

**POP-IDOL CONCERTS IN CONTEMPORARY
JAPAN—QUEERING GENDER, SEXUALITY AND
ETHNICITY**

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CONTENTS

Summary	iv
Chapter One	
Introduction: A Performance Studies Approach to Pop-idol Concerts	1
Chapter Two	
He? She? It? The Drag Performances of Shingo-mama	23
Chapter Three	
Gender, Gendering, Gendered— (Hyper)Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in the Performances of Nakai Masahiro	50
Chapter Four	
Gone Camping—Chonangang and the Queering of Gender and Ethnic Identities	93
Chapter Five	
Conclusion: Pop-idol Concerts—Subversion or Play?	115
Bibliography	122
Appendices	129

SUMMARY

Young pop-idols, many of whom find difficulty carrying a tune, reign in the present-day Japanese music industry. In addition to releasing albums and singles, pop-idols keep their names at the top of popularity charts by making appearances in print advertisements, TV commercials, variety programs, dramas, films, and concerts. Indeed, concerts constitute an important aspect in the career of a pop-idol. It is through these events that the physical and emotional distance between fans and idols are bridged, thus authenticating the fan-star relationship and reaffirming its existence in the minds of the fans. But besides fostering fan-star relationship, what else can pop-concerts do? How does one unravel the concert performances by Japanese pop-idols, given the socio-cultural context of contemporary Japanese society?

In this dissertation, I adopt a Performance Studies approach to Japanese pop-idol concerts. Through conducting performance analysis of the concert-performances of the boy-band, SMAP, and drawing on gender theories, camp and queer theories, I seek to examine how these performance texts ‘behave’, interact with, influence, and are influenced by the socio-cultural conditions under which they are performed. In particular, I am interested in discerning how gender, sexual and ethnic identities are performed, challenged and de/re-constructed. Ultimately, I wish to bring across the point that concerts can function as a site for the contestation of dominant forms of identities as well as fostering the negotiation of new ones.

Different audiences may have different interpretations of the same performances. My aim in this thesis is to present one out of many possible interpretations of the concert-performances of SMAP, which when considered in the socio-cultural context of present-day Japanese society, may work towards undermining and shaking the foundations of commonly taken-for-granted and deeply

entrenched assumptions regarding gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction:

A Performance Studies Approach to Japanese Pop-idol Concerts

Pop-idols and pop-idol concerts in Japan

The Japanese pop music scene is currently dominated by pop-idols. As Guy De Launey notes, “[w]hen people think about Japanese pop music, ‘idol pop’ inevitably comes to mind. ‘Idol pop’ was all about young girls (and sometimes boys) who were extremely ‘cute’, but somewhat lacking in musical talent.”¹ Mark Schilling also defines idols as “young pop singers who were scouted, trained, and packaged by talent agencies and record companies for mass consumption [...] Although an ability to carry a tune certainly helped, idol handlers often considered looks and personality more important.”² In Hiroshi Aoyagi’s study on Japanese pop-idols, he argues that pop-idols are characterized by their life-sized quality and encompass images of an average girl or boy-next-door. Together with their cuteness, pop idols are marketed as innocent and harmless companions, who can easily solicit empathy and support from their fans.³

The Japanese pop idol phenomenon began during the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the peak of Japan’s postwar economic boom that saw the birth of a new consumer culture, fed by the rising affluence of Japanese youths. The rise of star search contests such as *Star Tanjō* (Star Search) which were broadcasted nationwide

¹ Guy De Launey, “Not-so-big in Japan: Western pop music in the Japanese market”, *Popular Music* 14/2 (1995), p.208.

² Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997), p.230.

³ Hiroshi Aoyagi, *Island of Eight Million Smiles: Idol Performance and Symbolic Production in Contemporary Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), p.67-78.

also boosted the number of idol wannabes, contributing to the idol boom.⁴ As Aoyagi notes, this “whole new domain of popular culture” that has emerged is heavily “sponsored by the media, the entertainment industry, the advertising business, and retail corporations specializing in the creation of profit-generating teen-oriented trends, fashions, products.”⁵

As noted by many, the classic idol Matsuda Seiko rose to stardom with her childlike quality and reigned over the Japanese pop music scene throughout the 1980s, which was also known as the golden age of pop idols.⁶ Her popularity led to the boom in the production and promotion of young pop stars characterized by their cuteness rather than by their talents.⁷ Till this day, cute stars continue to pervade the Japanese entertainment industry but the rise in popularity of idols such as the Johnny’s boy-band KAT-TUN with their bad-boy image, and *ero-kakkoi* (erotic-cool) songstress Koda Kumi, seems to indicate a shift in the term ‘idol’ away from connotations of cuteness to wildness.⁸ As the term ‘idol’ may be defined differently and have different connotations depending on the changes in trends in the entertainment industry as well as in the socio-cultural conditions over time, I will refer to ‘idols’ in this thesis as not only young and cute artistes, but artistes of any age group whose marketing is largely image-based (rather than talent/skill-based).

One of the top figures orchestrating the creation and promotion of idols is

⁴ Hiroshi Aoyagi, “Pop Idols and the Asian Identity”, in *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. Timothy J. Craig (New York: ME Sharpe, 2000), p.316.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995); James Stanlaw, “Open Your File, Open Your Mind: Women, English, and Changing Roles and Voices in Japanese Pop Music,” in Craig, *Japan Pop!*; Kitsukawa Yūko, “J-pop 50 nen shi nyumon Book,” (Introductory book to 50 years of J-pop) *Nikkei Entateinmento* (attached booklet), July 2006. *Nikkei Entateinmento* (Nikkei Entertainment) is a monthly magazine devoted to the analysis of various events or trends in the entertainment world, such as music, drama, film and concert.

⁷ Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” p.235.

⁸ Kitsukawa, “J-pop 50 nen shi nyumon Book,” p. 16. By ‘wildness’, I mean a less seemingly innocent, and a deviant or bad-boy/girl demeanor and attitude.

Johnny Kitagawa who founded Johnny's Jimusho (Johnny and Associates) in 1963. For four decades since its establishment, members of the Johnny's Jimusho have dominated the boy-band market in Japan, from earlier groups such as Four Leaves, Hikaru Genji, to today's leading boy-bands such as SMAP, Tokio, Kinki Kids, V6, NEWS and KAT-TUN. These 'crown princes' of the Japanese entertainment industry, with their squeaky clean, pretty boy-next-door image, permeate all aspects of the entertainment industry, appearing everywhere, from best-selling albums to TV and radio shows, commercials, magazine covers, dramas, etc. These activities not only keep them in the spotlight between singles and tours, but also at the top of popularity rankings.

Besides releasing singles and albums that constantly top the Oricon charts⁹, pop idols also hold regular concert tours which span three to four months and cover most of the major cities in Japan. For example, in 2004, each of the Johnny's boy-bands held an average of two to three concert tours, with twenty to thirty shows per tour.¹⁰ KAT-TUN, even before releasing their debut album, performed to a full-house at Tokyo Dome in March 2006 which, according to a staff at the records company, is something that can only be achieved by their seniors, Kinki Kids and SMAP ("*5 man nin ga hairu Tokyo Dome wo manin ni dekiru no wa SMAP, Kinki Kids made*").¹¹

Given the rise in popularity of such pop-idols and their products in postwar

⁹ According to *Nikkei Entateinmento*, between January and July 2006, the Johnny's idols occupied 55% of the number one rank on the Oricon chart by topping the chart for 17 weeks out of the 31 weeks. The number of weeks where the Johnny's idols topped the chart gradually rose from 5 weeks in 1996 to 30 weeks in 2006, while the number of the groups hitting number one rank on the Oricon also rose from 2 groups in 1996 to 12 groups in 2006. "Tokushū: ongaku hitto ni itsutsu no hisaku," (Feature: 5 secret strategies to becoming a hit music) *Nikkei Entateinmento*, September 2006, p.50.

¹⁰ "The Best of Duet 2004," *Duet* (attached booklet), January 2005.

¹¹ "KAT-TUN ga tsuini debyū, irei dukushi no shuhō ni gyōkai sōzen" (The awaited debut of KAT-TUN that caused dispute in the music industry with their unconventionality), *Nikkei Entateinmento*, April 2006, p.13.

Japan, various scholars, especially in the field of Japanese Studies, have sought to unravel the idol phenomena as well as examine the production and consumption of popular music in general, adopting approaches from audience study to musical analysis to biographical accounts of the star-persona. For example, anthropologist-idologist Aoyagi Hiroshi, in *Islands of Eight Million Smiles: Idol Performances and Symbolic Production in Contemporary Japan*, provides an enlightening ethnographic account of the field of idol production. As he notes, “idols performances offer important anthropological insights regarding the ways in which the ideal images of adolescent selfhood are socially constructed.”¹² Through interviews, participant observation and his own experience of being produced as an idol, Aoyagi attempts to uncover the symbolism of pop idols and their performances in contemporary Japanese society, especially in terms of the socialization of Japanese youths. In “Open your file, open your mind: Women, English, and Changing Roles and Voices in Japanese Pop Music,” James Stanlaw gives an overview of some of the prominent female pop-singers in the 1980s and 1990s, from Matsuda Seiko to the trio, Dreams Come True. In his analysis of their song lyrics, Stanlaw attempts to show how these female singers, through their songs, construct alternative models of femininity or female subjectivity.¹³

Besides pop-idols, *enka* singers also became subjects of analysis. Alan Tansman traces the career of *enka* singer Misora Hibari, detailing her major works and performances and situating them in the socio-cultural context of postwar Japan in an attempt to understand her popularity that earned her the name of Japanese Elvis

¹² Aoyagi, *Island of Eight Million Smiles*, p.9.

¹³ Stanlaw, “Open your file, open your mind.”

Presley.¹⁴ Similarly, working in the genre of *enka*, Christine Yano tries to look into the production and consumption of *enka* through an examination of the consumers, as well as through an analysis of the lyrics of *enka* songs and the performance conventions of the genre.¹⁵ In her other work, “Letters from the Heart: Negotiating Fan-Star Relationships in Japanese Popular Music,” Yano attempts to explain the fandom of *enka* singer Mori Shinichi. She delineates that fan identity and subjectivity are built around the construction and consumption of intimacy and it is this desire for intimacy with Mori that “drives flocks of fans to the concert hall, to the music stores to buy Mori’s latest CD, to the karaoke booths where they sing Mori’s songs.”¹⁶ While Yano attributes fans’ concert attendance to the desire for intimacy with their idols, Carolyn Stevens, in her anthropological study of audiences at The Alfee concerts, argues that the physical and emotional closeness to their idols that fans experience at the concert event generate pleasure, which in turn contribute to the shaping of the fans’ personal identities, and help them make sense of their lives.¹⁷

These scholars have made significant contributions to the study of Japanese popular music, especially in terms of its production and consumption as a cultural product. However, these writings came mainly from anthropological and sociological perspectives which focus more on production studies, audience reception, or fandom. Analyses of the music performance per se, in particular concert performance, are rarely conducted. When they are, they are at most briefly mentioned, without much

¹⁴ Alan Tansman, “Mournful Tears and Sake: The Postwar Myth of Misora Hibari,” in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, ed. John Whittier Treat (Surrey: Curzon; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Christine Yano, “The Marketing of Tears: Consuming Emotions in Japanese Popular Song,” in Craig, *Japan Pop!*

¹⁶ Christine Yano, “Letters from the Heart: Negotiating Fan-Star Relationships in Japanese Popular Music,” in *Fanning The Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan*, ed. William W. Kelly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 42.

¹⁷ Carolyn Stevens, “Buying Intimacy: Proximity and Exchange at a Japanese Rock Concert,” in Kelly, *Fanning The Flames*.

detailed account and in-depth analysis of the performance and its social efficacy. For example, although Stevens uses The Alfee rock concerts as her case study to find out how concerts produce symbolic meanings for the fans, her focus is more on how fans consume the concert event in general rather than the performances of The Alfee itself.

Philip Auslander, in his study of glam rock performances, similarly highlights the neglect of musical performances by academia. While he criticizes musicologists for privileging the music score over the performance as objects of analysis, he also condemns scholars in cultural studies for trivializing the role of musical performances especially in rock music.¹⁸ As he asserts, “Lawrence Grossberg, a major figure in cultural studies, takes a broadly similar position [to that of Theodore Gracyk who claims that rock music is primarily a piece of recording rather than a performance] by claiming that live performances of rock are at most secondary iterations of a work contained in the recording.”¹⁹ He criticized scholars like Grossberg for not seeing any aesthetic values and cultural functions of rock music performances other than serving as a socializing space for fans.

A Performance Studies approach to pop-idol concerts

Auslander proposes a Performance Studies approach to studying musical performances, where he examines how musicians create and present their musical personae through their performances by applying performance analysis to one genre of popular music—glam rock. By adopting a performer-centered position, he is interested in “finding ways of discussing what musicians do as performers—the meanings they create through their performances and the means they use to create

¹⁸ Philip Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14 (1), 2004, pp.2-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

them.”²⁰ For Auslander, musical performances are channels for the crafting and presentation of self, and the musical persona is the “version of the self” that the musician performs through musical performances.²¹ He situates the production and performance of musical identities or personae in the socio-cultural context of the society in which they are performed, and notes that in the case of glam rock, “the gender ambiguities of glam rockers’ personae [...] challenged the gender norms of American and European societies in the early 1970s. The performance of glam rock was a safe cultural space in which to experiment with versions of masculinity that clearly flouted those norms.”²² Auslander, by analyzing the performances of glam rockers in terms of the aural and the visual, extracts the means through which these musicians perform their musical personae and unearths the meanings that these personae generate in relation to the context of the music genre and the socio-cultural conditions.

Following Auslander, I propose for a study of Japanese pop-idol concert-performances from the perspective of Performance Studies. The field of Performance Studies is a relatively new area of study that “draws on and synthesizes approaches from a wide variety of disciplines including performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, queer theory, semiotics, ethology, cybernetics, area studies, media and popular culture theory, and cultural studies.”²³ In his ‘textbook’ of Performance Studies, Richard Schechner, one of the pioneering scholars in the field, argues that ‘performance’ can encompass a variety of human activities, from everyday life to the arts to popular entertainment

²⁰ Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam rock: gender and theatricality in rock music* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), p.2.

²¹ Philip Auslander, “Musical Personae,” *The Drama Review* 50(1), 2006, p. 104.

²² Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music,” p.10.

²³ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

and to rituals.²⁴ These activities are now generally termed ‘cultural performances’, “the living, embodied expression of cultural traditions and transformations,”²⁵ or in other words, the symbolic performances of cultural dynamics. By studying these activities or events *as* performance, by using performance as a tool of inquiry, one can look at how human actions and behavior do or show something, or in Schechner’s words, “what people do in the activity of their doing it,”²⁶ and how they relate to or interact with the world around them. Performance Studies is interested in issues such as how a text is made, by whom it is made, how it interacts with its audiences, how it changes over time, and the conditions in which the text is created and performed.²⁷

In a Performance Studies approach to pop-idol concerts, I will deploy performance as a tool to study the concerts. Concerts will be studied *as* performance, examined as events or behaviors and analyzed in terms of their relation to or interaction with socio-cultural forces. Drawing on the methodology of textual analysis in cultural studies, I will conduct a close-text reading of concert-performances and attempt to explicate the meanings of the ‘text’ through an examination of the signs of performance, such as costumes, voice, language, gestures and dance. The significance of the concert-performances will be situated within the socio-cultural context of contemporary Japanese society, and discussed *vis-à-vis* key concepts in Performance Studies, such as performativity, the construction of gender and race, queer theories, as well as postmodern gender theories.

As Jon McKenzie notes, “within Performance Studies, performance has taken on a particular political significance; with increasing consistency, performance has become defined as a ‘liminal’ process, a reflexive transgression of social

²⁴ Ibid., p.25.

²⁵ Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.8.

²⁶ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p.1.

²⁷ Ibid., p.2.

structures.”²⁸ Scholars in the discipline have increasingly emphasized on the liminal quality of performances, where the liminal is an in-between time and space that enables the temporary subversion of social norms.²⁹ Performance has come to be widely associated with and discussed within Performance Studies along with notions of transgression and subversion, or in McKenzie’s terms, the “challenge of efficacy,”³⁰ instead of being mere entertainment without any social value.

In this thesis, I would like to argue that pop concerts can be seen as channels for the performances of unconventional identities that queer normative notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. As a popular cultural text, and as a form of cultural performance, I posit pop-idol concerts in the larger social processes of shifting gender norms in Japanese society, and as cultural practices that contest the dominant discourse of gender in contemporary Japan.

Gender Norms and Diverse Voices

As Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno notes, “contemporary gender expectations are reflected in the attitudes and representations of the salaryman warrior, [...] and of the housewife/mother lovingly yet efficiently managing all aspects of the household from budget and menus to cleaning, yardwork, childrearing, and perhaps her husband.”³¹ In the postwar economic boom, the figure of the salaryman or corporate warrior became the dominant discourse of masculinity. As Japan turned its attention away from its defeat in the Pacific War to economic development, the white-collar male

²⁸ McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, p.8.

²⁹ Liminality, a concept developed by Victor Turner from Arnold Van Gennep’s theory of rites of passage, refers to “a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic ‘in betweenness’ allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed.” Ibid, p.50.

³⁰ Ibid., p.53.

³¹ Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno, *Gendering Modern Japanese History* (Cambridge, M.A: Harvard East Asia Center, 2005), p.22.

worker came to bear “Japan’s ‘Economic miracle’ of the 1950s and 1960s on their shoulders, [replacing] the soldier as the new masculine ideal.”³² The salaryman is expected to work for the economic progress of the country and the development of the company, and in addition, he is expected to be the breadwinner and provider of the home, i.e. the *daikokubashira* (the main pillar).

The dominant discourse of masculinity in Japan discerns male subjectivity as being that of the middle-class, white-collar and heterosexual salaryman, while women on the other hand are expected to be *senkyō shufu* (full-time housewife), taking care of the family and the household so that the salaryman husband and father can be freed of household burdens and be fully committed to his work. The supporting role of the *senkyō shufu* to men evolved from the Meiji period *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideology, where women were expected (and trained) to be the good wife and wise mother of the family. Although the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology is no longer sanctioned by the state in present-day Japan, it continues to be incorporated into state regulations and social institutions, influencing modern constructions of femininity (see Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of notions of femininity in Japan).

Throughout Japanese history, gender expectations have been molded and administered by the state and social institutions, and perpetuated in society through various channels such as in the form of legislations or the mass media. Yet, individuals have lived lives and developed identities that differ from or even challenged such “unitary constructions of gender.”³³ In her discussion of feminism in Japan, Vera Mackie similarly notes, “[I]n every decade of Japan’s modern history, men and women had been addressed in gender-specific ways in government policies

³² Romit Dasgupta, “Creating Corporate Warriors: The ‘salaryman’ and masculinity in Japan,” in *Asian Masculinities: The meaning and practice of manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Kam Louie and Morris Low (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 122.

³³ Uno and Molony, *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, p.8.

and political statements and through cultural products. In every decade, some women (and a few men) had challenged accepted ways of thinking about women, men and society.”³⁴ For example, although hegemonic constructions of femininity pervaded Japanese society as the norm, many women have chosen to live outside of the discourse such as by initiating divorces, delaying marriage and child-birth, or choosing to be career-women.³⁵ Other women have actively sought to challenge dominant notions of appropriate feminine behavior that restricts women to the domestic sphere, by participating in women’s movements and joining feminist groups such as *ūman ribu* (Women’s Liberation) which has attempted to reconceptualize women’s identity outside of the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal.³⁶

Although women have already been actively engaging in efforts to challenge and change dominant notions of femininity since the 1960s, men’s voices to resist state sanctioned masculine identities only became prominent in the post-economic-bubble years. The collapse of the Japanese economy and corporate re-structuring in the 1990s called into question the traditional notions of masculinity defined by work and embodied by the salaryman. As the prestige of the middle-class, white collar, heterosexual male is being threatened, the salaryman whose existence has hinged on being a corporate warrior is at risk, thus challenging his identity as a father, provider and as a ‘man’.³⁷ Yet, it is this decline of the salaryman model of masculinity that, according to Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta, “allowed

³⁴ Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.1.

³⁵ Karen Ma notes that the divorce rate in Japan has doubled in twenty years, rising from 95,000 cases in 1970, to 188,303 cases in 1993. The increase was especially sharp among couples who are married for less than five years, and those who are married for more than twenty years. Karen Ma, *The Modern Madame Butterfly: fantasy and reality in Japanese* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1996), p.177.

³⁶ Setsu Shigematsu, “Feminism and Media in the Late Twentieth Century: Reading the Limits of a Politics of Transgression,” in Uno and Molony, *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, p.559.

³⁷ Dasgupta, “Creating Corporate Warriors,” p.131.

previously muted concerns about the assumptions and ideals surrounding hegemonic masculinity to emerge as an audible form of public discourse.”³⁸

Indeed, the 1990s saw the increase in men’s voices, through the formation of men’s groups such as *Menzuribu Kenkyūkai* (Study group for men’s liberation) and Men’s Center Japan, as well as through the establishment of men’s studies.³⁹ One of the pioneers in the men’s movements, Itō Kimio, has not only contributed to establishing and spreading men’s studies in colleges and universities, but has also produced a eight-episode serial on NHK education channel in 2003, *Otokorashisa to iu shinwa* (The myth of masculinity). The program serves as a space for Itō to educate the general public on current issues faced by Japanese men, as well as to highlight the constructedness of prevailing notions of masculinity in the Japanese society.⁴⁰ For example, episode two features the socio-cultural constructedness of gender, where Itō highlights the trend towards unisexification in Japanese society. While men are increasingly ‘feminized’, visiting *esute* (beauty salons) and engaging in various beauty works, women are increasingly ‘masculinized’.⁴¹ He introduces the term *famio-kun* (feminine man) to describe such young effeminate males whose sense of masculinity is distinct from their counterparts a decade ago. Ultimately, he seeks to put across the point that notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are socially and culturally constructed, and can change overtime.

Recent ethnographic research on the lives of Japanese men by scholars such as Taga Futoshi and Romit Dasgupta also show that there is an increasing tendency

³⁸ McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders, and Sexualities*, p.10.

³⁹ Futoshi Taga, “Rethinking Japanese masculinities: Recent research trends,” in McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders, and Sexualities*, p.157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159

⁴¹ “Bunka to rekishi no naka no ‘otokorashisa’,” (Socio-cultural ‘masculinity’) ‘*Otokorashisa*’ to *iu shinwa: Gendai dansei no kiki wo yomihodoku*, (The myth of ‘masculinity’: interpreting the crisis of modern [Japanese] men) by Itō Kimio, NHK jinmon kōza, NHK Education, 20 August 2003.

for men to seek identities beyond the traditional salaryman model. For example, Dasgupta's interviews with employees of two organizations in Northern Japan during the late 1990s show that, although most informants still conform to dominant notions of masculinity that is articulated through work, many show keenness in playing a part in child-rearing.⁴² Similarly, in Taga's study of the gender formation of middle-class young men, it is found that some of his informants have experienced conflict with traditional notions of masculinity and have "tried to re/construct their gender identity by negotiating the definitions of masculinity with others or by reflecting upon masculinity themselves [...]"⁴³ Many of his informants have come to be more concerned with the sex-role division of work and were considering the possibilities of men sharing the household chores so that their partners can continue working after marriage. Some modified their perceptions of masculinity while others even questioned the viability of traditional models of masculinity and femininity.⁴⁴

While individuals living gender and sexual non-normative lives have always existed in Japan, they have been underrepresented in both English and Japanese literature. It was until the last decade or so that saw a boom in the publications of research on marginal genders and sexualities, bringing fore the diversity of gender and sexual identities that have been overlooked. McLelland and Dasgupta's new book, *Gender, transgender and sexualities in Japan*, is a significant work in mapping the changes in research within Japanese academia regarding gender and sexuality, and in foregrounding the multiplicity and intricacy of the realities of gender and sexual

⁴² Romit Dasgupta, "Salaryman doing straight: Heterosexual men and the dynamics of gender conformity," in McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders, and Sexualities*, p.180. In the mid-1990s, the Japanese government attempted to encourage fathers to play an active part in child-raising through a series of campaigns, and the most well-known was the 'Sam Campaign', where Sam, husband of pop-star Namie Amuro was featured in the promotion posters of the Ministry of Health and Welfare carrying his baby. Ibid., p.177.

