

The Culture of Play: Kabuki and the Production of Texts

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Text as Art

Japan is an interesting comparative point in the broader history of modes of reading and literary/artistic composition, and in understanding the role of performance in literary culture, although it has rarely been brought into the discourse on “oral traditions.”² One reason for this is that it has a relatively long tradition of literary production in both popular and elite genres. The creation and survival of literary texts in manuscript and in woodblock print (commercial woodblock printing from the early 1600s to the 1870s) is also considerable, and the many types of extant literary texts—illustrated scrolls, poetry sheets, manuscripts, woodblock printed book genres—have been treasured as precious objects. Court culture, from as early as the seventh century, demanded high literacy (including the skill of composing poetry) from those who participated in the aristocracy and government. Reading and literary composition (including in Chinese) has continually been a prized skill among the elite (courtiers, clergy, samurai, or merchants). As a consequence literacy rates have also been relatively high, particularly from the early modern Tokugawa period (1600-1868), and especially in the cities and towns. Along with this long history of the creation and preservation of literary texts as art objects, often with illustrations, we also see a culture that has consistently encouraged active participation in the arts, not only from the elites, but also at the popular level.

¹ All figures referred to below may be viewed in the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition.org.

² In this essay the word “performance” is used to refer to a wide range of activities such as reciting texts, composing poetry orally, singing, dancing, and stage productions. Essentially it is in opposition to the reading of a text silently.

This tendency to cherish physical texts as art objects (perhaps bolstered by the strong East Asian tradition of the high status of calligraphy as art), however, has not meant a diminishment of the importance of oral performance in literature. Ironically, the opposite seems to have been the case. “Orality” has remained central in Japanese literary culture even at the most highly literate levels. This has usually meant participation in a group activity, a performance of some kind, in which the individual takes a turn at being the reader/interpreter (audience) and at being the creator (performer).³ As a consequence, performance has been a key element in the process of both literary composition and literary reception, whether in poetic, narrative, or theatrical genres. Performance has also been an important stimulant for the visual arts.

The relationship between a performance (using the term in its broadest sense) and its physical representation is an essential aspect of literary cultures throughout the world. In this essay, I will make a case that performance in Japan has been a catalyst for the artistic production of physical objects, both visual and literary texts. Furthermore, I shall argue that it is more useful to consider such physical texts not simply as representations of performance. They, of course, may have been created directly in response to a performance (or in anticipation of a performance), but as physical objects they became something entirely distinct and of a different genre. Such objects (texts) existed on their own and usually served various functions, one of the most important of which was to stimulate new performances.

Performance as Text

Another fundamental premise of this essay is that a performance should also be viewed as a “text,” one that has a physical existence in sound and movement, but which dissipates as it passes through time, continuing to exist only in the memory of the participants. Work on oral poetry⁴ has helped us to understand how an oral poem or story can be perceived as a text, and Haruo Shirane (1998) makes the point that most performances are repeated, thus creating forms that are held in the communal memory. These points may seem to be but truisms to readers of *Oral Tradition*. We need to

³ See Haruo Shirane’s article in this issue for details on the process of creating traditional poetry.

⁴ See articles by Karin Barber and Martin Orwin in this issue.

be continually reminded of it, nevertheless, because the physical object (text) sits in a privileged position within the modern academy (and the modern world of print) in relation to performance, which cannot be fully packaged and brought back to the library. The academy has tended, not unexpectedly, to make the physical text the focus of analysis, rather than the performance that dissipates into thin air.

The history of reading habits in Japan is still a relatively unexplored area. Peter Kornicki's recent work, *The Book in Japan* (1998), covers related research and suggests that while oral recitation continued to be common as a style of "reading" well into the late nineteenth century, reading alone and silently was also a mode of "reading" (251-76). Much work needs to be done until we can be more certain of the variety and styles of reading in Japan. We do know, however, the extent of book production and book circulation both in manuscript form and in woodblock print, which continued until the 1870s. Commercial publishing and commercial book-lending libraries were well developed and extensive in Japan from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards.⁵ Maeda Ai, stimulated by Marshall McLuhan and other work on the role of orality in culture, many years ago made a case (1973) that it was common to read aloud in Japan well into the late nineteenth century. Although this phenomenon has been acknowledged in research on Japan, its significance or extent has remained elusive.

With the growth of university literature departments in the twentieth century, scholars have come to see the reading or study of literary or dramatic texts almost entirely as acts of interpretation and analysis, rather than for the purpose of the re-creation of new literary texts. I want to take a different approach to the history of reading by tying it more closely to the history of literary and artistic composition. I want to argue for a different sense of what reading means in the literary genres in which performance is essential and in which the purpose is creative fun and pleasure. In some genres the act of reading (or the watching of/listening to a performance) is primarily for the purpose of artistic creation or re-creation. Although coming from a very different perspective, this approach does echo Roland Barthes' idea that we should view a "text as score to play on." One reads (or takes part in a performance) to be stimulated to engage creatively with a text and to use it as a catalyst to create a new "text."

⁵ Nagatomo Chiyoji has explored the range of publishing and reading in the Tokugawa period in several major studies: *Kinsei kashihonya no kenkyū* (1982), *Kinsei no dokusho* (1987), *Kinsei Kamigata sakka, shoshi kenkyū* (1994), and *Edo jidai no shomotsu to dokusho* (2001).

