

**On the western myth of Takarazuka
fantasy: japanese women playing
men and westerners on stage**

*Sobre o mito ocidental de Takarazuka fantasy: mulheres
japonesas representam homens e ocidentais em cena*

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[abstract] This work investigates the female performers from Takarazuka Revue in Japan, who play the role of Westerners and men in several musicals and which challenges the traditional power orientation of Orientalism. The construction of the Western identity is analysed through the outer shell of the body, the costumes, stage props and musical plots, and the body presented on the stage with make-up and other bodily techniques. The visual elements are analysed following a semiotical approach, investigating how the layered up meanings express the romanticised Occident distant from the image of the West in today's society. The ritualistic bodily techniques of Takarazuka performers reveal the performative nature of gender and race. While Ahmed's phenomenological Orientalism supports the analysis of the orientation between the Occident and Orient, *otokoyaku* (male impersonators) and *musumeyaku* (female impersonators), performers and audience, presenting the dynamic power flow in the Occidental/Orientalist structures, hence explaining the transgender and transcultural image of the *otokoyaku*, and their importance in the revue's image and, ultimately, the "hybrid" discourse it manipulates.

[keywords] **Takarazuka. Otokoyaku. Phenomenological Orientalism. Occidentalism. Semiotics.**

[resumo] O presente artigo investiga o grupo japonês Takarazuka Revue e sua trupe de atrizes, mulheres que performam papéis de ocidentais e homens em musicais, subvertendo as orientações de poder típicas do Orientalismo. A construção da identidade ocidental será analisada na superfície externa do corpo, figurinos, objetos de cena, e enredos musicais, bem como o corpo maquiado e outras técnicas corporais apresentadas no palco. Os elementos visuais serão analisados a partir de um aporte semiótico, investigando em que medida os significados sobrepostos nas performances expressam um Ocidente romantizado, distante da sociedade ocidental de hoje. As técnicas corporais ritualizadas das performers do Takarazuka Revue revelam a natureza performativa do gênero e da raça. O Orientalismo Fenomenológico de Ahmed sustentará a análise da orientação entre Ocidente e Oriente, *otokoyaku* (imitador masculino) e *musumeyaku* (imitadora feminina), performers e audiência, apresentando o fluxo das dinâmicas de poder em estruturas Ocidentalistas/Orientalistas e sua importância na imagem da companhia e, finalmente, os discursos "híbridos" que ela manipula.

[palavras-chave] **Takarazuka. Otokoyaku. Orientalismo Fenomenológico. Occidentalismo. Semiótica.**

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Introduction

Takarazuka Revue, known for its all-female cast, has a long-standing history back in 1914 as Takarazuka Girls' Opera founded by Kobayashi Ichizō. It is a Japanese musical theatre group that performs musicals and plays adapted from a wide range of categories, including films, novels, manga, Eastern and Western historical stories and folktales. (YAMANASHI, 2012) The performers are graduates of Takarazuka Music School, trained with essential performing skills and assigned to their “secondary genders to play male and female characters on the stage”. (ROBERTSON, 1998, p.11) A large proportion of the performances are set in the Western background, bringing the audience (mostly composed of women nowadays) on a romantic journey to a distant and lavish dream². These Western plays are adjusted to fit in the values of Takarazuka, “purity, integrity, grace”³. In terms of characters, the plays tend to present “Prince Charming” stories illustrated with various Western historical figures clearly mentioned to add a certain degree of realism. The Takarazuka performers who perform Westerners and the male impersonators, *otokoyaku*, who perform men on stage allow us to investigate the transcultural and transgender performance, while the very representation of the West carries a strong Occidental charge, constructing an idealised yet distorted image independent from the reality.

The notion of Us, as a centralised Europe, and the Other, as an over-romanticised stereotypical image of the East, from Edward Said's (1978) seminal work *Orientalism*, are constantly adopted and reinterpreted in the field of fashion, feminism and queer studies. The Other, the East, described as romantic, exotic and haunting (AHMED, 2006), is almost systematically associated with women, the submissive Other in the system of the patriarchal society. *Otokoyaku* who are technically women becoming men, most of the time representing Westerners at that, bring a rebellious voice to the traditional submissive image. On the stage of Takarazuka, the costume, with the original meaning of “garments [...] worn as an ensemble”, “allows individuals to perform in dance, theatre, or a masquerade, hiding or temporarily cancelling an individual's everyday identity” (EICHER, 2004, p.271). Hence, in this work, we would first look at the Western world presented on the Takarazuka stage and investigate how the Takarazuka performers, *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*, play Western characters through garments, plots and stage settings. We would then focus on the body of the performers and discuss the transcultural transformation achieved through make-up and hair. Lastly, we would shift our focus on the performative gender of *otokoyaku* and analyse how the performers incarnate their “secondary gender” through spatial orientation as well as through a contrast with the *musumeyaku*, the female impersonator, and ultimately through a game of distancing with the audience. The image of Takarazuka constantly evolves as it is an organic community consisting of changing performers, managers and fans

² Takarazuka is constantly referred as “yume no kuni (the land of dreams)” by the company management and fans. (YAMANASHI, 2012)

³ The motto of Takarazuka Music School by Kobayashi, Ichizō, Kiyoku, Tadashiku, Utsukushiku. (YAMANASHI, 2012).

and also largely influenced by the social background. We would use the original musical *Casanova*⁴ and the adapted musical *Elisabeth*⁵ presented by the Flower Trope⁶ in 2019 and 2014 as main examples supporting the analysis to peek at the representation of Westerners and men in recent years.