⁴³ Futoshi Taga, "Rethinking Male Socialization: Life Histories of Japanese male youth," in Louie and Low, *Asian Masculinities*, p.150.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.161.

identities that have existed among Japanese people. The book highlights the fact that increasing numbers of people are rejecting the gender binary that has been constructed in contemporary societies.⁴⁵

As current trends in research and publication show, such alternative voices have always existed; yet dominant notions of masculinity and femininity as defined by the salarymen and the good wife, wise mother still remain as the ideological linchpin. In their study, Dasgupta and Taga found that despite the rising visibility of individuals of non-conventional gender and sexual identities, social pressures to conform to conventional gender ideologies is still very strong in contemporary Japan.⁴⁶

In the ongoing process of negotiation of gender and sexual identities, popular culture in its various manifestations play an important role in disseminating, enforcing and/or challenging dominant notions of gender and sexualities. As Dasgupta observes in his analysis of popular cultural representations of salaryman masculinity, “on one level, sites of popular culture serve to produce and reproduce the hegemonic discourse,”⁴⁷ while “on a more serious level, popular culture has always worked simultaneously to consolidate the hegemonic discourse and to destabilize it (or at the very least to present alternate readings).”⁴⁸ He cites the example of a manga series (which was later made into a drama serial and a film) *Sarariiman Kintarō* (Salaryman Kintarō), in which the male protagonist Kintarō is both the epitome and the antithesis of a salaryman. While gangster-turned-salaryman Kintarō fits into the male archetype—heterosexual, middle-class white-collar worker, he also possesses an aggressive, working-class biker alter-ego which he would reveal when dealing with

⁴⁵ McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders, and Sexualities*, p.2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.180-181.

⁴⁷ Dasgupta, “Creating Corporate Warriors,” in *Asian Masculinities*, p.123.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.128.

villains. The portrayal of “the idealized attributes of several disparate (and often mutually hostile) discourses of masculinity in the body of one individual,”⁴⁹ such as the co-existence of hypermasculinity, bawdiness and submissiveness to corporate norms in the figure of Kintarō, serves to foreground the inessentiality and tenuousness of the dominant ideal.

Through the figure of Kintarō, the normative notion of masculinity as defined by the salaryman is being destabilized. Darling-Wolf also provides another example of the contestation of the dominant discourse of masculinity in popular culture through her textual analysis of the television and concert performances of boy-band, SMAP. She accounts for the popularity of SMAP by interpreting their images as appealing to the female sexual fantasy, where media representations of SMAP members usually focus on qualities of non-aggressiveness and effeminacy, which are the antithesis of the overworked, sexist salaryman. Darling-Wolf asserts that the multiple images of masculinity represented by the SMAP members may function as a form of the deconstruction of dominant notions of masculinity, as represented by the salaryman, and open up avenues for audiences to explore and redefine their gender and sexual identities.⁵⁰

Pop-idols such as SMAP may indeed be seen as the epitome of the new-male ideal that is divorced from the salaryman model, centering on effeminacy and emphasising on physical appearance. In Laura Miller’s study of the changes in male aesthetic in Japan, she notes that there is a “shift in Japanese canons of taste for young heterosexual men,”⁵¹ epitomized by stars such as Kimura Takuya, who pay

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fabienne Darling-Wolf, “SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity: Constructing the Perfect Female Fantasy in Japanese Popular Music,” *Popular Music and Society* 27(3), 2004, p.367.

⁵¹ Laura Miller, “Male Beauty at Work in Japan,” in James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salaryman doxa* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p.37.

attention to their appearances and engage in beauty works as a way to articulate their identities. Miller notes that the *Binan* (beautiful men) phenomenon or the rising trend of men engaging in beauty works and body projects may be interpreted as a reconstruction of masculinity towards a new model of male beauty, as defined by the slim and smooth male body that can be achieved by going to *esute* salons, or consuming D.I.Y. products specifically for such body projects. She attributes this trend towards male beauty consumption to the advancement of consumer capitalism, female desire and the rejection of the salaryman model of masculinity. Young men today are choosing to live outside of the conventional model of masculinity as defined by the salaryman, and this symbolizes a rejection of the work-based, salaryman model of masculinity by men and women, towards a masculine identity that hinges on consumption.⁵²

As seen above, the lived realities of Japanese men and women have never totally aligned with the gender ideology, and there has been a recent trend among academics in mapping out and making visible such silenced lives. Scholars in popular culture have also attempted to understand the changes in popular representations of men and women, studying the changes as a social phenomenon or attempting to interpret the messages embedded in the images. I agree with these scholars in recognizing the diversity of gender and sexual identities that have existed and are existing in Japanese society, as well as the positive role that popular culture may play in challenging mainstream notions of identities. However, I also propose a slightly different approach to addressing similar issues, i.e. through a performance analysis of pop-idol concerts. In addition to unpacking the meanings of the performance text, I am also interested in looking at how these texts *behave* and what these texts *do* in

⁵² Ibid., p.52.

relation to the socio-cultural context in which they are performed. As I will show in the subsequent chapters, pop-idol concerts are part of the larger discourse of changing notions of gender and sexuality. As a form of social processes, they can serve as a site to negotiate and contest dominant notions of masculinity and femininity, and challenge prevailing conceptualizations of gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

Sports Music Assemble People

I have chosen concert performances of the boy-band SMAP (Sports Music Assemble People) as my text in this study because of their high popularity and the pervasiveness of their images and performances in a wide variety of media, ranging from print advertisements to live concerts. Debuting in 1988, this five-member group continues to dominate the Japanese entertainment scene as pop-idols even as they entered their thirties. According to a research conducted by *Nikkei Entateinmento*, SMAP's 2003 concert DVD, *Live MIJ*, topped the Oricon chart for DVD sales at a figure of 33.2 million copies as of May 2006, while their 2005 concert DVD, *SMAP to icchatta! SMAP SMAPLE TOUR 2005*, was ranked number four at a sales of 28.8 million copies.⁵³ Their 2002 concert DVD, *Smapp! Tour! 2002!* also followed closely with a sales of 199,962 copies for the period March 1999 to November 2005.⁵⁴ Their live concerts usually attract a total of one million audience per concert tour, and such annual concert events have brought about a phenomenon called the '*Summapu jyutai*' (SMAP traffic jam), where in the city in which SMAP is touring for the day, there will be massive traffic congestion in the vicinity of the concert venue.⁵⁵

⁵³ "rekidai ongaku DVD seerusu rankingu," (DVD sales ranking) *Nikkei Entateinmento*, May 2006, p.32.

⁵⁴ Uchiseto Hisashi et al, "densetsu no ongaku raibu 150 sen," (The legendary live music events: 150 Selections) *Nikkei Entateinmento*, February 2006, p.57.

⁵⁵ Shinohara Sari, *Sumappu Wocchingu: aidoru de heisei nihon shakai wo yomihodoku* (SMAP Watching: Understanding Heisei Japan through idols) (Tokyo: Nikkei BP sha, 2003), p. 6.

In this thesis, I will focus on the characters/personae which are performed by Katori Shingo, Nakai Masahiro and Kusanagi Tsuyoshi in SMAP's annual concert, from 2001 to 2006. Auslander defines persona as "the performer's self-presentation," and the character as "a figure portrayed in a song text."⁵⁶ However, characters and personae may overlap and at times, it may be difficult to demarcate the boundary between them. In the case of SMAP, because the characters such as Shingo-mama (Katori Shingo) and Chonangang (Kusanagi Tsuyoshi) are not one-time characters, but are repeatedly performed in variety programs, movies, dramas, albums and live performances, they can contribute to the construction of the personae or the star-text of the artistes. No doubt these characters are based on other texts from which they originate, and the performance of these characters in the concerts may be seen as another manifestation of the characters' texts. Nevertheless, I am interested in examining the representations of these characters in concert performances, and see how these portrayals supplement the ongoing construction of the characters, as well as the star-personae of Katori, Nakai and Kusanagi.

These characters/personae that Katori, Nakai and Kusanagi perform are dramatic and theatrical, offering clear cut cases that foreground the performance of identities. In the postmodern world, all aspects of life from the social to political to artistic are seen as having what Schechner calls, the "qualities of performance."⁵⁷ I will explain the notion of 'performative' in more detail in subsequent chapters, but what I would like to emphasize here is the conceptualization of identities (in the postmodern world) as constructed, as acquired rather than innate.

⁵⁶ Auslander, *Performing Glam rock*, p.4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.110.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter Two, I analyze the performances of Shingo-mama, a drag character played by Katori Shingo. I interpret Katori's performance of Shingo-mama as a denaturalization of the prevalent notions of femininity in Japan which is influenced by the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal that later took on the form of the *senyō shufu* in its modern incarnation. Shingo-mama's embodiment of the prevailing gender norm and her excessive performance of its functions to denaturalize what appears to be natural: the incongruous gender signs that she portrays create a distancing effect that exposes the gender signs that *construct* gender, and the exposure of the man beneath the woman's clothes recontextualizes femininity, questioning the essentiality of feminine behavior to biological females. In addition, through the juxtaposition of Shingo-mama with 'real' women, one is compelled to ask, what is 'true' gender? And even, what *is* gender?

The notion of a 'true' or 'original' gender is further contested in Chapter Three, as I highlight the performative and imitative nature of gender through Nakai Masahiro's impersonation of Morning Musume in SMAP's concerts.⁵⁸ In addition to an imitation of a variety of personalities and celebrities in his solo performances, Nakai also performs characters that are marked by their gender and sexual non-conformity. Through an analysis of the various characters and identities that Nakai performs—men in bikini, *buriburiman*, and HardGay, I argue that Nakai's performances not only disrupt the binaries within categories of sex, gender and sexuality, but also destabilize the relationships among the categories. His performances of gender variance and seemingly homosexual identities can also be posited as a critique of the representations of homosexual men in the Japanese

⁵⁸ Morning Musume is an all-female, 15-member idol group that capitalizes on young, cute teenage girls as their main marketing strategy

mainstream and gay media, as well as an attempt to deconstruct prevailing stereotypes of gay men in Japan.

In Chapter Four, I introduce queer theory through the performance analysis of Chonangang, the Korean persona of Kusanagi Tsuyoshi. Chonangang, as a fantastic construct of a campy, hybrid, intercultural body, can function as a vehicle to question and disrupt rigid social systems of gender and ethnic identities in Japan. Based on camp and queer theory, I argue that through the act of queering, spaces for the emergence of alternative identities, such as cultural pluralism, and non-normative sex and gender identities may be opened up.

The Liminal-norm

In the field of Performance Studies, as scholars continue to institutionalize and legitimize the discipline, many have solely focused on or even over-privileged the transgressive and political aspects of performances. As they tried to establish the efficacy of performances (and of the discipline), they have repeatedly employed the concept of liminality in their discussion of performance. In the state of liminality, it is believed that participants can develop the ability to subvert, resist and challenge existing norms. However, liminality reinforces existing social structures more than it transgresses. It was during the social unrest in North America and Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s that Performance Scholars came to read such cultural performances as being efficacious in their ability to challenge social structures and bring about radical changes. Such deconstructive readings of cultural performances have gained much popularity among scholars of Performance Studies, causing liminality, a concept which was primarily associated with normative forces to become

associated with mutational forces.⁵⁹ As such perception of performances eventually becomes *the* norm, McKenzie coins the term, the 'liminal-norm', to describe such a phenomenon.

I have looked at the performances of some pop-idol concerts in my study as generally being subversive, challenging the existing norms of Japanese society. While this could be seen as an act of perpetuating the liminal-norm, I do not advocate for the total invalidation of utilizing liminality to discuss performances as it would be imprudent to overlook or underestimate the political significance of any performances. The performances in my study may be seen as a perpetuation of gender norms in prevalent Japanese society, but they at the same time also yield subversive interpretations.

In Auslander's study of glam rock, he passionately argues that there has been a neglect of the study of musical performances not only in musicology and cultural studies, but also in the field of performance studies. He attributes this negligence to the genealogy of the field of performance studies, where Performance Studies was born out of a "synthesis of theatre studies with aspects of anthropology, sociology, and oral interpretation."⁶⁰ As he notes, Theatre Studies has generally excluded the study of music and musical forms which scholars in performance studies have "unfortunately inherited."⁶¹ Auslander's study of glam rock from the perspective of performance studies can be seen as an attempt to fill up the gap in the discipline, i.e. the neglect of the study of musical performances. Inspired by Auslander, I would like to posit my study of Japanese pop-idol concerts as part of this effort (taken by

⁵⁹ McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, p.51.

⁶⁰ Auslander, *Performing Glam rock*, p.3.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Auslander and probably many other scholars currently) to incorporate popular music performances in performance studies, as well as to contribute to the existing scholarship in Japanese popular culture from a new perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

He? She? It?

The drag performances of Shingo-mama

Shingo-mama, the drag queen character played by Katori Shingo, was born out of a Japanese variety program *Sata Smap*.⁶² Through the deployment of cross-dressing, a performance style entrenched in the tradition of Japanese comedy, Katori transforms into the emblem of the good wife, wise mother—the idealized image of traditional Japanese femininity. From the lyrics of *Shingo mama no oha rokku*, a single released by Shingo-mama in 2000, the portrayal of Shingo-mama takes the form of a bubbly mother-figure who is good-natured and brilliant in cooking, the epitome of a caring mother and efficient housewife.⁶³ While music critic Sakaki comments that Shingo-mama’s cross-dressing is not an expression any notions of transgenderism (transgenderism in terms of homosexuality) but simply for comic effects,⁶⁴ Darling-Wolf argues that Katori’s cross-dressing as an extremely feminized representation of man contributes to the overall androgynous image and sexual appeal of SMAP, which “may allow SMAP fans to imagine romantic relationships moving beyond the boundaries of currently dominant constructions of gender roles based on compulsory heterosexuality.”⁶⁵ However, she seems to equate the wearing of dresses by men to androgyny which in turn resists “heterosexist constructions of

⁶² *Sata Smap* is a weekly variety program co-hosted by Nakai Masahiro and Katori Shingo. It was on air on Fuji TV every Saturday evening from April 1999—March 2002. *Shonentonō Katori 1999*, Fuji TV, 25 July 2007 <http://www.fujitv.co.jp/b_hp/katori/>; *Sata suma*, Fuji TV, 25 July 2007 <http://www.fujitv.co.jp/jp/b_hp/satasuma/index.html>

⁶³ See Appendix A.

⁶⁴ Sakaki Hiroto, “Shingo mama & Chonankan: imeeji gyappu de warawaseru dentougeiteki kyara” (Shingo mama and Chonangan: characters who generate laughter through the traditional art of ‘image gap’), *Ongakushi ga kakanai J-poppu hihiyō 23: Minna no Jyaniizu* (A review of J-pop unparalleled in music magazines Vol 23: Everyone’s Johnnys), April 2003, p.18.

⁶⁵ Darling-Wolf, “SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity,” p.361

masculinity.”⁶⁶ Although she did not clearly explain how the figure of Shingo-mama as an effeminate man functions especially vis-à-vis the context in which the character is performed, I do agree with her premise that the multiple images of masculinity portrayed by SMAP may help to “deconstruct essentializing notions of masculinity.”⁶⁷ However, in the case of Shingo-mama, rather than simply dismissing her cross-gendered performances as mere hilarity, the performance strategies of overstatement and alienation often observed in Shingo-mama’s acts can be read as a destabilization and questioning of the gender norms that bind Japanese females to the role of the wife and the mother.⁶⁸

Because of the intertextuality of the character of Shingo-mama which is derived from *Sata Smap*, any discussion of the performances of Shingo-mama would be incomplete without considering her performances in *Sata Smap*. In one segment of the program called *Shingo mama no kossori asagohan* (Shingo-mama’s stealthy breakfast), audiences can write-in to Shingo-mama to request her to take over the role of the mother of the family for the morning, so that the mother can take the opportunity to sleep in (at least for a day). Shingo-mama would arrive at the residence of the family early in the morning, let herself into the house secretly, turn off everyone’s alarm clocks, and prepare breakfast out of leftovers or whatever that can be found in the family’s refrigerator. She would then wake the whole family up (except the mother), eat breakfast with them, and see them off to work or school. Only after the morning routine has been completed would Shingo-mama wake the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.367

⁶⁸ The third-person pronoun ‘he’ will be used to refer to Katori Shingo, while ‘she’ will be used to refer to Shingo-mama. The choice of such personal pronouns here is based on the gender identity that Katori or Shingo-mama (and later in the chapter, Takuya-mama) is seen to be performing, enacting or imitating.

mother up. For example, in the February 19, 2002 episode of *Sata Smap*,⁶⁹ Shingo-mama, at the request of a member of the audience, Mrs Atarashi, to help her manage her mischievous kids, arrives at the household at six-thirty in the morning, and sets off to prepare a nourishing breakfast and to get the father and four other kids up on time. Over breakfast, Shingo-mama reports to the father of the disobedience of two of the kids, one who frequently skips his English tuition classes, and the other who steals money from the mother's wallet to buy toys. She makes them apologize to their mother over the camera to show that they have repented what they have done. She then sees Mr. Atarashi off to work, and receives a goodbye kiss from him. Lastly she wakes Mrs Atarashi, the ritual that marks the end (as well as the success) of Shingo-mama's mission.

Shingo-mama is always portrayed as being an efficient domestic caregiver, from household chores to cooking to looking after the father and the kids. As she goes about carrying out her 'mission' in the program, she constantly provides household tips and recipes, working systematically according to the schedule that she has laid out earlier. In the Atarashi-family's episode, while Shingo-mama is nagging at the children over breakfast, one of the kids remarked that she is just like their mother ("okāsan mitai"). She not only manages the household well, she also plays a pedagogical role in educating children such as not sucking mayonnaise directly from the bottle, or getting the two kids to be remorseful of their mischief.

The maternal image embodied by Shingo-mama can be seen as a derivative of the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal. It was established in 1899 by the Meiji Ministry of Education, and it constituted the bedrock of education for Japanese women, ascribing women to the role of domestic caretakers, from the nurturing of children to managing

⁶⁹ "Shingo mama no kossori asagohan," (Shingo-mama's stealthy breakfast) *Sata Suma*, Fuji TV Network, 19 February 2002.

the entire household.⁷⁰ As Kathleen Uno notes, the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal has permeated the mass media, girls' schools and even the upper-class families, soon becoming the "official discourse on women in Japan" till the Second World War.⁷¹ In the pre-war periods, the designation of women's place to the home suited the state's colonization plans that needed women to reproduce male offspring to be conscripted and go to war. In the post-war periods, however, women were still encouraged or rather obliged to remain in the domestic sphere and reproduce in order to overcome labor shortage problems in the postwar period. The ideal continues to pervade Japanese society in its various modern forms, relegating women to the domestic sphere as mothers and housewives, and restricting their participation in society.

Even with the advancement of women into the workplace in the 1970s and 1980s, Ueno Chizuko argues that the increase in the number of women (especially married women) in the workforce is actually a marginalization of women's labor, where women are left with low-paying jobs with long working hours and without job security or employee welfare and benefits.⁷² The establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986 also did not effect much change in the conditions of the female labor-force. Rather, it is because of this law that caused women to shun the career tracks usually adopted by men. If women were to choose the career track, they would have to compete equally with their male counterparts, not only in terms of academic qualifications, but also in terms of the long working hours and responsibilities at work. Such burdens at work, in addition to expectations of child-raising and household management, deter more than encourage women to enter

⁷⁰ Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno, *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, p.21.

⁷¹ Kathleen Uno, "Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.294.

⁷² Ueno Chizuko, "Women and the Family in Transition in Postindustrial Japan," in *Women of Japan and Korea: continuity and change*, ed. Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. 24-35.

into the (male-dominated) career track. Shigematsu similarly highlights that “by maintaining that women were supposed to be full-time housewives, industries justified paying women as ‘part-time’ workers no matter how many hours they worked.”⁷³ Women are deemed subordinate to men in the work force, not only in wages, but also in terms of career advancement. Even by the mid 1990s, women do not occupy more than 10 percent of the managerial roles in the workforce;⁷⁴ and as of 2003, the wages of full-time working women are only 67.6 percent of the wages of their male colleagues.⁷⁵

Therefore, even as married women were allowed to re-enter the workforce, employment policies and state regulations continue to reinforce the notion that women’s place is in the home. The prewar model of ideal womanhood has endured throughout the postwar period, continuing to influence the lives of modern women. In his study of the representations of gender in Japanese television dramas during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Andrew Painter highlights that in home dramas, women were usually portrayed as home-bound housewives, under the subordination of their mother-in-laws and their husbands. Their main responsibilities centered on taking care of the household and caring for the children and the elderly; any failure to appropriate the role would be met with punishment. As Painter asserts, such representations of women “are all promoted, in politics, in theory, and on television, as eternal features of the national landscape. What is left out is the careful consideration of the actual social-historical factors that shape contemporary social relations in Japan.”⁷⁶ The representations of women’s lives as limited to the domestic

⁷³ Shigematsu, “Feminism and Media,” p.564.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Women’s Issues: Changing roles in a changing society,” *Japan Fact Sheet*, Web Japan, 28 September 2007 <<http://web-japan.org>>

⁷⁶ Andrew Painter, “The Telerepresentation of Gender in Japan,” in *Re-imagining Japanese Women*, ed. Anne Imamura (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.68.

sphere naturalized and justified women's subordination to men. Together with state regulations and prevailing social norms, modern notions of ideal womanhood continue to be shaped alongside the roles that women play in the domestic sphere.

The character of Shingo-mama can be found not only in *Sata Smap*, but also in recordings, dramas⁷⁷, and SMAP's concerts. Given Shingo-mama's almost perfect substitution of the mother figure in terms of her success in carrying out the role of a mother, can we then interpret Shingo-mama and her performances as a reinforcement of the notion that ultimately, women's place is in the home and thereby thrusting women further into the domestic realm? Can one argue that the pervasiveness of Shingo-mama in the mass media serves as another channel for the reinforcement of the good wife, wise mother ideal in Japanese society? Shingo-mama is easily recognizable by her dramatic visual style which typically consists of a pink bow or headband attached to the top of her short, curly wig; blushed cheeks; a pink-based costume with white polka dots in the form of a dress or a sailor suit; white sneakers with pink shoe-laces or pink boots. Such portrayal of the maternal figure through Shingo-mama is highly excessive—Katori's six-foot tall, rugby-player physique, together with the extra-large ribbon and the strikingly colorful costume contrast sharply with the other 'real' or 'natural' women on stage, i.e. the female dancers. The female dancers for the Shingo-mama segment in SMAP's concerts are usually dressed in street clothes, such as T-shirts and pants with non-elaborate hairstyle and make-up. Even when these dancers are portrayed in roles of nurturers, such as school teachers, they appear in modest dark blue aprons worn over white T-shirts, nothing like the bright pink costume of Shingo-mama. In contrast to the 'real' women, Shingo-mama's femininity is overstated, hyperbolic, and anything but 'natural'.

⁷⁷ Shingo-mama starred in a Fuji Tv Drama Special, *Shingo mama dorama supesharu—'Oha' wa sekai wo sukuu*, on January 8 2001.

As Carole-Anne Tyler notes, “the drag queen ‘camp up’ ideology in order to undo it, producing knowledge about it, that gender and the heterosexual orientation presumed to anchor it are unnatural and even oppressive.”⁷⁸ A drag queen performs gender signs in excess, assumes incongruous and confused gender signs that in effect denaturalizes dominant constructs of gender norms. Therefore, I argue that Katori’s over-the-top embodiment of femininity can be interpreted as a foregrounding of the gender norms and in doing so, disrupts the naturalness and the irrevocability of the norm that binds women to the good wife, wise mother ideal, and its evolutionary models. It is hence noteworthy to first review some of the prominent research on drag, which will then provide the theoretical framework through which Katori’s drag performances of Shingo-mama can be analyzed.

The Newtonian Camp

Anthropologist Esther Newton’s work on drag contributed significantly to conceptualizations of gender and sexuality as well as subsequent studies on queer. In *Mother Camp: Female impersonators in America*, Newton, situating drag in a homosexual context, defines a drag queen as “a homosexual male who often, or habitually, dresses in female attire.”⁷⁹ For Newton, drag is a form of homosexual identity that questions the masculine/feminine, inner essence/outer appearance dichotomies. In other words, drag, by playing around with the opposition of surface appearance and ‘inner reality’ or ‘inner essence’, questions the naturalness of the sex-role system.

