gender role types that were developed onstage and which have remained persistent throughout the history of *kabuki* were those of the courtesan and the dallying dandy, the gay quarter hallmarks. At the very outset Kamigata produced the majority of the female impersonators. At the same time the male role actors were sometimes criticised of being deficient in masculinity, as the words of Kuhê demonstrate:

> When one considers present-day *tachiyaku* actors, there do not seem to be many men among them. Nevertheless they are not *onnagata* and there is no reason at all for their lack of masculinity.[60]

To the 'feminisation' of Kamigata *kabuki*, the rising samurai culture of Edo added its substantial share of vigorous masculinity and hence the core *sekai* of gender representations in early *kabuki* was shaped. Central role in the formative process played leading male-role actors such as Ichikawa Danjûrô I (1660-1704) and Nakamura Shichisaburô I (1662-1708) in Edo, and Sakata Tôjûrô I (1647-1709) in Kyoto, and playwrights like Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724). The distinct cultural ideologies of Kamigata and Edo societies shaped *kabuki* performance to produce and reinforce different meanings in regard to the representation of male gender

and body. These different meanings were first articulated by Sakata Tôjûrô I and Ichikawa Danjûrô I who established, respectively in Kamigata and Edo, the two main styles of performing masculinity: *wagoto* ("soft, gentle business", comic-erotic acting manner, representing an effeminate and romantic lover) and *aragoto* ("rough business", vigorously masculine, bravura acting style). Nonetheless, although the difference in gender construction between Edo and Kamigata has been carefully preserved until modern times, it would be too simplistic to over accentuate it. Nakamura Shichisaburô I, for instance, became famous in Edo as actor of *nimaime*, a romantic male lead. The practice of actors from Edo to perform in Kamigata and visa versa was already common in this early period and contributed to the exchange of ideas and to the merging of acting techniques. Shichisaburô I was one of the first actors who gained fame both in Kyoto and Edo and thus "bridged the regional performance biases" between the two cities.[61] In 1694, Danjûrô I performed in Kyoto with success roles in *aragoto* style such as the wicked priest Narukami. Still, the *nimaime* actor Shichisaburô became more popular in Kamigata than his rival Danjûrô, especially with his interpretation of the semi-legendary rônin, Nagoya Sanza, as a samurai dandy from Edo.[62] Similarly, in this formative period, a variation in gender construction was established between the two main genres of popular theatre – *kabuki*, with its emphasis on the actor and the body, on dance, eroticism and 'contemporary' life, and *ningyô jôruri*, the puppet theatre focused on text and music, grounded in the medieval narrative storytelling practices and, hence, expressing more traditional values. Both forms, however, began to influence each other from the very beginning. Initially, Chikamatsu introduced the pleasure quarter theme into *jôruri* from *kabuki*, writing his famous *shinjûmono*.[63] A decade or so later *kabuki* commenced to borrow intensely from the puppet theatre. A seminal adaptation was also Chikamatsu's play: in May 1717, his masterpiece *Kokusen'ya kassen* ("The Battles of Coxinga," originally written in 1715 for *jôruri*) was produced simultaneously in the three Edo *kabuki* theatres - Nakamura-za, Ichimura-za and Morita-za. The main male character of this play, Watônai, is an *aragoto* figure, of the scale of and even surpassing exemplary *aragoto* characters in *kabuki* such as Narukami and Soga Gorô that, in turn, were created by Danjûrô I on the basis of earlier puppet plays about Sakata Kimpira, a violent superhero.[64]

In conclusion, during this early period a set of conventions in the representation of femininity and masculinity was created on the stage of *kabuki*. The foundation of this *sekai* was formed to a great extent by the differences in gender construction between Kamigata and Edo *kabuki*, produced by the distinct cultures in these two areas, as well as between *kabuki* and *jôruri*. Insightful for deconstructing the mechanisms of gender production in that époque would be a detailed exploration of the following questions: What play types were performed with biggest success and what were their gender implications? Were these plays revived afterwards? What acting and plot elements were retained in the repertory and 'played with' in later plays? Who were the most popular stage characters? How were the actors depicted in *ukiyo-e* and in what way were they evaluated in the actors' critique books, *yakusha hyôbanki*?