Takarazuka musicals based on Western historical figures could be regarded as a technical reproduction of the life experience of the original figures. As suggested by Benjamin (2008) and Berger (1972), the meaning changes through transmitting in different mediums and being situated in or juxtaposed with another context, which would explain the distorted and romanticised representation of the Western figures on the Takarazuka stage. The technical reproduction presented as musicals comprises performers, costumes, stage props and plots in which the signs deliver the message of Occidentalism. The way of uttering the message could be analysed with a semiotical approach following Barthes's (1979) study on myth, in which additional layers of meanings are attached to the sign and empty out the original meaning. "Myth as speech stolen and restored" (BARTHES, 1979, p.124) echoes the notion of appropriated elements found on the Takarazuka stage. Lévi-Strauss (1966) talks about the bricoleurs adopting available materials or resources to construct to transform objects contrary to the engineers who make concrete plans and use specialised tools, knowledge and materials. This would reveal the implicit connection between the appropriated elements found on the stage of Takarazuka and explain how they construct the concrete "reality" of the world of Western, forming the visual style of Takarazuka.

To understand the distorted representation of the West on stage, we turn to theories on Occidentalism and Orientalism. The notion of Occidentalism comes to arise when the centralised West becomes the Other in the eye of the East, while the East gains its power in its native land, adopts the stereotypical elements of the West, manipulates and presents the West as "shallow, materialistic, mediocre, root-less, and un-Japan" and "promote individualism and democracy" (BURUMA, 2004, pp.29-30). The image of the West⁷ on the Takarazuka stage is flattened, cropped and enhanced into a distorted representation, hence becoming a consumable exotic fantasy for the Japanese audience. Ahmed (2006, pp.2,113) "offer[s] an approach to how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon", and suggests the "'directions' are 'given' to certain places" and make them become the East or West. By adopting this phenomenological framework, we would investigate the spatial relationship between the audience and the performers, analysing how the performers become "Westerners" in contrast with

⁴ The performance took place in Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 8 February to 11 March and Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 29 March to 28 April 2019.

⁵ Full title as *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love & Death* (エリザベート -愛と死の輪舞 (ロンド) -). The performance took place in Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 22 August to 22 September and Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 11 October to 16 December 2014. The musical is an adaptation of German-Austrian musical *Elisabeth* presented in 1992.

⁶ Takarazuka consists of five tropes with their own characteristics and focus. (YAMANASHI, 2012)

⁷ Unlike the blurring boundary of the West and East nowadays as well as the evolving and more diverse Western world, Takarazuka always anchors its stage in the past and presents the Western characters as Anglo-Europeans.

the Other, the audience. The model also applies to *otokoyaku*, the male impersonators. They become “disorientated” after the redistribution of gender in Takarazuka and reorientated and establish their identity as men through the direction given by the women on stage, the *musumeyaku*. “[T]he other side of the world’ is associated with ‘racial otherness’”, (AHMED, 2006, p.120) which reveals the manmade nature of race, and creates a monolithic portrayal of race⁸, “white” and “non-white”⁹. Ahmed (2006, p.121) also suggests “whiteness as forms of bodily inheritance” to understand how certain traits of the race are reproduced through sexual reproduction and passed down through the family line. In the micro-society of Takarazuka, “whiteness” is passed down from one generation of Takarazuka performers to another. The “family” structure within the revue and passing-down skills will be analysed with supporting research by Yamanashi (2012) and Stickland (2008). The framework will also be employed to analyse the passing-down gender traits of the performers. Lastly, Ahmed also points out that the Other attracts Us as they have things We are assumed to be lacking, which would be used to examine the attractiveness of the Western fantasy and *otokoyaku* to the Japanese audience.

The transformation into the Westerners involves the adoption of signs and appropriation to form the above-mentioned bricolage and links to Baudrillard’s concepts of Simulacra and Simulation (BAUDRILLARD, 1994). For a non-Caucasian performer, to become a “Westerner” involves dissimulating the features they naturally have, and simulating, to reach the features the performers are lacking. For that double transformation to happen, strongly marked make-up and hair dye are used and create the look of blond hair and fair skin associated with “Western-ness” in the discourse of Takarazuka. The audience is hence convinced by the signs. However, when the symptoms of the “West” are produced, the distinction between the true and false blurs. The distorted representation of the face, instead of reflecting the “profound reality”, has gradually denatured and covered the “reality” beneath and finally becomes independent of the original image and “becomes a simulacrum of its own”. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p.6) The make-up process also follows the three orders of simulacra (BAUDRILLARD, 1993), from the counterfeit mimicking nature to the mass-produced models. The simulation consisted of language signs also provide a solid framework for the denaturation of the face of the West and the reformation of the face of Takarazuka.

Lastly, we would like to use Butler’s theory on gender performativity to explain the transformation of the race and gender of the Takarazuka performers. The performers adopt the “discourse of primary and stable identity” (BUTLER, 1993, p.174) and actively adorn their bodies with clothes, make-up and hair dyes to turn the surface of the bodies closer to the stereotypical representation of the gendered body or the race of the Other they want to

⁸ Similar to the manmade distorted image of the West in Occidentalism, the Western race is stereotypically expressed as “whiteness” regardless the variety of physical appearance and the spectrum of skin colour in today’s Western world. This is therefore reflected in Takarazuka musicals as the Western face is illustrated based on Caucasian features.

⁹ Despite to the historical connection of Chinese people with the colour yellow, such as the son of Empress Yellow (炎黄子孙) and yellow as the royal colour, yellow does not have an important significance in Japanese culture. The yellow race of the Far East is proclaimed by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in late eighteenth century, as different to the white “Caucasian”. (KEEVAK, 2011, pp.2,4)

incarnate. Hence, the inner truth of the Other gender and race is fabricated through a ritualistic act on the body based the stereotypical image of the Occident and men and customised for Takarazuka audience. While the notion of cross-dressing which challenges the coherence of anatomical sex and gender identity and blurs the “distinction between inner and outer psychic space” (BUTLER, 1993, p.174) will be used to analyse the discursive gender of *otokoyaku* with the primary gender identity masked by costumes and make-up and the “secondary gender” contradicts with anatomical sex.

The Tailored Skin of Western Fantasy

Takarazuka Revue reproduces the life chapters of famous historical figures from the West on the Japanese stage, with the performers dressing up in costumes constructing coherently documented yet imagined sceneries belonging, seemingly, to the Western world. We would use the musical *Casanova* (2019) as a case study to investigate the delicate but false representation of the West and focus on analysing the prominent visual and narrative elements, the costumes, stage props and plots.

