

MSc in Social Anthropology Dissertation

Men Performing Women: Constructions of Gender in
Contemporary Japanese Comedy

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1. Introduction and research questions

This dissertation examines a selection of instances in contemporary Japanese comedy in which men act as women and asks what gender constructs men use when they are impersonating women in Japan. The study then asks why this is funny locally and to what extent these manifestations of humour do or do not fit into more universal theories of humour. Together with existing literature, these theories enable us to compare theoretical propositions regarding the impact of this kind of humour on constructions of gender and prompt us to ask how radical or conservative these acts are.

1.1 Situating the research questions within the cultural context

As with any symbolic system Japanese culture displays distinctive modes of differentiating between male and female gender roles. For a developed nation with the third largest¹ economy in the world however, and as a member of OECD that shares many of the characteristics of other liberal, westernised, democratic and capitalist member states, Japan's average wage for women is relatively low compared to that of men² and reflects what the literature generally reports as a low status for women compared to men. Although there is a frequent tendency towards essentialism within

¹ On PPP (Purchasing Power Parity). CIA, *The World Factbook 2005*, available at: <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ja.html>>, retrieved: 1st September 2005

² Fig 12.11 Monthly Contractual Earnings by Size of Enterprise (2003), Statistics Bureau & Statistical Research and Training Institute, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c12cont.htm#cha12_4>, retrieved 1st September 2005

“*Nihonjinron*” (literature about the Japanese), the Japanese language may be considered as an ongoing means by which gender differences are circumscribed and perpetuated since in it the male and female voices are normatively ascribed different personal pronouns, verb endings and registers.

In this context the question of whether locally humorous representations of gender within contemporary Japanese comedy are culturally specific is thought to be of particular interest. If, for example, they can be appreciated locally but not more universally one might be better placed to make assertions regarding both the local constructions of gender and the relationship between the operation of humour in general, and local constructions. If, on the other hand, one observes these humorous representations of gender to be both appreciable from outside Japanese gender constructs and consistent with predominantly western theories of humour, one would want to know how to characterise these gender jokes within a broader typology of humour and then ask in what way this type of joke affects the gender construct it refers to.

2. Existing literature

A considerable body of literature exists on the area of humour in general, significantly less on humour arising out of cross-gender performances. Similarly, there is a sizable body of work on the role and status of women in Japanese society and a growing corpus on masculinity – however, there is relatively little on men performing as women. This literature review chapter approaches the topic specific to this dissertation from three intersecting axes: gender, performance and humour. I first examine the literature on gender in Japan, then I examine writing on performance both in Japan and globally as it relates to gender. Subsequently humour in Japan is contextualised.

2.1 Sex and gender in Japan

2.1.1. Sex and status

In the workplace, while Japan has a relatively high percentage of women in the workforce at 40.8%³, patterns of employment differ significantly for women in Japan as against other industrialised countries. From 1992 statistics, women's average wage was 50% that of men's in Japan compared to 74% for the equivalent disparity in the US⁴. With length of employment this gap in pay increases and women tend to leave for longer periods to have children than in western economies, subsequently

³ 2003 figure; Anthony Faiola, 'Japanese Women Live, and Like It, On Their Own: Gender Roles Shift As Many Stay Single', *washingtonpost.com*, available at: <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47261-2004Aug30.html>>, posted: 31st August 2004, retrieved: 1st September 2005

⁴ Gordon Mathews, 'Can 'a real man' live for his family?: *ikigai* and masculinity in today's Japan', *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Beyond the Urban Salaryman Model* (London: Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies, 2003), p.109

finding it difficult to return to work on the same pay or status. The range of occupations which Japanese women tend to occupy is narrow with very few women in upper management positions. Furthermore, the pattern of employment discourages investment in training for women. Alice H. Cook and Hayashi Hiroko⁵ go so far as to remark in 1988 that combined with wider ideology about women's roles, women are probably more exploited in Japan than in any other industrialised society. The stereotype of the *OL* or "Office Lady" who has few opportunities for promotion and makes tea for her male colleagues is far from obsolete.

In language use, the pejorative associations embedded in Sino-Japanese ideographs have been examined by Kawata (2000)⁶; and Ogino (1992), Fukada (1993) and Yamaguchi (1998) have commented on the use of the word *shujin* (literally "master") for husband. The *kotoba to onna o kangaeru kai* ("Group for Thinking about Language and Women")⁷ found in 1985 upon conducting an analysis of the definitions and examples used in Japanese dictionaries that women were invariably represented as passive, nice and pretty and referred to in terms of appearance or promiscuity, whereas men were represented as the strong, reliable agents of actions and referred to in the contexts of taking the initiative and influencing women's lives. Publishers have addressed some of these criticisms. Similarly, in 1993 a survey of newspaper language undertaken by Kazuko Tanaka⁸ critiqued the double standard applied to men and women as reflecting a patriarchal viewpoint. Tanaka drew attention to the unnecessary marking of women ("the female company president"), the female subject placed within relational frames ("Yoko, the wife of ...") and the

⁵ Alice H. Cook and Hayashi Hiroko, 'Working Women in Japan', *Inside the Japanese System: Readings on Contemporary Society and Political Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988)

⁶ Cited by Sumiyuki Yukawa, and Masami Saito, *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.30.

⁷ Yukawa and Saito (2004), p.29

⁸ Cited by Yukawa and Saito (2004), pp.29-30

extensive use of stereotypical images of women as emotional, considerate, devoted and passive.

2.1.2. Japanese cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity

Codified within the Meiji Civil Code and operative therefore between 1898 and 1947, the *ryosai kenbo* model for the woman as “good wife, wise mother” was, as Jennifer Robertson⁹ points out, premised on two givens: firstly on the strict alignment of sex, gender and sexuality, and secondly on women’s dependence on and subordination to men. Walter Drew Edwards warns us against eliding socially endorsed norms, especially those affirmed during a ritual such as a wedding ceremony, with actual practice¹⁰, yet from his ethnographic account of marriage rituals in contemporary Japan the following represents an example of the more conventional sentiments expressed during the wedding speeches: “When men go out to work in the world, things don’t always go their way. When they come home, they wish to have everything their way, so please obey whatever your husband says as though you were a child”¹¹. Edwards notes the prevalence of a construction of male incompetence in the domestic sphere – “if men live by themselves they just don’t eat regularly”¹² – which constitutes one belief of many in a “broad range of male and female differences – including the complementary abilities and inabilities in the domains of *shakai* and *katei* [society and the domestic sphere]” that are essentialised as being grounded in nature.

⁹ Jennifer Robertson, ‘Doing and Undoing “Female” and “Male” in Japan: The Takarazuka Revue’, Japanese Social Organization, ed. Takie Sugiyama Lebra (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), p.179

¹⁰ Walter Drew Edwards, *Modern Japan through its weddings : gender, person, and society in ritual portrayal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p.127

¹¹ Edwards (1989), p114

¹² *ibidem*, pp.121-2

Nihonjinron literature has traditionally emphasised the marked differentiations of gendered speaker in Japanese between *danseigo* and *joseigo* – male and female forms of the language. However, in their co-edited work *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith¹³ argue in favour of a less hegemonic characterisation that takes account of actual real language practice and they claim that previous studies have tended to dismiss as inappropriate, erroneous or deviant those usages which differed from the essentialised norm.

The traditional understanding of women’s language use in Japanese has been that femininity required conformity to that “gentle, polite and refined”¹⁴ behaviour and speech which is *onnarashii* (“womanly” or “ladylike”). Miyako Inoue suggests that an imagined “women’s language” swiftly fell out of the process of modernity, rationalisation and nation-building when the indexically conceived *gembun’itchi* narrative voice of Meiji novelists was found not to be able adequately to represent the speech patterns of school girls¹⁵. Rumi Washi adds that later, in 1941, a secondary school textbook on etiquette was circulated by the Ministry of Education as a manual on female speech – the *reehoo yookoo*¹⁶.