The second perspective from which the construction of gender and the body can be looked at applies to what has been defined as "mature *kabuki*", mainly from the 18th century onwards. Once a core of gender concepts had been sufficiently well established, *kabuki* began to play with them, which, however, does not mean that there was no play with gender constructs during what I have defined as formative period. Cross-dressing, for instance, was a major mechanism for construction of meaning in *kabuki* from its outset. Depictions of Okuni *kabuki* show women clad like men and men clothed like women. Okuni and *onna kabuki* featured females performing emphatically erotic dances, disguised like *kabukimono,* a slang term for the popular male type of the day, men who dressed too conspicuously or over-smartly, or who resorted to extraordinary acts or behaviour. Cross-dressing remained *kabuki*'s trade mark throughout the centuries as it evolved in the art of the female impersonation. What I want to explain, however, is a more complex play with representations of femininity and masculinity in the mature *kabuki*, i.e. mechanisms of innovations, *shukô*, that were perpetually invented in

order to create new twists of a conventionalised *sekai* of gender constructs. In my view, these mechanisms had both artistic implications, for they functioned as dramaturgic devices designed to generate novelty and titillate audiences' interest,[65] and important gender implications, for the blurring distinction between femininity and masculinity, for instance. In other words, the dynamics of gender ideology in the changing Tokugawa society produced reformulations of gender and body construction in *kabuki*. The mechanisms of innovation (*shukô*) included, for example, the increasing practice one actor to play multiple role-types;[66] *tachiyaku* to act in female roles; male actors to perform dance pieces;[67] the development of new *yakugara*;[68] and the creation of versions of the great male roles for *onnagata* such as *Onna Narukami* and *Onna Shibaraku*, to name just a few.

Finally, a third phase in the construction of gender in *kabuki* could be identified in the late Edo and early Meiji periods. This phase was marked, on the one hand, by deconstruction of the conventionalised gender perceptions as seen in the plays of Kawatake Mokuami (1816-1893), which expressed the general decadence of the *bakumatsu* époque. On the other hand, Meiji *kabuki* witnessed a denial of its inherent eroticism under the influence of Western sexological discourse and Japan's efforts for 'modernisation.' Simultaneously, there was a 'return' to, and reinforcement of, traditional notions of gender and, particularly, of 'ideal' femininity, as part of the increasing Japanese endeavours to define and preserve their national identity 'threatened' by the growing westernisation of the country. This epoch is very important for the consolidation of *kabuki*'s modern repertoire. There has been little discussion about the possible changes or, rather, about the lack of significant changes in the representation of femininity and masculinity in productions from that period. Although *kabuki* was a major target of the theatre reforms during the Meiji era, all in all, it remained a true product of the popular cultural ideology of the time that itself was slow to change.

Next, I outline in more detail the specifics of gender construction in *kabuki*, which, as the urban culture per se, had two sides: traditional and carnivalesque. If viewed from a narrow perspective, *kabuki* remained within, and even reinforced, a conventional phallogocentric representation of female and male gender as diametrically opposite, especially by constructing 'ideals' of femininity and masculinity through the *yakugara* of *akahime* (red princess) and *keisei (*high-ranking courtesan), on the one hand, and of the *aragoto* hero, on the other. The polarisation is literally visible at the level of the performance of the body, which exemplifies in a crystallised manner "the Japanese gendered body"[69] by presenting females as self-regulating, self-censored, fragile, soft and immobile, and men as dynamic and mobile. The costumes and bodily comportment of the *aragoto* hero as embodiment of 'ultimate' masculinity and of the *akahime* and *keisei* as symbols of 'perfect' femininity strengthen further the binary opposition. *Akahime* is a role type developed in *jôruri* and *jidaimono*, an epitome of loveliness, self-restraint, self-sacrifice, chastity and, sometimes, of extreme physical frailty – all features traditionally coded desirable in a woman and highly erotic. Hatsugiku in *Ehon Taikôki* ("The Picture Book of the Taiko"), for example, cannot lift heavy objects, even a helmet, but must drag them on her sleeves, a specially developed acting technique named *nezumi-hiki* or "dragging like a rat."[70] The *yakugara* of *keisei*, the female icon of the époque and a lead character in many *sewamono*,[71] is of equally "fantastic disposition"[72] but with different sexual appeal. These two most admired female roles are performed in an exaggerated style, in multi-layered kimonos and exceptionally heavy wigs, which altogether transform the 'female' body into an immovable, emphatically frail object of representation. In contrast, the *aragoto* hero radiates extreme physical, superhuman strength; the muscular and bony structure of his face and body is conspicuously accentuated by the bold red lines of the *kumadori* make-up. His costume is voluminous, his voice - powerful and his onstage presence overwhelming. Both the *keisei* and the *aragoto* hero often need support from a stage assistant to perform their respective femininity or masculinity. Both the *akahime* and the *aragoto* hero are culturally imagined, fantastically exaggerated constructions of female and male gender.[73]