According to Newton, sex-role behavior has normatively been associated

⁷⁸ Carole-Anne Tyler, “Boys will be Girls: Drag and Transvestic Fetishism,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p.381

⁷⁹ Esther Newton, “Selection from Mother Camp,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.122.

with the possession of particular genitals; thus individuals who possess the male genitalia should behave in a masculine manner and desire individuals who possess the female genitalia. Such conflation of anatomy, gender and sexuality, characteristic of the sex-role system, deems homosexuals abnormal, as individuals who deviate from the system by making “wrong sexual object choices and wrong sex-role presentation of self.”⁸⁰ Under such a sex-role system, drag then functions as a positive force that can “wrench the sex roles loose from that which supposedly determines them, that is, genital sex.”⁸¹ As Newton asserts, homosexuals know that one need not naturally adopt behavior appropriate to the type of genital that one possesses (for example, biological males who do not behave in an appropriate manner in terms of sexual desire, i.e. desire women, and/or in terms of gender, i.e. a feminine man).⁸² Drag, as part of the homosexual subculture, makes visible the possible deviation of gender and sexuality from anatomical sex and thus, in Newton’s words, “questions the ‘naturalness of the sex-role system in *toto*; if sex-role behavior can be achieved by the ‘wrong’ sex, it logically follows that it is in reality also achieved, not inherited, by the ‘right’ sex.”⁸³

As their ‘inner’ self (same-sex desire) has been stigmatized, many homosexuals strive to present an ‘outer’ or social self that has been deemed appropriate for their sex. This very notion of the ‘outer’ self or appearance as illusion has been picked up and highlighted by drag. Newton notes that, “[b]y focusing on the outward appearance of role, drag implies that sex role and, by extension, role in general is something superficial, which can be manipulated, put on and off again at

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.124

⁸¹ Ibid., p.123

⁸² Newton argues that, “gay people *know* that sex-typed behavior can be achieved, contrary to what is popularly believed. They *know* that the possession of one type of genital equipment by no means guarantee the ‘naturally appropriate’ behavior.” (emphasis mine) Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

will.”⁸⁴ In a drag act, female impersonators (or drag queens) employ various tactics to expose the outer appearance as performance, and by extension “the entire sex-role behavior [a]s a role—an act.”⁸⁵ One such tactic, according to Newton, is the wearing of jockey shorts under female clothing which reveals that the feminine appearance is a construct. Drag queens may also play on the oppositions between outer appearance and ‘inner reality’ by suddenly lowering her voice or removing the bra and exposing the male body to show that underneath the female *costume* is a male body. Such alienation techniques reveal that feminine appearance and behavior is an illusion, something that is put on and performed.

In other words, a drag queen, through alienation techniques, highlights the disjuncture between the ‘outer’ and the ‘inner’, the feminine appearance on the surface of the body as opposed to the ‘real’ male body underneath the costumes. This at the same time also denotes that for the homosexual male, although he appears on the surface to be conforming to sex-role appropriate behavior, i.e. masculinity, it is actually an illusion because his ‘real’, ‘inner’ identification is feminine.⁸⁶ By highlighting that outward appearance is a construct, as something artificial rather than derivative from one’s genital sex, drag (in the homosexual context as Newton conceptualizes it) denaturalizes sex, gender and sexuality by showing that a woman need not be born a female and desire men, and vice-versa.

While Newton’s theorization of drag contributes significantly to the understanding of gender, or what she calls “sex-role behavior”, as a construct that can be manipulated at will, her arguments are not without flaws. For example, she argues that children learn sex-role identity before they learn sexual object choices. This is

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 127

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.122

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.124

hinges on the presumption that gender precedes sexuality where it is due to wrong identification of sex-role (or gender) that leads to same-sex desire—because a man (first) identifies with the feminine role and therefore he desires men.⁸⁷ Following this thread of argument, does it then mean that individuals with same-sex desire would necessarily display traits of wrong sex-role identification? In other words, are homosexuals necessarily drag queens or do they show some kind of gender-nonconformity?

Moreover, in her assertion that the outer appearance or sex-role behavior is a role that can be manipulated and put on and off at will, and which can differ from the ‘inner’ essence, Newton appears to assume that there is an ‘inner’ truth, a ‘real’ self that is pre-existing ‘inside’ the body. But what exactly is this ‘inner essence’? Of what is this ‘inner truth’ comprised?

The Butlerian Camp

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, uses drag as an example to illustrate her theory of the performativity of gender. For Butler, it is the prohibition on homosexuality that causes heterosexuality, which in turn frames the way in which gender is formed (rather than sexuality as following from gender). Butler similarly argues that the ‘outer’ appearance need not necessarily reflect an ‘inner’ essence, but contrary to Newton, she also shows that there is actually no ‘inner’ truth to be projected onto the ‘outside’ or the surface of the body. That there is an ‘inside’ to be expressed on the ‘outside’ is an illusion maintained for heterosexual reproduction. According to Butler, gender is not something that one can put on or take off at will—whatever gender signs that we produce on the surface of our bodies, they have already been framed by

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.129.

the heterosexual law.

The Butlerian notion of the performativity of gender suggests that gender is a compulsory and repeated enactment or citation of the law in order for one to enter into subjectivity. Gender as performative, however, should not be understood in the sense that one can choose his or her gender like choosing clothes from the wardrobe, and putting it on or taking it off at one's free will. Butler proposes that gender is constituted through the consistent citation of the norm, a citation that is compulsory in order to qualify as a subject. Gender does not come from having a particular anatomy, neither does it come from an 'inner' essence or identity; it comes into being as we *do* it, through the reiteration of a set of socially established norms that are enacted on and through the body by corporeal signs like acts, gestures, and behavior.⁸⁸

Foucault postulates that prisoners are compelled (or else face punishment) to signify on and through their bodies the prohibitive law which in effect produces the illusion of the law as being internalized by, living within, and emanating from the prisoners. Following Foucault, Butler argues that there is actually no prior 'inner' essence that can be projected onto the surface of the body. What we see on the 'outside' is actually a compulsory and repeated citation or embodiment of the law that prohibits homosexuality, and not an exteriorization of an 'inner' essence/psyche. However, these acts, gestures and behavior have been fabricated to appear as an expression of a pre-existing inner identity or inner reality, leading to the assumption that corporeal signs express an inner truth, which in fact is all but an illusion.

By whom is this illusion constructed, and for what purpose? According to Butler, it is the prohibition on homosexuality that produces the effect of

⁸⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.232

heterosexuality, which in turn frames how individuals are gendered.⁸⁹ Since heterosexuality is a result of the prohibition on homosexuality and this prohibition (which is intentionally made to be mistaken for the ‘inner’ essence) is enacted on the surface of our body as gender signs, in an effort to maintain heterosexuality, gender has often been policed. As individuals gain subjectivity through repeated citations of the law, i.e. abidance to the gender norms, deviations or failure to cite the norm would lead one to suffer punishments, usually in the form of discrimination or marginalization. Under the heterosexual frame, it has been assumed that individuals should desire the opposite gender (which in turn has been conflated with biological sex). Homosexual desires are desires that have been prohibited from the beginning, and it is through this rejection of homosexuality that “heterosexualized genders” are formed, which at the same time also produces “a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love [i.e. same-sex sexual objects].”⁹⁰ Such “disavowed attachments” constitute a domain of the forbidden in the heterosexual frame, which in turn become stigmatized.⁹¹

Therefore, gender is, as Butler asserts, “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness.”⁹² Heterosexual gender norms are thus performances that are not a result of free choice, but that which we are compelled to embody;⁹³ and our consistent re-iteration of such norms leads to

⁸⁹ Sara Salih with Judith Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.110.

⁹⁰ Butler, *Bodies that matter*, p.235

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.114

⁹³ Butler, *Bodies that matter*, p.237

the naturalization of heterosexuality. In addition, under heteronormativity, gender has been conflated with sexuality, but their relationship is not necessarily causal: gender can be ambiguous or gender bending may take place (such as in the case of cross-dressing) without disturbing normative sexuality. Contrary to Newton who assumes that wrong gender identification leads to wrong sexuality, gender can be non-normative without upsetting sexuality.

Under such conditions of naturalized heterosexuality and (false) unification of sex, gender and sexuality, Butler posits drag as a hyperbolic parody of gender that exposes the inessentiality of sex, and denaturalizes heterosexuality. Following Butler, I argue that the persona of Shingo-mama in SMAP's concerts functions as a means through which gender signs are made visible. It also foregrounds gender as being constructed through the citation of gender norms via the embodiment of gender signs, thereby exposing the constructedness of femininity in Japan, and denaturalizing assumptions of femaleness and femininity.

Oha! Shingo-mama!

In the 2001 *Live Urasuma*,⁹⁴ Shingo-mama made her debut performance in SMAP's live concerts and performed to the song *Shingo mama no gakuen tengoku* (Shingo-mama's School Paradise) in the typical Shingo-mama outfit that consists of a wig, a pink and white polka-dot blouse and a knee length skirt. Through her singing and dancing, with a group of children dancing in the background, she portrays an image of a cute, motherly figure. Similarly, the oversized *okāsan* (mother) image of Shingo-mama continues into the *Smep! Tour! 2002!*⁹⁵ concert, where she performs *Shingo mama no oha rokku* with a group of samba dancers, singing greetings to her

⁹⁴ SMAP's concert tour in 2001. *Live Urasuma*. DVD. Victor Entertainment Inc., 2001.

⁹⁵ *Smep ! Tour! 2002!* VCD. Music Street Pte Ltd, 2003.

family and neighbors joyously.

As Elin Diamond notes in her discussion of feminist theater and performance (i.e. female-female impersonations, where through strategies of alienation, the female actress steps out of character and distances herself from the female character that she is playing, with the purpose of puncturing conventional representations of women⁹⁶), the cultural signs of gender—the “words, gestures, appearances, ideas and behavior that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity”⁹⁷—is the gender ideology or the prohibitive law of gender that is being cited and re-cited. Diamond draws upon the Brechtian theory of alienation and argues that gender can be alienated by disrupting the assumptions that audiences have so naturally made with regards to femininity. When the portrayal of a coherent gendered body is punctured, or when the conventional representation of (in Diamond’s case) women is being repudiated, the constructedness or inessentiality of gender is made visible. When gender is alienated, the cultural signs that make up gender are being exposed, and in effect reveals that the notions of femininity and masculinity that we have taken-for-granted to be natural to our existence are actually constructed through those very signs that have been alienated.

Female-female impersonation, or what Luce Irigaray calls mimicry (i.e. the disidentification and distancing of a woman from her image, by “putting it on so as to signify it is a put on and can easily be taken off”⁹⁸), are a form of subversion from within. The actress, by distancing herself from her character, makes visible the gender signs out of which the character is constructed. In other words, the actress is doing femaleness to queer femaleness, which in effect exposes the gender ideology at work

⁹⁶ Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf, *Performance analysis: An Introductory Coursebook* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.78-85.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁹⁸ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.76, cited in Tyler, “Boys will be Girls: Drag and Transvestic Fetishism,” p.380.

and ultimately makes audiences realize that “all [...] women, real and fictional, are [...] the focus of social and political forces.”⁹⁹ Butler also provides another example of subversion-from-within, where queer performances such as cross-dressing or public kissing between lesbians can function to subvert the heterosexual law.

Under the Butlerian theory of gender, the prohibition of homosexuality produces heterosexual gender norms that marginalize homosexual attachments. In other words, the queer subject, by entering into signification as queer, as the disenfranchised, has the potential to oppose the (heterosexual) norm that renders the queer subject queer.¹⁰⁰ Through a hyperbolic imitation and public display of that which is prohibited under the norm, the marginalized uses marginalization itself as a tool to expose and resist the norm/law. As this law can now no longer contain what it seeks to control, or in Butler’s terms, the “unperformable,”¹⁰¹ the taken-for-granted-ness of the law is being denaturalized.

Both female impersonation and Butler’s subversive performances can be said to work through the same mechanism of subverting the dominant forces from within the forces, whereby the norm or what is prohibited by the norm is being embodied to foreground the domineering forces that have been naturalized. While Diamond’s feminist performances works through alienation, Butler’s queer performances work through overstatement and recontextualization. Nevertheless, both function to destabilize the norm that has been presupposed, and these slightly differing (yet inter-related) forms of subversion-from-within can be used to understand Katori’s drag acts. I argue that Katori’s performances of the drag character Shingo-mama can be understood in terms of both the alienating effects characteristic of female-female

⁹⁹ Counsell and Wolf, *Performance Analysis*, p.78.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Bodies that matter*, p. 232.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.236.

impersonation, as well as hyperbolic enactments and recontextualization characteristic of Butler's queer performances.

Although feminist scholars have high acclamations of performances of female-female impersonation, many detest performances of male-female impersonations or drag performances. As some feminist and psychoanalysis scholars argue, drag is a mockery of women as the drag queen is being seen as imitating women to distance himself from the lack that women symbolizes. The feminine is first mimicked through a display of excessive femininity; the drag queen then dis-identifies herself from the feminine or the lack of the phallus through distancing effects such as abruptly lifting her skirt to reveal her male genital. At this point, the woman is revealed to be phallic, and the symbolically castrated man (the feminized male or the male who identifies with lack) restores his phallic identity.¹⁰² In other words, the transvestite or the drag queen assumes femininity in order to masculinize himself, and therefore, drag is deemed to be a satire of women that undermines femininity.¹⁰³

As Tyler notes of the phallocentrism commonly found in psychoanalytic studies of cross-dressing (which has been conflated with transvestism, i.e. a man cross-dressing as female due to fetishism with women), the drag queen is often associated with the phallic women. Distancing effects such as "joking in double entendres, dropping the voice, removing the wig and falsies, exposing the penis all work to resecure masculine identity by effecting a slide along a chain of signifiers which are in a metaphoric and metonymic relationship with one another and with the

¹⁰² Carole-Anne Tyler, "Boys will be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 42.

¹⁰³ Tyler, "Boys will be Girls: Drag and Transvestic Fetishism," p.374.

transcendental signifier, the phallus.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, according to the various studies on drag that Tyler highlights, the disclosure of the male body underneath the female costume in a drag act functions to reinforce the phallus or masculine identity (However, such conflation of the penis with the phallus is problematic and I will address this in Chapter Three).

In Katori’s performances of Shingo-mama, one can find several instances where she suddenly lowers her voice and alienates the female role that she is portraying. For example, In *Smop! Tour! 2002!*, as Shingo-mama is chirping “oha!” in the chorus of the song *Shingo-mama no oha rokku*, she suddenly dropped her voice at the last “oha!” of the chorus after several high-pitched, cute-sounding “oha!”. Her voice at that last “oha!” is deep and masculine, in a markedly lower tone than Shingo’s usual voice. In effect, the signs that constitute femininity or gender are made visible, i.e. in this case, voice; thereby destabilizing the naturalness of gender. I argue that the alienation techniques of exposing the male body or lowering the voice in drag performances such as that of Shingo-mama not only have the effect of disrupting the stable representation of a coherent femininity, but also recontextualize femininity, thereby foregrounding the constructedness of gender.

Similarly, in *Live Urasuma*, Kimura Takuya attempts to imitate Shingo-mama, dressing up in Shingo-mama’s outfit and calling himself Takuya-mama. However, while Shingo-mama speaks and sings in a chirpy voice, Takuya-mama addresses the audience in a husky, apathetic tone. Although in a Shingo-mama outfit, Takuya-mama appears to be disinterested in portraying a perfect imitation of Shingo-mama and projecting any traits of femininity; rather, she appears to be lethargic, showing no enthusiasm in the act of impersonation, as if being forced

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.374-375.

into the female costume. When attempting to answer a question from Nakai, Takuya-mama stopped short as soon as she blurts out “*atashi sa...*”, and exclaims, with an expression of self-loathe, “*atashi?!*” *Atashi* is a first-person pronoun commonly used by Japanese women to refer to themselves in an informal context. Takuya-mama’s detest of her own usage of the term, together with her gruff behavior can be interpreted as a distancing from associations with the feminine. Her unsuccessful imitation of Shingo-mama reveals the mechanisms through which femininity is constructed, i.e. through the embodiment of signs such as appearance, behavior, gestures, voice and language. Takuya-mama’s refusal to enter into femininity through these signs contrasts sharply with the Shingo-mama dress that she is wearing and this highlights the Butlerian concept that femininity or gender is something that one *does*, rather than one *is*. It is this very disjuncture between the female costume and un-feminine behavior that makes the gender signs, the signs through which gender comes into being, visible. Takuya-mama’s disdain at his slip of the tongue (“*atashi*”) also foregrounds language as one of the mechanisms that produces femininity or gender.

It is widely held that there are certain gender identity markers in the Japanese language that index the masculinity or femininity of the speaker. For example, according to linguists Ide Sachiko and Yoshida Megumi, terms for address or reference are commonly taken to be gender specific. They delineate a list of personal pronouns that are used frequently by men and women, where ‘polite’ pronouns like ‘*watashi*’ and ‘*atashi*’ are commonly used by women to refer to themselves while the deprecatory self-referent ‘*ore*’ that is used by male speakers has no equivalent in ‘women’s language’. As they assert, “women index their femininity and display their

own good demeanor through their polite linguistic behavior.”¹⁰⁵ They also claim that “people who frequently use [sentence-final particles] *wa*, *wane*, and *wayo* [...] index their identity as female, while people who tend to use *zo* or *na* at the end of utterances index their identity as male.”¹⁰⁶ However, as Elinor Ochs, one of the pioneers in the field of developmental pragmatics argues, “few features of language directly and exclusively index gender.”¹⁰⁷ She posits a constitutive relation between language and gender, where “one or more linguistic feature may index social meanings (e.g. stances, social acts, social activities), which in turn helps to constitute gender meanings.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, there is nothing inherent in the terms of reference or sentence-final particles that mark the gender of the speaker. Rather, it is the linguistics features that are associated with men’s (or women’s) speech patterns that directly index a coarse (or gentle) impression that forms part of the socially acceptable image of men and women.

Similarly, on several occasions during the recording of *Shingo mama no kossori asagohan*, Katori, while performing the motherly role of Shingo-mama, constantly alienates himself from the character, exposing the man beneath the exaggerated female dress. For example, Shingo-mama would use the personal pronoun ‘*ore*’ (I, me) commonly used by Japanese men. In the Atarashi-family episode, after Mr Atarashi kissed her on the cheeks, Shingo-mama beaming with satisfaction, turned towards the camera and said, “*kyou mo gambattan...ore*” (“I have put in my best today again, [and thus the success of my mission]”). Shingo-mama

¹⁰⁵ Sachiko Ide, Megumi Yoshida, “Sociolinguistics: Honorifics and Gender Differences,” in *The Handbook of Japanese linguistics*, ed. Natsuko Tsujimura (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.471.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.466.

¹⁰⁷ Elinor Ochs, “Indexing Gender,” in *Rethinking Context: Language as an interactive Phenomenon*, ed. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.340

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.341

also constantly reminds the audience that her cross-dressing is only a performance by foregrounding the act of performing. When one of the Atarashi kids said to her, “*okāsan wo okiraseru*” (“let’s wake mother up!”), Shingo-mama replied, “*ore no serifu iu na yo! Sono hitokoto no tameni dondake gambatta to omotten dayo!*” (“Don’t take my line! Do you know how much effort I have put in just for that line?!”))

As Diamond notes, “when gender is ‘alienated’ or foregrounded, the spectator is enabled to see a sign system as a sign system—the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes, etc., that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionistic trappings to be put on or shed at will.”¹⁰⁹ Through such alienation effects, the masculine beneath the feminine appearance is revealed and this can effect a reinforcement of the masculine identity. At the same time, this can also expose gender as not innate to one’s body but is constructed through gender signs. The gender signs do not come from nowhere, but are produced and regulated by the norm, contrary to Newton’s assumption that one’s gender appearance can be constructed at free will. The alienation techniques not only foreground the gender signs that make up femininity, but also expose the man beneath the female costume. That it is a man assuming femininity has the effect of perverting and recontextualizing dominant notions of femininity, thus making visible the norm and denaturalizing normative notions of femininity.

Katori, by embodying normative notions of femininity as represented by the good wife, wise mother ideal, and by revealing that it is a man who is performing the role, denaturalizes the norm as essentially inherent to females. His appropriation of

¹⁰⁹ Counsell and Wolf, *Performance Analysis*, p.79. I do not agree with Diamond in that these signs can be put on and shed at will. Rather, I follow Butler, and argue that these signs have been determined by the gender norms, and we have to cite them or else risk punishment, i.e. lack of subjectivity and become marginalized.

the maternal role, rather than being a marginalization of women, can be read as taking the good wife, wise mother ideal out of the context of female-femininity (femininity as essential to the female sex) and putting it into the context of male-femininity (a male body embodying femininity). In doing so, the prevailing assumption of the ideal as essential to females and femininity is first foregrounded and then disrupted. Mrs Atarashi's request to Shingo-mama to help her handle her children and Shingo-mama's success in it shows the failure of 'real' women and mothers as efficient caregivers. That it is possible for a man to fulfill the role of a wife and mother makes visible the norm as an act that one appropriates (rather than natural to one's anatomy), thus de-essentializing the ideal as part of women's (read female-bodied beings) role, and calling into question the assumption that women should necessarily be bound to the domestic sphere.

This is similar to the effects of female-female impersonations where femininity is exposed as being constructed out of gender signs, as well as the effects of the queer performances, where the norm (in this case femininity) is being forced out of its original context (the female subject) and placed into another (the queer subject of the drag queen). Femininity then is not only being detached from anatomical sex, but the original meanings attached to the doing of femaleness, the demeanor that is expected of women are also being called into question.

Some may argue that the hilarious, over-the-top performances of Shingo-mama serve to show how unnatural a man is in the domestic realm, thus re-inscribing the notion that a women's place is in the home. However, I tend to align with theorists of drag who argue that it is this very hyperbolized and campy performance that produces distancing effects which in turn de-essentializes normative

identities.¹¹⁰ As I will show in Chapter Four, camp, on one level, can be read as pure artifice and thus be dismissed as ridiculous and insignificant; but on a deeper level, it possesses the ability to queer normativity.

'Real' Gender, Gender 'Reality'

Shingo-mama and her performances may appear to be exemplary of Newton's theorization of drag where outer appearance need not necessarily correspond to the 'inner essence'. For Newton, drag shows the disjuncture between appearance and the 'inner' reality which highlights the constructedness of surface appearance and shows that the 'outer' is not an expression of the 'inner'. However, as mentioned earlier, Newton seems to assume the existence of an 'inner essence' or 'internal truth' of one's gender or sexual identity, but that which is masked in the guise of the surface appearance. But as Butler's theory of gender performativity shows, that gender is an expression on the surface of the body of an inner truth is an illusion maintained for heterosexual reproduction. What we take to be internal essence is manufactured through stylized acts in accordance to socio-cultural specific values, and overtime, becomes naturalized as the gender norm. Drag is therefore used as an example to disrupt such naturalized knowledge and expose its insubstantiality.

According to Butler, in a drag performance, if the audience thinks that it is a man that is underneath the female costume, one would naturally assume that 'male' is the 'real' or 'true' gender of the actor, while the surface appearance of the female character would be rendered as constructed or 'unreal.' It may appear evident as to what the 'reality' is, or in Butler's words, "we think we know what the reality is,"¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Tyler, "Boys Will Be Girls," pp.51-55.

¹¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), xxii.

but on what grounds is that assumption based? Is gender ‘reality’ based on anatomy, or rather, what we thought to be the anatomy of the actor? We may construe the anatomy of the actor based on the clothing (in addition to clothing that Butler notes, I would like to add behavior, gestures, voice, i.e. the acts that sex the body), but there is actually nothing essential about the clothes or behavior that signal particular bodies as male or female. Such clothing or acts that mark anatomical maleness or femaleness are “cultural inferences” that have been naturalized to represent the ‘reality’ of gender, or what men and women should look or behave like. How ‘real’ can then such perception of gender be? And what if even seeing the body does not tell us the ‘real’ gender of the actor? Butler cites the example of the transsexual’s body, which “may be preoperative, transitional, or postoperative [to show that] even ‘seeing’ the body may not answer the question,”¹¹² the question of what constitutes “gender reality,” as the ‘body’ cannot be fitted into either categories of male or female.

Thus, for Butler, drag allows for an instance of the failure of one’s conventional perception of gender, whereby cultural notions that inform one’s understanding of gender are suddenly brought to task. Through drag, what we have always assumed to be the ‘real,’ the norms that govern gender which we have taken to be natural, are destabilized as the boundary between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘unreal’ becomes blurred. There is no ‘inner essence’ that gender expresses as gender only comes into existence through the citation or performance of acts, gestures, behavior that is culturally-specific; and the repeated citations of these gender attributes over time become naturalized and taken-for-granted as the gender norms, or the ‘proper’ behavior of males and females.¹¹³ Butler highlights that “to the extent the gender norms establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.114.

will not be considered to be ‘real,’ they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression.”¹¹⁴ In other words, what and whether bodies can enter into subjectivity is dependent on whether these bodies cite the norm. It follows then that there is no ‘true’ gender reality, but the illusion of an ‘internal truth’ of gender that can be found inside our body is constructed by the socio-cultural forces for the purpose of “masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.”¹¹⁵ Given that there is no ‘true’ gender, gender is then only performed as the truth effects of a culture’s gender ideology—that it is ideology that categorizes individuals into gender categories and deems what is appropriate behavior for subjects under each of the gender category.