Shigeko Okamoto describes how by being widely promulgated by language policy makers and linguists with considerable influence over the popular media¹⁷, the “hegemonic ideology of politeness and *onnarashisa* ... may considerably affect one’s

¹³ *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

¹⁴ Yukawa and Saito (2004), p.8

¹⁵ Miyako Inoue, ‘Gender, Language, and Modernity: Toward and Effective History of “Japanese Women’s Language”’, *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.57-75

¹⁶ Rumi Washi, “‘Japanese Female Speech’ and Language Policy in the World War II Era’, *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.79-80, p.88

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.3

conception of the norms”¹⁸. The construct reinforces itself since “this ideology provides a basis for the interpretation of honorifics as polite and *onnarashii*, which in turn contributes to the maintenance of social inequality in regard to gender and class”¹⁹. However, Okamoto elaborates that the understandings of norms appropriate to a given situation vary diachronically, synchronically with context and according to the individual. Momoko Nakamura’s essay in the same volume develops this measured approach by explaining her findings that whilst these language rules may seem to have a coercive normative influence with regard to gender, they also present opportunities:

At the same time, gender ideologies offer categories, subject positions, social relations and conceptual frameworks, which can be used as resources in discourse (e.g., a Japanese speaker can perform a variety of identities by using or not using feminine languages precisely because the notion of “women’s language” exists in Japanese gender ideologies)²⁰

Burikko has emerged as a term of chastisement which further linguistically regiments female speech and behaviour with constructs of appropriate femininity. It can be seen as a reaction to what John Treat once referred to as a “celebration of vapidness”²¹ – the reified aesthetic of cute in Japan. *Burikko*, meaning literally “phoney girl(s)”²², is regarded by Laura Miller as something which one “does” rather than “is” and hence as a “social evaluation that arises from situated behaviour”²³. Examples of the kinds of speech act that might elicit this peer policing in specific contexts are given as: labialised forms (“*ureppi*” instead of “*ureshii*” for “happy”)²⁴, reduplication for animals, body parts and indelicate concepts (“*nenne*” from “*neru*” to

¹⁸ Shigeko Okamoto, ‘Ideology in Linguistic Practice and Analysis: Gender and Politeness in Japanese Revisited’, *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.53

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Momoko Nakamura, “‘Let’s Dress a Little Girlishly!’ or ‘Conquer Short Pants!’ Constructing Gendered Communities in Fashion Magazines for Young People’, *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.135

²¹ John Whittier Treat, ‘Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: The Shōjo in Japanese Popular Culture’, *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, ed. John Whittier Treat (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p.283; cited by Laura Miller, ‘You Are Doing *Burikko*! Censoring/Scrutinizing Artificers of Cute Femininity in Japanese’, *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p.149

²² Okamoto and Smith (2004), p.12

²³ Miller (2004), p.156

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.154

sleep, particularly where used euphemistically to refer to sexual intercourse)²⁵, high pitch, melodic swoop over the vocal chords²⁶ and nasalised delivery²⁷. In physical terms *burikko* could (depending on context and judgement) include demurely covering one's mouth whilst laughing, and expressing embarrassed mortification “*hazukashii!*” when by doing so the lady doth protest too much. Miller concludes that “women continue to be objects of intense social surveillance”²⁸.

2.1.3. Transgender in Japan

The contemporary transgender context in Japan is remarkably diverse. Wim Lunsing²⁹ characterises the possible expressions of gender available to males. *Josō*³⁰ is the term for transvestism and Lunsing distinguishes between transvestites and drag queens (who cross-dress purely for theatrical purposes)³¹. *Nyūhāfu*, literally “new half” refers to transgendered people (either real or fictional) who, as a result of oestrogen supplements or surgery display some feminine characteristics. Typically *nyūhāfu* have breasts and a penis. *Nijikon* are mentioned by Jennifer Ellen Robertson in this connection. Literally meaning “double complex” *nijikon* men dress as Lolita-esque adolescent girls³². Neither are to be confused with “Mr. Lady” who having undergone surgery to remove genitals, is “post-op”³³. MTFTS is the acronym for the

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ib.*, p.152

²⁷ *ib.*, p.153

²⁸ *ib.*, p.162

²⁹ Wim Lunsing, ‘What masculinity?: transgender practices among Japanese ‘men’’, *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Beyond the Urban Salaryman Model* (London: Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies, 2003), pp.20-36

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.22

³¹ *ib.*, p.24

³² Jennifer Ellen Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.201

³³ Lunsing (2003), p.24

apparently distinct category of Male To Female Transsexuals; and hermaphrodites or “intersexual” people bring up the rear.

The word *okama* as well as *gei* refers to homosexuals, but with bearing upon transgender, in Japan *okama* have typically been conceived of as effeminate and sexually passive, sometimes referring to themselves using the female first person pronoun *atashi* and adopting *onē kotoba* (“older sister language”) as a distinct manner of speech in the gay bar scene³⁴.

2.2 Performance and gender

2.2.1. Performing gender

Judith Butler wrote of gender that it “must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self ... an act ... which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority”³⁵. This definition separates gender from sex qua male and female to make it a culturally contingent learnt performance. Miller speculates that herein lies the discomfort expressed in response to the *burikko* – could it be because they are “like a bad actor ... just caught “doing gender” red-handed”³⁶? She later adds, “Perhaps a *burikko* performance makes us uncomfortable because it asserts a hard truth about gender roles in general”³⁷. Judith Butler’s rejoinder, from

³⁴ *ib.*, p.31

³⁵ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p.270; cited by Amy E. Seham, *Whose Improv Is It Anyway?: Beyond Second City* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), p.72

³⁶ Miller (2004), p.161

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.162

Gender Trouble, would be that heterosexuality too “is a comedy whose norms even heterosexuals find impossible to embody”³⁸.

Assessing the reception and impact of the 1976 Off-Broadway performance of Eve Merriam’s *The Club*, Alisa Solomon argues that one contemporary reviewer’s likening the all-female cast’s recreation of a gentleman’s club to instances of white actors in “blackface” performing minstrel shows, misunderstood the centrality of the status dynamic³⁹. Solomon claims that *The Club* was challenging because it presented lower status women performing higher status men’s roles; and in so doing they framed the artifice of gender performance and “ridiculed men by showing how absurd they are when they ridicule women”⁴⁰. In a similar vein, the Chicago-based all-female improvised comedy troupe *Jane* formed in 1996⁴¹ and, as Amy Seham describes, presented audience members and performers with interpretative questions as to the gender performances on stage. When neither script, costume, makeup, props nor set were available to mark maleness, would masculinity be mistaken for a comic stereotype of “butch” lesbianism? In interviews, members of the troupe described “a distinct difference for them in terms of interior motivation, attitude, and mannerisms”⁴² on stage between performing male and lesbian roles, although Seham observes these signifiers were not always clear to audience members and that furthermore, “it was not uncommon for characters initiated as men to shift into lesbians or visa versa”⁴³. The latter plot twist might suggest that a feature of the medium was sometimes being used to make a meta-textual joke. However, Seham also writes that particularly during the opening moments of scenes, performers

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), p.122; cited by Mark Simpson, ‘The Straight Men of Comedy’, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.144

³⁹ Alisa Solomon, ‘It’s never too late to switch: Crossing toward power’, *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Lesley Ferris (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.147

⁴⁰ Solomon (1993), pp.147-8

⁴¹ Seham (2001), p.69

⁴² *ibid.*, p.73

⁴³ *ib.*

“sometimes began a scene in one gender only to be endowed mid-gesture as another”⁴⁴ by their partner (and in line with the principle of “yes and”⁴⁵). She adds that this occurred less frequently with *Jane* than with mixed sex groups.

2.2.2. Humour using gender stereotypes

Christie Davies observes the preoccupation with masculinity in Australia’s jokes and accounts for it on the basis of the marked gender imbalance of Australia’s demographic during its early years⁴⁶. Laraine Porter posits more generally that male anxieties have traditionally been expressed and discharged through comedy, thereby manifesting an “omnipresent need for heterosexual masculinity to disavow homoerotic desire and to suppress the feminine and bisexual drives in male sexuality”⁴⁷. Considering the phallic microphone of stand-up comedy, the aggressive “rhetorically male”⁴⁸ speech patterns of traditional stand-up, the power of a monologue⁴⁹ and the tendency towards tendentious humour in the Freudian sense⁵⁰, Joanne R. Gilbert asks the question, “Is stand-up comedy inherently male?”⁵¹ Furthermore, we should ask: if the male-dominated world of comedy is providing a forum for projected male anxieties, what representations of women are being circulated? Gilbert asserts that “Stand-up comedy may thus be considered a

⁴⁴ ib.