It is not only the 'ideal' female body that is performed in the self-restraint mode; on the whole, the bodily

movements of all types of female roles in *kabuki* are highly constrained. Especially the hand and arm gestures are particularly inhibited by the kimono and its exclusively long sleeves. These sleeves were seen as an extension of the hands and at the same time functioned as a means of concealing them, as well as of covering the face in a coquettish manner when needed. Therefore, the long sleeves symbolised an extremely important sign of 'femininity' and were built, for example, into different dance movements to express shyness and other 'female' emotions.[74] Further, the hand and arm gestures are additionally performed as "small and tightly controlled"[75] for, as already stated, restraint was considered the most desirable quality in an 'ideal' woman. This is how the female body is constructed by the *onnagata:*

> The shoulders droop, knees are bent to reduce height, and most noticeable of all, the walk becomes a tiny, feminine gait with knees held together and toes pointed inward. Even today, young actors … practice walking with a sheet of paper between their legs.[76]

The 'performed' in this way body posture has a completely different signification; it is as if shrinking in order to take less space while the male body is always represented on the stage of *kabuki* as expanding in the space.

There was, of course, a practical reason for representing the female body in this way. In general, men who assumed women's roles could not always build the required illusion of femaleness from their own physical body, beauty or grace. Therefore, in order to appear convincing on the stage they "must overdetermine their desired look by displaying excess markers of femininity - the more stereotyped the better."[77] Thus the excessiveness is still "within a conventional model of femininity, which is itself overdetermined." [78] In a similar way, in Kabuki, in order to represent a 'convincing' female image on the stage, *onnagata* stylised and emphasised what was culturally deemed 'female' movements and gestures, turning them into pure forms to be followed then as a model by actual women. In other words, they had to deconstruct or disembody the culturally encoded notion of femininity and the female body to its most essential traits and further underlined those in order to become an embodiment of 'real' woman, "in much the same way that puppets exaggerate human gestures to appear alive."[79]

The gender polarisation is articulated largely in *jidaimono*, whose plots are based mostly on traditional narratives of samurai epics, and reflects the subordinate position of women in the feudal military society. Tokugawa culture, particularly in the shogunal centre of power, Edo, was explicitly masculine, influenced by the *bushidô* code and valorising self-discipline, frugality, absolute loyalty, fearlessness in the face of death, etc.[80] These principles were admired and internalised by townsmen in their endeavour to be 'elevated' into the official ideology and cultural tradition and, thus, given access to knowledge and power. *Kabuki* was greatly contained within the ideological hegemony of the ruling military class both by being forcefully subjected to constant governmental restrictions and censorship, and by consciously drawing upon the authority of the cultural tradition. In fact, *kabuki* and, to an even greater extent, *jôruri*, have been instrumental in the sustaining of samurai mythology and samurai vision of masculinity. *Jidaimono* are deemed an apotheosis of feudal code, and the characters are performed within the "horizon of expectation"[81] as regard to the traditional Confucian and Buddhist perceptions of male and female gender. The portrayal of women in *kabuki* is invariably shaped by the patriarchal ideology that required from them "the three obediences": obedience, while yet unmarried, to a father; obedience, when married, to a husband and that husband's parents; and obedience, when widowed, to a son. Although undeniably men did have more power in Tokugawa Japan, nevertheless they were also oppressed because of the social expectations imposed on them by the masculine military paradigm. Samurai's accent on unconditional loyalty, spiritual strength and the absolute denial of the body are inseparable part of *kabuki*. On its stage the body, both the male and the female one, is being cut, mutilated, killed, and disemboweled, i.e. readily rejected and sacrificed through death for the sake of one's lord. From this perspective, perhaps of

importance here is not so much the polarisation of gender construction, which is not surprising in an all-male theatre and predictable in such an androcentric society, but rather the issues of status and class. For in *kabuki* both men and women of the lower social strata, with which the audience would identify, are implicitly represented as victims of the feudal system and explicitly represented as equal to and, often, even more ennobled than their 'betters.'