Among those of high literacy (“professional” poets and writers), however, we see an interesting phenomenon. Regardless of whether or not an individual read a text alone silently, we see a persistence of oral performance as essential to the composition and reception of literature. This is evident in the court practice of poetry compositions (*uta-awase* competitions, *daiei* composition on themes at banquets) and in the development and flourishing of linked-verse composition by a group of poets (*renga*, and later *haikai no renga*, haiku). Ogata Tsutomu (1973) and Haruo Shirane (1998) have shown how important the communal context was for the production of haiku poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The development of Noh drama from the fourteenth century and its appropriation by successive samurai governments until the nineteenth century is particularly significant. Training in the recitation and performance of Noh drama became an essential part of samurai education, and gradually a hobby that many non-samurai as well continued throughout their lifetimes. Haiku linked-verse (*haikai no renga*) and Noh drama recitation (*utai*) during the seventeenth century came to be considered fundamental training for anyone interested in participating in literary culture. This was true for the rising merchant class in the cities and the wealthy farmers around the country, as well as among the clergy and samurai.

For those interested in literature, aside from the actual practice of calligraphy (which can, of course, be considered a performance art), participation and training was fundamentally that of performance. Because one was expected to perform on occasions, one “read” to memorize in order to compose poetry in a performance session of linked verse. In the case of Noh drama, one “read” (or more commonly chanted) in order to perform at recitals. This is close to the situation described in medieval Europe by Mary Carruthers in *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (1990), where physical texts (manuscripts) were considered useful primarily as an *aide-mémoire* for one’s oral performance (lecture, storytelling, and so on).

From the seventeenth century onwards, with the flourishing of commercial publishing using woodblock print technology, we see an expanding rate of participation in literary and performance culture among the Japanese populace. Amateurs took lessons in performance arts and joined poetry circles. Individuals paid for books and fees to teachers to participate in hobby activities and as a means of social intercourse. The pleasure of performance in a social context was an essential enticement.

Woodblock Print Technology

A key element here is the technology of woodblock print. Although China, Korea, and Japan all relied on woodblock printing technology until the late nineteenth century, the style of printing is very different in each country. Woodblock texts in China (and those in the Chinese language in Japan) are usually in a squarish, block style, whereas woodblock texts in Japanese are almost always cursive, and at least in the early stages can be considered woodblock printings of manuscripts. Carvers followed the lines of the manuscript. As genres developed, publishers created house styles easily recognized by readers. The cursive style (carved to look as if the text has been written in formal calligraphy with a brush) remains predominant throughout the era of commercial woodblock publishing until the switch to metal movable type after the 1870s. The result is a much more distinctive form of a book that is noticeably more tactile and “touchy-feely” than that produced by modern movable type.

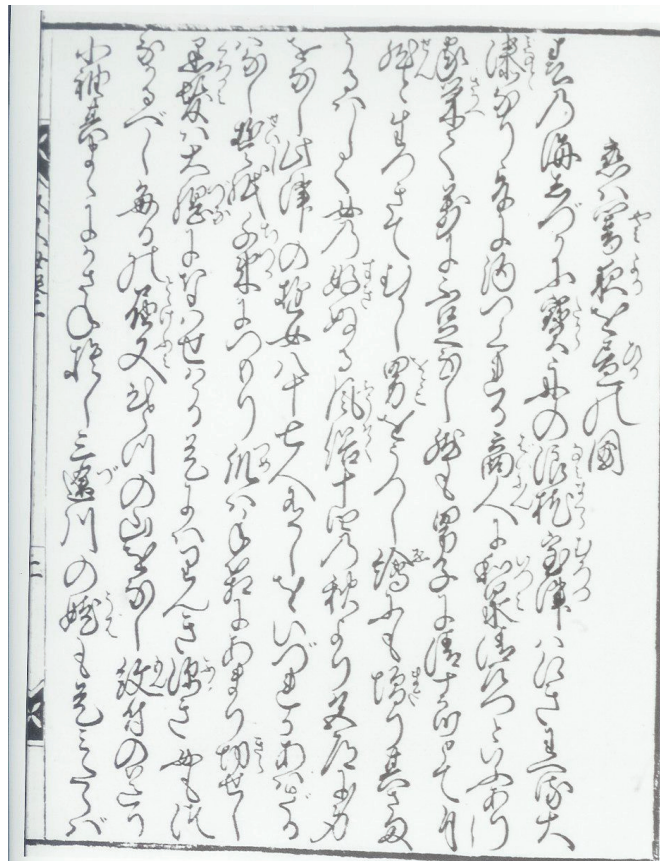


Figure 1. Ihara Saikaku, *Kōshoku gonin onna* (“Five Women Who Loved Love,” 1686). Note that the text, though commercially printed, has no punctuation.

[Figure 2]⁶

This tendency is even more pronounced because of the copious amount of illustration in literary texts, a trait that continues from the earlier “manuscript” age of illustrated scrolls.

The particular Japanese application of woodblock print technology produced a distinctive, early modern literary culture, which is certainly of interest as a comparative point in the representation of performance and the relationship between individuals and literary culture.

Kabuki Culture

I have previously discussed aspects of “orality” in relation to composition patterns in Japanese drama (2000). Here the aim is to examine the role of performance in what I shall call “Kabuki culture” during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This urban subculture was a world of play. Many of the works examined below are illustrated in color in the recently published exhibition catalogue, *Kabuki Heroes on the Osaka Stage: 1780-1830* (Gerstle 2005a).

Bakhtin, in his work on Rabelais (1984), eulogized the medieval ideal of a “carnival” culture, which was opposed to the official culture of the Church or government, a “second life outside officialdom.” His passionate description of this other world is worth recalling (7): “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom.” Bakhtin is discussing medieval Europe, of course, but many of his ideas on the nature and function of carnivals/festivals are useful to us in getting a perspective on the role of Kabuki (and more broadly popular theater) as well as of the licensed pleasure quarters of the cities.