In the context of Japan, motherhood and wifehood as appropriate and essential to women’s subjectivity is constructed by the state, reinforced by media, employment laws and regulations, and over time naturalized in society as the norm, therefore leading to the widespread assumption of the role of the wife and the mother as inherent and true to women’s identity. Through the performances of Shingo-mama, gender signs that constitute Japanese femininity are being rendered visible and in turn expose femininity as being constructed through the embodiment of various signifiers such as appearance, deportment, gestures and behavior. And by recontextualizing the notion of an ideal woman that has been at the heart of the construction of Japanese femininity, the inessentiality of the ideal to female-bodied subjects is being highlighted. In doing so, taken-for-granted normative notions of femininity as the appropriate behavior of female-bodied individuals are being disrupted and purged from their position of “naturalized knowledge of gender”¹¹⁶ (i.e. the dos and don’ts

¹¹⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

¹¹⁵ Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.115.

¹¹⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

of male and female subjects which are produced and regulated by the hegemony, but taken to be natural and inherent). As Butler notes, “drag exposes the tenuousness of gender ‘reality’ in order to counter the violence performed by gender norms.”¹¹⁷ The embodiment of the norm by Shingo-mama, and the juxtaposition of male-bodied and feminine Shingo-mama with female-bodied but un-feminine Mrs Atarashi compels audiences to rethink about gender and its abiding forces: is Shingo-mama less a ‘real’ woman than Mrs Atarashi? Can a woman like Mrs Atarashi who has failed in her role as a wife and a mother be still considered a ‘real’ woman? What *is* a ‘real’ woman?

While the performances of Shingo-mama can be a positive force that calls into question the abiding relationship between biological women and the ideal woman, her impersonator, Takuya-mama, can in turn function to question the viability of the ideal itself. Takuya-mama appears to imitate Shingo-mama, but without the good-natured, efficient housewife image of Shingo-mama. This Shingo-mama impersonator not only fails as a female subject by refusing to enter into gender signs, but also fails in assuming the ‘proper role’ that has been deemed appropriate for females. However, it is this very failure of Takuya-mama to become Shingo-mama that, as mentioned earlier, foregrounds the gender signs out of which gender is constructed, as well as perverts the whole notion of the good wife, wise mother. If Shingo-mama is the embodiment of the perfect mother and wife (albeit being male-bodied), then Takuya’s-mama’s (failed) imitation re-contextualizes the good wife, wise mother ideal, showing the image of a feminine good cook and efficient household manager out of the mother figure. After Takuya-mama’s self-loathe at her use of “*atashi*,” she pulls up her skirt with both hands in a seductive manner and calls herself “*sabisu-mama*” which literally means “service-mama” or “free-mama,”

¹¹⁷ Ibid., xxiv.

having connotations of entertainment and pleasures related to sex. Such sexualized context under which Takuya-mama performs this act eroticizes the positive and healthy maternal image of Shingo-mama, thereby disrupting dominant notions of wifeness and motherhood.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

Katori Shingo, in his performances of Shingo-mama, combines gender signs of maleness and femaleness which in effect produces an incongruous, campy, queer manifestation of the *ryōsai kenbo* or *senjyō shufu* ideal of Japanese femininity. As I have illustrated, gender norms are constructed, produced by hegemony and naturalized as essential and true. Butler argues that there is no ‘true’ or ‘false’ gender, but only the truth effects of gender—gender is not inner psyche or appearance, but is what the society or culture deems to be the appropriate behavior for men and women. Drag performances then serves as a positive force that exposes the malleability of gender ‘reality’, where gender as a citation of the norm is being highlighted.

Katori’s performances of Shingo-mama, through strategies of overstatement

¹¹⁸ The mother image of Takuya-mama as one who is unfeminine and sexually-open goes a step further than Shingo-mama (who only purges the image of wife and mother from female-bodied individuals) by denaturalizing the stereotypical image of womanhood or motherhood that is epitomized by the good wife, wise mother ideal.

Such resistance to the gender ideology of the good wife, wise mother can also be found in the works of *manga* artist and celebrity Uchida Shungiku. Uchida’s works, from *manga* series to essays and novels to appearances on television and magazines, transgress dominant notions of femininity, family and sexuality, and subverts the good wife, wise mother ideal. For example, in October 1992, Uchida released a series of photos of her nude pregnant body in top-selling women’s magazine, *Josei seven*, over two consecutive weeks, portraying a provocative maternal figure that deviates from prevailing norms concerning motherhood. For Uchida, who has three children and thrice divorced as of 2002, motherhood does not deprive a woman of her individuality and sexuality, as she forthrightly poses nude her maternal body and asserts that marriage is not essential to having a child. Shigematsu, “Feminism and Media,” pp.572-577.

As Shigematsu notes, “Uchida thus promotes a different kind of synthesis between womanhood and motherhood, which [...] refuses the old *ryōsai kenbo* ideal, making publicly visible a kind of motherhood that affirms the expression of female sexuality.” Ibid., p. 578. Takuya-mama’s erotic *sabisu-mama* bears similarity to Uchida’s transgressive acts, and both construct a different version of womanhood, “adding another option to the pre-existing and predominant incarnations of *ryōsai kenbo*.” Ibid.

and alienation, recontextualize femininity and expose the taken-for-granted nature of the ideal woman. In his performances, not only are gender signs that constitute gender revealed, the notion of appropriate feminine behavior by biological females is also perverted. The figure of Takuya-mama further de-essentializes the *ryōsai kenbo* or *sengyō shufu* ideal that has bound Japanese women to the domestic realm, while the juxtaposition of Shingo-mama with ‘real’ female dancers in the concert performances also highlights the imitative nature and artificiality of gender. In the next chapter, I will expand on this notion of the imitative nature of gender.

CHAPTER THREE

Gender, Gendering, Gendered— (Hyper)Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in the performances of Nakai Masahiro

Despite the widespread belief that Nakai Masahiro's (ironically the group leader of SMAP) singing is an ear-sore,¹¹⁹ SMAP's high popularity among Japanese audiences remains unshakable. As one of the highest tax-payers in the Japanese entertainment industry, Nakai always suffuses his solo performances in SMAP's annual concert with an assortment of interesting yet contesting elements. This naturally leads one to ponder if Nakai's efforts are simply meant as a cover-up for his inability to sing, or could one draw deeper significance from his performances? In this chapter, I will analyze the various characters that Nakai plays in SMAP's live concerts, drawing upon existing theories and research on gender and sexuality. I argue that Nakai's playing around with signs of sex, gender and sexuality through the characters that he assume may be read as functioning to destabilize normative conceptualizations of gender and sexuality as well as to disrupt the dichotomy that has been constructed around such categories of identities.

'Original' Gender—The Yellow Sailor scouts

When Nakai re-appears on stage as the character Peace after his solo song, he performs *Za Piisu* with twelve female dancers in yellow sailor suits. While he claims in the video that what the audience is seeing originates from Peace himself and is not

¹¹⁹ See Appendix B for a description of Nakai's solo performance in *SMAP! Tour! 2002!* Concert.

an imitation of anyone,¹²⁰ the number is in fact a single that Morning Musume released in 2001. Nakai's version of the song closely resembles that of Morning Musume's, not only in terms of music arrangement, but also in costuming and dance choreography.¹²¹ What are the implications of Nakai parodying the performance of Morning Musume?

In my discussion of Shingo-mama's drag performances in Chapter Two, acts such as cross-dressing and gender impersonation reveal the performative nature of gender through the imitation of gender. Butler argues that gender is as an imitation without an original, and only comes into being through the very citation of the norm via gender signs. When gender ideals are being recontextualized in drag-acts and when the male body beneath the female clothing is exposed, gender (that has been assumed to be inherent) becomes denaturalized. In other words, our daily doing of femaleness and maleness is an imitation or reenactment of a set of acts that have been inscribed with socially/culturally established meanings.¹²²

Following Butler's framework, I argue that Nakai's imitation of Morning Musume and his claim that it is an original piece is a displacement of the notion of an original. If what he claims to be the 'original' is actually a copy, then is there still an 'original'? Gender parody such as drag reveals that the parody is not of a pre-existing original or true identity; rather, it is a parody of the notion of the original—drag brings to light that “the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an

¹²⁰ In the video, Peace claims “*Kore kare minasan ga me ni suru deki goto wa, dare no mare demo nai. Boku no originaru no jiken desu. Sekai de haijimate okoru jiken desu*” (What you will be seeing from now is not an imitation of anyone. It is my original that is happening for the first time in the world). Ibid.

¹²¹ Morning musume performed the song *Za Piisu* in various sets of costumes during different occasions. One of their earliest versions of the costume is a blue and white sailor-suit blouse with checkered pants. Subsequently, they performed the song in a range of costumes from frilly dresses to midriffs with mini skirts, but all are in the color yellow.

¹²² Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, pp. 109-115.

imitation without an origin.”¹²³ At the end of the day, it is futile to speak of the ‘original’ and ‘copy’ because there is no original to begin with. The notion of an ‘original’, a true gender somewhere inside the body, and subsequently a ‘real’ femininity or masculinity which can be modeled after, is an illusion, and the drag-act reveals such an illusion.¹²⁴

In her discussion of drag, Butler expands on Newton’s argument by suggesting that drag not only “plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed,”¹²⁵ it also reveals the falsely unified relationship between anatomical sex, gender identity of the performer and the gender that is being performed. Although she did not explicitly explain what she means by the ‘gender identity’ of the performer, and how different it is from the gender that is being performed, one can infer from her argument that Butler regards the physical body on different grounds from gender behavior. Here, I would like to draw on a similar concept of sex and gender which differentiates the corporeal/material body from the sexed and gendered body. Scholars such as Julie Hanson define the corporeal body as the “sensing and feeling body”, and the sexed and gendered body as the “cultured and socialized body.”¹²⁶ Her discussion of the ‘body’ draws very much upon Elizabeth Grosz’s arguments, one of which asserts that “the body becomes immersed in, becomes bound up with, and is intimately connected to the ‘structure of individual and collective fantasies and significations’ that are a

¹²³ Ibid., p.112.

¹²⁴ Shingo-mama’s drag performances, as discussed in Chapter Two, also foregrounds the imitative nature of gender in that the juxtaposition of Shingo-mama with ‘real’ women (the female dancers) may appear to show the artificiality of Shingo-mama, of her being a female impersonator, a ‘copy’ of the ‘original’, ‘real’ women. However, the appearance of Takuya-mama, itself a copy (or rather, an imperfect copy) of Shingo-mama, reveals that feminine behavior is nothing but imitations. The multiple layers of imitations at work here expose the imitative nature and artificiality of gender, which as Butler asserts, “is an imitation without an origin.”

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Julie Hanson, “Drag Kinging: Embodied Acts and Acts of Embodiment,” *Body & Society* 13, 61 (2007), p.71

product of, and work at the level of, established social and cultural beliefs.”¹²⁷ This idea of the body as being socially and culturally inscribed upon is reminiscent of Butler’s discussion of the material body in *Bodies that Matter* where she argues that the material body is sexed and gendered through an interpellative and performative process. Butler draws on Althusser’s concept of Interpellation, and asserts that individuals are not born male or female; rather, they are “hailed into sex” or interpellated into categories of male or female. Butler gives the example of an infant *becoming* a girl through the utterance, “It’s a girl!” The utterance not only describes the infant as girl, but is also performative in the sense that the uttering of such words ‘girl’, or ‘hailed’ the body into female sex. As she notes, “sex itself is a gendered category;”¹²⁸ biological sex does not precede gender, but rather is an *effect* of gender. A body is sexed or interpellated into categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ the moment it is born based on the genitals it possesses. Hence, one’s sex is not innate or essential; one is sexed into subjecthood (as male or female) through a naming process (“It’s a girl!”). Following this initial process of interpellation, the body undergoes subsequent gendering, an ongoing process that produces a “gendered social identity.”¹²⁹ Through dress, posture, gestures and speech style, for example, a body that has been identified as male-sexed (or female-sexed) carries out the process of ‘maling’ (or ‘femaling’), as Richard Ekins and Dave King delineate, and in effect produces male- and female-gendered subjects, or masculinities and femininities.¹³⁰

Butler and other scholars like Hanson, Ekins and King have tirelessly emphasized that sex and gender are not inherent, and are not something one has but

¹²⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994), p.55.

¹²⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.7.

¹²⁹ Richard Ekins and Dave King, *The Transgender Phenomenon* (London, New Delhi and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), p.33.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

something one constantly does. The initial sexing of the body (at the ritualistic pronouncement of the sex of the infant) involves the material body *becoming* a male- or female-body. Subsequent gendering (and sexing) reaffirms the sexed bodies' gendered subjectivity—individuals possessing the male body behaving in a masculine manner, and individuals possessing the female body behaving in a feminine manner. The constant social and cultural process of gendering not only reaffirms the gender of a body as Ekins and King assert, but also the sex of the body—that a body behaving in a certain manner signifies and reaffirms the possession of particular genitals which has come to be thought of as 'sex' (but as Hanson argues, sex and the corporeal body need not equate). Such conflation of the sexed and gendered body with the material body leads to the widespread assumption that gender should follow from sex, and sex (as well as gender) is innate and essential.

In this context, Nakai's parody of Morning Musume can thus be interpreted as an act of denaturalizing the falsely unified relationship between anatomy, sex and gender. In doing so, the notion of an innate, true, abiding or 'original' identity that pre-exist in one's body, as well as the assumption that sex is prior to gender, are displaced. Such effects are further accentuated in the segment following the Morning Musume parody.

MIB—Men In Bikini

In the concert, Nakai's imitation of Morning Musume ends abruptly after the first chorus of the song. He disappears backstage and reappears before the next verse, marching down the *hanamichi* with twelve male dancers in single file, clad in red bikini. However, while the bikini that Nakai and his dancers are wearing have been socially coded as feminine, their acts, gestures, and voice are masculine, or rather,

excessively masculine, i.e. hypermasculine. Why is male prowess and aggression framed in such a manner? And why does Nakai perform such excesses of masculinity?

In Lynne Joyrich's discussion of hypermasculinity in television texts, she argues that because of feminine connotations attached to the television set as an object of gaze, as well as the feminizing television texts, hypermasculinity has been employed in the television dramas/programs as a response to such feminization. She cites the example of the drama, *Miami Vice*, where the castrated male protagonist reacts to his feminization through acts of violence, leaping into the camera, staring at the spectator, and committing murders.¹³¹ Similarly, Hans Toch tries to account for aggressive behavior among male inmates by attributing it to the deprivation of respect, autonomy and status. As a response to such vulnerability, the male prisoners resort to violence, or the display of hypermasculinity.¹³² Hypermasculinity was also employed by gay-men of the late 1970s America who came to be known as the clone. The clones adopted the macho-man style, as epitomized by the Marlboro cowboy, not only in terms of appearance, but also in their lifestyles and sexual activities. Some scholars interpreted the clones' identification with traditional masculinity as a form of resistance towards effeminacy and androgyny that gay-men have been associated with.¹³³

The concept of hypermasculinity as a response towards feminization may serve as an explanation for Nakai's performance of excessive masculinity. His adoption of the hypermasculine style may be seen as a reaction to his

¹³¹ Lynne Joyrich, "Critical and textual hypermasculinity," in *Postmodern after-images. A reader in Film, TV and video*, eds. Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (New York: Arnold, 1997), pp.217-218.

¹³² Hans Toch, "Hypermasculinity and Prison Violence," in *Masculinities and Violence*, ed. Lee H. Bowker (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc., 1998), pp.168-178.

¹³³ Jamie Russell, *Queer Burroughs* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp.117-124.

self-feminization where he symbolically castrated/feminized himself by foregrounding his 'lack', i.e. his inability to sing, especially at the beginning of his solo segment as I have described in Appendix B. This is evident in, for example, his solo performance in *SMAP SAMPLE TOUR 2005*.¹³⁴ In that concert, Nakai opens his solo segment by singing to his own piano accompaniment, and this minimal use of music accompaniment in effect foregrounds his bad singing. Immediately following this, Nakai reappears after a quick-change, and performs a fast number with several sections of rap, accompanied by a rowdy, hip-hop dance. While this fits nicely into the hypermasculinity-as-reaction-to-feminization concept in explaining Nakai's performance of excessive masculinity, Nakai's performance of hypermasculinity while cross-dressing in the bikini remains unexplained. Why did he perform hypermasculinity in a bikini?

The bikini, as a socially-coded female dress, marks Nakai's body as female-identified, or in other words, sexes and genders his body as female. Through the process of gendering, or the doing of femaleness through clothing in this case, Nakai's (material) body is signified as female-gendered and female-sexed. However, Nakai also at the same time genders his body as male through acts of hypermasculinity. This in effect produces a sexed and gendered body that is both male *and* female. Such sex and gender identity do not fit into the clearly defined dichotomous category of 'male' and 'female', 'masculine' and 'feminine', and thus disrupts the binary within the categories of sex and gender and foregrounding that sex and gender are socially and culturally constructed as sex, through signifiers such as dress, enactments, gestures, etc. As mentioned earlier, gender (and sex) is constructed through signs such as acts, gestures, enactments, costumes and language that we put

¹³⁴ *SMAP to icchatta! SMAP SAMPLE TOUR 2005*. DVD. Victor Entertainment Inc., 2006

onto the surface of our body. In our daily re-enactment of such socially established signs, we reproduce and reinforce the gender norms in our society. Butler notes that for individuals to gain subjectivity, they will repeatedly cite the norm or behave according to the norms. However, cases of deviation from the norm may occur, and such acts have the potential of subverting existing norms. While Nakai and his dancers are gendered male through their hypermasculine acts, they are also at the same time being gendered as female by the bikini (which has been coded as a female dress). His juxtaposition of two seemingly oppositional/abrasive corporeal signs together (feminine-coded bikini with hypermasculine acts) can thus function to disrupt the prevailing gender norms as well as destabilize the male-female sex and gender binary. Moreover, the stripping act that occurs at the end of the sequence reveals the material body beneath all the markers of sex and gender, further accentuating the notion that sex and gender are not essential or fixed identities, but are constructed on the surface of the material body. The stripping act can be seen as a metaphor for the removal of signs and markers of sex and gender, thus highlighting that sex and gender are not innate, but are put onto the body through various signifiers.

Nakai and his dancers by doing both maleness and femaleness at the same time foreground the notion that gender need not follow from sex. If gender need not follow from sex, then it follows that masculinity need not follow from a male body. Another effect of Nakai's enactment of masculine behavior in a female-identified body is that of a disassociation of masculinity from the male body. In the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic schema, the penis is bound to the phallus, where the phallus is taken to be the sole signifier of the penis, thereby essentializing phallic power with the male body. As Judith Halberstam notes, Freud "talks about phallic

power as the representation of the power that seems to be available to men in social and political terms in a male-dominated culture.”¹³⁵ However, she asks of Freud, does the having of the penis signify the having of social power, or does having social power signify the having of a penis? She claims that it is Freud’s assumption that the penis produces social power and ultimately, refutes his assumption by citing the Butlerian lesbian phallus, which de-essentializes the notion of a male body producing male power. Butler argues against the Lacanian notion that locates the male body as a privileged place for the development of masculinity.¹³⁶ She claims that in the Lacanian scheme, the penis has been misrecognised as “proof of [male] superiority and [the] guarantor of [men’s] privileged relations to power, language, sexuality and desire,”¹³⁷ or in other words, the phallic body (the body that has the penis, which is symbolized by the phallus) has been mistaken for social power.

Butler also contests the Lacanian scheme that designates the phallus as the privileged sole signifier of the penis. She argues that while the phallus signifies the penis, it is *not* the penis. In other words, the phallus is merely a *symbol* of a body part, and as Butler asserts, “if what comes to signify under the sign of the phallus are a number of body parts, discursive performatives, alternative fetishes, to name a few, then the symbolic position of ‘having’ [the phallus] has been dislodged from the penis as its privileged anatomical (or non-anatomical) occasion.”¹³⁸ What Butler is proposing is that, the penis is not the sole referent of phallic power as delineated by Lacan; ‘having’ the phallus can be symbolized by other body parts, other (non-male)

¹³⁵ Judith Halberstam, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity,” in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.355.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.356.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹³⁸ Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.171.

bodies, or “purposefully instrumentalized body-like things.”¹³⁹ Following this, phallic power can be accessed by female-bodied people, such as lesbians, giving rise to a whole new notion of masculinity that is dislodged from the male body/male body part, i.e. female masculinity.

In the red-bikini sequence, Nakai and his dancers gain access to phallic power or masculinity not through identification with a male body, but through the “discursive performatives” as Butler has described. Although she did not explicitly explain what she meant by “discursive performatives” in “The Lesbian Phallus”, it can be taken to refer to the acts, gestures, language and dressing that one embodies to assert one’s identity. Halberstam also notes that, “masculinity [...] can be recognized [...] as a dynamic between embodiment, identification, social privilege, racial and class formation, and desire, rather than the result of having a particular body.”¹⁴⁰ In Nakai and his dancers’ dance choreography, one can notice movements such as pelvic thrusts and staccato accents made by various parts of their bodies that suggest “male aggressiveness.”¹⁴¹ Like the dances of male striptease dancers, Nakai’s performance place emphasis on the physical display of muscles or the male body as epitomized by the body-builder. The focus of the audience is drawn to the presentation of savage strength, male power and authority through Nakai and his dancers’ deployment of movements that display their physical strength.

The effects of Nakai’s performance can be read along the same lines as the Butlerian female masculinity, whereby masculinity or phallic power is being distanced from the male body. As the bikini-clad Nakai and his dancers show,

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.170

¹⁴⁰ Halberstam, “The good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” p.355.

¹⁴¹ Katherine Liepe-Levinson, in her discussion of striptease choreography, notes that dance steps like pelvic thrusts or staccato movements “suggest the intensity and power associated with ‘male aggressiveness’.” Katherine Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show: Performances of gender and desire* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.109.

masculinity can be enacted by a female-identified body; and if masculinity can be embodied by a non-male-identified body, then phallic power is not exclusive to men. In other words, the phallus or social power can be signified by other bodies and other body parts, and masculinity can be embodied by non-male bodies. Thus, Nakai's performance shows that masculinity and phallic power need not necessarily come from a male body/male body parts.

This point is further accentuated in the Final Concert Special of *Smop! Tour! 2002!*, where the red bikini is replaced by a white one, with a tutu skirt and a swan-head attached to the front of the bikini bottom. Such image is reminiscent of a scene in *Austin Powers*. In her analysis of the film, Halberstam notes,

In one scene, Austin walks around a room nude while Vanessa, seated in the foreground and oblivious to his presence, holds up various objects (a sausage, a magnifying glass, a pen) that simultaneously conceal and prosthetically extend his penis. In this penis concealment/replacement sequence, the naked body of the male is both on display and under construction; while the gaze of the camera at Austin's nude body should confirm at least that this body is phallic, in fact it suggests once again that the body requires a prosthetic supplement.¹⁴²

Here, Halberstam argues that the sausage and the pen function as a "prosthetic supplement" to the male body—the male body part is being replaced by a dildo, an external, penis-like instrument which functions to undermine the sexual appeal and prowess of the male body (as the male body is malfunctioning and thus requires a supplement). The prosthetic supplement also highlights the constructedness of

¹⁴² Judith Halberstam, "Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7, 3 (2001), p.433.

maleness and masculinity, as a (malfunctioning) male body part can be constructed by a pen or a sausage, and masculine power can be achieved, for example, by manipulating the body (through prosthetics), thus de-essentializing masculinity and male body/body part.

Similarly, in another scene that Halberstam describes, Austin is being symbolically castrated by a guard who unpacked his bagful of “accessories that were crucial to his sex appeal in the 1960s: the male-symbol necklace and crushed velvet suit with pointy black boots [that] suggest the swinger, the sexy man about town,”¹⁴³ as well as a penis-enlarger. Halberstam argues that it is the penis-enlarger that reveals Austin’s body as lacking the phallus, and which also implies that the accessories function as a “cover over phallic lack.”¹⁴⁴ Austin is castrated in the sense that his body is, in Halberstam’s words, “lacking the equipment for phallic success,”¹⁴⁵ and thus requires the accessories and the penis-enlarger to cover and replace his lack.