⁴⁵ “Yes and” is an improvisation principle and catchphrase which embodies mutual acceptance of and development upon contributions to a scene on stage.

⁴⁶ Christie Davies, *Ethnic Humor Around the World: A Comparative Analysis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p.261

⁴⁷ Laraine Porter, ‘Tarts, Tampons and Tyrants: Women and representation in British comedy’, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg (London: Routledge, 1998), p.75

⁴⁸ Joanne R. Gilbert, *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender, and Cultural Critique* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p.69

⁴⁹ ib., p.70

⁵⁰ ib., p.68

⁵¹ ib., p.70

“conservative” act – one that builds on preconceived types, as comics base their acts on generalizations”⁵².

In *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*⁵³ Ted Cohen ventures that jokes only work because they are predicated on truths – not truths about the object, but truths about the far-reaching influence and impact of the stereotype. Does the joke not then simply reinforce a stereotype? In a political climate of increased sensitivity towards characterisations of religious and ethnic groups, Christie Davies’ pamphlet *The Right to Joke*⁵⁴ ardently makes the case against increased censorship of jokes. He argues that jokes circulate and use “scripts” not stereotypes: “Jokes are based on conventional scripts which are accepted for the sake of enjoying the jokes but which do not form a guide to everyday behaviour”⁵⁵. As well as asserting the enclosed nature of these scripts, Davies insists that where there is an overlap between a joke script and a stereotype, it could be accounted for since both may arise out of the same set of observations. However, the joke is seen to have no malevolent intent and it does not perpetuate harmful stereotypes because: its scripts lack any real impact; because the joke is often built around an ambivalent core⁵⁶; and because the intentions of their tellers and the interpretations of their audiences are always in flux⁵⁷. In *The Mirth of Nations* Davies retracts an assumption made in his earlier work to affirm that a joke does not exist because it is functional for a given group such as a nation in the sense of serving its interests – a consideration of functionality does not appear relevant to an understanding of which jokes do emerge and which do not in a given nation and era. Davies writes, “Joke tellers are social not ideological creatures and laugh at groups

⁵² *ib.*, p.150

⁵³ Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); cited by Gilbert (2004), p.151

⁵⁴ Christie Davies, *The Right to Joke*, Research Report 37 (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2004); available at <<http://socialaffairsunit.org.uk/digipub/content/view/11/27/>>, retrieved: 1st September 2005

⁵⁵ Davies (2004), p.11

⁵⁶ Davies (1996), p.307

⁵⁷ Christie Davies, *The Mirth of Nations* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p. 6

whom they can portray as expressing an exaggerated version of their own failings rather than groups whom they regard as completely strange and alien”⁵⁸.

How would humour that refers to gender stereotypes such as blonde women and “Jewish American Princesses” fit into such a schema? First, Davies categorises “blonde jokes” as part of a binary of stupid/canny jokes⁵⁹ which arise in response to – and play with – the central anxiety of democratic capitalist societies. In a society in which a degree of social mobility is assumed and the free market is willed to apportion our status, the two deviations from a reasonable mean – Davies claims – that people intuit will lead to disaster are: being static and unenterprising or being joyless and mercenary. The stupid/canny pair is one of many, but relates to “commonly experienced ambiguous and indeed contradictory situations, to dilemmas that seem to generate uncertainty and ambivalence”⁶⁰. Blondes become the “butt” of some stupid jokes because although they do not occupy the typical “stupid locations”⁶¹ in the sense of peripheral or lower paid locations in the supposedly meritocratic hierarchy, they can be suspected of offending against the meritocratic principle. This is presumably either because, like the derided apparatchiks of the soviet era⁶² they have risen to their station by their other merits, or because their as their scripts imply – (“blondes have more fun”: adventurous sexual availability⁶³ and reckless, polymorphous promiscuity⁶⁴) – they enjoy more for less endeavour than their peers. Davies argues that blonde jokes are the antithesis⁶⁵ of jokes involving the archetype of the Jewish American Princess since Jewish jokes about Jewish women are neither

⁵⁸ Davies (2002), p.15

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.8

⁶⁰ Davies (1996), p.307

⁶¹ Davies (2002), p.10

⁶² *ibid.*, p.11

⁶³ Christie Davies, *Jokes and Their Relation to Society* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), p.182; cited by Davies (2002), p.83

⁶⁴ Davies (1998), p.183; cited by Davies (2002), p.84

⁶⁵ Davies (2002), p.83

about sex (intercourse) nor about women, but “are about the conflict between duty and choice experienced by the virtuous Jewish man”⁶⁶.

“That women have so often been the butt of the joke in western culture says a great deal about that culture. Principally it reveals the jokers have primarily been men,” remarks Lizbeth Goodman. Judith Stora-Sandor goes further to contend that the persistence of male and female comic types throughout literature from the Greek and Biblical world onward⁶⁷ testifies to the role of the repressed in the male unconscious which created them. The Greek and Jewish traditions consistently depict woman as a trap whose dangerous and insatiable sexuality should be rendered submissive, but instead destabilises social order by its seductive power⁶⁸. In contrast to mediaeval French fabliaux and farces, there are no adulterous wife jokes in Jewish literature – perhaps the social structure means that too much would be at stake⁶⁹ – but the other great threat to male dominance does find comic embodiment: the shrew figure (based on the mother) who reduces men to infantile repression⁷⁰. Stora-Sandor’s psychoanalytical bias finds in the comic stereotype of the Jewish mother a combination of Jewish and American misogyny. The Jewish mother is shrew and seducer and that seduction is depicted as incestuous⁷¹.

Following the reasoning which Stora-Sandor uses, since men are the authors of these stereotypes and since humour is sometimes regarded as another means of social control that takes self-control and power away from the auditor to the speaker⁷², are the representations of women used in humour funny because – as a function of an all-pervasive normative patriarchy – women are constructed as lacking? Are funny

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.84

⁶⁷ Judith Stora-Sandor, ‘From Eve to the Jewish American Princess: The Comic Representation of Women in Jewish Literature’, *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humor*, ed. Avner Ziv and Anat Zajdman (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), p.131

⁶⁸ Stora-Sandor (1993), pp.132-3

⁶⁹ see Davies (2002), p.78

⁷⁰ Stora-Sandor (1993), p.133

⁷¹ *ib.*, p.136

⁷² Gilbert (2004), p.9

representations of women funny because women will always be not-males and as such constitute one of – to use Davies’ formulation – the “groups whom [joke tellers] can portray as expressing an exaggerated version of their own failings rather than groups whom they regard as completely strange and alien”⁷³?

Laraine Porter asks challenging questions of humour that uses gender stereotypes. If femininity is a perverse deviation from a masculinity understood to be the norm, is the breast an inherently comic object?⁷⁴ Are overweight bosomy ladies intrinsically funny as a parody of heterosexual desire?⁷⁵ If we grant that desirable femininity is a constructed masquerade, a heterosexual imagining along patriarchal lines, could the act of ridiculing female stereotypes be considered a sublimated critique of patriarchy?⁷⁶ . Harriet Margolis considers whether a comic stereotype can be used to explode a stereotype and argues that since a stereotype works by othering, wider questions regarding the perceived and real power of the othered group will have a bearing on how deeply the othering has been internalised and thus on the potential for re-imagining; as will existing traditions of co-opting humour⁷⁷.

Examining the actual content of comic stereotypes circulated in *Viz*, a weekly magazine-format comic that was started in 1980 in Newcastle upon Tyne, Dave Huxley notes of the characters sometimes criticised as being sexist – “Sid the sexist”, the “Fat Slags”, “Mrs Brady”, “Millie Tant”, and “Roger Mellie” – that only “Millie Tant” is represented as unambiguously suffering for her “feminist” behaviour. “Roger Mellie” tends ambiguously to “get away with”⁷⁸ his indiscretions whereas “Sid the Sexist” invariably suffers some form of retribution for his behaviour and the “Fat

⁷³ Davies (2002), p.15

⁷⁴ Porter (1998), p.92

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ib.*, p.93

⁷⁷ Gilbert (2004), p.151

⁷⁸ Dave Huxley, ‘Viz: Gender, class and taboo’, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.285

Slags”, whilst fat, are generally happy. Taking a broader overview, Porter examined representations of women in British television and film comedy from the 1930s to the 1970s. She identified five common comic stereotypes which she labels: Tarty, Naggy, Matriarch, Spinster and Grotesque⁷⁹.