Concurrently, the emerging townsmen culture was highly carnivalesque and hedonistic, particularly at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century but overall throughout the entire Tokugawa period. At the dawn of the seventeenth century, Japan was unified for the first time after a century and a half of exhausting civil wars. This brought a general "explosion of lust for life and extravagance,"[82] which found expression in an emphasis on the corporeal and sexuality, in cross-dressing and cross-gender play that were the most distinctive features of early *kabuki*. Townsmen's resistance to the rigid social structure imposed by the dictatorial regime was played out within the pleasure quarters and theatre districts, on the very stage of *kabuki* – through the body – the tangible, sensual, eroticised, idolised [male] body. Being a major form of popular entertainment, *kabuki* functioned as a main site of the carnivalesque culture where the struggle for power in society was played out through the means of cultural representation. Multiple manifestations of townsmen's defiance were produced on its stage.

In terms of gender, the fluidity and ambiguity of this notion in Japanese popular culture, which "manifested little concern with the maintenance of rigid gender roles"[83] is also best demonstrated by *kabuki*. As was already asserted, a major mechanism for construing new meanings (*shukô*) with regard to both content (plots) and form (acting techniques) was the constant play with gender constructs. It was applied, in the first place, as a means of producing novel scripts by adding new twists to old narratives, by combining male and female characters from different dramatic worlds (a technique known as *naimaze*),[84] by creating 'female' versions of male roles,[85] and so forth. Secondly, gender performance is in the foundation of *kabuki* acting techniques: the so-called *kata* or, in other words, "patterns" or "forms" present a repertoire (what I have defined as *sekai*) of stylised gender markers that are culturally coded feminine or masculine. Further, an important device of *shukô*[86] is to play with, and sometimes even to parody, the conventionalised set of stylised forms. This was achieved, for example, by acting *aragoto* roles in *wagoto* style and visa versa,[87] by one actor performing multiple role types in the course of one play and thus deconstructing the 'naturalness' of the distinct *kata*, and by the frequently utilised technique of cross-dressing whereby usually a male role actor performs disguised as a 'woman.'[88] The most representative example for the ambiguity of gender and body construction in *kabuki*, however, is *onnagata*.[89] While producing the impression of 'ideal' femininity for the audience, the female impersonator inevitably retains traces of his male sex.[90] The fragility of the 'feminine' body, for instance, is paradoxically achieved by extraordinary physical effort:

> [*Onnagata*] use the muscles around the shoulder blade to pull the shoulders back and create a sloping line, which they emphasize by wearing robes slung low over the shoulders... The softness and delicacy of the actor's movements are counterbalanced by the extreme muscular tension that is necessary to maintain these positions.[91]

This body posture creates the unique gender aesthetics of *kabuki*'s female impersonators, the blending of idealized 'female' and hidden 'male' characteristics,[92] of superficial or external 'feminine' delicacy and lying behind it or internal 'masculine' strength.[93] It is because of this androgynous nature that *onnagata* was said to be more erotic than a 'real' woman for their performance underlined and elaborated the elements that men thought quintessentially 'feminine,' such as frailty, shyness, coquetry and gentleness, while retaining at the

same time "the inner steel that we traditionally (and chauvinistically) think of as masculine."[94] Due to this peculiar androgynous eroticism the female impersonation in *kabuki* has been viewed as transcending any bipolar and fixed gender roles.

Pertinent here is a brief discussion of the nature of cross-dressing as conceptualised by the feminist and deconstructivist thought, since it gives insight into the essence of *onnagata* and *kabuki*. In Judith Butler's view, cross-dressing brings forward the fundamental performativity of all gender identity and drag, in particular, "reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency."[95] Marjorie Garber similarly argues that cross-dressing draws attention to the manner in which every person is constructed within cultural paradigms.[96] Viewed from this perspective, the drag performance of *onnagata* underlines the performativity and constructivity of female gender as culturally preconditioned. Nonetheless, since these cultural paradigms have been established within the phallogocentric discourse, feminists like Butler and bell hooks perceive male appropriation of female clothing and gender as essentially misogynistic. It perpetuates and, thus, reinforces "an utterly conventional feminine appearance,"[97] because that is precisely what men select to reproduce, as is evident in *onnagata*'s representation of the female body and gender. Even so, if we put aside the question whether it is liberating or stigmatising for women, cross-dressing still undermines the rigid gender distinction. It correlates with transgression of established order and traditional hierarchies, evokes eroticism and play, and as such is a persistent part of the carnivalesque *kabuki* culture.