Halberstam attempts to work towards the proposal of alternative masculinities by using Austin Powers as an example of a man who lacks the phallus, but who indulges delightfully in such castration. She asserts that Austin does not try to overcome his lack or “rebuild his masculinity in normative ways,”¹⁴⁶ neither does he deny the lack. Rather, he lives with such lack positively and “works his loser status up into an alternative mode of masculinity throughout the film.”¹⁴⁷ However, while she proposes for non-male masculinity, and tries to illustrate how a male character learns to live with ‘lack’ (i.e. masculinity that is not centered on phallic power), Halberstam inevitably falls back into the Freudian and Lacanian scheme of conflating the penis with the phallus, and taking the penis to be the sole signifier of the

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.444.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

possession of the phallus.

She argues that the prosthetic supplements such as the sausage/pen, the penis-enlarger and the accessories reveal that the body is short of the tool for phallic success, and these supplements further accentuate Austin's 'lack'. However, Austin does not try to overcome his lack, but "revels in it."¹⁴⁸ This implies that the prosthetic supplements do not entirely replace the penis, otherwise Austin will not be suffering from 'lack'. Despite the supplements, there is still lack—the supplements do not completely fill the gap left by the absence of the "proper equipment for phallic success", hence, the sausage/pen are not a perfect substitute for the penis, and penis is still the ultimate force required for phallic success. Although Halberstam makes a significant contribution to psychoanalytic theories in arguing against the convention of either 'having' or 'lacking' the phallus and asserting that Austin lives with such lack with relish, she nevertheless ends up suggesting that Austin is lacking the phallus because of the lack of proper equipment, i.e. the penis. The sausage/pen/penis-enlarger, as imperfect substitutes for the penis, highlights that the body lacks the penis for assessing phallic power. In doing so, she appears to equate the tool, or in her words, the "equipment" for phallic success with the penis, thereby essentializing the relationship between the phallus and the penis, suggesting that the penis is essential for the expression of phallic power.

While Halberstam argues that the prosthetic supplements or the dildo shroud and replace the penis, highlighting that Austin is lacking the penis and thus phallic power, I would propose that the dildo embodies the phallic power, i.e. the dildo signifies the 'having' of the phallus. In the case of *Austin Powers*, I would argue that although the sausage/pen/penis-enlarger conceal Austin's penis, they do not

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

symbolize his lack of the phallus; rather, these supplements function to signify Austin's possession of the phallus, effecting the dislodge of the phallus from the penis. In the case of Nakai's swan-head bikini, I argue that his having of the phallus is symbolized by the swan-head, which functions like the sausage or pen in *Austin Powers*. The swan-head, rather than signifying a lack of the phallus, signifies the possession of the phallus; but it is phallic power without the penis. Phallic power/masculinity is thus being disassociated from the male body/male body part, as Nakai's performances (both red bikini and swan-head bikini) show that masculinity is not the sole privilege of bodies with penises, but can be symbolized by "body-like instruments" such as the swan-head, or it can be attained via gestures/acts of masculine prowess.

Both versions of Nakai's performance have the effect of dislodging masculinity and phallic power from the male body/male body part, or in the words of Halberstam, such performances create "counterfeit masculinities" or "masculinities without men."¹⁴⁹ According to Halberstam, counterfeit masculinities are "masculinities that are produced subculturally and that challenge the primacy, authenticity, and originality of dominant masculinities."¹⁵⁰ In other words, counterfeit masculinities are non-dominant forms of masculinities such as the female-masculinity that Halberstam has extensively researched and written on. In her theorization of female-masculinity, Halberstam draws largely upon the drag king subculture in America, which started to gain popularity in the American queer scene since the 1990s. She defines a drag king as "a female (usually) who dresses up in

¹⁴⁹ The first chapter in Halberstam's book *Female Masculinity* is entitled, "An introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinities without Men." See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Halberstam, "Oh Behave!", p.433

recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume.”¹⁵¹ She asserts that a drag king differs from a male impersonator in that “the male impersonator attempts to produce a plausible performance of maleness as the whole of her act, [but] the drag king performs masculinity (often parodically) and makes the exposure of the theatricality of masculinity into the mainstay of her act.”¹⁵² Through performance strategies such as parody, mimicry and exaggerated impersonation, drag kings in their performances achieve the effects of critiquing dominant forms of masculinity, and distancing maleness from masculinity

As Robyn Wiegman notes, Halberstam’s theorization of female masculinity has contributed significantly to the study of masculinity. Her works, by dislodging masculinity from men compel a rethinking of the relationship between anatomy and gender, or in Weigman’s words, the “normative wedding of sex and gender.”¹⁵³ Rather than being a result of possessing certain physicality, notions of masculinity in Halberstam’s study are shifted to the realm of identification and the performative. She maps out a whole range of female masculinities, of women who do not conform to normative forms of gender identifications, or who identify with traits conventionally associated with men, but who do not have same-sex desires. In doing so, Halberstam dislocates homosexuality from gender variance (i.e. the gender identification/performance that is at odds with the sexed body which in turn has been assumed to be equated to the corporeal body), and such (re)articulations of sex, gender and sexuality can also be found in the concert performances of Nakai.

¹⁵¹ Judith Halberstam, “Drag kings: Masculinity and performance [1998],” in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.400.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Robyn Weigman, “Unmaking; Men and Masculinity in Feminist Theory,” in Gardiner, *Masculinity Studies*, p. 50.

Gender variance and homosexuality in Japan

Nakai's performances, like the subcultural space of the Drag King performances, produce counterfeit masculinities in the form of non-male masculinities. His performance strategies such as mimicry, hyperbole, and parody bring about an effect similar to that of the "kingy" effects which expose the theatricality of masculinity, distance masculinity from maleness, and denaturalize genetic sex and gender. This production of non-male masculinity, like that of Halberstam's female masculinity, can also have the effect of disrupting the conflation of gender variance with homosexuality that has been a prevalent belief in Japan.

Mark McLelland, in *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities*, notes that representations of gay men in Japanese popular culture fall mostly into the *okama* stereotype. He defines *okama* as a cross-dressed homosexual male, but highlights that the term *okama* can be also used to describe "a man who displays any transgender attribute."¹⁵⁴ Following James Valentine, McLelland argues that homosexual men cannot be represented in the media in terms of sexuality as this would undermine the male gender role, which has been widely assumed in the Japanese society to be natural and dominating. Both Valentine and McLelland assert that because of the conflated relationship between gender and sexuality that has been constantly perpetuated by the media, representing gender-normative men in same-sex relationships would threaten not only male sexuality, but also the naturalness of male gender. Male dominance in Japanese society has been closely tied to men's "sexual domination of women."¹⁵⁵ If homosexual men are represented as gender normative, or in other words, just like

¹⁵⁴ Mark McLelland, *Male homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), p.8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

ordinary men in terms of behavior, language or gestures except that they desire men instead of women, the viability of the dominance of men (over women) in the sexual realm and in Japanese society will be called into question. The popular representation of homosexual men as gender non-normative or non male-gendered therefore became “the main paradigm Japanese people have for understanding non-normative sexualities,”¹⁵⁶ where the transgendered, woman-like *okama* is the most common representation of homosexual men in Japan. Such representation of homosexuality is, as McLelland argues, “ideologically motivated,”¹⁵⁷ with the intention of sustaining the authority of male gender role in Japan.

Building on the research of scholars such as Yamaji and Valentine, McLelland shows that the portrayal of homosexual men as cross-dressers or transgenders is so prevalent in Japanese media that “when Japanese people think of homosexuality, they do tend to think of a man in a dress, or a hyper-feminine man who uses ‘sister speech’ [...]”¹⁵⁸ He argues that in the print media, homosexual men are approximated to the feminine domain in terms of behavior, gestures and appearance, even if they are not cross-dressed. Sexual preference of gay men is downplayed, while the effeminacy and their attraction to women’s clothes, perfumes or feminine activities like cooking are foregrounded. He cites the example of a chapter from a book written by Nomura Sachiyo,¹⁵⁹ in which Nomura identifies several supposedly prominent characteristics of gay men, such as being overly obsessed with their appearance or body, always using perfumes, decorating their rooms with lace curtains or rose-patterned wallpaper, and having extremely tidy

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁵⁹ See Nomura Sachiyo, *Anata otoko no kantei dekimasuka? Chekkupointo wa 17 ka sho* (Can you judge men? 17 check points) (Tokyo: Kuresutosha, 1995).

rooms.¹⁶⁰ Here, gay men are effeminized, portrayed as women-like, thus conflating homosexuality with the crossing of the gender border into the female domain.

In another article, “Gay Men, Masculinity and the Media in Japan,” McLelland also shows how gay men are being represented in the Japanese media as women’s best friends. He notes that in the February 1991 issue of the women’s magazine *CREA* which ignited the 1990s gay boom in Japan, the articles portrayed friendships between gay men and women, and represented gay men in feminized images.¹⁶¹ Gay men are represented as more understanding towards women’s needs, as women’s allies, not only due to their supposed effeminacy, but also because of their marginalized positions in society which is similar to that of Japanese women. Such representations of gay men became a trend that quickly caught on in dramas, films and print.¹⁶² From McLelland’s research, one can then discern some of the media portrayals of gay men. They mainly revolve around transgenderism, which takes the form of cross-dressing, crossing into the feminine realm in terms of behavior, attitudes or interests, and being women’s best friends.

Valentine also illustrates how homosexuals are represented in Japanese dramas as gender non-conformists. In one of his examples, he shows how a homosexual character is constructed to fit into the *okama* stereotype. As Valentine illustrates, in *Blocked Road*, “[s]he [the homosexual character] (the character refers to herself in feminine terms) has a female name [Karen], wears ambiguous clothing, is unsuccessfully made up and hence instantly recognizable (as an *okama*) to a principal character, who expresses shock when he first meets her. Karen is shown as being

¹⁶⁰ McLelland, *Male Homosexuality*, p.52.

¹⁶¹ Mark McLelland, “Gay Men, Masculinity and the Media in Japan,” in Louie and Low, *Asian Masculinities*, p.62.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

homosexual but not being sexual.”¹⁶³ Through this example, Valentine shows how homosexual men are being stereotyped into the image of cross-dressers or feminine roles by Japanese media producers, identified by their (trans)gender rather than their sexuality.

Contrary to the media conflation of homosexuality with transgenderism, not all cross-dressers are homosexuals. The presence of various images and voices that contest media portrayals of gay men, such as the cross-dressing clubs that cater to heterosexual men who enjoy cross-dressing as a hobby, as well as transgender academics (see Chapter Four), highlights the inadequacies and irrelevance of stereotypical representations of homosexual men to their lived realities.

Media representations of homosexuality have also been criticized by gay men as being fantasized images of gay men produced by and for women, according to informants of Yamaji Masami.¹⁶⁴ McLelland also argues against this popular portrayal of gay men in Japanese popular culture, and claims that they do not reflect the lives/realities of gay men in Japan. As he asserts, stereotypical images of homosexual men as portrayed in the media appear to have little relevance to the actual lives of gay men. Most of his interviewees speak, dress and behave like their heterosexual counterparts, and his visits to his informants’ homes also did not yield any evidence of the lace curtains or rose-patterned wallpaper that Nomura has described.¹⁶⁵ Most of them live their lives as gender normative males, rather than being effeminate men or as cross-dressers, and some even resent being thought of as *okama*. In other words, media representations of the gay men are fantastical

¹⁶³ James Valentine, “Skirting and Suiting Stereotypes: Representations of Marginalized Sexualities in Japan,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, 3 (1997), p.65. *Blocked Road (Tōsenbo dōri)*, was broadcast on NHK in 1992, with disabled people as its main subject concern. *Ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁶⁴ Yamaji Masami, *Dansei dōseiaisha no raifuhisutorii* (Tokyo: Gakubunsha, 1997), cited in McLelland, “Gay Men and the Media in Japan,” p.64.

¹⁶⁵ McLelland, *Male Homosexuality*, p.216.

constructs—homosexuality is made to be conflated with transgenderism because of the difficulty in portraying gay men’s sexuality, and the portrayal of gay men as women’s best friends is mainly directed at women’s fantasy and consumption. These made-up images of gay men create mythical figures of homosexuality that have been perpetuated and reinforced by the media, and delimit the choices of self-presentation that gay men can choose from should they want to ‘come out’.

Following McLelland, I concur that representations of gay men in Japanese mainstream media are largely artificial constructs with which homosexual men have little affinity. It is in such a context that I would posit Nakai’s solo performance in SMAP’s 2005 concert, where I argue that his performance may function as a deconstruction of current stereotypes of gay men as depicted in the media, and exposing the artificiality of such images.

Buriburiman!

Nakai’s solo segment in SMAP’s concert, *Sample Bang 2005* may at the outset be seen as performing and perpetuating the *okama* stereotype as represented by Japanese media, associating cross-dressing with homosexuality. His solo performance in the 2005 concert follows more or less the same format as those in the previous years—he opens his solo with a slow song to his own piano accompaniment (which highlights his lack of ability to sing well), followed by a fast, hip-hop piece, that centers on hypermasculine acts and movements. Following the hip-hop number, Nakai again transforms into another character—that of *buriburiman* (or what I call, *okama-Nakai*), a hero(ine) who when summoned, comes to the rescue of a little boy captured by a group of villains. He appears in a red low-cut dress with high slits, red heels and a blond wig. He uses speech patterns typically associated with females, such as using

reference terms like *watashi* (I/me), *anata tachi* (you all); and sentence-final particles like *da wa*¹⁶⁶ (in the HardGay version of the same segment which I will discuss later, Nakai uses ‘male reference terms’ such as *ore* and *omaetachi*). Given the widespread assumption in the Japanese society of transgenderism as homosexuality (as McLelland and Valentine have pointed out), Nakai’s transgendering act or his attempt to pass as a woman in terms of appearance and language falls easily into the stereotypical image of the *okama* which can signify him as a homosexual male.

However, I argue that his performance is actually a parody of the *okama* stereotype that can be read positively as a disruption of the conflation of homosexuality with transgenderism that has been prevalent in popular belief. Nakai, although cross-dressed, fails to pass successfully as a woman. While performing femaleness through his dressing, gestures and language, his voice remains coarse and is very much like his usual voice. In McLelland’s discussion of transgender stars in the Japanese entertainment world, he notes that there are several celebrities who cross-dress and pass as women, while some others dress in women’s clothes, put on make-up, wear long tresses, but make no attempt to pass as women (other than in terms of appearance). As he asserts, the primarily transgendered artistes such as IZAM (from the band SHAZNA) and Mana (from Malice Mizer) “cross-dress and can actually ‘pass’ [as women] although their gender performance (language, etc) is masculine.”¹⁶⁷ Reworking McLelland’s assertion, I argue that such unsuccessful

¹⁶⁶ As noted in Chapter Two, personal pronouns and sentence-final particles contribute to constituting the gender of the speaker. When *watashi* and *da wa* are used, a soft, dainty image is being portrayed, thus constituting an image of femininity that is in line with the socio-culturally defined female ideal.

¹⁶⁷ McLelland, *Male Homosexuality*, p.46. Here, although McLelland did not explicitly state what ‘gender performance’ consist of besides language, it is clear from this statement that he does not consider dressing to be part of his definition of ‘gender performance’. However, academics in gender studies, influenced by developments in postmodernism and queer theories, as well as by the works of gender theorists such as Judith Butler, have come to conceptualize gender as

gender passing of those transgendered artistes give them away as men. In other words, they pass as women only to the extent of appearance as they continue to maintain their masculine speech patterns and/or other behavioral traits often (socio-culturally) associated with men. Although unclear from McLelland's discussion as to whether or not these transgendered artistes put on such contesting images in their gender performances intentionally, such instances of unsuccessful gender passing closely resembles that of Nakai's performance of the transgendered woman.

In his discussion of the media portrayal of *okamas*, Valentine argues that “[*o*]kama stereotypes combine oddity and comedy: they are funny-peculiar and funny-humorous.”¹⁶⁸ *Okama* are intentionally made to be portrayed as gender weirdos, who attempt to cross-dress and pass as women albeit without much success. Failure to pass is part of their task. As women-manqué but who constantly fail to pass as ‘real’ women, *okamas* are seen to be weird and funny, thus mitigating the potential threat that they may pose to the heteronormative gender system. As both McLelland and Valentine have argued, homosexual men cannot be represented in terms of their sexuality as this would undermine the patriarchal system in Japan. Therefore, they are most commonly represented in terms of their gender, or rather, as transgendered. However, while these transgenders fail to be ‘real’ men in terms of gender and sexuality, they also fail to pass as ‘real’ women, thus providing the source of “oddity and comedy” as they are eventually signified as gender failures, as men who want to become women but who constantly fail. By portraying them as weird and funny, the threat that the gender bending and gender crossing acts of the transgenders pose to the stability of the binary gender system is nullified. The male-female gender border

something that one *does* rather than something that one *is*. Therefore, dressing can and should be considered as one of the means through which one *does* gender.

¹⁶⁸ Valentine, “Skirting and Suiting Stereotypes,” p.64.

remains intact, as any act that suggests the crossing of the border is denigrated as ridiculous, bizarre and insignificant.¹⁶⁹

Like the representations of the *okama* that Valentine describes, Nakai appears as transgendered and cross-dressed but ultimately fails to pass as a woman. On one level, his performance can be read as perpetuating the media representation of the *okama* stereotype, where gay men are portrayed not only as transgenders/cross-dressers, but also as failures in their transgending. I argue, however, that although Nakai is performing the media-stereotyped *okama*, his performance functions as more of a challenge to than a reproduction and perpetuation of the stereotype.

When Nakai appears on stage in his female costume, he is immediately recognized as an *okama*—a cross-dresser or gender non-conformist and by extension a ‘homosexual’. As mentioned earlier, *okama* is an image that was initially created to overcome the difficulty of representing gay-male sexuality. In media representations of homosexual men, he is often represented in terms of gender (but as gender outcastes) rather than in terms of sexuality because it is impossible to represent his sexual partner (who is of the same sex) without undermining the male (heterosexual) gender role, as well as the dichotomous gender system. The *okama* is always made to fail to pass as a woman because if the *okama* were to pass, then it would not be possible to identify the gay man under the woman’s clothes. This would then defeat the whole purpose of creating the *okama* figure, which was intended as a representation of homosexuality through gender (instead of sexuality).

With the intentions behind the construct of the *okama* in mind, Nakai’s embodiment of the *okama* can be construed as a deliberate move towards subverting

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 64-66.

the construct itself. He first identifies himself with homosexuality through cross-dressing, hinging on the common perception of gay men as transgenders or cross-dressers who fail to pass as women. In the case of a typical media representation, the homosexual male would not be portrayed in any sexual relations, need not mention the sexual partner whose representation is almost impossible. However, in the 2005 concert, *Okama*-Nakai is portrayed as engaging in sexual relations with seemingly gender normative men, evoking the same-sex sexual activity which has been a taboo in mainstream media representations. At the concert, as Nakai is singing in his *okama* character, he performs acts that closely resemble fellatio with his male dancers who play the villains that have captured the little boy. The dancers/villains fervidly thrust their faces into Nakai's lower body-part, while he 'whips' them away although apparently indulging himself in the act. After the villains have their share of the 'face-fucking' act, they kneel on the floor, awaiting *okama*-Nakai's whipping one by one. This sequence can be interpreted as reminiscent of a sadomasochistic (S/M) scene whereby acts of punishment or acts of inducing pain, such as spanking, whipping or bondage, are deployed to stimulate sexual pleasure. McLelland highlights that the *okama* is characterized as "a transvestite man whose preferred sexual act is to be the passive recipient of anal penetration."¹⁷⁰ However, contrary to this common perception, *okama*-Nakai plays an active role in this S/M scene, subverting the media portrayal of gay men as without sexuality, as well as disrupting the assumption that *okamas* or gay men occupy a passive sexual role.

In this segment of the 2005 concert, Nakai is rendered as an *okama* who fails to pass as a 'real' woman and at the same time is shown in same-sex relations with

¹⁷⁰ McLelland, *Male Homosexuality*, pp.48-49.

gender-normative men. This can be read as a capitalization on the disadvantaged position of *okama*, who are intentionally represented as gender-passing failures so that the threat that they pose to the normative gender system will be mitigated. By turning the spear-head against itself, media's very portrayal of gay men as without sexuality or without sexual relations is challenged, and ultimately, the entire construct of the *okama* is called into question.

In addition to subverting the construct of the *okama*, Nakai's *okama*-act can also be interpreted as an attempt to dislodge cross-dressing or transgenderism from homosexuality. At the end of the S/M scene, a video is screened in which Nakai appears as the father of an infant and the little boy whom *okama*-Nakai saved. The father character is a poor, boorish village-man who keeps calling his elder son *baka* (stupid), while being gentle and caring towards the baby. Here, Nakai portrays himself as a gender normative male, like that of a conventional a father figure, markedly distinct from the earlier *okama* image. One could read this juxtaposition of the *okama* with the conventional father figure as an attempt to disrupt (intentional or not) the conflation of cross-dressing with homosexuality so prevalent in the media. As the gender normative, presumably heterosexual, Nakai that appears in the video shows, a transgender need not necessarily be homosexual—he may cross-dress and appear like a woman, but cross-dressing does not essentially indicate that he has same-sex desires. Hence, the appearance of an 'ordinary'-looking man with two kids shows that behind this woman-manqué is a gender and sexual normative man, not a gay man.

If the man behind the woman's clothes is homosexual (since the partner of the father is not shown, it may or may not be a heterosexual couple), this juxtaposition of transgenderism and gender normativity can suggest that gay men

need not necessarily be transgenders or cross-dressers. As mentioned above, there are gay men who do fit into the *okama* or effeminate male stereotypes, but most gay men live their lives as gender normative males. Thus, one reading that can be derived from this segment is that gay men can have a family¹⁷¹, and that although some homosexuals may fit into the *okama* stereotype, it does not mean that all gay men are *okama*; as Nakai shows in the video, gay men can be gender normative or non-feminine at all.

Homo-non-sexual HardGay VS Homo-sexual HardNakai

In the Final Concert Special of *SMAP SAMPLE TOUR 2005*, instead of transforming into the blond, sexy *okama* hero(ine), Nakai, after his solo ballad and hip-hop number, re-appears as Japanese comedian Razor Ramon HardGay (pronounced as Haado Gei). Razor Ramon HardGay, or more commonly known as HardGay, is a comic character played by male professional wrestler and comedian Sumitani Masaki. Debuting in 1997, but whose brand of humor only became a hit in 2005, HardGay is easily recognizable by his visual-style which consist of a black leather vest, micro hot pants, studded cap and sunglasses.¹⁷²

Nakai's impersonation of HardGay includes not only his dressing style, but also his gestures, postures and even HardGay's famous catch-phrase, "Fuuuuu!!" If Nakai's embodiment of the *okama* in the 20 shows of *SMAP SAMPLE TOUR 2005* can be interpreted as a challenge to the stereotypical portrayal of homosexual men in mainstream media, then how can we make sense of his solo performance of the very

¹⁷¹ According to McLelland's interviews, some of his informants express desires to be heterosexually married but continue having sexual relationships with men, while some others are willing to give up sexual interactions with men for marriage. Ibid., pp.207-209.

¹⁷² Endō Toshifumi, "2006 nendo owarai geijin ninki rankingu: Kyū fujyō! Yōchui jinbutsu 11" (Popularity Ranking of comedians: on the rise! 11 figures to be noted), *Nikkei Entateinmento*, June 2006 p.29. For more on HardGay, see *Hardgay*, 24 July 2007 <<http://www.hard-gay.org/>>

same segment in the Final Concert Special, only with the exception that *okama* is now being replaced by HardGay?

If homosexual males are characterized in mainstream media as transgenders and effeminate men, then representations of gay men in Japanese gay media, produced by and for gay men, occupy the opposite end. As McLelland gathers in his mapping out of the various ‘fantasy figures’ of gay men in gay magazines and gay pornographic videos, images of homosexual men largely focus on the hypermasculine male body, centering around the portrayal of the erotica. Unlike Euro-American gay magazines that usually feature gay lifestyles issues or foster the development of a gay identity, Japanese gay magazines or rather, gay media in general are mainly produced for sexual pleasure or masturbatory purposes of their readers, and are constructed around the (hyper)masculinized body.¹⁷³

However, as McLelland’s research shows, both stereotypical images of gay men as *okama* or as “hypermasculine sex machines” do not reflect the realities of the lives of gay men in Japan. Results of McLelland’s interviews with homosexual men show that not all gay men are solely interested in sex; while some of his informants are simply interested in seeking sexual relations with men, others are more interested in romantic relationships or intend to marry women but would want to continue seeking sexual and emotional relationships with men. Despite having little relevance to the realities of homosexual men in general, such representations of the hypermasculine gay man have recently found its way into mainstream media through a character by the name of HardGay, and this to some extent seems to open up more avenues in which homosexuality may be perceived, other than in terms of the *okama* stereotype.