When men perform women however, Porter writes that there are only two kinds of female impersonations by men and these tend less to be illustrative of underlying misogyny or philogyny, than they are functions of the actor’s physique⁸⁰. Uniting 40 years of men performing women are traits of obsessive gossiping, a preoccupation with health and “the empty minutiae of everyday life”⁸¹ as well as a fixation on aspects of femininity unknowable to men. The menopausal woman is a perennial stalwart of cross-gender comedy – the menopause, dropped wombs, large bosoms and hot flushes forming part of the repertoire of comic material⁸². Most heterosexual female impersonators are assumed to be ridiculing rather than celebrating the feminine acknowledges Porter⁸³, but argues that at one level their discourses act as “a celebration of female solidarity and survival”⁸⁴. The stereotypes used by female impersonators present “points of recognition” with “a base in certain ‘truths’”⁸⁵ that transcends the stereotype and which women can enjoy⁸⁶. Frances Williams concurs: “Although such exaggerated caricatures may not be that complimentary, there’s a recognition of themselves in the performance that nevertheless delights”⁸⁷.

⁷⁹ Porter (1998), p.69

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp.88-89

⁸¹ *ib.*, p.89

⁸² *ib.*, p.90

⁸³ *ib.*, p.89

⁸⁴ *ib.*, p.90

⁸⁵ *ib.*, p.91

⁸⁶ Porter (1998), pp.90-91

⁸⁷ Frances Williams, ‘Suits and Sequins: Lesbian comedians in Britain and the US in the 1990s’, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.160

Porter speculates that the reason why the menopausal woman is so frequently the archetype chosen for impersonation by men may in part be because she is a “safer”⁸⁸ target, who as a sexually redundant object of past desire will not draw accusations of homosexuality⁸⁹. A stronger version of this motivation is Porter’s first explanation however. The impersonated menopausal woman is funny because her increased sexual appetite and decreasing sexual appeal, concurrent with the failing virility of her male opposite, poses a threat to male authority and violates the principle that female sexuality is a function of male desire. Thus, when the accoutrements of female attractiveness and femininity – the child-bearing hips, the large breasts – are denuded of both their allure and their functionality, “they become obsolete, parodic and repulsive to the male”⁹⁰. This anxiety is met with laughter.

2.2.3. Cross-gender performances in Japan

When women performed as women on the kabuki stage, the word kabuki had connotations of excess, dissolution and taking liberties, and a 1603 Japanese-Portuguese dictionary definition of the derivative *kabuki-mono*, literally “off-kilter people” was, in the words of Laurence Senelick, a “derogatory term describing nonconformists whose challenge to order might range from outlandish costumes and hair-styles to the display of outsized swords and tobacco pipes”⁹¹. In 1621 females were banned from performing in kabuki⁹². Subsequently in 1652, a year after the death of the Shogun Iemitsu, the rowdy aftershow solicitations had not abated and the

⁸⁸ Porter (1998), p.92

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ib.*

⁹¹ *ib.*, p84

⁹² Robertson (1992), p.187

adolescent male replacements of *wakashū* kabuki were also prohibited from performing⁹³ and their fetishised *maegami* bangs were cut.

The skilful *onnagata* is much admired in kabuki today with performers gaining mainstream celebrity status. Bandō Tamasaburō (born 1950) attracted a following among women his age and younger, and achieved crossover popularity in the gay community from 1975 onwards⁹⁴. In a 1981 survey he was voted “sexiest star in Japan” along with the popular music artist Sawada Kenji who performs in semi-drag⁹⁵. The enduring fame of the Living National Treasure Nakamura Jakuemon IV at the age of 85 should perhaps also attest not only to the artistry of his *onnagata* performance but also to the ability of this performance to evoke sexual femininity. Rei Sasaguchi describes Jakuemon’s performance in the following terms, “extraordinarily beautiful, highly contrived, and has been acquired by unstinting efforts over the years”⁹⁶.

The *Takarazuka Revue* merits attention in any discussion of Japanese cross-gender performance. Founded in 1913, the 340 member⁹⁷ all-female *Takarazuka Revue Company* performs Japanese cabaret by reworking western templates and has weathered post-war censorship, as well as economic hardship and diverse political climates⁹⁸. With a devoted female fanbase and a growing gay male following, Kaja Silverman’s thesis would suggest that *Takarazuka* owes its success to the fact that it provides an opportunity for the female audience member to “suture” with the performers; whereas traditional film does not allow women to identify with either the

⁹³ Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, drag and theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.86

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ib.*

⁹⁶ Rei Sasaguchi, *Nakamura Jakuemon IV: The Art of Onnagata Acting*; cited by Donald Richie, ‘Jakuemon: A man for the ladies’, *Japan Times*, 13th January 2005, available at: <<http://www.japantimes.com/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?fb20050113a1.htm>>, posted: 13th January 2005, retrieved: 1st September

⁹⁷ Karen Nakamura and Hisako Matsuo, ‘Female masculinity and fantasy spaces: transcending genders in the Takarazuka Theatre and Japanese popular culture’, *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Beyond the Urban Salaryman Model* (London: Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies, 2003), p.61

⁹⁸ Jennifer Ellen Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

male protagonist nor with the unempowered female lead⁹⁹. Karen Nakamura and Hisako Matsuo argue that in a post-Freudian academic discourse there is an analytical bias towards sexualising relationships and that *Takarazuka* should be regarded as an asexual space. Their writing suggests that in assessing *Takarazuka* as a commercial activity we should see this cross-gendered performance as the manifestation of an economic need for an escapist fantasy space – arguably a space of freedom from the anxiety of sexuality (in both senses) – rather than as a libidinous outlet¹⁰⁰. They refer us to Anne Allison writing on male erotic comics:

In this sense, desire is not reduced or repressed as much as it is actively produced in forms that coordinate with the habits demanded of productive subjects. The ‘dullness’ and ‘arduousness’ of the tasks Japanese must execute over a lifetime, starting in childhood, are made acceptable not by the mere threat or force of an external structure (fear of failure on exams, for example). More powerful is the internalization of a different sort of process, one based on desires that make the habitual desirable as well as making escape from the habits of labour seem possible through everyday practices of consumptive pleasure.¹⁰¹

2.3 Japanese comedy

On the subject of mainstream British situation comedies, Maggie Andrews observes that, “The role of sitcoms in television programming is usually governed by the necessity to gain as wide an audience as possible, preferably not antagonising viewers, and therefore women cannot be so completely objectified or marginalised in the way they can be by some stand-up comedians”¹⁰². In the light of this remark, it is of particular note that the audience of one popular mainstream television showcase for sketch, character, manzai and stand-up comedy known as *enta no kamisama* – “The

⁹⁹ Cited by Nakamura and Matsuo (2003), p.65

¹⁰⁰ Nakamura and Matsuo (2003), p.70

¹⁰¹ Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires in Japan: Mothers, Comics and Censorship in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p.xv; cited by Nakamura and Matsuo (2003), pp.70-71

¹⁰² Maggie Andrews, ‘Butterflies and Caustic Asides: Housewives, comedy and the feminist movement’, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.52

Gods of Entertainment” – which is one of the texts in this study, features a live studio audience of whom all are female.

The 13th century *ujishui monogatari* seems to have been the starting point for the humorous narratives performed as *rakugo*. In the *rakugo* genre the raconteur sits atop a *zabuton* cushion and relates traditional comic narratives using mime, impersonation, as well as a fan and a towel as props. The familiar stories usually culminate in a contrived pun and the pleasure of the performances lies in the individual rendition¹⁰³.