In the musical *Casanova* with its story set in Italy, Takarazuka performers bring the audience the romantic adventure between the charming womaniser Giacomo Casanova and the heroine Beatrice, the daughter and heir of the viceroy of Venice. Casanova, who recalls having love affairs with 1017 different women, struggles to abandon his life motto, “Love and adventure is a necessity of life”¹⁰, and turns to chase for his designated love and spiritual partner, Beatrice. Beatrice, the daughter of the viceroy of Venice, on the other hand, dramatically falls in love with him, attracted by his free spirit. As a result, Casanova not only frees Beatrice from her controlled life and arranged marriage but also crashes the conspiracy of the villain, the head inquisitor for political Condulmer. Casanova finally receives recognition from the viceroy of Venice and love from Beatrice.

Berger (1972) points out that the invention of the camera allows paintings to travel to the spectators, and the meaning is diversified. Similarly, the life adventure of Casanova and Venice in the 18th Century is reproduced in a musical and presented to the Japanese audience. It is inevitable for the reproduced image to be reused for many different purposes, and its meaning is influenced by the contents juxtaposed with it and the context it is situated. (BERGER, 1972) In this case, the story of Casanova brought to the Takarazuka stage aims to entertain the Japanese audience and fulfil their fantasy of the exotic and romantic West. The life adventure of Casanova is adopted and reproduced as a “Disney Princess” story with emphasis on the love story between Princess Beatrice and Prince Charming Casanova. The costumes and stage props not only enhance the realness of the Western world constructed and scrutinised on stage but also serve as signs to communicate information and bring new meanings to the musical.

¹⁰ The original lyric is “人生には、恋と冒険が必要だ” (my translation). The line also appears on the official brochure for the show. The image of the brochure on Takarazuka Revue official website: <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/revue/2019/casanova/poster.html> (accessed on 24/6/2023)

In the Gondola Scene¹¹, Beatrice steps onto a gondola, sailing to “freedom” to escape her arranged marriage. She wears a sky-blue dress with an exposed neckline, puffy sleeves, a narrow waist and a layered skirt. The dress serves its original function of covering the off-stage identity of the performers and providing a new stage identity for Beatrice in the musical. The visual identity of Beatrice is established based on the image of Cinderella from Disney animated movies, with the blue dress of Disney’s Cinderella being appropriated into a dress from 18th Century Venice, where the story of Casanova took place. The dress hence not only fulfils its functional purpose but also expresses the romantic princess stories. In addition, the blue dress with excessive details and floral embellishment echoes the floral hair decoration and employs more details than the Disney princess dress, adding the fairy aura to Beatrice and expressing the imaginary image of the wealthy West. While in the same scene, the tricorne is detached from its original context signifying the traditional European Military wear to serve as the gondolier’s hat. The notion of masculinity associated with military wear turns the tricorne into a gendered dress and helps to construct the stage gender of *otokoyaku*. The tricorne appropriated for a new context also carries a strong Occidental charge, contributing to the construction of an untrue representation of the West on stage. While the gondola that Casanova and Beatrice take in the scene not only serves as a vehicle but also unambiguously and metonymically suggests the location: Venice. The gondola with no specific destination other than sailing to “freedom” ultimately takes a metaphorical meaning as it echoes the free spirit desired by Casanova and Beatrice.

The elements in the musical, the costumes, stage props and story used to construct the visual identity of the Occident are adopted from the existing and available signs by Takarazuka, the bricoleur. These elements, such as the princess dress, the tricorne and the gondola, all have a Western origin and hence are associated with the notion of Western-ness. As the “Orient” always seek things they do not have from the Occident (AHMED, 2006), these readymade signs frequently appearing in Disney animated and live-action movies, Western films, tourist guides and fiction are soon captured by the Orient and collected as the material for bricolage. Unlike the systematic approach to reproduce the Western stage based on knowledge, referring to the history and acquiring materials and techniques to construct the stage with a prior plan, the materials available to the bricoleur are rather limited in the close system, as they cannot produce signs themselves (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1966). The bricoleur of Takarazuka appropriates the available elements and places them into different parts of the musical. Hence the reproduction is constructed with concrete elements emphasising visual similarity to a stereotypical West. The bricolage also explains why the elements that appear on stage used to express Westerners are originated from different areas and periods. As these elements available to the bricoleur of Takarazuka are limited, the other Western musicals in Takarazuka reuse the elements in different circumstances, hence explaining the re-occurring costumes and props in different performances, such as the same deep blue court

¹¹ Image of the scene on Takarazuka Revue official website: <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/revue/2019/casanova/cpl73a000007vbnk-img/cpl73a000007vbnk8.jpg> (accessed on 24/6/2023)

dress¹² appearing in both *Casanova* and *The Poe Clan*¹³ crossing the boundary of time and geography. Lévi-Strass (1966, p.18) describes the elements consisting of the bricolage as “a set of actual or possible relations; they are ‘operators’ but they can be used for any operations of the same type”. The deep blue court dress as a costume for *musumeyaku* is possible to connect with the meaning of the dress of a mistress in Venice or the daywear of a young lady in France. However, in both operations, they are adopted to construct the image of Western women on the Takarazuka stage.