¹⁷³ McLelland, “Gay Men and the Media in Japan,” p.66.

The visual style adopted by HardGay is modeled after the leatherman of the band Village People or the Castro-clone gay style, a style that emerged as a result of the gay liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. It is a masculine-identified model of homosexuality that came about as a reaction towards feminization where gay men have been stereotyped as effeminate. By appropriating signifiers of heterosexual masculinity, such as sporting a body-builder macho look, or a 'masculine' fashion style consisting of "flannel check shirts, button-up Levis, work boots, short haircuts and moustaches,"¹⁷⁴ the gay man at once conforms and transgresses.¹⁷⁵ As Russell asserts,

The gay man who claims to be "masculine" instantly violates that masculine identification when he expresses (gay) sexual desire. Masculinity and gay sex can never be equated, trapping the gay man in a paradoxical position: possessing the anatomical sex of a man and identifying with the masculine gender, the macho man is at once a part of the masculine dominant and forever excluded from it because of his sexual desires.¹⁷⁶

The Castro-clone is an image that is politically charged—the gay man conforms to dominant images of masculinity, but at the same time transgresses the notion of masculinity as it is being recontextualized in a homosexual context. By appropriating the dominant heterosexual masculine, the homosexual man perverts the whole notion of masculinity, dislodging masculinity from heterosexuality. Since a non-heterosexual male can assume masculinity, masculinity is therefore not the sole privilege of heterosexual males. The Castro-clone serves not only as a resistance towards

¹⁷⁴ Colin Spencer, *Homosexuality: A History*. 1995. (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), p.347, cited in Russell, *Queer Burroughs*, p.118.

¹⁷⁵ Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 66, cited in Russell, *Queer Burroughs*, p.123.

¹⁷⁶ Russell, *Queer Burroughs*, p.123.

effeminating images of gay men, but also questions the whole notion of ‘masculinity’ by disrupting the natural unification of masculinity with heterosexuality through the body of the masculine-identified homosexual Castro-clone.

HardGay’s gayness (be it an imitation of the images found in gay media or the leatherman in Village people, which in one way or the other are derived from the Castro-clone image) is largely derived from his adoption and performance of various images associated with the hypermasculine gay man, such as the macho man who is overly obsessed with sex. In his performance, he makes constant references to his potency and virility through his hip-grinding moves and pelvic thrusts. However, while gay male bodies in gay media have been eroticized for sexual pleasure, HardGay’s performances are centered on making fun out of his body (and making fun of gay male sexuality). Although he adopts a homosexual appearance, he is not gay (as evident from the exposé of his relationship with his girlfriend, and his eventual marriage with her); and furthermore, same-sex desire is never portrayed in his performances.

While HardGay received his major break in 2005 and has generated high ratings for the TBS variety show, *Bakuten*, in which he has his own program corner,¹⁷⁷ individuals from sexual minorities however, tend to take a different stance towards his performances. Lesbian-Politician Otsuji Kanako of the Osaka Prefectural Assembly, when asked in an interview with The Japan Times how she feels about the treatment of sexual minorities in the media, replies:

¹⁷⁷ HardGay plays a significant role in maintaining the high ratings of the variety program, *Bakuten*. As one of the crew in *Bakuten* reveals, “ ‘on a special program recently, the ratings went over 14 percent, which kept the show alive. As far as those making the program are concerned, he’s our savior.’ ” Ryann Connell, “Razor Ramon Slices along Japan’s cutting edge,” *Mainichi Daily News*, 22 July 2005, 22 May 2007
<<http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/waiwai/face/archive/news/2005/20050720p2g00m0dm024000c.html>>

“[The way the media treats sexual minorities] makes me angry. This morning I saw [comedian] Razor Ramon for the first time. I never watch TV. I’d only heard about him. He’s not homosexual. He just uses gayness for his act, to make people laugh. I’m afraid that people will get the idea that gay people are all like that, yelling and pumping their hips.”¹⁷⁸

HardGay’s portrayal of homosexuality was also criticized by a spokesperson for the Hokkaido Sexual Minority Association Sapporo Meeting (a support group for gay, lesbian and transgender people), who said: “Hard Gay’s acceptance by the Japanese public shows me that there is a strong tendency here to see homosexuality as something to be laughed at. That is sad.”¹⁷⁹ In a survey conducted by *Nikkei Entateinmento* in March 2006, HardGay, although voted the mega-hit comedian for the past year, was at the same time voted the most hated celebrity and the celebrity who would disappear from the screen in the following year.¹⁸⁰

Although HardGay’s precipitous fall to the bottom of the popularity ranking from the number one hit figure could be understood as a the decline of a fad, the adverse reactions towards HardGay by sexual minorities remain unaccounted for. The critiques that were directed at HardGay mainly centered on the misleading, derogatory images of gay men that he has been perceived to portray. Both Otsuji and the spokesperson for the Hokkaido Sexual Minority Association condemned HardGay for making a laughing stock out of gayness, for associating demeaning images with homosexuality. While their criticisms are not fallacious, one would wonder *why* they

¹⁷⁸ Masako Tsubuku, “Assemblywoman puts sex on the agenda. Lesbian politician Kanako Otsuji talks about gender issues in Japan,” *Japan Times*, 11 September 2005, 27 July 2007
<<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/member/member.html?fl20050911x2.htm>>

¹⁷⁹ “Masaki Sumitani,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, 27 July 2007
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masaki_Sumitani>

¹⁸⁰ Endō, “Owarai geijin ninki ranking,” p. 25.

have such adverse reactions towards HardGay when the majority of the Japanese audiences are amused (or bemused) by him.

In his discussion of the treatment of foreign gay men in the Japanese media, Valentine uses the *uchi/soto* (insider/outsider) model to explain why Japanese gay men are stereotyped into narrow images such as that of the *okama*, while foreign gay men are viewed as non-threatening. As foreigners occupy the realm of the *soto* (*outside*), they are relegated as outsiders, as aliens. Therefore, regardless of their sexual orientation, they pose little threat to Japanese society, or the *uchi* (inside). However, when it is the ‘insiders’, i.e. the Japanese, who are behaving inappropriately, or who in Valentine’s words, “do not belong properly,”¹⁸¹ actions will be taken to mitigate the threat that these deviant behavior appear to pose. One such way is through stereotyping, such as in the case of stereotyping homosexual men as *okama*.

The hypermasculine gay image that HardGay adopts is evidently a western (read American) one, derived from the leatherman character in Village People which originated from the Castro-clone style. If that is the case, HardGay will not be viewed as a threat since he is labeling himself as an outsider through the adoption of a foreign image. Furthermore, images of the hypermasculine, hypersexual gay man that are characteristic of HardGay’s persona are not uncommon in the gay media. Why then is he being viewed with such contempt? In addition, his portrayal of the masculine-homosexual in the mainstream media may be interpreted in a similar way as the Castro-clone style, as a form of resistance towards effeminate images of gay man, and as a positive move towards deconstructing stereotypes persistent in mainstream media that has associated gay men with gender non-conformists, transgenders and cross-dressers. So why is there such hoo-ha, especially among

¹⁸¹ Valentine, “Skirting and Suiting Stereotypes,” p.70.

sexual minorities about HardGay? Why do the sexual minority groups interpret HardGay as demeaning their identity?

One reason that will explain the mixed feelings felt towards Hardgay is, that the “odd and comic” image of HardGay has been interpreted as another stereotypical portrayal of gay men—men who jump around, “yelling and pumping their hips.” Since it is openly known that HardGay is not a homosexual, his portrayal of a ‘gay’ man could have been taken to be an outsider’s view of gay men that is homophobic, denigrating, which in effect can construct another stereotype of gay men that is irrelevant to reality. While it is unclear whether the character of HardGay was created by Sumitani himself, or by the producers, or both, we can at least surmise (from HardGay’s performance) that HardGay’s gayness is being tamed (and this is probably what the critics are dissatisfied with). As I have mentioned earlier, non-Japanese gay men (as outsiders) are viewed as posing little or no threat to the Japanese society, while Japanese gay men (insiders) are deemed as threatening the heteronormative social structure and patriarchal dominance. In reaction to such threat, homosexual men have been stereotyped in media representations as *okamas*, the gender deviants and the feminine men. Presumably, HardGay should not have caused much apprehension since he is an imitation of a foreign gay figure (Village People/Castro-clone); but the source of the problem (especially among sexual minorities) is that HardGay is played by a Japanese man. This in effect leads to the association of the hypermasculine, gay-ish figure that Sumitani assumes under the name of HardGay with Japanese homosexuality.

HardGay, despite his appropriation of a foreign gay figure, is probably being seen by critical audience as a Japanese gay man, an insider, who does not belong. As Valentine argues, when marginality that is posed by insiders threatens the social

structure, it will be contained within stereotypes, hence accounting for the stereotyping of Japanese homosexual men as *okama*. Any other representations of the marginal or of homosexuality that fall outside of the *okama* stereotype will be hidden away or rendered strange or alien. Such is the strategy used to dismiss, in Valentine's words, a "serious gay identity."¹⁸² In the case of HardGay, he is not only a homosexual outsider, but also a homosexual who does not fit into the *okama* stereotype. The source of threat comes from his very assumption of a foreign (read non-*okama*) gay image; his adoption of the foreign paradoxically renders him threatening to homonormativity: HardGay's hypermasculine gay image is deemed as a total opposite to or challenge of the tamed, "odd and comic", unthreatening *okama* which has become the norm for representing homosexual men in the media. To mitigate such threat, the non-conformist has to be tamed and be contained within stereotypes.

One of the strategies being employed to reduce threat of the hypermasculine, hypersexual image of HardGay is by portraying him as "odd and comic", similar to the case of the *okama*. HardGay is always shown doing seemingly frivolous things: in the variety show *Bakuten*, where HardGay goes around town carrying out acts of social improvement, he would do things like, as Connell describes, "suddenly springing up in front of them [people on the streets, regardless of whether they want his help or not], holding his arms above his head, then wildly gyrating his hips and thrusting his pelvis forward while screaming out a piercing 'Whoooooo!' and announcing himself as 'Hadoo Gei!'"¹⁸³ Although his image is reminiscent of the hypermasculine gay men as represented in gay media and the masculine-homosexual Castro-clone; although his acts are overtly sensual and profane, he is never shown or

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Connell, "Razor Ramon Slices along Japan's cutting edge."

even suggested to be in sexual relations with men. Rather, he is portrayed as a Good Samaritan, going around helping people such as carrying the elderly across an overhead bridge; picking up cigarette stubs from the ground and making the litter-bugs promise that they will not do it again; or rescuing a ramen shop from closing down by helping it draw in customers. There is often a moralistic message or social value behind his acts. By portraying HardGay as the Good Samaritan, yet relegating the things that he does as menial and comical, the threatening image of the hypermale, hypersexual gay man is being tamed.

Hardgay's masculine-homosexual image, despite being an image (directly or indirectly) borrowed from the Castro-clone style which has been associated with the resistance of the effeminate model of gay men and the perversion of dominant notions of masculinity in 1960s and 1970s United States, did not inherit connotations of liberation accompanying the Castro-clone. Although the masculine image of homosexual men (prevalent in gay media but brought into the mainstream by HardGay) appear to disrupt the *okama* stereotype of gay men as feminine, it nevertheless ends up becoming another stereotypical image of homosexual men that has little resonance with the realities of gay men in Japan. Representations of gay men are still contained within the binary opposite of effeminate man versus hypermasculine man, and on top of that, a hypermasculine man ripped of his sexuality. While the hypermasculine gay man is depicted in gay media as obsessed with sex, the hypermasculine gay man in mainstream media (as represented by HardGay) is being tamed and is without sexuality, like the *okama*. This taming and re-stereotyping (not to mention, trivialization) of homosexual men by mainstream media can be accounted as the cause of criticisms of HardGay by gender activists such as Otsuji.

It is within this context of HardGay as the tamed masculine-homosexual that

I would like to discuss Nakai's solo performance in the Final Concert Special of *SMAP SAMPLE TOUR 2005*. I argue that Nakai's imitation of HardGay in the *buriburiman* segment may function not only to disrupt representations of (tamed) homosexual men in Japanese media, but also reveal the artificiality and imitative nature of dominant images of homosexuality, showing that there are no ideal types or models of homosexual identities. His performances on the whole can be seen as a manifestation of post-modern theories that seek to disassociate gender from sex and sexuality, and question the binaries that exist within each category.

Nakai performs the *buriburiman* segment in a similar manner in his HardGay outfit (leather vest, hot pants, cap, and boots) as when he is in the blond transgender outfit. Instead of a 'complete' impersonation of HardGay, Nakai only imitates HardGay to the extent of his visual-style and his signature poses and gestures; in other words, it is an imperfect imitation. In Halberstam's theorization of cloning or impersonating as a kingy effect that questions the authenticity of white masculinity, she notes, "White masculinity in particular becomes more performative when it is not simply multiplied but, as we see here, replicated imperfectly."¹⁸⁴ Using examples such as Elvis Herelvis (a drag king impersonation of Elvis) and Elvis Herelvis impersonator, and Dr. Evil and Mini-Me (the clone of Dr. Evil, from the Austin Powers sequel, *The Spy Who Shagged Me*), Halberstam shows that cloning, as a (failed) impersonation of a form of masculinity (Elvis Herelvis impersonator) that is already being impersonated (Elvis Herelvis), "allows [for] white masculine failure and ineptitude [...] and breaks down all claims to masculine and white authenticity."¹⁸⁵

Nakai's imitation of HardGay (which in turn is an imitation of the

¹⁸⁴ Halberstam, "Oh Behave!," p.429.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.449.

Castro-Clone/Village People) can thus be understood in a similar manner as a subversion, in this case not of white masculinity, but of dominant notions of homosexuality. While HardGay's imitation of the Castro-clone is a tamed one, disassociating sexuality from the hypermasculine gay man, Nakai's imitation of HardGay is an untaming of the tamed. The figure of the masculine-homosexual (who has been tamed in HardGay's version) is re-associated with same-sex sexual acts such as 'face-fucking' and S/M in Nakai's performance, thereby exposing the 'homo-non-sexuality' of HardGay. Nakai's re-inscription of sexuality onto the hypermasculine gay man, in effect questions the portrayal of homosexuality in HardGay's performance. HardGay is not homosexual, but he performs gayness by imitating the Castro-clone/Village people, yet leaving out expressions of same-sex sexual and emotional preferences. This tamed portrayal of homosexuals without sexuality (reminiscent of the *okama*) is picked up by Nakai, whose imperfect imitation of HardGay reveals that which is absent in HardGay, i.e. sexuality, by the very performance of it. The figure of HardGay as regulated and erased of sexuality is self-reflexively exposed as Nakai sexualizes himself by appearing to enact sexual acts during the solo segment.

Moreover, by imperfectly impersonating a 'homo-non-sexual' (HardGay) and becoming a 'homo-sexual' (Nakai's version of HardGay) instead, the imitative nature and constructedness of sexuality is foregrounded. HardGay's homo(non)sexuality can be performed (by a non-homosexual) just as Nakai's homosexuality can be re-inscribed onto the homo(non)sexual figure. This shows that sexuality is not innate, but is called into being through enactment and performance. In addition, by highlighting the multiple levels of impersonation that is taking place (Nakai's imitation of HardGay which is an imitation of the Castro-Clone/Village

People imitating Castro-Clone, which in turn is an imitation of dominant masculinity), Nakai's performance may be interpreted as questioning the authenticity or originality of dominant images of homosexual men, and revealing that there is no pre-existing, 'original' (homo)sexuality. The sexuality that one enacts is an effect of the re-iteration/imitation of other enactments of sexuality, which in turn are imitations themselves. Therefore, there is no single model, or in McLelland's words, "ideal types" of sexuality, be it hetero or homo.¹⁸⁶

Nakai's performances also reveal the artificiality of such popular imagery by showing that not all cross-dressers are gay, that gay men can be gender normative, and by exposing the erasure of sexuality from popular representations of homosexual men. Both McLelland's research results and Nakai's performance find fault with media's stereotypification of homosexuals. The portrayal of homosexuality through gender instead of sexuality (homosexual men as cross-dressers, woman-like; non-homosexual who enact gayness through gender performance) is problematic as gender becomes conflated with sexuality, where gender then becomes assumed to be an expression of sexuality.

(Trans)Gender, (Homo)Sexuality

Prior to the 1970s feminism in the Euro-American context, sexuality had unquestioningly been attached to gender through reproduction. As the naturalness of women's gendered role as wives and mothers were assumed, gender differentiation became associated with reproduction (reproductive role that women play); and the focus on reproduction became the driving force behind sexual preferences or

¹⁸⁶ McLelland, *Male Homosexuality*, p.222.

identities, thus leading to the conflation of gender and sexuality.¹⁸⁷ Feminist writings and activism, and social construction theory in the 1970s contested such natural associations between gender and sexuality, and argued not only for the rethinking of sexuality and gender as separate systems, but also for the constructedness of sexuality.¹⁸⁸ As Vance asks, “[h]ad the categories ‘homosexual’ and ‘lesbian’ always existed? And if not, what were their points of origin and conditions for development? If identical physical acts had different subjective meanings, how was sexual meaning constructed?”¹⁸⁹

In social construction theory, culture is prescribed as having an important role in informing and shaping one’s sexual experiences and identities. For social constructionists, sexual behavior is given specific meanings according to the socio-temporality in which it exists, rather than being universal. In other words, sexuality is constructed and one example is the state’s deployment of science in the regulation of sexuality to maintain heterosexuality for reproduction. As Mac an Ghaill and Haywood notes, “scientific discourses [...] have the effect of naturalizing sexual and gender relations, suggesting that they are determined by an underlying ‘natural’ force.”¹⁹⁰ The scientific model to sexuality generally tends to associate sexuality to biology, as something that is innate and natural, bound to “physiological functioning or instinctual drives.”¹⁹¹ In the name of science, heterosexuality (maintained for

¹⁸⁷ Vance delineates that it has been widely believed that sex causes gender, where “male-female reproductive differences and the process of reproduction (framed as and equated with “sexuality”) give rise to gender differentiation”; and gender causes sex, where “women as a marked gender group constitute the locus of sexuality, sexual desire, and motivation. [Therefore] [r]eproduction and its organization become the prime movers in all other male-female differentiation and in the flowering of the gender system,” seamlessly knitting gender and sexuality together. Carole S. Vance, “Social Construction Theory and Sexuality,” in *Constructing Masculinity*, eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.46.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-32.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

¹⁹⁰ Máirtín Mac an Ghaill and Chris Haywood, *Gender, Culture and Society: Contemporary Femininities and Masculinities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 127.

¹⁹¹ Vance, “Social Construction Theory and Sexuality,” p.47.

reproduction) is framed as normal, while same-sex desires are pathologized, or at least seen as a deviation from the norm.

As social constructionists argue, the meanings that one attaches to sexual desires and experiences are influenced, constructed and regulated by state ideologies, cultural-specific values and practices, as well as temporality. According to Vance, although there is a variation of theories on sexuality even within social construction theory, “all reject transhistorical and transcultural definitions of sexuality, and suggest instead that sexuality is mediated by historical and cultural factors.”¹⁹² The social construction approach to sexuality questions prevailing assumptions about the naturalness of sexual norms and behavior by contesting sexuality as a derivative of biology, and foregrounding the role that culture plays in shaping sexuality. Rather than privileging the biological body as the determinant of sexuality, social constructionists are more interested in examining “the range of behavior, ideology, and subjective meaning among and within human groups, and would view the body, its functions, and sensations as potentials which are incorporated and mediated by culture.”¹⁹³

In social construction theory, although the focus is shifted away from sexuality as inherent to biology and physiology, the physical body is still conceptualized as a pre-existing matter onto which culture is inscribed and through which behavior is emitted and experiences are felt. Butler however, contests the notion of a body that exists “prior to its cultural inscription.”¹⁹⁴ For Butler, as Salih explains, “there is no ‘natural body’ which preexists culture and discourse, since all

¹⁹² Ibid., p.42.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.47.

¹⁹⁴ Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.105.

bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence.”¹⁹⁵ As I have discussed in Chapter Two, the body comes into being, becomes known as a body, or is called into being as a meaningful subject, through the very process of cultural inscription (in this case, the ‘doing’ of gender). Through the citation of established norms, the body comes into being and gains subjectivity. This citing of the norm and calling into subjectivity is ritualistic and compulsory in that society compels such an act for the reinforcement of heterosexuality and reproduction; and any deviations will be punished. This is what Butler calls the performativity of gender—citing established norms and calling the (gendered) being into existence through the very citation of the norm.

If there is no body that is prior to significations, then there is also no pre-existing ‘inner truth’ that is there to be projected onto the surface of the body. As Butler argues, the body only comes into being through inscriptions onto the surface of the body (such as acts, gestures, enactments, or what Butler calls, “corporal signs”). This inscription has been assumed to be a reflection or an exteriorization of an inner truth or inner essence (see Chapter Two). However, this is actually an illusion because there is no pre-existing inner truth to be projected onto the surface of the body in the first place. That the (outer) corporeal signs appear to express a (inner) gender identity, and the naturalization or coherence between the outer and the inner are “fabrications” maintained for the purpose of heterosexual reproduction. Thus gender becomes produced alongside heterosexuality, i.e. heterosexuality already sets the frame/boundary within which subjects can come into being, be it through initial interpellation as sexed (and therefore gendered) individuals or through subsequent re-significations. Heterosexuality is produced as an effect of the prohibition on

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.91.

homosexuality, and as Butler notes, gender may be regulated to ensure normative sexuality or heterosexuality.¹⁹⁶ A gender-normative male need not necessarily be heterosexual; even though he may be citing the norm of a male gender and thus appearing to be heterosexual, his sexual desires need not necessarily abide by the heterosexual law.

As Mac an Ghaill and Haywood ask, “what is it about occupying ‘proper’ forms of masculinity that almost inevitably implies a heterosexual identity?”¹⁹⁷ Drawing on theories of Eve Sedgwick, and calling for a deconstruction of the equation between gender and sexuality, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood point out that in Anglo-American cultures, heterosexuality and gender have been knitted together (as Butler has also highlighted), but that does not mean that “everyone who inhabits hegemonic forms of masculinity experiences themselves as heterosexual and everyone who inhabits subordinated forms of masculinity experiences themselves as homosexual.”¹⁹⁸ As evident from the examples of Castro-clone and female masculinities, there do exist masculinities and sexualities that do not belong to the hegemonic-masculinity= heterosexual dyad.

The conflation of gender with sexuality is not only pervasive in Anglo-phone societies, but manifestations of such model are also not uncommon in Japanese media. As Valentine highlights, gender and sexuality has often been presented in the same context, where homosexual males are portrayed as transvestites while homosexual females are represented as dressed in men’s clothes. This has led to widespread (mis)belief that gender deviants are necessarily homosexuals, and homosexuals are always gender non-conformists—either men who are too feminine or women who are

¹⁹⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xii.

¹⁹⁷ Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, *Gender, Culture and Society*, p. 129.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.130-131.

too masculine. Similarly, the various gender-normative homosexual subjects and non-homosexual transgenders in McLelland's study show that gender and sexuality need not coincide.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked if Nakai's comic performances are a façade for his miserable singing. As I have argued, his imitation of Morning Musume displaces the notion of an 'original' gender, while his juxtaposition of the female-coded bikini with hypermasculine gender acts not only disrupts the conflation of sex and gender, but also highlights their constructed nature. In the context of the conflation of transgender and homosexuality in Japanese media, Nakai's performances may function (like the Castro-clone or drag kings) to disassociate gender non-conformity from homosexuality. His parody of the *okama* stereotype and the hypermasculine gay man can be seen as a destabilization or queering of the widespread naturalization of gender and sexuality, where gender variance has commonly been associated with and represented in the media as homosexuality, falling into the stereotypes of the *okama* or woman-manqué, and the hypermasculine, hypersexual gay man. While Nakai's performance in the 2002 concert enacts non-male masculinities, disassociating masculinities from the male genetic body, his performance in the 2005 concert destabilizes the conflated relationship between gender and sexuality. *Okama*-Nakai questions the *okama* stereotype that is prevalent in media representations of homosexual men by performing a non-homosexual transgender, or a homosexual but gender normative character. His parody of HardGay further disrupts the common representations of homosexual men as without sexuality. By performing the de-sexualized 'gay' character of HardGay and associating it with sexual images, Nakai may be seen as exposing the character of HardGay as a tamed 'gay' man being stripped of his sexuality, and in effect (re)sexualizing the

homosexual as represented in the media.