Bakhtin’s carnival is based on a concept of temporary disruption and inversion of everyday life. Carnival is a festival within a set time frame. It is “play time.” Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was no longer Rabelaisian, if it ever was. It was a relatively well-ordered land with three large cities—Edo (Tokyo, approx. one million), Osaka (350,000), and Kyoto

⁶ All Figures may be viewed in the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition.org.

(350,000)—and a number of other towns with populations around 100,000. An official (Confucian-inspired) class system was established in the seventeenth century with four descending ranks: samurai (civil/military), farmers, artisans, and merchants. Traditionally Japanese “carnivals” were centered on annual, local religious festivals and around particular shrines to which the community belonged, whether in villages or the towns and cities.

The work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) has stimulated many to examine how societies construct their cultural spaces. In the early seventeenth century the Japanese government agreed to the idea of establishing urban, secular “carnivals” not within a temporal frame, but rather within a spatial one—licensed pleasure quarters and licensed theaters. These performance worlds were permanent carnival spaces for play, pleasure, and fantasy. Courtesans and actors were given an official status as social pariahs (*hinin*, beneath the four classes, less than “human”) outside the pale of society, while at the same time the system cleverly created the stars among them as celebrities who became wealthy.⁷ Both of these spaces are best thought of as performance spheres where professionals interact with patrons, and where the performance dissipates at its completion. The government and conventional view was that people were allowed to play in these “bad spaces” (*akusho*), but that patrons, male or female, must leave this fantasy world behind when they return to the everyday world of work and responsibility, though they may, nevertheless, cherish the memory.

Within this relatively strict class system and its division of urban carnival space into licensed quarters, the arts played a crucial role in creating social networks that transcended space and rank. Artist, writer, and performance circles (*ren, za*) became essential to social life from early on.⁸ These groups may or may not have been bohemian, but they were not made up solely of “professional” artists/writers/musicians/dancers or those with such aspirations. Leaders of such groups may have made a living as poets, artists, or teachers of their art, but fundamentally the circles were made up of ordinary individuals who wanted to participate in cultural activities for fun as a hobby. Many pursued these hobbies over a lifetime.

⁷ See Teruoka 1989, for a discussion of how the pleasure quarters created courtesans of high value and fame.

⁸ The number and range of these cultural arts (*yūgei*) is considerable. The usual pattern is to have a group based around a master/teacher and to have periodic recitals or creative gatherings. Moriya (1980) has explored the significance of these groups in “Kinsei no chōnin to yūgei.” The range of groups was very wide—from tea ceremony and the martial arts to poetry, music, and painting.

The most popular and widespread genre was haiku poetry (*haikai*). When one joined a group, he or she would take a haiku pen name (*haimyō*, *haigō*), and the convention was that within the group class distinctions and so on did not matter. These circles can also be considered “carnival”-like spheres where one participated in an egalitarian space as both a spectator and as a performer in linked-verse parties.⁹ Oral composition and presentation were fundamental to these arts, such as poetry, music, and dance. Although individuals needed a certain amount of means to participate in these circles, participation in one kind or another of such culture groups flourished from around 1700, spreading among classes in the cities and over time far into the countryside. It became common for both men and women to take lessons (under an artistic or pen name) in some art or literary form, from tea ceremony, painting, and calligraphy to haiku, kabuki dance, Noh drama, or Bunraku chanting.¹⁰ Like the pleasure quarters and the theater districts, these art/literary circles were enclosed within social fictions, and like them they became essential egalitarian “carnival spaces” for cultural participation. Within this structure, performance is both an aim of artistic production and a catalyst for artistic production.

Kabuki theater—different from its sister art Jōruri (Bunraku puppet drama) within the same theater districts and from Noh drama—did not publish complete texts of the plays (*shōhon*, *maruhon*, *utaibon*, which included notation for voice). Creative interaction with Jōruri puppet theater meant learning from professionals how to perform the texts and participating in public recitals. Kabuki was not as word-centered as Jōruri is. Kabuki has been and is today actor-centered and a star system. The only true “text” of kabuki is a performance, which should be different every time (even if it is the same play), and dissipates into thin air at the close of the curtains. Kabuki actors did teach dance but not acting or declamation (voice training for actors was accomplished by learning to chant Jōruri plays).

Kabuki came to play a crucial role within urban culture in the late eighteenth century as a catalyst for literary and cultural production. It is useful, I think, to consider kabuki as a subculture of play, fantasy, and creativity within the society. The government never acknowledged this activity as anything but a necessary evil, an outlet for passion and desire.

⁹ Hino (1977) called these “utopia spaces” in his study of circles around the kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō V (1741-1806).

¹⁰ I have explored the popularity of Bunraku chanting in “Amateurs and the Theater: The So-called Demented Art *Gidayū*” (1995).

The relatively democratic openness of this world and its dynamism stimulated many to become actively involved in artistic production. It was a clever strategy for kabuki theaters to keep the actor's performance, his body and voice, the sole focus. This policy fostered a cult of the actor and gave individual actors, although officially within an "outcast" group, a privileged position in cultural life as celebrities.¹¹

As a consequence of being so determinedly performance-centered, kabuki has, ironically perhaps, generated a huge range of texts that aim to capture or "translate" the magic of performance. The genres are considerable: *e-iri-kyōgen-bon* (illustrated summary versions with lengthy text), *ezukushi-kyōgen-bon* (illustrated plot summaries with little text), *yakusha hyōbanki* (actor critiques), *yakusha ehon* (illustrated books on actors), *gekisho* (illustrated books on theater), *yakusha-e* (single-sheet actor prints), *surimono* (single-sheet, privately-produced prints of poetry and images), *e-iri-nehon* (illustrated playbooks), and *mitate banzuke* (single-sheet topical, parody playbills).¹² These were all attempts to represent, re-create, or translate performance into another genre.