Here, the elements adopted from the Western culture are manipulated and they help construct the superficial and exotic image of the Occident with exaggerated costumes and meticulous attention to detail. In the musical, Casanova and Beatrice fall in love with each other for their common interest in Voltaire’s thoughts. Voltaire’s thoughts are reduced into short sentences, “everyone has the right to live”¹⁴, and appears repeatedly in the musical to indicate the bonding between Casanova and Beatrice. The original meaning Voltaire’s thoughts signify is disposed and the sign is flattened into the word “Voltaire” to carry the message of the free spirit. The free spirit is presented to the Japanese audience as a consumable commodity with their desire to temporarily escape from reality and experience life adventure with Casanova. Said (1978) describes the Orient as a romanticised imagination of the East created under the manipulative power of the West. Similarly, in this case, the bricoleur of Takarazuka possesses the power to construct the image of the Occident and distort the representation of the West into a consumable commodity. The action of Japanese *Musumeyaku* and *Otokoyaku* playing Westerners in the “Takarazuka-esque” musical adds a mythical layer to the original story of Casanova. The meanings attached to the signs accumulate through the process of bricolage and the stereotypical image of the Occident forms from the appropriated signs.

Occidental Face and Hair

Although the style which communicates the message of Occidentalism is attached to the bodies of the Takarazuka performers through the costumes and the stage they are situated in, the performers need to transform their bodies into the race of Other to make the immersive reality of the Occident convincing to the audience. Although make-up is always regarded as a constitutional element of costume, we would separate it from the garments and accessories in this work as it fulfils additional functions to blend into the body as a part of the natural and naked body of the Westerners perceived by the audience. Jardim (2021, p.169, author’s highlight) suggests that “the covering of the face is the rawest form of denying individual subjectivity and installing a (collective) *role*”. The Occidental hair also adds

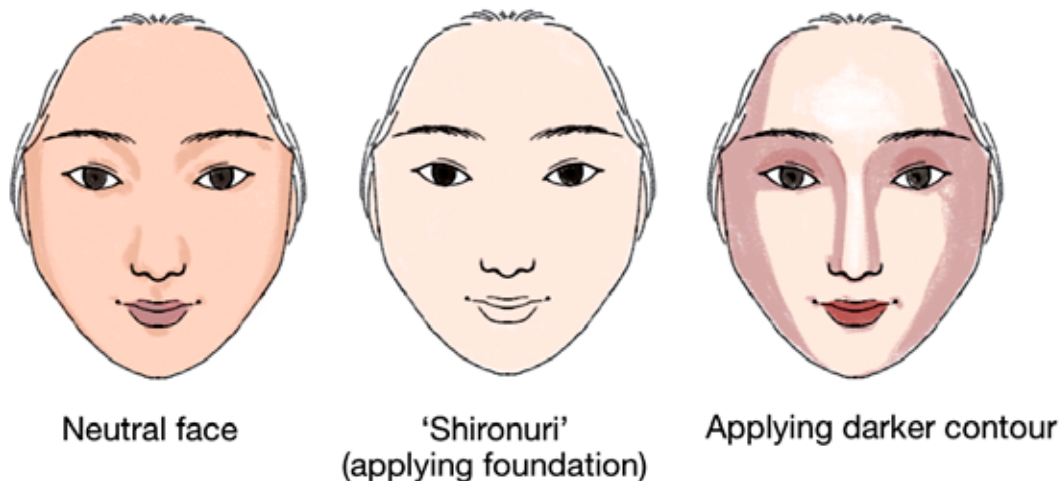
¹² The dress appeared in *Casanova* (2019) on Lady Solce: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1SK7s-mdl0> (3:06-3:13), the same dress also appears in *The Poe Clan* (2018): <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/revue/2018/ponoichizoku/cpl73a0000076829-img/cpl73a000007686n.jpg>.

¹³ The performance was presented by the Flower trope and took place in Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 1 January to 5 February and Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 16 February to 25 March 2018. The musical is based on Japanese comic book series *The Poe Clan* (ポーの一族) by Hagio Moto.

¹⁴ The original line in the musical is “どんな人間だって 生きる権利がある” (my translation).

individuality to the figures on stage beyond the face covered by the mask formed with make-up and contributes to the performative race of the performers through a series of repeated actions on and in the bodies.

IMAGE 1. MAKE-UP PROCESS OF TAKARAZUKA PERFORMERS



SOURCE: Elaborated by the Author (2023)

The make-up, which covers every exposed skin of the Takarazuka performers, sometimes appears less dominant due to the overwhelmingly excessive garments. However, it still fulfils the linguistic function of the costume which hides or temporarily cancels one's everyday identity, dissimulating the undesirable features of the Japanese body and feigning to have the features of the Occident the body does not have. The simulation process of the face first starts with mimicking nature and producing a counterfeit of the original. The face refers to Caucasian features, but instead of referring to a specific face, the original is created based on binary opposition, forming a stereotypical Western face opposite to the face of Us. The make-up techniques in traditional Japanese culture always involve "*shironuri*", the action of painting the facial skin with homogeneous white adopted by geisha and kabuki actors, hence flattening the face into a two-dimensional canvas with eyes and lips emphasised with eyeliner and lip paint. With Us as the referencing point to define the Other (SAID, 1978), the features representing the face of the Westerner are hence reduced to the emphasis on the facial structures. The reproduction of the face is created through make-up, with darker contours contrasting with the highlight applied on the forehead, bridge of the nose and the cheek, turning the performers' faces smaller with spatial optical illusion and avoiding the "moon face" (see IMAGE 1). The eye is further emphasised and enlarged through thick eye-liners extending to the edge of the face as well as the heavy eyelashes on both the upper and lower eyelids for both *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*. The face is then mass-produced through make-up techniques and applied to each of the performers, massively duplicates itself and overwrites the original faces of the performers, forming a mask which allows the performers to transform into the idea of a Westerner. The excessive face created with make-up techniques denatures the original face of the Westerner which echoes Sontag's (2003) notion

of the new demands in the era of cameras, that the image needs to be enhanced to appear convincing to the audience. The original face of the Westerner is disregarded through the process. As Barthes (1979, p.57) suggests that Garbo's face was a "concept" and "was not to have any reality except that of its perfection". The perfect face of Takarazuka contests the notion of Occidentalism exists in the hyperreal space and is immediately recognised by the Takarazuka audience as the face of Westerners. Although imitation is the basis for performance, the Western faces of Takarazuka performers evolve from imitation to innovation which adapts to the aesthetic and practical need of the performers and finally obtain originality with the audience seeing the faces from many different perspectives. (YAMANASHI, 2012)