In particular, Nakai's performances may be seen as achieving similar effects as the Drag king performances described by Halberstam. As counterpublic spaces, these performances may work towards the projection for counterfeit masculinities, i.e. non-male masculinities. Nakai's drag acts and enactments of gender variance and sexual non-conformity, through parody, exaggeration and the comic, call into question the assumptions about 'gender reality' and deconstruct prevailing notions of sex, gender and sexuality. His imperfect imitations of gender and (homo)sexuality not only criticize and question the authenticity of dominant notions of masculinity in Japan, but also problematize representations of homosexuality in mainstream and gay media that do not reflect the realities of gay men in Japan. Such enactments of counterfeit masculinities can be situated under a larger context of queer culture where normative constructs of identities are being disrupted and boundaries between and within sex, gender and sexuality are being challenged.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gone Camping—Chonangang and the Queering of Gender and Ethnic Identities

Chonangang is the ‘Korean’ persona of Kusanagi Tsuyoshi. Determined to debut in Korea, Kusanagi started learning Korean in 2000, and made several visits to Korea, auditioning for movies and making appearances in Korean variety shows. In 2002, Kusanagi released a Korean single as Chonangang, and in 2003, he conducted an interview on TBS with South Korean President No Mu Hyun upon his visit to Japan. In 2004 Kusanagi starred in Korean movie, *Hotel Venus*, speaking his lines throughout the movie in Korean. He currently hosts a variety program on Fuji TV as Chonangang, *Chonangang 2* (it is running its second season due to its popularity in the first season), in which he interviews Korean artistes, and introduces Korean talents to the Japanese audiences.

Although Chonangang sometimes appear on television programs in a black suit, his signature costume for which he is widely known is a red, flowery shirt topped with a pink and white checkered jacket, which is matched with white, tight-fitting trousers. He also puts on bright pink blusher on his cheeks and darkens his eyebrows. His trademark hand gesture is that of the ‘peace’ sign which is usually accompanied by a wide grin. How do we make sense of Chonangang’s image? Why does he associate Korea or a Korean identity with such a feminized portrayal of masculinity? *Who* exactly is Chonangang?

Camp site: Chonangang

Chonangang made his debut appearance in SMAP's concerts in the *Live Urasuma* concert. In a video preceding his appearance, Chonangang is shown marching out of Narita Airport with fully straightened arms swaying in sync with his stride. As he comes to a stop in front of the camera, he whips out his 'peace' gesture with a wink and addresses the audience in Korean, stating that he has just arrived from Korea, and would like to be on closer terms with the friends of SMAP. He asks the audiences to wait for him while he runs to the concert hall from the airport. Following this video screening, a huge poster of Chonangang hanging on a platform rose from beneath the stage. Chonangang in the poster, bathed in a bed of colorful flowers, is dressed in his trademark pink and white costume and smiling into the camera with dopey eyes and lipstick-smearing grin. A voice-over repeatedly recites in Korean "*chonangang imida*" ("I am Chonangang") over fast-paced techno music. At a burst of fireworks, Chonangang springs out from the inside of the raised platform, greets the audiences in Korean,¹⁹⁹ and performs to the Korean version of *Asahi wo mi ni ikou yo* (Let's go and watch sunrise).²⁰⁰ Upon finishing the song, Chonangang declares his love for the audience before 'flying back' to Korea, and the words "Let's meet again" is projected onto the screen in both Korean and Japanese, together with a picture of Chonangang (in which he posed with his upper-body leaned back, right hand raised with the 'peace' gesture, eyes squinting into the camera seductively and mouth wide apart as if saying 'yeah') slowly dissolving into background.

The excessive performance of gender by Chonangang is in every way *camp*. As Susan Sontag highlights in "Notes on Camp," one of the remarkable works on camp, "[C]amp is a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of

¹⁹⁹ See Appendix C

²⁰⁰ The original Japanese version was included in SMAP's twenty-ninth single, released in 1999.

style. It is the love for the exaggerated, the 'off', of things-being-what-they-are-not [...] Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a 'lamp'; not a woman, but a 'woman'."²⁰¹ She cites Art Nouveau as an example of the camp style, where lamps that take the shape of flowers and plants or the entrances of Paris Metro made with "cast-iron orchid stalks" are considered camp.²⁰² The artifice and outrageousness that lie at the heart of camp as a style, and as a sensibility is also noted by Esther Newton who asserts that one of the characteristics of camp is its dependence on "the perception or creation of *incongruous juxtaposition*."²⁰³ According to Newton, the juxtaposition between the masculine and the feminine is the exemplar of camp where the adornment of symbols, characteristics or behaviors that are in contrast with one another produces camp effects. Be it intentional camp (where the subject knowingly produces camp effects) or unintentional camp (where it is not the intention of the subject to produce camp effects, but is perceived as such by others), "[i]ncongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style, and humor its strategy."²⁰⁴ As Sontag highlights, "[t]he hallmark of Camp is the spirit of extravagance. Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers."²⁰⁵ In addition to producing signs of incongruity, camp is also marked by the element of artifice where camp objects or camp persons employ the outlandish to produce comic effects which ultimately, in Sontag's words, "dethrone the serious."²⁰⁶

In the homosexual context in which Newton situates camp, the camp homosexual subject embodies the stigma attached to homosexuality, performs it in a humorous manner and in doing so, derides the stigma and foregrounds its frivolity.

²⁰¹ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," in Cleto, *Camp*, p.56.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Newton, "Mother Camp," in Stryker and Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, p.125

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," p.59.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.62

However, I tend to align with Sontag's theorization of camp theory which is not confined to homosexuality but which delineates camp as a "playful, ironic, aesthetic strategy that anyone [not only the homosexual subject] could deploy in order to upset conservative beliefs, practice, and forms of representation."²⁰⁷ From 2001-2003, Kusanagi performed his solo segments in SMAP's concerts as Chonangang in his signature campy outfit. On one level, Chonangang and his performances, by being associated with conventionally feminine characteristics (such as the blusher, pink costume and flower motifs), may be interpreted as the feminization of Koreans, exoticizing and relegating them as clownish and comical, thus further perpetuating the marginalization of Koreans in Japan. While this reading of Chonangang may not be unfounded, a closer examination of his performances yields another interpretation, an interpretation that "dethrone[s] the serious."

Sontag asserts that the term 'camp', whether used as a verb (camp as something that people do) or as a noun (camp as a person or an object), involves a duplicity in meaning. In other words, the camp person/object or the campy action may be taken at its surface value as pure artifice and/or may be interpreted as having a more significant meaning, a "witty meaning for the cognoscenti," a meaning "behind the 'straight' public sense."²⁰⁸

While Chonangang and his performances may on the surface appear to portray a feminized and denigrating image of Koreans, on another level, his campy performances may function to denaturalize the assumed accordance of sex with gender, as well as reveal the performative nature of gender, where gender is expressed through the stylization of the body. Chonangang's corporeal style is that of a

²⁰⁷ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p.194.

²⁰⁸ Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," p. 57.

combination of physical codes of maleness and femaleness. While he puts on men's clothing, he at the same time also dons on feminine physical codes, such as putting on blusher and adopting pink (which conventionally indexes softness and cuteness, often associated with the feminine) as his dominant color code. Such gender incongruity is in every way disruptive to normative heterosexuality, thereby foregrounding the inessentiality of gender expectations. In drag performances, it is the opposition of the anatomy of the performer to the gender that is being performed that brings about a denaturalization of sex and gender. Drag assumes that gender has to be male *or* female, and similarly, anatomical sex has to be male *or* female (which implies the binary in gender and in sex). The performances of Chonangang takes a step further from drag in that the gender that is performed which is in contest with his anatomical sex is a combination of the corporeal signs of the male and female. This not only denaturalizes the relationship between sex and gender, but also problematizes the binary within each category (I will develop further on this point later).

In perceiving something as camp, the subject becomes objectified and is imbued with “*other* intentions, or with an irreducible ambiguity of ambitions, than its own declared ones.”²⁰⁹ As Sontag notes, “In camp there is often something *démesuré* [i.e. extravagance, excessiveness] in the quality of ambitions [...] the ambition on the part of one man to do what it takes a generation, a whole culture to accomplish.”²¹⁰ Similarly, in Newton's demarcation of the differences between drag and camp, she delineates that “the drag queen is concerned with masculine-feminine transformation, while the camp is concerned with what might be called a philosophy of transformations and incongruity.”²¹¹ In other words, the drag queen merely

²⁰⁹ Fabio Cleto, “Introduction: Queering the Camp,” in Cleto, *Camp*, p.25.

²¹⁰ Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’,” p. 59.

²¹¹ Newton, “Mother Camp,” p.124.

showcases gender incongruity but the camp uses gender incongruity to, in Newton's words, "achieve a higher synthesis,"²¹² i.e. the flaunting of homosexuality, imbued with a touch of resistance or challenge. Therefore, in reading Chonangang and his performances as camp, we can interpret his actions as an attempt to accomplish something significant, something that breaks down the prevailing perceptions of sex, gender and (which I will later add) ethnicity within Japanese society. Be it the performance or the perception of a performance of imitation, overstatement and theatricality, camp, as various scholars note, exposes the performative nature of sex, gender, sexuality and race and in doing so *queers* dominant notions of identities.²¹³

Queer(ing) identities

'Queer' has generally been construed as being at odds with the symbolic order, as a position that challenges the norm by embodying the marginalized and the uncanny. As Sullivan notes, Queer Theory has been constructed along notions of resistance, where "as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) positions [it] has the potential to challenge normative knowledge and identities."²¹⁴ Drawing on the works of Foucault, David Halperin, in his somewhat often cited *Saint Foucault*, argues that

Queer does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm.

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it*

²¹² Ibid., p.125

²¹³ For more on the relationship between camp and queer, see David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.29; Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, pp.189-206

²¹⁴ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, pp.43-44.

necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence.²¹⁵

For Halperin, queer is a positionality that any marginalized subject (in terms of gender, sexuality, race, class) can take, and such positionality is marked by its oppositional relationship to the norm. By entering into positionalities that are at odds with the dominant, the queer subject can challenge the discourse, resist the forces and practices that produce heteronormativity and in doing so open up spaces for alternative identities.²¹⁶

However, as Sullivan rightly points out, if queer refers to a positionality that can be taken up by the marginalized or the oppressed, “then the majority of the world’s population is (at least potentially) queer.”²¹⁷ Moreover, what about the deviant behaviors that exist within the heterosexual frame? What about the identities that neither belong to the dominant discourse, nor to the traditionally oppressed groups of homosexuality or people of color, but exist somewhere in between? Sullivan, following Janet R. Jakobsen, posits queer as a verb, as a set of actions that takes on a deconstructive function. Rather than thinking of queer as an identity or even as a positionality despite its non-essentiality, it can be understood as an act that does not simply challenge the norm, but break down the dichotomous notions of normality and abnormality, hetero and homo, proper and improper behaviors. In other words, queer is not so much about challenging the norm than challenging the concept of ‘normality’, the binary of normal and abnormal that shapes our existence. Queer, as a deconstructive practice that allows for the transgression of boundaries and the collapse of binaries “enables us to acknowledge the constructedness of meaning and

²¹⁵ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p.62.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

²¹⁷ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, p.49.

identity and thus to begin to imagine alternative ways of thinking and of living.”²¹⁸

Queering can take the form of perceiving an object as camp or by creating a camp subject/object, as in the case of Chonangang illustrated above. Another strategy (which may intersect with camp) to queer the dominant discourse is what Sullivan calls, “guerilla tactics”²¹⁹, or in Cleto’s terms, “confrontationist tactics.”²²⁰ Here, queering involves disruption of the norm from within the norm, loosening its foundations and breaking it down bit by bit. Through acts of subversions, through the enactments of alternative, transgressive behavior, the deviant “demystifies [dominant categories of identities] as self-ratifying devices, as cultural constructs deployed to subordinate otherness.”²²¹ Butler also proposes for a subversion of the norm from within the norm itself, whereby through the embodiment of the prohibited or the outcaste identity, the marginalized can oppose the norm and gain subjectivity. In doing so, the (heterosexual) norm is not only exposed as having being naturalized and taken-for-granted, the norm that has sought to control and suppress particular identities, such as homosexuality, can be overthrown. For Butler, drag and cross-dressing function as cultural practices that queer dominant notions of masculinity and femininity. She notes,

[...] the transferability of a gender ideal or gender norm calls into question the abjecting power that it sustains. For an occupation or reterritorialization of a term that has been used to abject a population can become the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political signification. [...] a prohibition and a degradation [is enacted] against itself, spawning a different order of values, a

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp.50-51.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.201.

²²⁰ Cleto, “Introduction: Queering the Camp,” p.14.

²²¹ Ibid.

political affirmation from and through the very term which in a prior usage has as it[s] final aim the eradication of precisely such an affirmation.²²²

For Cleto and Butler, it is the deviant or the disenfranchised that can be, or rather, are motivated to resist against the hegemonic forces. I propose that *anyone* can perform the unperformable, embody that which has been prohibited by the norm in order to transgress and challenge the dominant discourse. As exemplified by my discussion earlier, the performances of gender crossing by Katori, Nakai and Kusanagi, the various characters that they perform—Shingo-mama, Morning Musume impersonation, Men in bikini, *Buriburiman*, Chonangang—disrupt normative notions of masculinity and femininity. While Shingo-mama recontextualizes femininity by enacting the good wife, wise mother ideal on a male body, Nakai plays around with notions of sex, gender and sexuality by portraying non-male masculinities and identities that are at once male *and* female, neither male nor female, and hetero *and* homosexual. Chonangang also performs gender ambiguity by putting on behavioral signs of maleness and femaleness. These characters do not fit into clear-cut categories of male or female—they move in-between the categories, or even stay outside of the categories. The identities that they perform cross the gender border, disrupt the male-female binary, and in effect highlight the problems with the binary construct which do not allow for the representation of individuals who do not ‘fit in’ (such as transgenders and transsexuals) thus putting the categories of male and female, or rather, gender as a category, into crisis. In other words, Shingo-mama, Chonangang and Nakai’s men in bikini, for example, fit into neither ends of the bipolar divide of maleness and femaleness, and this not only exposes the gender binary as social

²²² Butler, *Bodies that matter*, p.231.

construct, but also calls into question the dominant gender expectations which are part of the heteronormative social structure.

Katori, Nakai and Kusanagi's performances of cross-dressing, or rather *queer*-dressing can be situated in the context of the emerging visibility of transgender individuals with multiple gender identities, such as *nyūhāfu* (new half)²²³, transsexuals and amateur cross-dressers. The Japanese society is still generally fixated on the concept of a binary gender system, which causes the disenfranchisement of individuals leading transgender lives. In addition, as McLelland points out, individuals who fail to adopt gender identities according to their biological sex are seen to be suffering from "gender identity disorder", and require medical treatment. This medicalization of gender in Japan, according to McLelland, shows the deep-set notions of binary categories of gender as either male or female, and any deviation is seen as pathological.²²⁴ Even with the legalization of sex-change operations in Japan in 1996, the transsexuals are expected to "fit back into the sex and gender system as 'normal' representatives of their newly assigned genders [...]"²²⁵ In other words, there is still the general expectation of performing one's gender according to one's anatomical sex.

Transgender practices where individuals engaged in cross-dressing as a recreational activity is not uncommon in Japan. There are cross-dressing clubs that cater to amateur/part-time cross-dressers, who are heterosexual men that enjoy dressing up in women's clothes as a hobby. These cross-dressing clubs, such as the popular Elizabeth Club, provide services to help men cross-dress and pass as women,

²²³ *Nyūhāfu* refers to "[male] entertainers who had gone beyond the wearing of women's clothes, makeup and hairstyles to develop breasts, through the use of hormones or implants." Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005), p.198

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.210

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.209

as well as a space for these amateur cross-dressers to interact, socialize and relax in their premises while cross-dressed. Publications such as *Queen* that offer make-up and dressing tips for amateur cross-dressers, together with the advent of the internet provide a non-sexualized space for individuals with transgender identities to interact and express themselves.²²⁶ The visibility of academic transgenders such as Mitsuhashi Junko²²⁷ and Miyazaki Rumiko²²⁸, who are both heterosexual biological males, also helps to broaden gender choices as well as to dissociate transgenderism from homosexuality.

Queer Theory, having its roots in sexuality studies, has generally been associated with gay and lesbian identities, bisexuality and homosexuality. However, its deconstructive potential need not necessarily be limited to gender and sexuality. Sullivan notes in the preface to her book, “[r]ather than focusing narrowly on sexuality and/or sexual practices, the book aims to consider critiques of normalizing ways of knowing and being that may not always initially be evident as sex-specific [...]”²²⁹ Following scholars such as Sullivan who have attempted to broaden the terrain of Queer Theory beyond that of sexuality, I propose an expansive conceptualization of queer and Queer Theory and suggest its application can be extended to ethnic identity. I have argued that the “witty meaning” embedded in the campy performances of Chonangang is that of the queering of dichotomous gender identities; here, I would like to suggest another function of Chonangang’s campy performances—that of the queering of ethnicity.

²²⁶ Ibid., pp.212-218

²²⁷ Mitsuhashi Junko is a heterosexually married biological male, who teaches gender studies at Chuo University dressed as a woman, and teaches history at another university as a man. Ibid., p.216

²²⁸ Miyazaki Rumiko, also a heterosexually married male, is a male high school teacher during the weekdays, and becomes a female writer, lecturer and transgender activist on weekends. Ibid.

²²⁹ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, vi

Queering the Ethnic Camp

The 2001 *Live Urasuma* segment described earlier can be interpreted as a formal introduction of Chonangang to the Japanese audiences and establishing the character Chonangang as an artiste coming all the way from Korea to acquaint himself with the fans of SMAP. In the next two years, the portrayal of his ‘Korean’ identity follows very much the same pattern in the concerts of the following two years. Chonangang appears to be ‘Korean’ or at least associates himself with a Korean identity, conveying his ‘Koreanness’ mainly through his use of the Korean language, in both his addressing of the audiences, as well as in the songs that he sings.

However, besides having his Japanese name pronounced in Korean, addressing the audiences and singing in Korean, Kusanagi does not act in particular ways or don specific identity markers that can naturally associate his character, Chonangang, with Korea. Moreover, when Chonangang addresses the audience in Korean, Japanese and Korean subtitles are projected onto the screen. In the video segment where Chonangang walks out of Narita Airport, his Korean dialogue is subtitled with Korean and Japanese. Similarly, in a segment performed by Chonangang puppet and Shingo-mama puppet in *Live MIJ 2003*, Chonangang’s dialogue (which is in Korean) is subtitled with Korean and Japanese, while Shingo-mama’s dialogue (which is in Japanese) is not subtitled at all.²³⁰ Why is there a need for Korean subtitles? For the Japanese audience, the Japanese subtitles would have sufficed. If the Korean subtitles are meant for the Korean audiences, given Chonangang’s near perfect proficiency in the Korean language as commented by many, the Korean audiences would have more or less understood what Chonangang was saying. Moreover, if it was meant to help the Korean audiences understand the

²³⁰ *Live MIJ*, VCD, Music Street Pte Ltd, 2003.

Chonangang's dialogue (which is in their mother tongue), why are there no subtitles for Shingo-mama puppet's dialogue (which is in Japanese, a foreign language to the Koreans)?

So, who are the Korean subtitles for? One of the functions of subtitles is to translate a foreign language into a familiar one in the form of a written text, shown to the audience simultaneously with the visual text. When Chonangang's dialogue which is spoken in Korean is being subtitled in Japanese, his 'Korean' identity as being foreign to the Japanese is being highlighted. However, when Chonangang's Korean dialogue is also being subtitled in Korean, his 'Korean' identity is also being marked as foreign, i.e. defamiliarized. In other words, his 'Koreanness' is as foreign to the Koreans as it is to the Japanese. Why then does Chonangang portray such quasi-Koreanness?

I argue that Chonangang's associating himself with Korea or a Korean identity and at the same time defamiliarizing it shows the constructedness of social identities. Chonangang's 'Korean' identity is mainly portrayed through language. When he claims that he is from Korea, and when he sings and addresses the audience in Korean, one would naturally think that he is Korean, or at the very least associate him with a Korean identity. However, when he uses the subtitles to disrupt his Korean identity (which has been taken for granted) language as a tool through which he constructs his Korean identity is being foregrounded. Hall, following Foucault, argues that one's identity is formed from the internalization of the discourse, which consists of "languages, images, unspoken beliefs and prejudices, laws and scientific concepts, and all other means by which human values are communicated, naturalized and reproduced."²³¹ As mentioned in Chapter Two, when the signs that make up gender,

²³¹ Hall, *Queer Theories*, p. 65.

such as gestures, behavior, language, dressing are isolated, gender as a construct, rather than essential, is being revealed. Similarly, in the case of ethnic identity, Chonangang's 'Koreanness' appears to be stable, acceptable and normal, but when the mechanism (i.e. language) that constructs this seemingly normal identity is being foregrounded, the social constructedness of such identity is being exposed. As Chonangang's performances of a 'Korean' identity shows, ethnicity, like gender is a social construct, constituted in and by various signs. Ethnicity is also performative, in that it comes into being through one's *doing* of it: Kusanagi Tsuyoshi as a Japanese can *become* Chonangang, a Korean, by means of performance.

Plurality of identities

In Una Chaudhuri's discussion of multiculturalism in Asian-American drama, she argues that the use of doubling serves a dramatic function that point to a possibility of multiculturalism. Through the device of doubling, the "paradox of sameness and difference"²³² is foregrounded. Identity is presented as a changeable process that is "shifting, unfixed, unreliable, performative and shared [...]"²³³ Following Chaudhuri's thread of argument, I argue that Chonangang is a double of Kusanagi Tsuyoshi, and in the utilization of the dramatic device of doubling, his performances call for an acknowledgement and acceptance of the plurality of identities (in the individual) as well as a multicultural Japan.

In a special drama episode of *SMAP X SMAP*²³⁴ on April 29, 2002, Kusanagi

²³² Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), p.232.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p.234.

²³⁴ *SMAP X SMAP* is a variety program that SMAP hosts on Fuji TV since April 1996. Shinohara, *Sumappu Wocchingu*, p. 267.

Tsuyoshi plays both a Korean and a Japanese character.²³⁵ Tsuyoshi's Korean character speaks Korean, and adopts the behavior and attitudes commonly associated with Korean men, i.e. he expects his girlfriend to serve him dinner, fill up his wine cup, wash the dishes, etc. The Korean self of Tsuyoshi's character makes swift decisions and is a man of few words. On the other hand, the Japanese character is dependent on his girlfriend, and is indecisive. He is the epitome of the effeminate male, who is gentle towards women, and even helps his girlfriend with the dishes. The story is told from a first-person narrative of the girlfriend, who spends Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with the Korean man, and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays with the Japanese man. However, the Korean and the Japanese characters never appear at the same time, and when one day she asks to see both men, it turned out that the Japanese man and the Korean man is actually the same person. As Chonangang in the drama shows, an individual may have multiple identities, possessing some characteristics of a Korean person, while at the same time having certain characteristics of a Japanese person. Such characteristics are not antagonistic, but rather, they can co-exist in one body. The self is constructed and expressed through doubling—one can be Japanese AND Korean at the same time.

In solo-segment performances of Kusanagi Tsuyoshi/Chonangang in SMAP's concert, Kusanagi and Chonangang as a double of each other is also played up. For example, in *SMAP! Tour! 2002!*, following the solo performance of Chonangang, the other four members of SMAP joined Chonangang in the song *Asahi wo mi ni ikou yo*, in which Chonangang sings the first verse in Korean. While the others continue the song in Japanese, Chonangang disappears offstage, only to reappear as Kusanagi Tsuyoshi to join the other four members in the final chorus of the song in Japanese.

²³⁵ “ai no gekijyō 1: gomen ne,” (Theater of Love 1: I'm sorry) *SMAP X SMAP Special*, Fuji TV Network. 29 April 2002.

The distinction between the ‘Korean’ Chonangang and the Japanese Kusanagi is made clear to the audience, not to mention that the shift of identity (from Korean to Japanese) can be as swift as the matter of a few lines in a song, and as simple as the change of costumes. Similarly, in *Live MIJ 2003*, Kusanagi Tsuyoshi performs a solo tap dance as his Japanese self, while appearing later in the concert as Chonangang. In doing so, he shows that the plurality of identities in an individual is not impossible.