In this paper I have delineated a general pattern of the development and the 'nature' of gender and body construction in *kabuki* in the context of premodern urban commoner culture. I have argued that *kabuki* was a main site for performance of the notions of femininity and masculinity during the Edo period. It played a central part in consolidating Tokugawa gender notions and hierarchies, on the one hand, and in disrupting them, on the other, by constantly playing with conventionalised gender constructs and destabilising any fixed meanings. A detailed exploration of the ways in which the dynamics of gender in the changing Tokugawa society were both represented on and produced by the stage of *kabuki* could help us understand the mechanisms whereby the concepts of gender, eroticism and the body were constructed in early modern Japan. Simultaneously, it will also demonstrate the empowering nature of popular theatre as a main site for production of cultural representations with important social implications, its potential in orchestrating the construction and regulation of gender, sexuality and the body, and in literally staging the enactment of gender roles in society.

Notes

1   Kuhê was considered the founder of *kashagata*, the role type of old or middle-aged women. The term came from the technical vocabulary of the brothels. Cf. Charles J. Dunn and Torigoe Bunzô, *The Actor's Analects*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969: 166.

2   Sakata Tôjûrô I (1646 – 1709), a male-role actor in Kyoto and Ôsaka, founder of the *wagoto* style.

3   Male-role specialist.

4   Edo, Osaka and Kyoto. ITEM XLV in "Dust in the Ears," written by the playwright Kaneko Kichizaemon. In Dunn & Torigoe, 104. Emphasis added.

5   Sharp distinction between the three periods, however, would be artificial.

6   Includes all cultural production related with *kabuki*. C. Andrew Gerstle, *18th Century Japan: Culture and Society*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000.

7   As discussed in Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body," in *Up Against Foucault: Exploration of Some Tensions in Feminism*, C. Ramazanoglu, ed., London: Routledge, 1993: 179-202; Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Bodies," in Elizabeth Grosz, *Volative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Theories of Representation and Difference)*, Bloomington: Indiana University

Press, 1994: 3-24; Kathy Davis, "Embody-ing Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body," in Kathy Davis, ed., *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, London: Sage Publications, 1997: 1-19.

8　On the normalisation of and disciplinary power over the body see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, New York: Pantheon, 1978; also "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon, 1977; *Discipline and Punishment*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979; "The Subject and Power," in H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, eds., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983; Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; Kathy Davis, 1997.

9　Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991: 10. Also *Presence and Desire. Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

10　Grosz, 18-20.

11　Davis, 3. She refers to Foucault, 1978, 1979.

12　Ideas of Foucault discussed in Don Johnson, "The Body: which one? Whose?," in *The Whole Earth Review*, Summer, 1989: 6. See also Bordo, 1993.

13　An idea of Nietzsche as referred to in Elizabeth Grosz, "The Body as Inscriptive Surface," in Grosz, 1994: 138-159.

14　Michel Foucault, "Niets che, Genealogy, History," in Donald E. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. 1977: 148. As quoted in Grosz, 146.

15　Again a term of Foucault. Cf. Grosz, 1994.

16　In the words of Grosz. Ibid.

17　Dolan, 1993: 6. Dolan points out that feminist performance criticism appeared in the beginning of the 1980s. For more details on the relationship between feminist theatre and performance criticism refer to pp. 85-87.

18　Ibid., 88.

19　Dolan, 1991: 99.

20　Ibid., 99.

21　Dolan, 1991: 1-19. She admits that there are different subdivisions as socialist, spiritualist, or lesbian feminism, for example, but in her view the liberal, cultural and materialist trends are the three "most inclusive." Ibid., 3. A sharp distinction between those three trends, however, is rather artificial and arguable.

22　Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983: 355-58.

23　Dolan, 1991: 4-6.

24　Dolan, 1993: 86.

25　Dolan, 1991: 10.

26　It is based on British materialism and its focus on ideology formation in representation, and borrows as well variously from psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, Marxism, and especially the Brechtian theory. Cf. Dolan, 1993: 85-87. On the Brechtian theory, ch. 6: 99-119. More on materialist criticism in general in Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism*, London: New Left Books, 1984.

27　Dolan, 1993: 1.

28　Michelle Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, eds., *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class, and Race in Literature and Culture*, New York: Methuen, 1985: 73. As cited in Dolan, 1991: 15. Text in brackets () added by Dolan. Text in brackets [ ] added by me. Emphasis in bold added by me.

29　Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, "Towards a Materialist Feminist Criticism," in Newton & Rosenfelt, 1985: xix. This perception of ideology is very similar to Foucault's understanding of power, as was previously discussed.