Davies makes the point that despite the comic traditions of *manzai*, *rakugo* and *kyōgen*, there do appear to be very few modern jokes in Japan and attributes it with some essentialism to Japan’s long Edo isolation, internal homogeneity and geographical unity. In contrast to the Jewish diaspora say, Davies claims that the Japanese have been called upon to reflexively negotiate their own identity with “others” relatively little¹⁰⁴. Hence the reason why there are also relatively few jokes about other ethnic groups in Japan. Davies also comments that it is extremely difficult to elicit jokes from Japanese informants and that rather than being built around a tightly crafted punchline designed for some anticipated informal performance, such humour as there is in conversational Japanese is largely context-dependent – for example *share* consists of witticisms and verbal play – and does not travel well¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ see also Tsuyoshi Kida, ‘Prosody – A Laughing Matter? A Crosscultural Comparison of a Humour Phenomenon (*Rakugo*) in France, Tokyo and Osaka’, Speech Prosody 2002, Laboratoire Parole et Langage, Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, France, 11-13th April 2002, available at: <<http://www.lpl.univ-aix.fr/projects/aix02/sp2002/pdf/kida.pdf>>, retrieved 1st September 2005

¹⁰⁴ Davies (2002), p71

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

2.3.1. Manzai in context

The origins of manzai can be traced back to the dialogues of Heian refrains for divine intercession at banquet festivals, according to Shinobu Origuchi¹⁰⁶. The two roles of *tayu* and *saizo* already demonstrated a straight-man/funny guy dynamic by the 17th century; in the Muromachi period the objective of making comedy came to the fore; and in the Kawachi region near Osaka in the second half of the 19th century, the egg vendor Tamagoya Entatsu took the form into mainstream popularity by incorporating *ondo* singing. It was at this stage that the terms *boke* and *tsukkomi* came into circulation, the *boke* being the fool role and the *tsukkomi* seizing upon the *boke*'s gaffes with verbal and slapstick reprisals. From 1930, Yokoyama Entatsu and Hanabishi Achako developed many of the tropes of the genre familiar today, making the subject matter modern as well as family-friendly. Philip Brasor typifies Japanese manzai since the 1980s as frequently choosing for targets of its mockery “women, older people, salaried workers and the poor; in other words, the certifiably weak”¹⁰⁷. The question of what the term manzai means in its contemporary usage is dealt with in Appendix 3.

¹⁰⁶ Cited by Xavier Benjamin Bensky, *Commodified Comedians and Mediatized Manzai: Osakan Comic Duos and Their Audience*, Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast (ASPAC) Conference Papers, The Matsushita Center for Electronic Learning (MCEL) at Pacific University, available at: <<http://mcel.pacific.edu/aspac/papers/scholars/bensky/bensky.htm>>, retrieved: 1st September 2005

¹⁰⁷ Philip Brasor, ‘Hear the one about the Japanese comedian?’, *The Japan Times*, 30th June 2002, available at: <<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?fd20020630pb.htm>>, posted: 30th June 2002, retrieved 1st September 2005

2.4 Summary

There follows a précis of some to the salient points garnered from the literature review. Women have low status in Japan. In Japan, to be feminine means to be submissive and polite and coy. Additionally a cultural backlash against extremes of “girlish” behaviour has been reported. Japan has a diverse transgender language, yet homosexuals have typically been conceived of as feminine. Gender should be thought of in terms of learned performances. Whether or not the characterisations circulated in humour actually have an impact on people’s perceptions of the groups characterised, these characterisations form patterns. The dialectic pairs of comic archetypes such as stupid/canny can be observed to play with the central ambiguities, ambivalences and anxieties of the society and men’s jokes about women can be interpreted as manifesting male anxieties about – and intent to normatively dominate – the non-male.

On the other hand, jokes can be enjoyable and humour should perhaps be characterised by its social qualities first and foremost over its ideological qualities. And in that regard the male impersonation of the menopausal woman may be replete with male anxieties, but specific instantiations of it are not without some fondness and are enjoyable enough to watch. In Japan the cross-gender performances seem to be more relevant when considered as part of a cultivated appetite for fantasy rather than as sexualised material. The resulting performances can attain the distinction of being: “extraordinarily beautiful, highly contrived”¹⁰⁸. There is a long tradition of Japanese comedy – although not of informal planned joking – and manzai has developed gradually as a form since the Heian era.

¹⁰⁸ Sasaguchi; cited by Richie (2005)

3. Three theories of humour

I favour the terminology “theories of humour” (as opposed to theories of laughter or of amusement) because the physiological reaction of laughter is a secondary phenomenon and because there is held to exist an aesthetic response¹⁰⁹ of a different order to amusement and which interests us. The category of “humour” would be applied to that broad range of objects that could elicit such a response. The challenge therefore is to identify common features such that the term can enclose structural entities in a way that is both comprehensive and internally consistent; and also falsifiably explains what the contents have in common that other “non-humorous” items and structures do not. Christie Davies claims that theories of humour can be useful in helping to explain how jokes work, but not useful as an explanation of the social and historical setting of the jokes¹¹⁰: “Why are there no American jokes about Japanese-Americans or, indeed, the Japanese? ... It is only possible to understand the jokes that do exist by studying those that could exist but do not”¹¹¹, he argues.

The three main theories of humour are superiority theory, relief (or release) theory and incongruity theory¹¹². These theories of humour generally purport to explain how the mechanism of humour operates. However – and inconsistently with Davies – sometimes by defining what a joke is, a theory of humour necessarily

¹⁰⁹ *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, ed John Morreall (Albany: State of New York Press, 1987), p.171.

¹¹⁰ Davies (2002), p.14

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.6

¹¹² Gilbert (2004), p8; and *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987), p.5

informs the question of why that instance of humour has occurred there as opposed to elsewhere. For instance Henry Jenkins offers the following:

Jokes tend to cluster around points of friction or rupture within the social structure, around places where a dominant social discourse is already starting to give way to an emergent counter-discourse; jokes allow the comic expression of ideas that in other contexts might be regarded as threatening.¹¹³

Superiority theory was first advanced by Plato and forms of it appear in the work of Aristotle (combined with putative incongruity suggestions), explicitly in the work of Hobbes, and in Descartes¹¹⁴. For Henri Bergson humour arises out of the incongruity of “Something mechanical encrusted on the living”¹¹⁵, but underlying the froth of laughter is a saline base¹¹⁶ premised on spitefulness¹¹⁷, for “Laughter is, above all, a corrective”¹¹⁸.

Incongruity theory posits that humour occurs when something diverges from our expectations. Its advocates have included Francis Hutcheson, Kant, Schopenhauer, Hazlitt and Kierkegaard¹¹⁹. David Hartley combines incongruity and release theory; George Santayana argues that we enjoy the shock of the incongruity rather than the incongruity itself; and John Morreall emphasises that it must be a pleasant psychological shift accompanying an incongruity, wherein the origins of laughter subsist¹²⁰.

Whereas Herbert Spencer’s version of relief theory involves nervous energy, in Freud’s explanatory model the cumulative anxiety of social life is released when the psychic work of repression is allowed a respite in humour¹²¹. Gilbert cites P. Weiss’s colourful rendition of the Freudian model: “Civilisation is overpressurized,

¹¹³ Henry Jenkins, cited by Andrews (1998), p.51

¹¹⁴ *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987), pp.10-25

¹¹⁵ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: an essay on the meaning of the comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1911), p.37

¹¹⁶ *ib.*, p.200

¹¹⁷ *ib.*, p.198

¹¹⁸ Bergson (1911), p.197

¹¹⁹ *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987), pp.26-89

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp.41-128

¹²¹ *ibid.*, pp.99-116; and Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1966)

clanking and groaning, ready to burst, and comedy comes in wearing coveralls to open the bleeder valve and let off the pressure with dick jokes”¹²².

In conclusion, the three main theories of humour – superiority, relief and incongruity theory can explain the mechanisms that something operates by once it has already been identified as funny. A better understanding of humour would be able to explain why an incidence of humour occurs where it does as opposed to elsewhere.

¹²² P. Weiss, ‘100 characters in search of an offer; Welcome to the first American comedy convention’, *Rolling Stone* (3rd November 1988), 56+, p.118; cited by Gilbert (2004), p.68

4. Methodology

The visual texts to be examined in this study were selected by first circulating a brief questionnaire to 22 people, all but two of whom were anthropologists and all of whom were either living in Japan or had been within the past year. Numbering among those consulted were the humour specialists Professors Christie Davies and Abe Goh, Dr Akira Okazaki and Heiyo Nagashima. A copy of the questions posed by the questionnaire is included as Appendix 1. The questions related to contemporary manzai¹²³ groups and were intended to produce a snapshot of which groups were then regarded as popular and mainstream. The questionnaire was circulated between 7th March and 4th July 2005 and all replies were received by 12th July 2005.