Are these kabuki-related publications representations of performance or rather is it better to view them as being distinct works created in response to the catalyst of performance? Much of the illustrated material, in fact, was produced as advertisement in anticipation of a performance and therefore served as a stimulus for imagining an upcoming performance. These publications were not created by outsiders to kabuki theater; in Kyoto and Osaka in particular, they were mostly by passionate fans and were integral contributions to "kabuki culture." The key element in this kabuki culture is active and creative participation. This includes being a spectator or in a fan club, but it also means the practice of theater-related performance arts (*yūgei*)—such as dance (*odori*), Jōruri (Bunraku) puppet theater chanting (*gidayū*), and other kabuki music—as well as contributing to the annually published actor critiques, participation in the rituals of kabuki fan clubs (*hiiki-renjū*), and designing actor prints.

¹¹ See Gerstle 2002, which explores the ways that actor prints created superstars.

¹² See Gerstle 2005a. Akama (2003) has produced a thorough survey and analysis of these different genres.

Amateur Participation in the Arts

In Osaka at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a key activity for those keen to participate in this kabuki culture was the designing of single-sheet actor prints.¹³ In Osaka most of the artists who produced actor prints were kabuki fans and were amateurs, a situation different from that in Edo, where kabuki actor print production was commercially driven. More than 100 artists designed actor prints during the period, about 1813 to 1842, although most of them seem to have been active only for a short period with few works extant. Kabuki fans in Osaka produced art in response to the magic of kabuki performance, in most cases for fun not for financial gain.

Were these artists attempting to “translate” kabuki performance into a graphic art? Since many of the prints were produced in anticipation of a performance, it is not enough to say that they were trying to capture the essence of a particular performance. They could not, however, create effective or believable prints without being familiar with the particular actor and the role. Performance experience was the catalyst for storing a visual memory bank from which to create an effective image.

Most of those who produced actor prints were active in poetry circles, both haiku and *kyōka* (comic or light-hearted verse in the traditional court poetry format of 31 syllables). These poetry circles served as performance venues that complemented the kabuki theater. Star actors regularly participated in these poetic circles both as spectators and as performers under their haiku pen names (*haimyō*). The third performance context was the fan clubs with their rituals at the beginning of theatrical productions.¹⁴ Some of the actor print artists are known to have been active members of actor fan clubs—Hokushū, for example—and some were leaders of poetry groups. These various spheres, supported by the shops and restaurants of the theater districts, form an urban kabuki, carnival-like culture.

Poetry circles were also performance spaces that generated illustrated texts, both books and single-sheet *surimono* prints. We can get a sense of how participants viewed the poetic circles and the *surimono* prints that memorialized them from the preface to an album of *surimono*, dating

¹³ The following are illustrated books on Osaka actor prints: Keyes and Mizushima 1973; van Doesburg 1985; Schwaab 1989; Kondo 2001; Matsudaira 1995, 1997, and 1997-2001; and Gerstle 2005a. A special double issue of the journal *Andon* was recently published on Osaka prints (vols. 72-73, Oct. 2002).

¹⁴ For his exploration of the nature of these fan clubs in several publications, see Matsudaira 1984 and 1999.

around 1821, assembled by Kurimi, the pen name of an amateur Osaka businessman/poet. He participated in a circle of *kyōka* poets over many years in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, traveling between Osaka and Edo. The preface to this album was written by the senior figure of the group, the Osaka poet Tsurunoya, then over eighty-years-old, who is also known to have contributed to kabuki *surimono*.¹⁵

After reviewing the many prints of the album, each of them exquisite designs by well-known artists such as Hokusai and Hokushū, with both images and poems commemorating particular poetry gatherings, he wrote that the prints were “authentic” representations (*shōshin shōmei*). One could take this as a comment on the quality of the prints as art. He is, however, viewing the album as a participant and leader of the poetry gatherings, and sees the images and poems through the lens of his own memory. I would propose that, for this poet, the text consisted not only of the prints themselves, or his poems on them, but also included the memory of the communal performance of a day of art appreciation, tea ceremony, poetic composition, and finally saké drinking. The sum of these activities (performances) over many years constituted a life, and it was the old poet’s memories (and the prints contributed as an *aide-mémoire* that gave meaning to that life). Below is a translation of the preface (Chibashi Bijutsukan 1997:198):¹⁶

Many people collect examples of famous writers’ and artists’ calligraphy and drawings and hold them dear as rare treasures, but it is hard to determine if the items are authentic or fake. Rather than being proud of such paintings or calligraphy, how much more interesting is this album of prints. These *surimono*, collected by Kurimi, through images and calligraphy, depict magnificently the essence of the words of the *kyōka* comic verses of our contemporaries. This truly is authentic representation [*shōshin, shōmei*]; no need to strive to find specimens from ancient masters. Ask any discerning gentlemen knowing in the ways of poetry; I stand witness to this as fact.

¹⁵ One example is the Hokushū *surimono* celebrating a performance of the Edo actor Onoe Kikugorō III (1784-1849) for performance in the ninth month of 1826 at the Osaka Kado theater; see Matsudaira 1997-2001:vol. 2, no. 278.

¹⁶ All translations are mine unless noted otherwise. The word “tama” in the phrase *zare-uta (kyōka) no tama no koto no ha* means “jeweled” but can also signify “spirit.” I am thankful to Roger Keyes for introducing me to this album. Photographs of the complete album are in *Siren: The Bulletin of the Chiba City Art Museum* (2002:22-68), accompanied by an essay in Japanese on the album by Roger Keyes.

For the poet Tsurunoya, the *surimono* skillfully evoked through image and graceful calligraphy the essence of the performance occasion; each succeeded in re-creating the words of the poems, composed orally at the gathering. Each *surimono* was also, then, a stimulant for the group's next gathering.