Besides the meaning of "visage", the word "face" also contains the notion indicating direction. To face, as to be positioned towards, suggests the spatial relationship between the body of the Takarazuka performers and the audience. The faces of the performers are intentionally enhanced with make-up hence forming a barrier between their neutral faces and the audience. A spatial and psychological distance is established in the Takarazuka theatre between the audience and the performers. Taking the audience as the centre in which the Takarazuka "fairies" orientate towards them, the performers are endowed with the Other race to present the story of the West. The original identities of the performers are suspended and their bodies become the signifier carrying the meaning of exotic romance and dramatic adventure. However, when we tilt the perspective and take the stage as the centre of setting direction, the audience becomes the united Other with no difference among individuals and remains silent, while the individuality of the characters is highlighted under the theatre lighting. The authenticity of the "Westernness" of the performance is hence verified through the contrast established with the Japanese audience. In addition, unlike most contemporary theatres that only highlight the stage and performers using stage lighting, the bright setting of Takarazuka theatre creates a sense of unity and blurs the boundary between the stage and the audience. (STICKLAND, 2008) This hence reinforces the fluidity in the role of Us and Other in the Takarazuka theatre and provides an immersive experience in the otherworldly fantasy.

The blurring boundary between the stage and audience does not blur the identity of performers and audience, while the identity of the performers, or the "Westerners" in this case, is reflected in their mobility on stage and in the imaginary Occidental world. "[S]eeing oneself or being seen as white [...] does affect what one 'can do'" (AHMED, 2006, p.112), hence the Princess and Prince Charming in *Casanova* in the musical have adventures and pursue the freedom of love. The "whiteness" here empowers the fairies of Takarazuka to undergo fantastic journeys and adventures, allowing them to travel between locations, countries and even life and death in the limited stage space, while the "powerless" Other, the audience, orients around the "unreachable" stage.

Besides the face and the dynamic roles of Us and Other, the hair also plays a crucial part in forming the race, identity and gender on the Takarazuka stage. Here, we can analyse the role of hair with the example of the musical *Elisabeth* staged in Vienna. The musical presents the life experience of Princess Sissi and her struggle with the haunting image of death throughout her life. Similar to the face, the Western hair on the Takarazuka stage is idealised, always represented in blonde or brown and curly. The curly brown/blonde hair establishes

a distinctive line with the straight black hair of the majority of Japanese people and the representation of Japanese in other Takarazuka musicals. The image of the Western hair is first established based on selective representations, which suggest the most substantial contrast with the hair of Us, emphasising colour and form, hence widening the distance between Us and the Other. In the case of *Elisabeth*, the “original” hair of the historical figure Princess Sissi is documented in photographs and paintings and serves as the basis for reproduction in the musicals. The shiny brown hair with delicate curls on the Takarazuka stage¹⁵ is reproduced based on the representation of the “original”¹⁶. With the real hair of the *musumeyaku* star¹⁷, Ranno Hana, blending into the hair piece attached to the head, the visual identity of Princess Sissi is hence constructed through the iconic hair and clothing, which signifies the identity of the historical Princess Sissi.

Like Sissi’s player Ranno, the performers of Takarazuka usually dye their hair in light, “non-Japanese” colours, such as chestnut brown and blonde, which allows them to use their real hair or blend their real hair with the hairpiece to perform the role of Westerners on stage. The repeated ritual of dyeing the hair brings the body closer to the projected idealised Western body. And similar to the performative gender reinforced through repeated and excessive actions (BUTLER, 1993), the performative race is achieved through repeated action. The action of using real hair or semi-real hair instead of wigs on stage not only enhances stage performance and embraces the movements on stage but also blurs the boundary of the natural body and the costumed body, bringing the performer’s body closer to the idealised projection of the body of the Occident.

By investigating the hair from the perspective of simulation, we would find it transcending from merely representing the West into a pure simulacrum of the image of the Occident. The action of dyeing hair, to cover the original black hair of the Japanese performers, is the action to dissimulate and remove the “non-whiteness” of the body. The action is adopted to represent the Westerner, while the identifiable features of the Westerners are reduced and Othered into brown hair, regardless of the variety in hair colour and the use of vibrant hair dyes of people from the West¹⁸. Finally, the Takarazuka performers with brown/blonde hair exist as a simulacrum and contest the notion of the Occidental body itself. While Ahmed (2006, p.121) suggests “whiteness” as “a series of attributes that are reproduced through sexual reproduction and that are passed down through generations as the gift of its line”. When the ritualistic practice of dyeing hair is passed down to the new members of the revue, the dyed hair becomes an inherent feature passed within the “family” of Takarazuka. The

¹⁵ The image of Princess Sissi in Takarazuka musical *Elisabeth* (2014) on the Takarazuka Revue official poster: <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/revue/2014/elisabeth/poster.html> (accessed on 25/6/2023).

¹⁶ The look of Princess Sissi in the musical refers to the oil painting *Empress Elisabeth of Austria*, 1865, by Franz Xaver Winterhalter.

¹⁷ In the rigid hierarchy of Takarazuka Revue, each trope has two official “top stars”, one *otokoyaku* and one *musumeyaku*. (YAMANASHI, 2012)

¹⁸ The saturated or unnatural colour for the hair are commonly spotted in Japanese manga and anime, serves as distinctive and identifiable features of the characters, for example, *Kuroko’s Basketball* (黒子のバスケ). Hence, the saturated or unnatural hair colour strongly associated with Japanese manga culture is less likely to be regarded as a feature of Westerners.

dyed hair hence serves as the attribute and indicator of “whiteness” in the enclosed family system. We would elaborate on the family structure and extend the inherency of “whiteness” to the gender of *otokoyaku* in the following chapter.