Chonangang’s doubling also functions as a projection for cultural pluralism in Japan—the possible coexistence of Japanese and Korean in same time-space. Through doubling, the idea of sameness beneath the differences is highlighted—the Korean and Japanese self is the same person. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Chonangang’s Korean self with other Japanese selves (i.e. the other four members of SMAP), as evident from the number *asahi wo mi ni ikou yo* in the 2002 concert, suggests that harmonious co-existence of different identities or ethnicities is not impossible.

However, Chonangang also recognizes the problems that may arise from efforts of cultural pluralism. In a segment in *Live MIJ 2003*, puppets are dressed up to represent Chonangang and Shingo-mama. Throughout the whole segment, Shingo-mama constantly expresses her frustration at not being able to understand what Chonangang is saying as she does not understand Korean, and she demands that Chonangang speak in Japanese. While Chonangang continues mumbling to himself in Korean, Shingo-mama gives him a flying kick, sending him off stage, but he returns and continues speaking to Shingo-mama in Korean. In this puppet play, the failure of communication between a Korean persona (represented by the Chonangang puppet) and a Japanese persona (represented by the Shingo-mama puppet) is being foreground. The Japanese has no understanding of her Korean interlocutor, and instead of trying

to understand what her Korean counterpart is trying to say, she kicks him away at a burst of frustration. The Korean persona also sets himself as a foreigner, an outsider with linguistic deficiency in the Japanese language.

Although the performances of Chonangang may be interpreted as a projection for a multicultural Japan, the limitation of such a possibility is also highlighted. Despite the existence of ethnic ‘others’ such as the Ainu, Okinawan, Burakumin, and the *Zainichi*-Koreans and Chinese, as well as foreigners such as the white-collar expatriates and the migrant workers, many Japanese believe that they live in a homogenous, ‘middle-class’ society, where there is only one ethnicity, one state, and one language.²³⁶ The Korean population is one of the largest minority groups in Japan, standing at an estimated figure of 700,000, yet they remain deprived of citizen’s rights and welfare benefits despite being born and raised in Japan.²³⁷ While legal reforms such as the elimination of the fingerprinting on their alien registration card in 1991 did somewhat helped to improve the conditions of Koreans in Japan,²³⁸ they continue to face marginalization as outsiders, as non-Japanese nationals. The puppet segment in *Live MIJ 2003* plays out the ambivalence in attitudes towards the ‘others’ in Japanese society, oscillating between assimilation and discrimination. While their existence is on the one hand partially acknowledged, xenophobia and rejection of such multi-ethnic individuals persists. Is multiethnic, multicultural co-existence impossible in Japan then?

²³⁶ Herbert Wolfgang, *Foreign workers and law enforcement in Japan* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), p.25; John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.1

²³⁷ George Hicks, *Japan’s Hidden Apartheid: The Korean minority and the Japanese* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), vii & p.9. According to Hicks, there are about 700,000 non-naturalized and about 160,000 naturalized (i.e. they enter into Japanese citizenship by adopting a Japanese name) Koreans in Japan. *Ibid.*, p.3.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, viii

Chonan Tsuyoshi?!!!!

In Patrice Pavis' discussion of cultural performances, she draws on Kirsten Hastrup's typology of cultural exchange, which consists of cultural islands, cultural pluralism, cultural creolization and multiculturalism.²³⁹ If Chonangang's concert performances were to be mapped onto this model, his performances in the 2001 and 2002 concerts can be seen as 'cultural islands' in which Chonangang and the Japanese performers (be it the dancers or the other members of SMAP) have little interactions, or a "common denominator."²⁴⁰ From the 2003 concert, there are signs of cultural pluralism where Chonangang performs on the same stage as Katori Shingo in a musical segment, as well as in the puppet segment that features the squabble between the Chonangang puppet and Shingo-mama puppet. As Pavis notes, "Cultural pluralism occurs when a performance brings at least two products of different origins and styles into contact and competition with each other,"²⁴¹ and the result should be a performance that consists of multiple voices. Although Chonangang in *Live MIJ 2003* does not sing in Korean, he is not totally muted as his lines are still spoken in Korean (and sometimes Japanese), and he also co-performs a song with Katori.

From 2005, although Chonangang ceased to appear in SMAP's concerts in his blushed cheeks and pink outfit, Kusanagi continues to sing and greet his audiences in Korean. There is, in effect, a blurring of boundaries between the Korean and Japanese selves of Kusanagi. In *SMAP SAMPLE TOUR 2005*, Kusanagi performs his solo segment to the Korean-Japanese song *sora~eien no ai~* (Sky. Forever love), the original soundtrack to the Korean drama *Let's go to the seaside*. The song is a collaborative piece between Kusanagi Tsuyoshi and Shin Heson, a member of the

²³⁹ Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*, trans. David Williams, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 278-279.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.279.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Korean boy-band SHINHWA, whereby in the original version, Kusanagi and Shin sang the whole song in Korean as a duet.²⁴² In the concert version of the song however, Kusanagi sang the first half of the song in Japanese and switched to Korean in the second half. Kusanagi is dressed in a blue shirt and black pants, with no traces of the corporeal signs of the campy Chonangang. His switch between his Japanese self and Korean self does not require any change of costume—Kusanagi performed both Korean and Japanese identities using the same performing body. This marks the emergence of what I coin, Chonan Tsuyoshi—a hybrid performing body that has successfully transcended the ethnic boundary, and occupies a space that crosses the boundaries, thereby reinforcing cultural pluralism and the co-existence between Japanese and Korean.

While the performance of Kusanagi in the 2005 concert marks a crossing of the ethnic boundary, there is still a clear demarcation between the Japanese and the Korean identities. In the 2006 *Pop Up! SMAP LIVE!*²⁴³ concert however, Kusanagi brought cultural pluralism to the level of cultural creolization, i.e. cultural mixing. The song that he sang in his solo segment, *TOKIO*, is a mixture of both Japanese and Korean lyrics. Kusanagi moved between identities throughout the song, and highlighted the possibility of cultural mixing. The blending of the Japanese and Korean selves, or the “mixing of sources and traditions,”²⁴⁴ which according to Pavis may result in discordance, but is such dissonances not the essence of queer?

²⁴² “Shin heson & Kusanagi Tsuyoshi no duetto songu ‘Hanuru’, dorama no OST ni” (Shin Heson and Kusanagi Tsuyoshi’s duet song ‘Hanuru’ to become a drama’s original sound track), *Chosun Online*, 28 July 2005, 30 July 2007
<<http://www.chosunonline.com/article/20050728000025>>

²⁴³ *Pop Up! SMAP LIVE!* SMAP. Niigata Stadium Big Swan, Japan. 5 August 2006

²⁴⁴ Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p.280

So who is Chonangang?

Returning to the question that I ask at the beginning of this chapter—how do we make sense of Chonangang’s image? I posit Chonangang and his performances as a disruption or abrasion to the way one normally conceptualizes gender and ethnicity in Japan. Chonangang as a camp subject/object serves as a medium through which the queering of dominant notions of gender and ethnic identity in the Japanese society can take place. As Mac an Ghail and Haywood highlights, “[a]s a deconstructive project, [queer] seeks to destabilize socially given identities, categories and subjectivities, around the commonsense distinctions between homosexuality and heterosexuality, men and women, and sex and gender.”²⁴⁵ Through the act of queering, boundaries that have been assumed to be abiding are revealed to be tenuous thus opening up possibilities for alternative identities. Chonangang’s performances denaturalize the relationship between sex and gender, reveal the social-constructedness of gender and ethnicity and foreground the plurality of (ethnic) identities that can exist in the individual and in society, through tools such as language (which reveals the mechanism through which the assumption of an essential/abiding identity is constructed) and the device of doubling (which demonstrates identity as a shifting and changeable process).

As Christine Yano shows in her analysis of the star text of Korean *enka* singer Kim Yonja, a decade and a half ago, co-existence of Koreans and Japanese on the same stage would not have not been possible. At a music event at Tottori in 1992, although Japanese and Korean performers appear to be standing on the same stage, singing to the same tune, “the stage is not a neutral meeting ground, but a particularly Japanese

²⁴⁵ Mac an Ghail and Haywood, *Gender, Culture and Society*, p.128.

one.”²⁴⁶ As Yano highlights, the Korean performers were ‘silenced’ in various ways, such as through the use of interpreters during their interviews, the absence of Korean lyrics (the Korean songs, like the Japanese ones had their lyrics projected onto the screen in Japanese only), and the finale song that was only sung in Japanese despite the song’s supposed symbolism of Japan’s step towards connecting with its Asian neighbors.²⁴⁷ Kim Yonja, one of the Korean performers, foregrounded and played around with transnational identity throughout the performance by being a Korean, a Korean in Japan, a Japanese and an Asian, all at the same time.²⁴⁸ But as Yano notes, she at the very most “creates a Korean enclave within Japan.”²⁴⁹ Her identity as a Korean foreigner in Japan remains deep-rooted as she continues to be rendered, together with her Korean counterparts, as ‘outsiders’, as the colonized, inferior ‘others’.

A decade later on the stage of SMAP’s concerts, cultural co-existence is no longer a virtual impossibility. Chonangang’s (and later Chonan Tsuyoshi’s) performances of a Korean person *and* a Japanese person transcend the ethnic boundaries as he shifts easily between identities. While Kim’s transnational identity was only successful to the extent that it has enabled her to advance in her career as an *enka* singer in and outside of Japan, Chonangang’s transnational identity can function as a deconstructive strategy that weakens notions of monoethnicity in Japan and illustrates the possibility of cultural pluralism and the co-existence of multiple

²⁴⁶ The concert at Tottori was held on 1 August, 1992, featuring both Japanese and Korean *enka* singers. Christine Yano, “Raising the ante of desire: Foreign female singers in a Japanese pop music world,” in *Refashioning pop music in Asia: cosmopolitan flows, political tempos, and aesthetic industries*, eds. Allen Chun, Ned Rossiter and Brian Shoemsmith (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p.159.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.159 & 171.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.171. As Yano notes, Kim has been said to be the pioneer of bringing the song of Japan, *enka*, to countries like Cuba, Brazil and Vietnam. For overseas Japanese, Kim serves as a bridge linking them to their homeland, Japan. *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.170.

identities. If one were to situate Chonangang's performances in the context of the Korean wave, ignited by Korean drama *Winter Sonata* that was broadcast in Japan in 2003,²⁵⁰ as well as the recent trends in Japanese films that seek to reject the notion of a homogeneous Japan by exploring the lives of individuals of alternative identities or by criticizing the dominant definition of a 'Japanese' identity, multicultural Japan may not be completely unthinkable.

²⁵⁰ *Winter Sonata* (*Fuyu no Sonata*), starring Bae Yong-Jun and Choi Ji-Woo, was produced in South Korea in 2002, and became a nationwide hit in Japan when NHK broadcasted it on its General Terrestrial Channel on Saturday nights at 11pm, from April to August 2004. The *Winter Sonata* craze is responsible for 76% of the total increase in NHK's operating revenue in 2004, and Chuncheon, the hometown of Bae Yong-Jun in the drama, receives about seven hundred female Japanese tourist per day. Kim Chang-Woo, "Bae Yong-Jun's Japanese fan club to clean Chuncheon," *The Chosun Ilbo* 2 November 2004, 28 September 2007
<<http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200411/200411020046.html>>

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion:

Pop-idol Concerts—Subversion or Play?

Concerts are one of the important elements in the career of a Japanese pop idol, as it is one of the means for pop-idols to have direct, live interaction with their fans. These concert events may serve as a reinforcement of the fan-star relationship, where fans' physical and emotional closeness to their idols authenticates the relationship between fans and stars. Concerts may also serve as a means to reaffirm the star image of the artistes and to promote the sales of the idols' new albums, which are usually released before or during their concert tour. As Robert Wicks highlights, media institutions exist to make profits, and thus they have "a vested interest in attracting and maintaining the attention of the audience."²⁵¹ Nested in the context of the music and entertainment world, the mass media and advertising industry, and with the careers of the idols and economic profits of the promotion and record companies at stake, concerts certainly do more than being pure entertainment. Besides being sources of fantasy and entertainment for fans, and sources of income for the artistes and producers, what else can concerts *do*?

By approaching Japanese pop-idol concerts from a performance studies perspective, I have analyzed pop-concerts *as* performance, "as players in ongoing relationships."²⁵² According to Schechner, "any behavior, event, action, or thing can be studied 'as' performance, can be analyzed in terms of doing, behaving and

²⁵¹ Robert H. Wicks, *Understanding Audiences: Learning to use the media constructively* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2001), p.6

²⁵² Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p.2.

showing.”²⁵³ In his performance studies approach to glam rock, Auslander notes, performance analysis “is as much interpretive as descriptive and is not organized around a specific vocabulary [...] [it] is understood to be specifically from the spectator’s point of view [...] [drawing] from reception theory, phenomenology, cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural and literary theory, and other theoretical orientations.”²⁵⁴ Following Auslander’s approach to studying rock music but situating it in the context of Japanese pop-music, I have, in this thesis, conducted a performance analysis of the concert performances of SMAP and have examined their performances in terms of how they ‘behave’, and as texts that interact with, influence and are influenced by the socio-cultural conditions under which they are performed.

As D.P. Martinez highlights, although popular culture has generally been dismissed as trivial, as unworthy of research and study, it is “an arena of negotiation in which tradition, the present, the future, a Japanese identity, gendered identity and class/status identities are all reflected, reinforced, fragmented, re-created or created anew. In short, popular culture is the best possible means through which to examine the process that is often called ‘national culture’.”²⁵⁵ While I cannot totally agree with Martinez that popular culture is the “best possible means” to negotiate one’s identities, I certainly concur that in the realm of popular culture, there are various representations that reinforce, question, challenge, and demise dominant notions of identities, such as those of the Castro-clone, drag kings, *sarariiman Kintarō*, and the amateur cross-dressers.

As evident by now, I have situated Japanese pop-idol concerts within the complex web of social and cultural relationships in the Japanese society, and I have

²⁵³ Ibid., p.32.

²⁵⁴ Auslander, *Performing glam rock*, pp.3-4.

²⁵⁵ D.P Martinez, *The worlds of Japanese popular culture: gender, shifting boundaries and global cultures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 14.

largely proposed for a deconstructive reading of the concert-performances where concerts can function as a site for the contestation of dominant forms of identities as well as fostering the negotiation of new ones. Victor Turner asserts that popular entertainment and the arts in contemporary societies are liminoid activities, which function like liminal activities such as rituals and rites of passage in traditional or “technologically ‘simpler’ societies.”²⁵⁶ In the state of liminality, individuals are liberated from the constraints of ordinary life, and any identity or status or social role is being stripped off from them. They become reduced to a collective group, referred to by the same term, and are marked by passivity and silence. Individuals are temporarily powerless and identityless, “in the midst of a journey from one social self to another;”²⁵⁷ and due to the erasure of personal and social differences, liminal beings also experience a sense of comradeship and group solidarity, or in Turner’s terms, *communitas*.²⁵⁸ It is in this liminal time-space that identities are negotiated and new identities formed.

In Chapter One, I introduced the concept of performances as existing in the liminal, a betwixt and between time and space. In a concert-performance, audiences are being transported into a liminal state of being, into a fantastical make-belief world, a second reality. In this second reality, the audiences are reduced to a state of submissiveness, such as when asked by the performers to sing or dance along with them, the audiences usually comply. Audiences as liminal beings also have no status, rank or position—they are all reduced to a collective being referred to by the performers as “*Osaka no kanshū*” (“the audiences of Osaka”) or “*Fukuoka no minasan*” (“everyone in Fukuoka”). In other words, audiences “exist in a field of

²⁵⁶ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 61.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

²⁵⁸ Victor Turner, “Liminality and *Communitas*,” in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p.359.

double negative.”²⁵⁹ They are not themselves, and neither are they not not themselves, i.e. they exist in-between identities.

While audiences are being stripped of their ‘normal’ identities, they are at the same time encouraged to align with the performers on stage which together foster the transportation of the audiences into the second reality of the concert. In most pop-idol concerts, the performers would usually make use of various techniques to elicit the participation of the fans, both physically and emotionally. Through audience interactions such as MC corners, i.e. talk-in interactions, or traveling around the concert hall either by way of the stage extensions or making use of floats or cranes the perceived physical distance between fans and star is reduced. As Carolyn Stevens highlights, “of all fan activities, concert attendance is the most valued because it places the fan in closest physical proximity to the star.”²⁶⁰ Indeed, the physical closeness of the fan and star plays an important role in authenticating the fan-star relationship and reaffirming its existence. The talk-in interactions and the audience mingling activities which aim to reduce physical distance between fans and star, encourage, in Yano’s words, “bodily engagements”²⁶¹ which may take the form of screaming, cheering, crying, pounding hearts and the pressing of bodies. As the stars travel around the concert hall, fans receive them with their arms outstretched and screaming at the top of their voices, hoping to catch the attention of the stars. Stars also often throw autographed gifts to fans such as autographed softballs or posters, to elicit even more bodily engagements from the fans as they press against one another, pushing and jumping, hoping to catch the gift that is passed out personally by the star. As fans yearn and press forward to grab the gifts, they experience firsthand the

²⁵⁹ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p.64.

²⁶⁰ Stevens, “Buying Intimacy”, p.66.

²⁶¹ Yano, “Letters from the Heart”, p.45.

feelings of pounding hearts, crying, cheering and the pressing of bodies, which make the concert experience more compelling and more real. The gifts that the idols throw to their fans not only overcome the physical boundaries between the fans and the star, they also connect fans with the star emotionally. These gifts, like the concert goods that are sold at the concert arena, are souvenirs to the concert event, which create and sustain memories of such a personal experience. To the fans, concerts are a special event, where they have come all the way for. They not only have to overcome the difficulties of getting the concert tickets, but also the time and distance of traveling to the concert hall, which might be in a different city or prefecture from their home. The gifts and concert goods serve to commemorate their concert-going and because of the objects' close association with the idols, they have the power to connect the fan to the idol emotionally.

Through the possession and accumulation of these objects, which are charged with such a subjective social relationship, the fans' intimacy with the star is actualized. The 'realness' of the second reality facilitates the transportation of the audiences into the liminal time-space which can enable the transgression and subversion of societal norms.

In my analysis of the various characters performed by Katori Shingo, Nakai Masahiro and Kusanagi Tsuyoshi, I have argued that these characters function to deconstruct normative notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in present-day Japanese society. However, given that performances are framed as play, as activities that are not for real, how efficacious can any potential subversion be? Moreover, the characters that Katori, Nakai and Kusanagi play are often suffused with an element of comedy; how seriously can one then take their performances? How effective are such performances in deconstructing prevalent norms in the Japanese society? Furthermore,

as McKenzie argues, liminality reinforces existing social structures more than it transgresses. Does the liminal quality of pop-concerts (or any performances) mitigate their transgressive potential?

Although liminality may more often than not reinforce existing norms as McKenzie and Turner point out, its potential to reaffirm social values should not be overly presupposed, just as its transgressive potential should not be mitigated. It should be noted that a performance can yield multiple interpretations by different audiences. Even if the performers or the producers have the intention of conveying a particular message, there is no guarantee that the audiences will get at the intended message. As Sullivan highlights, “all performances and all attempts at subversion will be ambiguous and open to multiple meanings. And while it may not be possible to formulate a final, all-encompassing interpretation of a particular performance, it is nevertheless necessary to be able to compare and evaluate various forms of actions in terms of their supposed (political) efficacy.”²⁶² Similarly, in Tyler’s discussion of drag performances, she notes that it would be erroneous to argue that drag is always either revolutionary or reactionary. As she asserts, “whether revalued or devalued, camp and its interpretations participate in the reproduction of subjectivity and can be defensive as well as counter-offensive. That is, impersonators and their interpreters say more than they intend to because unconscious as well as conscious impulses motivate their performances [...] it is important to read each instance of drag (and its interpretations) symptomatically...”²⁶³ I would argue that it is not only the case of drag, but for any performances, interpretations of reinforcement and subversion are both sides of the same coin. The performances of Katori, Nakai and Kusanagi may not mean the same thing to all audiences but my aim in this thesis is to present one

²⁶² Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, p. 92.

²⁶³ Tyler, “Boys will be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag,” pp.33-34.

out of many possible interpretations of their performances which when considered in the socio-cultural context of present-day Japanese society, may work towards undermining and shaking the foundations of commonly taken-for-granted and deeply entrenched assumptions regarding gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Although their acts (to which I have relegated a disruptive function) are limited to the time and space of the theater, and sometimes disguised under the mask of the comic, the fact that such acts indeed exist and are experienced and felt by the audience members cannot be denied. As Judith Butler asserts, “Although this insight [when the naturalized knowledge of gender is being challenged] does not in itself constitute a political revolution, no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one’s notion of the possible and the real.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. xxiii.

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Performance

Pop Up! SMAP LIVE! SMAP. Niigata Stadium Big Swan, Japan. 5 August 2006.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Shingo mama desu minna kyōu mo genki ni aisatsu shita yo ne
Yancha bōzu yancha garu ohisama yori mo haya oki
Asa gohan chanto tabeta? Minna de taberu to oishii
Shingo mama wa ryōri jyōzu oishii gohan wo tsukurō
Mama to Papa oniisan onesan ojiisan obāsan otonarisan mo
Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha)
Itadakimasu
Oha de mayo chuchu

Kitto mama mo kimi no koto ga dare yori ichiban suki da yo
Kimi no mama ni dakara kyō wa asa nebō sasete ageyō
Mama to Papa oniisan onesan ojiisan obāsan otonarisan mo
Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha)
Itadakimasu
Oha de mayo chuchu

Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha)
Shingo mama wa ryōri jyōzu oishii gohan wo tsukurō
Kitto mama mo daimanzoku odekake chuchu shite kureru
Mama to Papa oniisan onesan ojiisan obāsan otonarisan mo
Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha)
Mama wa itsumo genki desu minna no koto ga daisuki da yo
Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha)
Itadakimasu
Oha de mayo chuchu
Odekake chuchu
Oha de mayo chuchu
*Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha) Oha (oha)*²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Lyrics from: Shingo Mama, “Shingo mama no oha rokku” (Shingo-mama’s oha rock), *Shingo mama no oha rokku*, CD, Victor Entertainment, 2000.

Appendix B

It was Nakai Masahiro's solo segment in Live Urasuma. While he was performing, audiences were seen running to the washroom, and in no time, a long queue was formed outside the ladies.

A year later in 2002, a recording of the above scene was screened at the Smap! Tour! 2002! concert, followed by a voice-over that recites:

*Tōkyō sutajiamu no minasama
Kore kara mokoto no kattenagara
Toire kyūkei ni
Sasete itadakimasu
Konkai no raibu ha
Drink! Smap!
to iu taitoru ni shitatame
takusan no Drink Smap wo
nomareta to omoimasu
Goyukkuri to
Otearai nasatteludasai*

*Ga, shikashi!
Kono ato sugu
Nakai Masahiro ga
Warainashide shinken ni
Utau kōnaa ga arimasu
Honnin no shōdaku ha morattemasu
Soredemo iku kata wa
Go yukkuri to²⁶⁶*

Two white spotlights focused on Nakai amidst the totally darkened stage. Following up on the announcement, he encourages his audiences to visit the washroom if they really need to, claiming that he is very used to such occurrences. He then breaks into his first solo number, My Childhood friend~ kagami chū no Radio, singing the first phrase without music accompaniment.

A video clip is then being played, mimicking a trial scene of Peace (a character played by Nakai) in the film, Mohōhan (Impersonator). He claims that

²⁶⁶ *Smap! Tour! 2002!*, Victor Entertainment.

what the audiences will be seeing next is not an imitation of anyone, but something that he has devised. The video cuts off, and Nakai/Peace marches out with twelve female dancers, all dressed in yellow sailor suits, singing and dancing to the song Za Pisu (The Peace) in a cute and cheerful fashion. After the first chorus, Nakai/Peace disappears backstage, only to re-enter in the next verse, marching down the hanamichi (extended stage) with twelve male dancers in red bikinis. The solo segment ends with Nakai baring his chest and dropping his pants right in front of fifty-thousand pairs of eyes...

Appendix C

Chonangang desu

Minna genki?

Ima kara boku ga minna no tame ni

Kokoro wo komete utaimasu

Dakara toire ni ittara dame yo

Soreto, oboetekudasai ne

*Boku ga Chonangang desu!*²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ From *Live Urasuma*, Victor Entertainment Inc. Japanese subtitles of Chonangang's lines spoken in Korean.