Theater, Poetry, and Art

I want to focus on two performance spheres—kabuki theaters and poetry circles (primarily haiku)—to show how the interactions between these two worlds were an important stimulus for cultural production. One of the earliest books produced in Osaka on kabuki actors is *Yakusha mono iwai* (*A Celebration of Actors*, 1784) by the first great Osaka actor print artist Ryūkōsai Jokei (fl. 1777-1809). It presents 49 actors in roles they made famous.¹⁷ However, each actor is listed not by his stage name but by his *yago* (an actor clan name that is called out during performance) and his haiku pen name (*haimyō*).¹⁸ Figure 3 (below) shows Nakamura Tomijūrō I (1719-1786) in the role of the “fox-woman” Kuzunoha (literally, “leaf of the arrow root”).¹⁹

The poem, presented as if it is one of his own, is:

<i>Kuzunoha ya</i>	The leaf of the arrow root,
<i>kaze ni omote mo</i>	Blowing in the wind, showing its regret
<i>misenikeri</i>	Even from the front

[This poem revolves on a poem from the play and the word *urami* (“regret,” “anger,” also the idea of one who can see into the future). *Urami* also refers to the back (*ura*) of the arrowroot leaf (*kuzu no ha*). The character Kuzunoha

¹⁷ This book was reprinted in a facsimile edition in 1927; see Kawakami 1927.

¹⁸ The illustrated book, *Ehon butai ōgi* (1780, copies in the Victoria and Albert Museum, British Library and the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin), produced in Edo was the first book on actors in full color. Actors are listed by their name and haiku pen name. There are no poems with the illustrations, but the back of the book has a range of haiku by famous haiku poets and includes a poem each by the two artists Ippitsusai Bunchō and Katsukawa Shunshō. The connection between haiku, kabuki, and art is implicit.

¹⁹ See Poulton's 2002 translation.

is a fox who has taken human form and married. The actor plays quick changes between the two roles, and the climax is when the fox-woman must grudgingly abandon her husband and son so that the son can grow up in human society. He becomes the famous Abe no Seimei (921-1005), who was known as a court soothsayer and diviner. The actor Tomijūrō, famous for this role, tried to show the feelings of the fox for her son in both roles, even when keeping those feelings hidden from the surface.]



Figure 3. Ryūkōsai Jokei, *Yakusha mono iwai* (“A Celebration of Actors,” 1784). The actor is listed only by his haiku pen name (*haimyō*) and his clan stage name (*yago*). The actor is Nakamura Tomijūrō I. The haiku poem is presented as if by the actor himself, although it could be by the artist Ryūkōsai, who published a book of haiku.

We know very little about Ryūkōsai, but he did illustrate *kyōka* poetry books and published a book of haiku poetry.²⁰ He is famous for a portrait style that does not idolize actors, and his presentation of them as poets as much as actors was significant and influential.

The 1790s is an active period in the development of Kabuki actor prints and books. In Osaka and Kyoto we have several publications celebrating two star actors, Arashi Koroku III (Hinasuke I, pen names Minshi and Koshichi; 1741-96) and Arashi Sangorō II (pen name Raishi; 1732-1803, retired 1797; see Gerstle 2005a:cats. 65-67). We see in such publications as the following the support of literati patrons who contributed poems, as well as poems by actors. *Minshisen* (*A Collection of Minshi Writings*, 1790), *Tama no hikari* (*The Glow of a Jewel*, 1796), *Arashi Koroku kako monogatari* (*A Tale of Arashi Koroku*, 1797), and *Arashi Hinasuke shide no yamakaze* (*A Journey on a Mountain Wind to the Other World*, 1801) are all focused on Koroku III. *Raishi ichidaiki* (*The Life of Raishi*, 1797) and *Kiri no shimadai* (*A Stand of Paulownia*, 1797, illustrations by Niwa Tōkei and Ryūkōsai) celebrate the life of Sangorō II.²¹ These contain many poems (haiku and *kyōka*) by writers and actors and include some illustrations. The impression created is that actors are an essential part of literary culture. The most influential Edo actor book publication is *Yakusha gakuya tsū* (*Actors Backstage*, 1799), which has color portraits of actors by Toyokuni, Kunimasa, and Utamoro, each with a signed *kyōka* poem by a noted figure.²²

Shōkōsai Hanbei (fl. 1795-1809), Ryūkōsai's student, was also a poet and contributed his own poems to the actor books that he illustrated. His *Ehon futaba aoi* (*Double-Petaled Hollyhock*, 1798) was the first color actor print book produced in Osaka. His work *Shibai gakuya zue* (*Theater Behind the Scenes*, 1800, 1802) is an encyclopedia-like series of two volumes on Osaka kabuki and Jōruri (Bunraku) puppet theater.²³ It shows actors behind

²⁰ Gerstle 2005a contains a wide range of examples of Ryūkōsai's paintings, illustrated books, and actor prints.

²¹ These texts have all been reprinted in Tsuchida et al. 1979.

²² Copies are in the British Museum (JH 200 [1979.3-5.0200]) and the British Library (no. 16104-a40).

²³ This book was printed in many editions. Copies can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Library, and the Cambridge Library. It has been reprinted in a facsimile edition with an introduction and transcription of the text (Hattori n.d.).

the scenes, their lives, and out of costume. It consistently presents them as cultured poets, with portraits listed only by haiku pen name, and accompanied by a verse from a contemporary poet. One section has a group of actors' poems displayed with a covering note that each is in the calligraphy of an individual actor (*jihitsu*). Shōkōsai includes poems of his own as well to accompany other illustrations.

[Figure 4]



Figure 5. Shōkōsai Hanbei, *Shibai gakuya zue* ("Theater Behind the Scenes," 1800-02). Portraits of two actors both listed by their pen names (*haimyō*) only. The haiku poems beside are by poets of the day, in praise of the actors.