30　Dolan, 1991: 2.

31　The notion of the performance of gender is central to the contemporary feminist thought. It has been conceptualised by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge, 1990; and Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

32　*Sekai* and *shukô* are the two major concepts of the theory of composition developed by *kabuki* playwrights in the late eighteenth century. *Sekai* means "world" and presents the context of some familiar narrative from the past, i.e. a well known constellation of characters and situations. *Shukô* denotes "plan, idea, contrivance, design, scheme;" applied to the plot construction in *kabuki shukô* means "innovation" or "twist." Hence, if *sekai* is the diachronic, vertical aspect of familiar worlds of subject matter, *shukô* is the synchronic, horizontal aspect of playwriting. As explained in Andrew Gerstle, "Performance Literature: the Traditional Japanese

Theatre as Model," in *Comparative Criticism*, 22 (2000): 39-62. And in James Brandon and Samuel Leiter, eds., *Kabuki Plays on Stage*. 1 vol. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2002: 365-66.

33   *Onnagata* is regarded both as a generic *yakugara* vs. *tachiyaku*, and as an acting technique, *kata*, of performing femininity.

34   The first male role type was that of the urban dandy, of samurai or merchant status, dallying with a courtesan.

35   The first female role type was that of the courtesan.

36   Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985: 24, 38. Gunji points out that *katakiyaku* developed later than the former two, when the plots became more complicated and based on an opposition between good and evil. Gunji identifies as the very first three role types: *tachiyaku (*the dandy), *onnagata (*the courtesan) and *dôke (*a comic role, the master of the house).

37   The expression *aragoto* is an abbreviation of *aramushagoto*, which means literally "the reckless warrior matter." This is a bombastic style exaggerating all the aspects of the role (acting, wig, make-up: *kumadori*, costumes, dialogues, oversized swords) to portray valiant warriors, fierce gods or demons. This style was created in Edo by Ichikawa Danjûrô I and is considered a family art for this line of actors. It is the opposite style of the soft *wagoto* created by Sakata Tôjûrô I in Kamigata.

38   The "gentle style." The typical *wagoto* hero is a young, soft, romantic, refined gallant, the heir of a rich family of merchants and deeply in love with the most beautiful courtesan of the Ôsaka pleasure quarter. He has spent all the family fortune in the pleasure quarter or does not have enough money to buy back the contract of his lover. At the end of the play, he often has to run away with his beloved and commit double suicide in order to live happy together in the afterlife. Or he is pardoned by his parents who ransom his lover and both live happily ever after. The speech and gestures in *wagoto* are considered more 'realistic' and delicate than in the *aragoto* style. Two famous *wagoto* roles are Fujiya Izaemon and Hiranoya Tokubei in the plays *Kuruwa Bunshô* and *Sonezaki Shinjû*.

39   Lim Beng Choo identifies a similar development in the treatise writing on Nô drama. Cf. Lim Beng Choo, "They Came to Party: an Examination of the Social Status of the Medieval Nô Theatre," in *Japan Forum*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2004: 123.

40   For exhaustive analyses of *onnagata* gender construction see Katherine Mezur, *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Female-likeness*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, and Maki Morinaga, "The Gender of Onnagata As the Imitating Imitated: Its Historicity, Performativity, and Involvement in the Circulation of Femininity," in *Positions: East Asia cultures critique*, 10.2 (2002): 245-284. Both authors apply postmodern gender theory to the analyses of female impersonation in *kabuki* and offer interesting although differing perspectives. A more detailed discussion of the two works would shift the focus of this paper too much in the direction of *onnagata* and requires a separate article, therefore it could not be included herein.

41   Included in Dunn and Torigoe.

42   Ibid., 49-67.

43   There exists, however, another contemporary comment, in a critique written in 1704, that declares Ayame as so good both in male and female roles that one cannot understand "what is under his loincloth!" As cited in G. P. Leupp, *Male Colors: the Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995: 177. Nonetheless, perhaps this critique meant simply to praise the actor, as Ayame himself gave up playing male roles and advised *onnagata* to stick to female parts.

44   Associated traditionally with the feminine mode of writing.

45   Ayame means both "a design, pattern" and "an iris," flower that has strong connotations with the *nanshoku* discourse. In addition *me* is a reading of the character for "woman" *onna*.

46   Cf. Andrew Nelson, *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962: 511.

47   Ayame advised another female role actor, Karyû to change the characters of his name from "perfumed dragon" 香竜 to "song stream" 歌流 as the character "dragon" is "too strong for the name of an *onnagata*." Cf. Dunn and Torigoe, 50.