I also asked individuals on a one-to-one basis whether they were aware of any particular manzai groups whose performance spoke to gender issues in particular. The results of these informal conversational enquires were inconclusive. The frequencies with which various popular contemporary manzai groups were cited in response to question 1 of the survey are listed in Appendix 2.

The visual texts to be chosen based on the questionnaire responses were then further narrowed down based on three factors prioritised in the following order: availability for despatch from the online vendor Amazon.co.jp or from CDJapan.co.jp, relative sales ranking off-set by release date as listed by Amazon.co.jp, and online customer reviews. The following 5 DVDs were selected as visual texts for this study:

¹²³ For a discussion of terminological issues with this category please refer to Appendix 3.

1. 'Enta no kamisama: Best Selection Volume 1', 22nd December 2004
『エンタの神様 ベストセレクション Vol.1』, 2004/12/22
2. Ōtake Kazuki and Masakazu Mimura, 'Summers Live 4', *Summers*, 17th March 2004
大竹 一樹・三村 マサカズ [勝和], 『さまあ~ずライブ 4』 さまあ~ず
2004/03/17
3. Hitoshi Matsumoto and Masatoshi Hamada, 'Downtown no gaki no tsukai ya arahende!! 5', *Downtown*, 29th June 2005
松本 人志・雅功 浜田, 『ダウンタウンのガキの使いやあらへんで!! 5』
ダウンタウン 2005/06/29
4. Shigeru Minaide and Akinori Takada, 'Owarai Network Manzai no Dendou',
All Hanshin Kyojin, 20th August 2003
南出 繁・高田 昭徳, 『お笑いネットワーク発 漫才の殿堂』 オール阪
神・巨人 2003/08/20
5. Takanori Takeyama and Tadayuki Nakashima, 'Cunning no omoide zukuri',
Cunning, 14th January 2005
竹山隆範 『カンニングの思い出づくり』 カンニング 2005/01/14

Within these texts the episodes selected for further analysis were those in which male actors were either dressed to evoke femininity, or could reasonably be considered to be consciously performing in a feminine way. Subsequently those instances which evoked most audience laughter were given priority for detailed study.

There was a potential methodological pitfall whereby certain instances of humour might have depended upon cultural references so obscure as to be overlooked entirely. In order to avoid this, careful attention was paid to the audience responses (the "laugh track") as an indicator.

5. Visual texts: Exposition and analysis

Using the criteria detailed in the previous chapter the following four clips were selected for close textual analysis.

5.1 ‘konyakusha ha gaikokujin’, *Darling Honey*¹²⁴

This sketch features in a “Best of” selection from the programme “enta no kamisama” and showcases duo *Darling Honey*. The title of the five minute sketch translates as “My Fiancée is a Foreigner”. In it “Eileen”¹²⁵, played by a man, is being prepared for her first meeting with Tomohiko’s parents. “Eileen” is characterised as having come to Japan by boat – the intimation is, as an illegal immigrant – and having found work in an “*osawari* pub” (loosely, “groping pub”). Tomohiko, who has lied to Eileen about his being a company director is keen for her to impress his parents so that the marriage can go ahead. In this scene, she displays a potentially disastrous lack of tact, cultural awareness and affection for her husband-to-be. The sketch ends with Eileen introducing herself to Tomokhiko’s parents in a patter which misuses earlier parts of the dialogue to comic effect.

The portrayal of a woman by the 26-year-old Japanese male member of *Darling Honey* is uncannily convincing both for consistent use of accent and in terms of appearance. Undoubtedly much of the humour in this scene is premised on the

¹²⁴ ‘konyakusha ha gaikokujin’, ‘Enta no kamisama: Best Selection Volume 1’, *Darling Honey*, 22nd December 2004, Chapter 9

¹²⁵ or “Ai-Lin”

outsider status of the foreigner – particularly because the foreigner is from a less developed country. Analytically separating the foreigner jokes from the humour inherent in the cross-gender performance is difficult – especially given that the artifice of the transvestism is not comically jarring.

However, I would suggest that the humorousness of this sketch is increased by virtue of local cultural knowledge, given that Eileen’s mannerisms and impassivity portray a disjuncture with the norms for Japanese femininity. Eileen’s body language and eye-contact are excessively assertive in the context of Japanese femininity and by not adopting physical postures of humility, attentiveness, timidity, admiration or submissiveness her immobility is tantamount to an act of defiance.

The phrase “*omae ga shinpai suruna*” is used by Eileen twice and elicits audience laughter on both occasions, particularly when picked up by Tomohiko – who tells her to stop saying “*omae*”. This is a *danseigo* second person pronoun, but the problem with the utterance – and its humorousness – runs deeper. By saying “don’t you worry”, Eileen usurps an unacceptably masculine (paternalistic) subject position.

5.2 ‘*touji no omokage*’, *Summers*¹²⁶

In this 30 minute long scene which forms the culmination of a live performance by the established sketch comedy double-act *Summers*, two former lovers meet after 22 years. He is 45, married with three children, she is single and 44 years old. The lights go up on a bar, empty but for two bar staff in their twenties, one male and one female. Kyouko – played by the male comedian Ōtake Kazuki –

¹²⁶ Ōtake Kazuki and Masakazu Mimura, ‘*touji no omokage*’, ‘*Summers Live 4*’, *Summers*, 17th March 2004, 01:06:27

emerges from the toilet, notices that the barmaid has left behind her handbag and exits after her. Mimura Masakazu enters the bar playing her ex-boyfriend. When Kyouko returns she is shocked to see her former love, but he doesn't recognise her. She uses a variety of ruses to find out more about his life and his feelings towards her, during which we observe her ambivalence and trepidation about revealing her identity. He is not particularly unhappy with his life, but expresses a desire to see Kyouko again, even if hypothetically she had become remarkably ugly. Eventually, she twice reveals herself to be Kyouko – and twice coyly retracts the admission. Masakazu's character resents being toyed with and leaves angrily, apparently without believing that it is her.

There is much humour to be enjoyed here that is not culturally specific. The impersonation of a 44 year-old woman by Ōtake Kazuki is humorous because whilst he affects a convincing repertoire of body language gestures, including the parting of his hair with both hands which becomes an effeminate leit-motif throughout the scene, he does not nevertheless make an especially convincing woman. His face and shoulders are ungainly and he deliberately breaks character, for example, to point at the barman with a pistol-like movement after every shot. Contributing to the comic effect of this artifice is the irony of the scene in that we, as the audience, know who Kyouko is. The staging heightens the atmosphere of this scene with tongue-in-cheek cinematic references which are far from culturally specific – such as the spotlit slow-motion moment of revelation, a radio wafting incidental music, and characters who seem to reminisce into the middle-distance during their blithely revealing monologues. I now turn to two culturally-specific areas which relate to femininity.

Kyouko sees Kana before she leaves work. Kana – who is addressed by Kyoko and by the barman with the diminutive suffix “-chan” – has changed clothes into a yellow polo-neck sweater over which a yellow one-piece dress is emblazoned with a

large motif of a flower. Kyouko asks with disdain if those are her casual clothes and then reprimands Kana for nervously flattening down her hair over her brow whenever she speaks. Kana, who in addition to doing this compulsively, speaks quietly with her head bowed and with fleeting eye-contact, replies that although Kyouko always patronises her, she is actually 26 years old. Appreciating the humour of this situation depends to some degree on knowledge of the *burikko* phenomenon. At one level the young woman who behaves and dresses like a shy pre-pubescent girl is being mocked by a man dressed as a woman who is heading for spinsterhood. At another level the critique is itself undermined since Kana musters the courage to ask Kyouko her age and declare that Kana herself is younger and more attractive. We are also a party to the surprising knowledge that the *burikko* barmaid's plans for the evening involve renting pornography and watching it with her boyfriend. The construction of femininity which Kana is projecting and operating within is made to look inadequate on both counts. Its quality of uneasy compromise between role expectation and self is evoked well by her parting words of formalised pleasantries to Kyouko: "douzogoyukkuri" – "please make yourself at ease here".