Shōkōsai also illustrated several playbooks (*e-iri nehon*). Two early ones are in the Cambridge University Library and the British Library: *Yakusha hama no masago* (*Actors Along the Shore*, 1803) and *Ehon hana-momiji akiha-banashi* (*An Illustrated Tale of Akiba in Autumn*, also known under the title, *Ehon kakehashi monogatari*, 1806; Gerstle 2005a:cats. 83 and 142). In *Yakusha hama no masago* the initial actor portraits have only their pen names and are accompanied by poems. The reader is offered a “dream team” of actors for each of the roles, some no longer alive. The reader is clearly challenged to connect their memories of the actors while they read the play. (*Yakusha*) *Masukagami* (*A Mirror of Actors*, 1806) is the last of Shōkōsai’s actor print books and again includes a poem with most portraits. The poems without signatures are by Shōkōsai himself.



Figure 6. Shōkōsai Hanbei, *Masukagami* (*Mirror of Actors*, 1806). Ichikawa Danzō IV; *kyōka* poem by Shōkōsai himself. Courtesy of the British Museum.

[Figure 7]

[Figure 8]

From as early as 1779 we see the production of full-color *surimono* (privately produced prints that include poems), which relate to Osaka kabuki (Gerstle 2005a:cats. 49-52, 104). Shijō's style of painting and prints, a realistic and elegant style, generally produced still-life nature scenes with images seemingly unrelated to theater. The other, usually produced by Osaka actor-print artists, shows the celebrity actor in role as the central image. I have recently published an article about a British Museum *surimono* by Kunihiro of the actor Arashi Kichisaburō II, dating from the first month of 1817.²⁴

An early example of a full-color Osaka "Shijō-style" kabuki *surimono* dates from 1805 and is preserved in a magnificent scrapbook album of material on Osaka theater dating from the early eighteenth century until about 1827. This series of 42 volumes, created within one Osaka family, entitled *Kyōta kyakushokujō (An Album of Theater Sources)* is held in the Waseda University Theater Museum (Tokyo).²⁵

The image, in the elegant Shijō style, is brightly colored and is probably by the artist Niwa Tōkei, although there is no signature.²⁶ The print has been severely trimmed to fit the size of the album and the artist's name is not evident. Here we have the interaction of three separate worlds to create a joint work of art. The *surimono* celebrates the rise and success of Arashi Kichisaburō II in 1805 to become a top actor and head of a troupe (*za-gashira*).

There are eleven poems, two by poets (Doran, Tosetsu), one by kabuki playwright Chikamatsu Tokusō, one unknown (Kokuse), and seven by actors all listed only by pen name. Nakano Mitsutoshi (1993) has written on Tomi Doran (1759-1819), a Kyoto court aristocrat who was a key figure as patron and liaison between actors and artists/poets. Doran is known to have written actor critiques and to have been a haiku master for a large

²⁴ Gerstle 2005a:cat. 173. See also Gerstle 2002, as well as Gerstle 2003 for an expanded version in Japanese.

²⁵ The entire set is reprinted in black-and-white in Geinōshi Kenkyūkai 1974.

²⁶ There are several *surimono* by Tōkei with Doran as the major patron/poet in the Waseda Theater Museum and also held privately by Nakano Mitsutoshi; see Nakano 1993. I am thankful to Prof. Nakano for sending me photographs of his collection.

number of actors, as evident from the magnificent Tōkei *surimono* commissioned in Doran's memory in 1819.²⁷ Doran was a particular patron of Sawamura Kunitarō I (1739-1818) and Arashi Kichisaburō II (1769-1821).



Figure 9. First section of a print privately produced in 1805 (*surimono*), in *Amata kyakushokujō* (a series of albums of theater sources). Courtesy of the Waseda University Theater Museum. For the complete print, see Figures 9, 10, and 11.

[Figures 10 and 11]

²⁷ Copies are in the Chiba City Museum, illustrated in *Edo no surimono: suijin-tachi on okurimono* (Chibashi Bijutsukan 1997), and in the *Nishizawa Ippō harikomi-chō* (Waseda Theater Museum). They are also illustrated with the poems translated in Gerstle 2005a:cat. 138. This is an extremely large *surimono* in two parts, both 40 cm. x 52 cm. Twenty actors contributed poems, including Kunitarō and Kichisaburō.

This *surimono* marks an important juncture when Arashi Kichisaburō II became a star of Osaka kabuki and a troupe leader, receiving top spot on the playbills. In the fourth month he performed three main roles in *Ōmi Genji senjin yakata* (*The Ōmi Genji and the Advance Guard*) at the Kado theater. *Kyōta kyakushokujō* notes that this performance was a big hit and includes a print of Kichisaburō in the three roles of Sasaki Shirō, Miura no Suke, and Sasaki Saburō (*Kyōta kyakushokujō*, Book 18: 57-58; Gerstle 2005a:cat. 195). Morita Kanya IX had come from Edo to perform with Kichisaburō. Kunitarō retired at this same performance (Ihara 1960:366).

The three key poems are:

(1)

<i>Tachibana mo</i>	The waft of a mandarin blossom
<i>mukashiya koishi</i>	Ah, what lovely memories
<i>sode kaoru</i>	The scent still in my sleeve

-Kitō (Sawamura Kunitarō I)

[The mandarin (*tachibana*) is Kichisaburō's crest. The mandarin flower's fragrance is a metaphor common in poetry for evoking memories of lovers long ago. On the surface this certainly refers to the magnificence of the handsome Kichisaburō II, in his prime and known as a favorite among women. Kunitarō played woman's roles and he therefore speaks of Kichisaburō as a sexy man. Kunitarō would have seen Kichisaburō grow up into a first-rate actor. On another level, I wonder if it could also refer to Kunitarō's memory of performing with Kichisaburō I (1737-80, Kichisaburō II's father), who was only two years older than Kunitarō. Kunitarō retired from the theater at the same time as this *surimono* was produced.]