48   Samuel Leiter, *Frozen Moments: Writings on Kabuki, 1966-2001*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2002: 153.

49   In quote to underline the constructed nature of masculinity.

50   Dunn and Torigoe, 56.

51   Ibid.

52   Ibid.

53   Suwa Haruo, *Kabuki no densho*, Tokyo: Senninsha, 1979: 36, as translated in Leiter, 153.

54   Nor to represent it themselves on the stage in the same 'persuasive' way as men did. I cannot restrain from a feminist critique of this postulate. This 'ideal' femininity is indeed unattainable, however, not because of the inferior nature of women but merely because it is a male imagining of womanliness, socially and culturally pre-conditioned by androcentric norms or, in the words of Luce Irigaray, a simple projection of male fantasmatic nature. Cf. Luce Irigaray, "The Female Gender," in *Sexes and Genealogies*,

trans. by Gillian C. Gill, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 105-123.

55   Interpolation can be made that they probably 'reminded' the actors of their biological male sex or androgynous appearance and in this way threatened to deconstruct *onnagata*'s painstakingly created image of 'femininity.'

56   It is not clear what came first: the admiration for the ornaments or the emulation. At any rate, Kikunojô's statement also hints at the commencing commodification of *onnagata* and of the *kabuki* actors in general in the increasingly commercialising economy. Kikunojô himself owned a prosperous oil shop in Edo.

57   Morinaga also discusses this process in her work. Cf. Morinaga, 2002: 255-265.

58   Cf. Mezur, 2005.

59   Gunji, 24.

60   Dunn and Torigoe, 104.

61   Holly Blummer, "Nakamura Shichisaburô I and the Creation of Edo-Style *Wagoto*," in Samuel Leiter, ed., *A Kabuki Reader: History and Performance*, New York: M.E.Sharpe, 2002: 60-75 (60).

62   Ibid., 71.

63   The first one, *Sonezaki shinjû*, was created in 1703.

64   The comparison of gender construction in *kabuki* and *jôruri* is a key element, since both genres influenced each other and especially because *jôruri* plays became key works in the kabuki repertoire. Also, *bunraku* tends to represent stronger female characters. For these reasons the topic needs to be examined in detail in a separate article.

65   A device especially typical for the nineteenth century *kabuki*; sometimes disparagingly dismissed as a way of simply breathing new life in old scripts.

66   This practice began in the mid eighteenth century and became common in the nineteenth century, accompanied with a break down of the distinction between the acting styles for female and male roles.

67   The original convention was that dance was a prerogative of *onnagata*, a means for display of *onnagata*'s eroticism.

68   As *onnabudô* (woman-warrior), and later in the nineteenth century: *akuba* (wicked woman), *shiranami* (romanticised bandit), *iroaku* (erotic villain), and many more.

69   A term I found in Peter Eskersall's article "Body of Light: The Way of the Butô Performer," in Stanca Scholz-Cionca and Samuel Leiter, eds., *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000: 313-328 (325).

70   At the same time, there are strong female figures both in *kabuki* and *jôruri*.

71   But not limited only to *sewamono*, *keisei* appears in *jidaimono* as well whereas *akahime* is a *jidaimono* character. Of course, a lot of plays combine *sewamono* and *jidaimono* plots.

72   Dunn and Torigoe, 34. ITEM VI of the text "One Hundred Items on the Stage", attributed to Sugi Kuhê.

73   I make a distinction here between *akahime* and *keisei* in the sense that the former is a fantastic 'historical' construct as the audience of the time would have imagined 'her,' while the latter was a 'real' contemporaneous part of the floating world. However, a dichotomy between 'historical' *akahime* and 'contemporaneous' *keisei* is not definitive, as their representation was more complex. *Akahime* was also considered 'ideal' of contemporary samurai woman, whereas 'ideal' female characters in *jidaimono* were often represented as courtesans, like Tora and Shôshô, the famous lovers of the two Soga brothers, for instance. Nonetheless, both *akahime* and *keisei* were equally distant for average theatregoer and idealised to extreme.

74   Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre. From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990: 159.

75   Ronald Cavaye, *Kabuki*, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1993: 41.

76   Ibid. Emphasis in bold added.

77   Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka. Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998: 38.

78   Ibid. Robertson refers to JoAnna Roberts, *Art and Illusion: A Guide to Crossdressing*, King of Prussia, Pa.: Creative Design Services, 1988: 26-7.