Kyouko's first entrance on stage immediately problematises her femininity. She re-enters the bar from the door marked "WC" wearing a pink cardigan over a white t-shirt with a checked red and white skirt, saying, to nobody in particular, "Well, that was a big one. A miraculous amount came out". She proceeds to persuade the barman that she has not had enough to drink and that, besides, she has nobody to go home to. We are being shown the picture of someone who has "let herself go". However, when later it appears that her ex-boyfriend will see her, she covers her face with both hands, surreptitiously sneaks past him to the toilets and returns having apparently beautified herself. When the barman asks why she is wearing a headscarf

she evasively replies, “Not really” (“*betsuni*”), and instead asks him if the gentleman is looking at her. Informed that he is not, she seems crushed.

This representation of femininity at the mercy of the male gaze, in thrall to body image and as a highly contrived performance, presents points of tension for femininity which transcend Japanese culture. This constructed femininity prescribes allurements but proscribes forwardness; woman is constituted by the gaze, but her primary audience is not typically especially observant; performance is demanded at all times, but falseness is abhorred. The humour at the interface of these ambivalences ought to be radical, one anticipates, yet it seems in this instance fundamentally to be conservatively mocking. The performance is arguably affectionate, but it is not helped by ostensibly being about failure. That we can laugh at the individual’s failure within the terms of the construct draws attention away from the failings of the construct itself.

5.3 ‘waratte ha ikenai onsenyado’, *Downtown*¹²⁷

Of the 2 hours and 13 minutes of footage on this double-CD set, I have chosen to focus on two very specific clips, one of which lasts less than thirty seconds. The overall scenario needs explanation. *Downtown* challenged a rival comedy troupe to a game of sushi *wasbi* roulette – much like Russian roulette, except with sushi. The forfeit involves a two day and one night stay at a ryōkan in the hot spring resort of Yugawara. If Hamada, Yamazaki or Tanaka (the losers) laugh during this period, they are assailed by latex-clad figures who spank them. A variety of laughter-inducing

¹²⁷ Hitoshi Matsumoto and Masatoshi Hamada, ‘waratte ha ikenai onsenyado’, 11pm, chapter 9, disc 1, ‘*Downtown no gaki no tsukai ya arahende!! 5*’, *Downtown*, 29th June 2005

situations are engineered with this end in mind. The compère for this period is the original manager of *Downtown* who is dressed in kimono throughout the two day challenge and has his hair neatly coiffured. He is playing the role of an *okamisama*, the ryōkan proprietress.

The main source of humour from this embodiment of cross-dressing derives from the understated and non-committal attitude towards cross-gender performance which accompanies it on the manager's part. A bulky man under any circumstances, he makes little effort to evoke femininity and the resultant incongruity is all the funnier for being a clumsily inept representation of gender. At 11pm on their first night, the manger knocks and enters their ryōkan room. He sniffs and says, "No, it's true after all, you do smell". He pauses. "You lot were all "I'm hungry, I'm hungry" – so the food's... erm. ... I've prepared dinner". The above serves as an example of this running joke and it is the manager's inadvertent use of a *danseigo* word for food – "*meshi*" – and his subsequent sheepish self-correction to "*shyokuji*", which the audience seems most to enjoy. It is perhaps the case that this slight slip of the metaphorical gender mask is more comic in our eyes because the mask was so unconvincing to begin with.

The incongruity of the manager's attire and manner is appreciable without access to local constructs. However the humour is heightened if we are clear about the established modes of appropriate dress and behaviour for an *okamisama*. Conversely, without knowledge of local *danseigo/joseigo* constructs, the humour of the inappropriate use of "*meshi*" would not be comprehensible, let alone funny. What is at issue here is: how deeply internalised must the sociolinguistic underpinnings of linguistic competency be in order to render this incongruity ticklish?

5.4 ‘kono yo de ichiban tsuraikoto’, *Downtown*¹²⁸

In a section of clips of manzai-style performance at the end of the second disc of this same two-disc set, Hitoshi Matsumoto and Masatoshi Hamada of *Downtown* respond to written audience questions which have been submitted in advance and which form the basis for improvised material. One of these involves a cross-gender impersonation, was well-received by the audience, and bears particular attention.

Matsumoto is asked to give his opinion on what constitutes the greatest hardship in this life. After some prevarication and a comic digression on the plight of having made yakisoba only to realise that one does not in fact have chopsticks, Matsumoto relates how when he was in primary school he once had to take some days off sick because of terrible toothache. Then he was told that his dog had run away. It was necessary for him to go and find the dog even though he had excruciating toothache. Matsumoto mimes the action of him searching for his dog, with one hand on his cheek and a facial expression somewhere between pain and consternation. Upon finding the dog, he did not have a leash, so he had to walk back through the neighbourhood holding the dog under one arm and still clutching his cheek with his other hand. He mimes the walk. [The footage is unevenly cut]. “I’m saying it’s not this walk...” he explains having shifted slightly from the mime of holding a dog and clutching his cheek so that he is now walking with one hand on his hip and the other behind his ear. At this point straight-man Masatoshi Hamada’s posture stiffens and he deadpans, “That’s not right is it?”¹²⁹ (“*sore ha chigau yarō*”). They exchange glances. “Eh,” Hamada stamps his foot aggressively, “if you do that, it’s a woman” (“*sō shi’ya onna*”). Matsumoto looks as if he has been scolded unfairly and holding up his

¹²⁸ Hitoshi Matsumoto and Masatoshi Hamada, ‘kono yo de ichiban tsuraikoto’, chapter 4, disc 2, ‘*Downtown no gaki no tsukai ya arahende!! 5*’, *Downtown*, 29th June 2005

¹²⁹ Or, “That’s a different one isn’t it?”

forefinger and thumb, he asides, “there’s a hair’s breadth between when you humour me and when you get angry” (“*waratekureru toki to okoru toki ha kamihitoe*”).

Quite aside from the framing of this anecdote within the context of the greatest hardship there is in this life, part of the humour of the anecdote must surely derive from the physical posture which these credible contingencies force Matsumoto to adopt. Even with only his hand against his cheek and a troubled facial expression, Matsumoto’s pose could be construed as effeminate. The outright transgression of gender norms which occurs when he shifts his pose is cause for laughter and can be accounted for using any of the three main humour theories as will be elaborated in the conclusion. In the context of manzai, it is relevant to note that the *tsukkomi* trope used by Hamada makes him simultaneously complicit in policing the semiotic boundary of gender performance. By reprising the straight-man *tsukkomi* role in this instance he effects the projection of conservatism at a more abstract level – about the kinds of transgression that will be tolerated by the group’s sensibilities.

Both the uncomfortable ambiguity brought about by this display of inappropriate signifiers by Matsumoto, and the tension of the confrontation between him and Hamada when this act is brought to normative account, dissipate in the audiences’ laughter because this confrontation is theatrical. What effect will this experience and the other situations described here have had upon collective understandings of gender norms for those who have witnessed them?

6. Conclusions

6.1 Constructions of femininity

It is suggested that in the instances examined, the following representations of women are observed. Eileen in *Darling Honey*'s sketch 'konyakusha ha gaikokujin'¹³⁰ is essentially woman-as-trap with some of the qualities of a prostitute figure. Her romantic feelings are not genuine, she is just keen to marry and raise her status, and she is mercenary in pursuing this aim. Although Ōtake Kazuki's Kyouko displays some of the comic characteristics of the cross-gender stalwart that is the menopausal woman, she is more relevantly a spinster figure. It would be fairer to characterise her as a type than to do so with *Darling Honey*'s Eileen, since Kyouko's comic behaviour and attitudes are largely rooted in her status as spinster whereas Eileen has a number of comic dimensions to her character. The ryōkan *okamisama* played by *Downtown*'s manager in 'waratte ha ikenai onsenyado'¹³¹ is not a representation of a woman, I would argue, since there was very little overt performance. The comic elements depended upon incongruity rather than parody and the kimono functions as a costume rather than as part of a repertoire of performative femininity. If representative of anything, *Downtown*'s Hitoshi Matsumoto's mime of a woman in 'kono yo de ichiban tsuraikoto'¹³² is evocative only of a generic curvaceous female form. The sexuality of the pose, serving to expose, accentuate and draw attention to the line of the hips, posterior and breasts is evocative of the confident display of

¹³⁰ 'konyakusha ha gaikokujin', 'Enta no kamisama: Best Selection Volume 1', *Darling Honey*, 22nd December 2004, Chapter 9

¹³¹ Hitoshi Matsumoto and Masatoshi Hamada, 'waratte ha ikenai onsenyado', 11pm, chapter 9, disc 1, '*Downtown no gaki no tsukai ya arahende!! 5*', *Downtown*, 29th June 2005

¹³² Hitoshi Matsumoto and Masatoshi Hamada, 'kono yo de ichiban tsuraikoto', chapter 4, disc 2, '*Downtown no gaki no tsukai ya arahende!! 5*', *Downtown*, 29th June 2005

1950s and 60s Hollywood actresses in the vein of Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell and Jayne Mansfield.