(2)

<i>Osamarite</i>	Now all calm and clear
<i>chiyo no michisuji</i>	May the long road ahead
<i>suzushikare</i>	Be pleasant and smooth

-Rikan (Arashi Kichisaburō II)

[Kichisaburō defers to the elder Kunitarō, wishing him well in retirement, and at the same time modestly hopes that his own tenure as a kabuki star and troupe leader will be smooth.]

(3)

<i>Mirubusa ni</i>	The long strands of hair
<i>sake no wakayagu</i>	Lively and young, the saké flowing
<i>yoake ka na</i>	Is it the dawn already!

-Doran (Tomi Doran)

[Doran cleverly shifts the imagery back to the poetry gathering and the party atmosphere. The image of young flowing hair (*mirubusa*, literally strands of seaweed) refers to Kichisaburō's vibrancy. A new dawn is rising that will lead to a bright future for Kichisaburō, the young and lively actor.]

This *surimono*, elegantly presented and with the aristocrat Doran as the patron, promotes the actors as sophisticated artists. At the same time it is the power of Kichisaburō's performance, his body and voice, which has been the stimulus for the poetry gathering and the subsequent *surimono* print.

The other type of *surimono* designed by those who portrayed actors in painting and prints places the actor as the focus, with him posed in costume at a histrionic moment. These, too, were created from within a poetry circle, whose members were the actor's fans. The next example (double *ōban* size²⁸) by Ashifune is in the album *Nishizawa Ippō harikomi-chō* (*The Nishizawa Ippō Album*) in Waseda Theater and has not been published before. Arashi Kichisaburō II (Rikan) is presented as the renowned court calligrapher Ono no Tōfū (894-966), a role he made famous in a performance in the fourth and fifth months of 1813 in the play *Ono no Tōfū aoyagi suzuri* (*Ono no Tōfū and the Willow Inkstone*) at the Kado theater.

Kichisaburō is competing with his younger arch rival Nakamura Utaemon III (1778-1838), who had returned from five years in Edo to perform in Osaka from the eleventh month of 1812 to a great fanfare. Utaemon had been successful in a third-month production in which he performed a dance with seven roles. The Ashifune *surimono* is offered in support of Kichisaburō against Utaemon.

²⁸ The *ōban* size is about 25-27 cm. x 37-39 cm., with special impressions sometimes larger.



Figure 12. A print by Ashifune privately produced in the fifth month of 1813 (*surimono*), in *Nishizawa Ippō harikomichō* (a three-volume album of theater resources). Arashi Kichisaburō II is in the role of the courtier calligrapher, Ono no Tōfū. Courtesy of the Waseda University Theater Museum.

There are seven poems, one by Doran, one by Kichisaburō, and five by unknown individuals—amateur poets, including two women. Kichisaburō is known to have been a favorite among women; the first two poems below are by women. The third is by the aristocrat Doran. A fascinating letter survives from Doran to another of his female students in which he discusses the performances at this time of Kichisaburō and Utaemon at the neighboring rival theaters Kado and Naka. He praises Kichisaburō and says how Utaemon's performance paled in comparison; he also mentions sending the woman a *surimono* of Kichisaburō as a gift (most likely this print), saying there is no actor to match Kichisaburō (Ihara 1960:515-17):

Hototogisu
matsu ni arashi no
ataru koe

A storm strikes the pine
The Japanese cuckoo
Cries in summer

-Sakujo

[The Japanese cuckoo has a striking cry, which is here likened to a storm (*arashi*) striking a pine (*matsu*). *Arashi* refers to Kichisaburō and *matsu* to Utaemon (Utaemon's crest is a crane that is associated with pine). Kichisaburō's performance is magnificently popular (*ataru*), showing up that of Utaemon.]

<i>Urigoe ni</i>	The seller's cry
<i>senryou ha ari</i>	Worth a thousand gold pieces
<i>hatsu-gatsuo</i>	The first bonito of the year

-Kikujo

[Like the cries of the streetseller selling the sought-after first bonito of the season, the audience cries out for Kichisaburō's performance, worth a thousand gold pieces. A top actor's annual salary was 1,000 gold pieces.]

<i>Sono fude ni</i>	In his brush
<i>shōbu no ka ari</i>	The fragrance of the iris blossoms
<i>sumi no tsuya</i>	The ink glistens with luster

-Doran

[Kichisaburō is presented as a the most elegant of artists, fittingly able to perform the role of a court aristocrat such as the calligrapher Ono no Tōfū.]

This image of Kichisaburō as an elegant court calligrapher must have been popular among his patrons (and Kichisaburō himself). The right half was republished as an actor print, without the artist's signature and with a different text, in the first month of 1821 for the occasion of Kichisaburō's taking of a new name, Kitsusaburō.

[Figure 13]

This print (Figure 13)²⁹ takes a further step in presenting Kichisaburō as an artist by stating that his poem is "in his own hand" (*jikihitsu*). We can imagine the exalted view Kichisaburō's fans had of their hero from an

²⁹ Another impression of this print is published in Matsudaira 1997:no. 78.