Becoming *otokoyaku*

The performers become the Westerners on the Takarazuka stage by actively adopting and presenting the stereotypical image of the Occident, hence challenging the dynamic of Orientalism. As the Orient is always objectified, sexualised and represents the second sex, *otokoyaku*, the male impersonators of Takarazuka Revue, reverse the power structure of Orientalism and become men on stage, bringing the second layer in challenging the notion of Orientalism and the image of submissive Japanese women.

As an all-female revue, the performers are assigned their secondary gender to perform the male and female characters. The gender of the characters in the musicals is divided based on the traditional binary model and follows the stereotypical representation of gender to present the heterosexual romance. The secondary gender is required to stay coherent with the performed gender on stage, with the *otokoyaku* playing male characters and the *musumeyaku/onnayaku* performing young women/daughters and women. The word “yaku” has a connotation to the role player, revealing the awareness of the performers performing the image of the ideal men and women instead of becoming Men and Women themselves. (ROBERTSON, 1998) Thus, the gender of the musical characters does not have to coincide with the gender identity of the performers off-stage.

The secondary gender is assigned based on multiple features, including physical appearance, for example, height, physique, facial shape and voice, and personality and personal preference to a small extent. (ROBERTSON, 1998) The secondary gender focuses more on the surface of the body and hence emphasises its performative nature. While the standard for the selection is established based on “a sedimentation of gender norms [...] that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another.” (BUTLER, 1993, p.178). The masculine features sought on *otokoyaku* are a taller body, longer and angular face, darker skin, broader shoulders, narrower hips and a lower voice, with *musumeyaku* as the contrasting role demonstrating a petite body with curvilinear lines. These signs are associated with the stereotypical representation of gender, and the differences in the physical attributes are further enhanced through make-up. The difference in skin tone between *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* is enhanced through foundation, while the contour used for respective gender, brown for *otokoyaku* and pink for *musumeyaku*, not only serves to emphasise a Caucasian facial structure but also highlight the gender difference and associate gender stereotypes to the choice of colours¹⁹. The brown contour matches the darker skin of *otokoyaku* and emphasises the angular shape of the face.

¹⁹ The contrasting skin tone and make-up style could refer to stage photo of Yuzuka Rei and Senna Ayase at Casanova (2019) finale: <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/revue/2019/casanova/cpl73a-000007vbnk-img/cpl73a000007vbw4.jpg>. (accessed on 26/6/2023)

On the contrary, *musumeyaku* use pink contour to blend with the blush, creating an innocent, adolescent look with a softer finish, retaining the function of enhancing the facial structure to become closer to the Occident but reducing the sharp contrast of the Caucasian facial structure. Also, the subtle rendering of the face of *musumeyaku* allows them to appear less visually dominant and brings the audience's focus to *otokoyaku*. Contrary to the skin colour difference based and amplified existing gender stereotypes, the eyelashes of *otokoyaku* are "defined" to be longer and thicker compared to the lighter but curvier eyelashes of *musumeyaku*, serving as the gender attribute created by Takarazuka. The long eyelashes associate with femininity in traditional gender norms hence revealing the manmade nature of gender attributes in Takarazuka Revue. These gender attributes serve the function of emphasising *otokoyaku* on stage, and also suggest the image of men in Takarazuka is not purely simulating the image of men but creating a more beautiful and idealised fantasy of men accustomed to the women-dominated audience. The respective gendered bodies with make-up enhancement are then dressed up in stage garments, accessories and hairpieces, delivering the message of the performative gender on stage. In addition, the genital evocation which overwhelmingly appears in media representation to express masculinity (DYER, 2002) is absent on the stage of Takarazuka, revealing the asexual nature of the Takarazuka romance and pushing the stage further from reality.

Besides the stylised body through costumes and make-up on stage, the intentional difference between the long hair of *musumeyaku* and the short hair of *otokoyaku* also contributes to the performative gender. *Otokoyaku* used to pull their hair back in a chignon or hide them under the top of hats. Kadota Ashiko cut her hair short in 1932 and establish the tradition for the future Takarazuka performers since then. The ceremony of cutting their hair short for the students assigned to *otokoyaku* in the Takarazuka Music Academy starts their bodily transformation of becoming a Takarazuka "male" and creating immediate visual distinctions with their peers assigned to *musumeyaku* with delicate long hair. (ROBERTSON, 1998) The contrast between the hair of *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* reinforces the gender difference within the revue. The hair also allows the fans to identify the secondary gender of the performers even without stage make-up and costumes, hence the secondary gender blends into their "natural body" off stage. As the action of cutting the hair is strongly regulated by the discipline of Takarazuka and the body is prepared to be seen by the audience, the performers are hence "dehumanised" and Othered due to the loss of complete control over body and gender identity, while the body is manipulated to fulfil the audience's need, becoming men on stage and consumed as a part of the romance presented in the Takarazuka fantasy.

The incoherence between the anatomical sex and the secondary gender leads to the disorientation of the bodies and the reorientation is required for the performers to adapt to the alienated body and hence move freely on stage. The performers are first reoriented towards the audience and receive the call of duty to weave the dream of Takarazuka, accepting and understanding the secondary gender assigned to them, becoming the ideal women or men in the eye of the audience through repeated performance. *Musumeyaku*, who are assigned as women for their secondary gender, are required to establish strong distinctions with the female-dominated audience to maintain the orientation system between the audience and Takarazuka performers. Hence, they are becoming closer to the projection of ideal women. *Musumeyaku*, with the literal meaning of "the role of young girl/daughter", reveals

the image of ideal women defined by Takarazuka, which expresses youthfulness, purity and flawless beauty. The *musumeyaku* star, the heroines in the musicals such as Beatrice in *Casanova* or Sissi in *Elizabeth*, are always portrayed as innocent and vulnerable princesses expecting their designated Prince Charming, while the make-up and costumes emphasise their body curves and flawless beauty. Although the costumes emphasise the curvilinear lines on the female body, the intention is to express the softness of femininity, hence enhancing the distinction between the body of *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*, instead of focusing on the sexuality of the female body. The ideal women in Takarazuka, the *musumeyaku*, are always asexual and become the symbol of the adolescent hood, to firstly enlarge the distinctive gap with the married audience establishing the innocent dream stated by the value of Takarazuka, and also, to reveal the power structure of the revue and the fact that “both *musumeyaku* and *otokoyaku* are products of a dominant social ideology that privileges masculinity and men”. (ROBERTSON, 1998, p.12)