79   Donald Shively, "The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki," in James Brandon, William Malm and Donald Shively, *Studies in Kabuki: Its Acting, Music, and Historical Context*, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978: 40.

80   Or rather, attempting to valorise those values and thereby maintain the dominant status of samurai class.

81   A literary term used in reader-response criticism, derived from phenomenology and hermeneutics. Defines the set of expectations determined by cultural norms and conventions that influence how a reader comprehend and assess a literary work at any given

time. As explained in Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds.*, Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995: 139-140. Cf. also Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Truth and Method,* trans. by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: Continuum Pres, 1975. Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. by Michael Show, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

82 Ortolani, 163.

83 Leupp, 177.

84 As in *Sukeroku*, for instance.

85 This innovation concerns both plot and acting technique as in some plays the female role actor imitates masculine *kata*.

86 Particularly at the end of the eighteenth and in the first half of the nineteenth centuries.

87 One extremely funny and parodying example is when Sukeroku aka Soga Gôrô teaches his *wagoto* brother how to behave as an *aragoto* hero.

88 As in the famous Hamamatsuya scene from the play *Benten musume meono shiranami* (translated as "Miss Benten, The Male/ Female Bandit" in Samuel Leiter, *The Art of Kabuki: Famous Plays in Performance*, California UP, 1979), written in 1862 by Kawatake Mokuami, in which the main character, Benten Kozô, disguises himself as a *musume*, a young samurai daughter of rank. Or Ojô Kichisa, one of the three bandits Kichisa, who plays an itinerant actor posing as a greengrocer's daughter. As expected, it is more rare female role actors to perform disguised as men.

89 I need to acknowledge here that there are different interpretations of the female impersonation in *kabuki* in terms of gender construction. Earl Jackson, for example, argues that the *onnagata* maintains dominant conceptions of masculinity and reviles *kabuki* for demanding "detailed mimicry of specific stereotypes of women" in contrast with the all-male Nô theatre that represents female figures as "highly symbolic and abstract." Cf. "Kabuki Narratives of Male Homoerotic Desire in Saikaku and Mishima," in *Educational Theatre Journal* (ETJ), 41/4 (1989): 459-477, as referred to in Leupp, 268, n. 28. Leupp, in his turn, contends that *onnagata* is "pernicious" more towards the established "neo-Confucian construction of gender" than to women.

90 Which itself is culturally defined. Cf. Mark Oshima, "The Keisei as a Meeting Point of Different Worlds: Courtesan and the *Kabuki Onnagata*," in Elizabeth de Sabato Swinton, ed., *The Women of the Pleasure Quarter: Japanese Paintings and Prints of the Floating World*, New York : Hudson Hills, 1995: 93.

91 Ibid., 92-93.

92 Both notions are not natural but culturally defined.

93 The performance, of course, depends on the idiosyncratic abilities of the individual actor. Some *onnagata* may look more 'feminine' than others.

94 Lenard Pronko, "Elizabethan and Kabuki Female Representation," in *Crosscurrents in the Drama: East and West*, Tuscaloosa, AL: Southeastern Theatre Conference: University of Alabama Press, 1998: 47-48. Pronko reveals more clearly than Oshima the constructed nature of *onnagata*'s visible traces of masculinity.

95 Butler, 1990.

96 Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interest. Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, New York & London: Routledge, 1992: 93.

97 Cf. Sara Gamble, ed., *Feminism and Postfeminism*, London: Routledge, 2001: 209.

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Gender and Body Construction in Edo Period *Kabuki*

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Abstract:

   This article delineates a general pattern in the development and the characteristics of gender and body construction in *kabuki* theatre in the context of Japanese premodern urban commoner culture. The paper consists of three parts. The first part poses the main research questions and outlines the contemporary conceptualisations of gender, body, power and performance which provide the theoretical approach to the present discussion. The second part examines *kabuki* as a main site for performance of the notions of femininity and masculinity during the Edo and early Meiji periods and roughly defines three stages in this process: formative, mature and modern. It is argued that *kabuki* played a central part in consolidating Tokugawa gender notions and hierarchies, on the one hand, by producing a "world" of conventionalised gender representations, and in disrupting them, on the other, by constantly playing with those conventionalised gender constructs and destabilising any fixed meanings. The third part of the paper outlines the specifics of gender construction in Edo period *kabuki*, which, as the Edo urban popular culture per se, had two sides: traditional and carnivalesque. This article contributes to the further study of *kabuki* from a gender perspective, an aspect not thoroughly explored yet.