Ashiyuki print in the book *Rikanjō* (1814) in which he is portrayed as an Emperor, something extraordinary for one officially considered an outcast.³⁰

Although we have a considerable number of *surimono* centering on Kichisaburō II, we have no commercially produced actor prints of him with poems by him or by others until the occasion of his taking of a new name in the first month of 1821.³¹ Poetry is to be found on commercially produced actor prints in Edo from early in the eighteenth century, but poems do not appear regularly until into the nineteenth century in Edo or Osaka. In Osaka, the production of single-sheet actor prints dates from about 1792, much later than in Edo. Regular production of the large *ōban* format (approx. 37-39 x 27 cm.) begins around 1813 there, even though it was common in Edo from the mid-1790s. The fierce rivalry between the actors Kichisaburō II and Utaemon III began in earnest in the first month of 1813, and was certainly a catalyst for the flourishing of Osaka *ōban* actor prints.

The first *ōban* Osaka actor print with a poem that I have seen was issued for a performance in the eleventh month of 1815 (Figure 14).³² It is a magnificently dynamic portrait of the actor Ichikawa Ebijūrō I (1777-1827). The text is a poem signed only with Ebijūrō's new pen name, Shinshō.³³ He had begun his career in Osaka under the name Ichikawa Ichizō, but after his teacher Ichikawa Danzō IV died in 1808 in Osaka, he went to perform in Edo in 1809. In 1815 he became a disciple of the famous Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (1791-1859) from whom he received the name Ebijūrō and his pen name Shinshō.

The Danjūrō line of actors was famous for a rough style of acting (*aragoto*) and Ebijūrō was a “rough or villain role” (*jitsuaku*) specialist. Utaemon III had been instrumental in bringing Ebijūrō to Edo and in having Danjūrō take Ebijūrō under his wing (Ihara 1960:562-63). Utaemon also orchestrated the re-launch of Ebijūrō's career in Osaka as a rough-style actor in the famous Danjūrō line, returning with him from Edo to Osaka in the eleventh month of 1815. The print, a full-frontal portrait, is extremely

³⁰ Gerstle 2005a:cat. 119. This book has been transcribed into modern print by Ogita Kiyoshi (2002). The 1817 British Museum *surimono* referred to in note 33 also has Kichisaburō in the role of a court aristocrat.

³¹ For my discussion of this question see Gerstle 2005b.

³² Another impression of this print is published in Matsudaira 1997:no. 4.

³³ Shinshō means “the new *shō*”; *shō* is a measure for grain or liquid and is the crest of the famous Edo actor Ichikawa Danjūrō. Ebijūrō, therefore, is a “new Danjūrō.”



Figure 14. An anonymous single-sheet actor print produced in the eleventh month of 1815. Ichikawa Ebijūrō I in the role of the fisherman Fukashichi. The poem is by the actor who is listed only by his haiku pen name Shinshō. The frontal portrait is rare and reflects his recent taking of a new name as a disciple of the famous Edo actor Ichikawa Danjūrō VII. Ebijūrō had returned to Osaka after many years away.

unusual in Osaka prints, but not uncommon in Danjūrō prints produced in Edo. There is no artist signature, giving the impression that this print may even be by the actor himself, although it was most likely by a patron. The poem alludes to the rough *aragoto* style:

<i>Fuyu no umi</i>	The winter sea
<i>aretaki mama ni</i>	Rough it wants to be
<i>arenikeri</i>	Rough it always was

-Shinshō

With this print the “actor as poet” is presented to the paying public in full color and aimed at the theater audience. Utaemon III, a master at creating celebrity, was most likely the strategist behind the re-launch of Ebijūrō’s career.³⁴ In competitive response to this full-frontal portrait, Kichisaburō’s artist-patrons produced two full-frontal portraits of him, the only two such known, for a production three months later.³⁵

[Figure 15]

The artist Kunihiro responded both to the visual imagery of the earlier print and to Kichisaburō’s performance to produce a new print, which most likely enhanced and perhaps influenced Kichisaburō’s performance.

I have tried to argue that performance, particularly in kabuki and in haiku (*haikai*) gatherings, has been an important catalyst and stimulant for the creation of visual and literary texts. One aim was to see these objects not as representations of performance, but rather as texts in a distinct genre stimulated by performance and in anticipation of performance. We need to distinguish between the documentation of a performance and the use of a performance to create new art, both in new performances and in visual and literary texts. Many of these performance-inspired books and prints were, then, often influential as catalysts for new performances. Actors and poets were stimulated by the interaction with different artistic spheres. This circular element of influence traveled back and forth, and its welcoming of participation from a wide spectrum of the populace fostered a highly creative culture of play. One can easily imagine how important it was for actors, who portrayed high officials, courtiers as well as elegant ladies from history, to be able to meet and interact with contemporary lords and ladies in poetry circles.

³⁴ Aoki (1991) outlines Utaemon III’s strategies to make himself and his troupe the star attraction. Kaguraoka (2002:67-188) also analyzes Utaemon III’s career.

³⁵ The Hokushū print and another impression of Figure 15 are in Matsudaira 1997: nos. 7 and 8 respectively. The Hokushū print is also in Matsudaira 1997-2001:vol. 1, no. 54.

Key terms have been memory, social interaction, pleasure, play, recreation, and participation. We can see many parallels with other pre-modern societies, as well as with the contemporary electronic age and the diversity of media now available, especially the Internet, which has proved to be a tremendous stimulant for popular participation.³⁶

There is still much basic research to be done to understand the dynamics of the interaction of kabuki, poetry, and art, and the networks through which individuals participated. I hope that this article at least shows how influential performance was for cultural production in Osaka in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and how complex were the dynamic interactions within the kabuki culture of play.

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³⁶ I am grateful to Ruth Finnegan for suggesting two recent books on communication in cyberspace: Brenda Danet's *Cyberpl@y: Communicating Online* (2001) and Tim Jordan's *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet* (1999). There certainly are parallels to the concept of "carnival" space idea I have discussed to describe kabuki culture, including the idea of taking a new identity when participating in cyber activities.

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