Musumeyaku become reoriented and confirm their duty as the performers playing the role of the ideal women, the princess. This results in the repeated pattern of romance in Takarazuka musicals and sometimes distorts the original story to emphasise the role of Prince Charming. The original German-Austrian musical *Elizabeth* portrays the life and death of Sissi with Death(Tod) as a personification of the abstract concept of death and reflects the protagonist Sissi’s struggle with depression and suicidal tendencies throughout her life. While in the adapted Takarazuka musical *Elizabeth* (2014), the role of Death(Tod) played by *otokoyaku* star Asumi Rio is largely emphasised and appears on top of the cast²⁰. The struggle with the concept of death by Sissi is also rearranged to portray the deep love and desire for Sissi by Death(Tod). The *musumeyaku* hence give direction to *otokoyaku* to reorientate with their assigned gender by performing the stereotypical image of vulnerable females, establishing strong visual and psychosocial contrast between the two genders. *Otokoyaku* perceive the masculine features of their body by comparing and contrasting with the petite princesses, getting familiar with their bodies and the stage, hence giving the orientation to perform the heterosexual relationship with *musumeyaku*. Here, *musumeyaku* serves as the occidant to provide direction to *otokoyaku* during the process of overcoming the vast gap to achieve a transgender performance, while the power dynamic within the revue seems to be the reverse.

With the literal meaning of “*musume*” as “daughter”, *musumeyaku* reflects the traditional patriarchal and power structure between female and male, the young woman/daughter and man, hence suggesting the protected and loved role of *musumeyaku*. The historical link between theatres and prostitution and the official prohibition of women performing on stage from 1629 to 1891 set the negative and sexualised connotation of women performers. (KANO, 2001) To reverse such a public image, the founder of Takarazuka Revue, Kobayashi Ichizō, intentionally recruit girls from wealthy families and desexualise the content of the performances. (YAMANASHI, 2012) Therefore, the youthfulness and purity features are emphasised on the *musumeyaku*, while *otokoyaku* play the role of a mature protector in such relationships. Kobayashi also actively promoted the idea that Takarazuka is preparing for

²⁰ Seen on Takarazuka Revue official site: <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/revue/2014/elisabeth/info.html>. (accessed on 26/6/2023)

the future bride, which is in vogue of the necessary education for girls to become good wives and wise mothers²¹. (STICKLAND, 2008, YAMANASHI, 2012) This not only suggests the submissive and supportive role of women but also the relationship between *musumeyaku* and *otokoyaku* in the rhetorical family of Takarazuka.

The hierarchy of Takarazuka Revue is a continuation of “absolute obedience (*zettai fukujū*) to seniors” (STICKLAND, 2018) in Takarazuka Music School and also takes consideration of popularity. The *otokoyaku* star on top of the hierarchy system of each trope is paired the *musumeyaku* star. The *musumeyaku* star is referred as the *otokoyaku* star’s bride (*o-yomesan*) (PHP INSTITUTE, 1991 in STICKLAND, 2008)²² which indicates the “marital status” between the pair and indicates the rhetorical heterosexual family structure. The other performers are also paired with a senior and more experienced *otokoyaku* and a junior *musumeyaku* to practice traditional techniques of portraying gender. The gender role is hence reinforced during the daily practice and passed down with other tributes like the make-up techniques, hair and gestures in the enclosed “family”. In such an environment, *musumeyaku* serves as the supporting “wife” of the *otokoyaku*. The hierarchy of Takarazuka Revue is also visually reflected through the appearing order of the grand finale on the grand staircase. The *otokoyaku* star appears last with the excess decoration of ostrich feathers²³ which “signify her distinguished status” (YAMANASHI, 2012, p.82) and links to the tail of male peacocks expressing beauty and sexual attractiveness due to the visual similarity. The *otokoyaku* star with the most extravagant outfit and occupying the most space on the stage immediately draws audience’s attention and pushes the unrealistic lavish fantasy of Takarazuka to the maximum.

Otokoyaku establishes an ideal image of men desired by the audience, which is “outstandingly handsome, pure, kind, emotional, charming, funny, romantic and intelligent [...] a complete opposite to the “salaryman/oyaji” stereotype of Japanese men”. (NAKAMURA & MATSUO, 2003, p.63, author’s highlight) The costumes, make-up and hair serve as repeated stylisation on the body to perform the image of the ideal man, while *otokoyaku* constantly move closer to the ideal projection of masculinity through studying the behaviour and actions of male celebrities. (ROBERTSON, 1998) We would notice that the transgender performance of *otokoyaku* does not challenge the notion of the traditional gender model but actively learns from the traditional male masculinity. The heterosexual perspective of the female performers may allow them to selectively mimic the masculine features while adding desirable features of men, which explains the emotional portrayal of men on Takarazuka stage which opposes the image of the rational man with suppressed emotional expression. Hence, *otokoyaku* provides an alternative path to illustrate masculinity and form the simulacrum of men on Takarazuka stage.

In addition, the transgender *otokoyaku* also provides the audience with a chance to experience another kind of life. The female bodies of *otokoyaku* reduce the barrier for the female-dominant audience to project their consciousness onto. Hence, the audiences are

²¹ 良妻賢母 (Ryōsai Kenbo) in Japanese.

²² PHP Institute, Inc, *Viva Takarazuka*, PHP Institute, 1991

²³ The visual example could be Asumi Rio at Casanova(2019) finale at: <https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/revue/2019/casanova/cpl73a000007vbnk-img/cpl73a000007vbx.jpg>. (accessed on 26/6/2023)

able to experience and actively participate in the dramatic life adventures and romances in the life world on the Takarazuka stage through regarding *otokoyaku* as the extension of their body. Thus, *otokoyaku* becomes the alter-ego (*bunshin*) (NAKAMURA & MATSUO, 2003) of the audience, bringing in the asexual heterosexual relationship with *musumeyaku* emphasising romance and fantasy instead of sexuality.

Lastly, although Yamanashi's study (2012) suggests that *otokoyaku* performers are aware of their female sex, the secondary gender still penetrates the body and extends to private life consciously or unconsciously (STICKLAND, 2008). The gender distinctions are still emphasised through garments off stage, with *musumeyaku* wearing skirts and *otokoyaku* wearing trousers during daily practice. As Takarazuka performers are seen by the fans off stage, their hair and make-up form "a play between the exterior public self (the decorated skin) and the relationship between the self and habitus" (CRAIK, 1999, p.150) and extend their stage gender on their "social body".

Conclusion

This work examined the Japanese performers from Takarazuka who perform Westerners and men in musicals. The transcultural and transgender effects are achieved through the constant stylisation of the body (BUTLER, 1993) and analysed through the visual identity constructed with costumes and the concrete reality of the Occidental stage in which the performers are situated, the body adorned with bodily techniques as well as the relationship between the audience and the performers, *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*.

The bricoleur of Takarazuka captures signs from Western culture and appropriates them to construct the Occidental world. These signs, such as the princess dress, the tricorne, the gondolier and the work of Voltaire, are delivered to the Japanese through mass media throughout history and captured to form the stereotypical image of the Occident. With the elements suspended from their original meaning and function and placed in the musical to fulfil new functions, the signified hence changed and added with a mythical layer delivering the message of a romanticized hence non-threatening Occidentalism. Similar to the stereotypical image of the Orient created with distorted and fragmented elements of the East, the Occident also experience the process, passively manipulated and Othered in the hand of the Japanese. This hence reveals "[t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination". (SAID, 1978, p.5) The Euro-centric ideology provides a nutritious ground for works which carry the notion of Orientalism, and the elements from the East are widely used in art and design to express exotic feelings, while the Oriental culture seems to become submissive and passively accept the flattened and distorted representation and the cultural appropriation. However, the musicals based on Western historical figures and stories provide us with another perspective on the Occidental/Oriental relationship, in which the Japanese possess the power to manipulate the image of the West and serve their audience with musicals presenting the shallow, materialistic aspects of the Occident. The Occidental world is also romanticised and turned into a consumable commodity, serving as a spiritual shelter for the Japanese audiences to escape from mundane duties and immerse in the lavish exotic dream constructed with the bricolage of elements.

When creating the Western face and hair on the Takarazuka performers using bodily techniques such as make-up and hair dye, we would identify that the image of the Westerner is flattened and reduced to specific features and aims to emphasise the distinctions between Us, the Japanese, and the Other, the Westerner. An intentional binary relationship is produced, and the image of the Westerner is reduced to features which emphasise facial structures through contour and brown or blonde hair achieved through hair dye. This not only simplifies the Western body used as the original to mimic during reproduction but also forms a uniform and identifiable image of the Takarazuka performers distinguishing them from the Japanese audience and allowing them to become the Other race. However, the simplified and distorted representation of the West also flattens the image of the Japanese in the bipolar system of Orientalism/Occidentalism, adding the opposite stereotypical elements to the Japanese. The Western body is hence denatured and covered with the reproduction by Takarazuka, while the Western face and hair undergo mass production through make-up techniques and the ritualistic act of dyeing the hair, gradually disregarding the original and forming an Occidental world independent of the real West on Takarazuka stage.

The repeated stylisations of the body, the make-up and the hair, allow the audience to perceive the “decorated” bodies of the performers as the bodies of the Westerners. The transformation to the race of Other is not only achieved through the distinction from the body of the audience, the Us, but also reveals the performative nature of race similar to gender. The constant stylisation of the outer body with costumes, make-up and hair dye hence gives birth to the inner identity of the gender and race of the performers perceived by the audience. Similar to the constructed race, the secondary gender of the performers is fabricated and inscribed on the body under the existing gender stereotypes, while the performers lose control over their bodies and stylise their bodies under the rigid instruction of the revue to fulfil the desire of the audience. This hence reveals the Other role of the performers. Instead of representing the image of Western men and women, the performers are performing the Other race and gender comparing to the audience and presenting the image of “ideal men and women” distant from reality.

Lastly, extending from the subverted role of the Orient and Occident in Takarazuka revue, the role of Us and Other can become rather fluid according to the shifting perspectives. The audience plays the role of Us and consumes the lavish dream weaved by the Othered bodies of the performers. However, with the audience seated distant from the stage, remaining silent and regarded as a uniform group, the individuality of the performers is highlighted on stage, allowing them to become Us, moving freely on the stage and experiencing life adventures and romance. Besides, the audience serves as a crucial anchor point for the performers to reorientate their bodies towards hence confirming their identity and duty on stage. The secondary gender assigned to the performers disrupted the original relationship between the anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance of the performers, masking the primary gender and covering the body with new sets of actions. The *musumeyaku*, the female impersonators, transform into the Other woman through the contrast with the female-dominated audience and present the ideal image of the innocent young girl on the stage of Takarazuka. The *musumeyaku* then serve as the Occident on the stage and redirect *otokoyaku*, the male impersonators, to the role of “ideal men”. While considering the hierarchy structure in the revue which the duty of the *musumeyaku* is to

support *otokoyaku* to express their masculinity and charm, the role of Us and Other hence switches between *musumeyaku* and *otokoyaku*. Hence, the Othered race and gender remain in the revue through the ritualistic acts on and in the body and the relation between the performers and audience, *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*. Takarazuka performers not only provide us with a perspective to look at the Othered image represented by the Japanese but also challenges the stereotypical submissive image of Japanese women. The evolving image of *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* reflects the shifting status and desire of Japanese women over the century and embraces the fluid position of Us and Other.

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