The richest text for its ability to carry multiple contradictory interpretations is that of *Summers*, ‘*touji no omokage*’¹³³. I have suggested that the scene goes some way towards using humour to problematise contemporary Japanese constructions of femininity by showing it in the Kyouko spinster-figure on the one hand as a parody of itself as a consequence of desperation and waning allure; and on the other hand as offering inadequate performative templates for Kana’s womanhood: femininity trapped in the body of a service-sector *burikko*.

6.2 Cultural specificity and theories of humour

It is posited that wherever male is the privileged term in the binary opposition of male/female, male female impersonation merits consideration as humour; and it does so as a function of a higher status (man) impersonating the lower status (woman). This can be explained as consistent with superiority theory because the knowing lowering of the male performer’s status permits a controlled spectacle of magnanimity. From the perspective of relief theory, the performance makes possible an opportunity to depart from the gender script. And within the theoretical model of incongruity theory, the male cross-gender performance is rich with humour because of its clumsy and disjointed artifice.

Using any one of these three main theories of humour, we are able to explain the appeal of this genre of humour in a universal way wherever it appears. Most

¹³³ Ōtake Kazuki and Masakazu Mimura, ‘Summers Live 4’, *Summers*, 17th March 2004

convincing within the narrow terms of reference of this study would seem to be the combination of relief and incongruity theory provided by Mary Douglas (and examined in detail in 6.3). However, we have also noted that there are locally specific elements to the instantiations of humour analysed and that local specificity can take the form of cultural references to specific genera of gender construct – what Davies would call the “scripts”¹³⁴ of local constructions of femininity. Examples from the texts would include the inappropriateness of the body language of Eileen and recognising Kana as representative of a broader type. In the former case an incongruous and possibly humorous aspect of the situation comes to light with the local cultural knowledge. In the latter instance, behaviour which may have seemed odd and laughable comes to seem familiarly absurd and ripe for parody.

On the linguistic issues such as recognising the incongruity of *meshi* as opposed to *shyokuji*, it is suggested that it is the sociolinguistic aspects of linguistic knowledge which constitute an integral part of the script knowledge necessary to recognise, for example, that linguistic behaviour is out of keeping with normative expectations. As Mary Douglas writes of jokes specifically, but as is arguably true of humour more generally, humour speaks “to the form of the social experience”¹³⁵. Knowledge of these forms is indispensable to the appreciation of certain structures, categorised locally as humour. Other instantiations of humour are embellished with local knowledge but not dependent on it. One of the defining features of male cross-gender performances is that the performative aspect of the gender humour does to an extent transcend linguistic boundaries. However, localised physicalisations of masculinity and femininity nevertheless vary a great deal and, like Kana’s flattening

¹³⁴ Davies (2004), p.11

¹³⁵ *ib.*, p100

of her hair across her brow, the learned performances must be learnt too by the anthropologist if he or she is to enjoy the joke.

6.3 How radical, how conservative?

This research suggests the thesis that the performance of comedy shares some of the characteristics of the liminal stage in ritual as described by Arnold van Gennep and developed by Victor Turner. Specifically the frame of public comedic performance operates as a space in which subversion, inversion and the collective questioning of norms are socially sanctioned to take place. In Turner's work, the liminal phase communicates "communitas"¹³⁶ thereby "giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society"¹³⁷; yet it also teaches humility, poverty and weakness as it interposes gaps between social positions and so enforces the integrity of the structure¹³⁸.

Mary Douglas' theory of humour is quintessentially that of an anthropologist, amongst other reasons, because in it the pleasure of humour is a function of it illuminating the arbitrariness of social constructs. Her model resembles a combination of relief theory and incongruity theory in which the joker figure "lightens for everyone the oppressiveness of social reality, demonstrates its arbitrariness by making light of formality in general, and expresses the creative possibilities of the situation"¹³⁹. There are echoes of Freud in this "image of the relaxation of conscious control in favour of the subconscious"¹⁴⁰. Yet Douglas also elaborates the structure of "jokes" as containing an incongruous element: "one accepted pattern is confronted by something

¹³⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969), p.96

¹³⁷ Turner (1969), p.97

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.170

¹³⁹ Mary Douglas, 'Jokes', *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1975), p.107

¹⁴⁰ Douglas (1976), p.96

else. All jokes have this subversive effect on the dominant structure of ideas¹⁴¹. It is because jokes speak to the symbolic system of which they are a part, that “a joke cannot be perceived unless it corresponds to the form of the social experience”¹⁴².

Most strikingly, while it may be – as Davies avers – that jokes have no dogmatic agenda¹⁴³, nevertheless in Douglas’ model they do speak about an aspect of the social structure which demands attention:

In the case of a bishop being stuck in the lift, a group of people are related together in a newly relevant pattern which overthrows the normal one: when one of them makes the smallest jest, something pertinent has been said about the social structure. Hence the enthusiasm with which a joke at the right time is always hailed.¹⁴⁴

Mary Douglas ends by speculating as to whether humour could not also be regarded as one strategy by which cognitive dissonance is reduced across different “realms of experience”¹⁴⁵. In this model then, humour plays games with norms.

Within the ritual space of public comedic performance, the comic enjoyment of games about constructions of gender is possible without social repercussions, and hence the spectacle of men acting as women is one of a variety of subversive transgressions observed. However, the question of whether one believes that this catharsis and disavowal leaves the social structure and its norms stronger; or whether conversely, one believes that this space functions to demystify the arbitrariness of norms and defetishize constructs – thereby making possible the conditions for their re-imagining – depends perhaps in large measure upon one’s training and theoretical convictions.

Is it possible to conceive that something like comedic performance could be conservative and radical at the same time in its effect upon constructions of gender and on the social structure more generally? Turner allows for ritual to comprise a

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* p.95

¹⁴² *ib.*, p100

¹⁴³ Davies (2002), p.6

¹⁴⁴ Douglas (1975), p154

¹⁴⁵ *ib.*, p.95

mixture of structure and anti-structure. This point is echoed by Gilbert who claims that jokes may thus serve as both rite and anti-rite – “as public affirmation of shared cultural belief and as re-examination of those beliefs”¹⁴⁶. I will posit additionally of men performing femininity within the comedic frame that exposure to this in the ritual spaces of comedy not only accustoms the observer to the idea of playing games with norms, but may also simultaneously condition them – as ritual does – to a keener conceptual facility with the nature of performance and with the framing of discrete units of space and time¹⁴⁷.

Have we then become more disciplined radicals – and more adept conservatives – as a result of taking part in the comedic ritual? The direction of our speculation as to whether the comedic ritual renders us more adept conservatives because we are more willing to uphold conservative norms or rather because we are better at performing would seem most critically to depend upon the extent to which one subscribes to relief theory on the one hand, and the differentiation one is prepared to allow between self and performance, on the other.

¹⁴⁶ Gilbert (2004), p.18

¹⁴⁷ For Van Gennep’s house metaphor for society where rituals more clearly delineate its limens and internal partitions, see: Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom, Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.26

Notes on Formatting

Names

In this dissertation all Japanese names are treated in the same way as western names. Thus where the full name is cited, the conventional order is as follows: given name followed by family name. This is reversed for bibliographies.

Works and Artists

In their romanized form the titles of visual works are treated as individual texts such as essays or articles would be and given single inverted commas (‘’). In the Japanese these titles are placed in inverted *kakou* (『 』). Artists’ names are formatted as ordinary text. The names of comedy troupes are italicised.

Foreign Words

Romanized Japanese words and all words which originate outside English but could still reasonably be regarded as “loan words” are italicised. *Manzai* is an exception to this as it is one of the keywords in this study and it is thought that italicising it would create distracting emphasis upon each occurrence.

Appendix 1

Questions posed by brief questionnaire circulated to humour specialists and Japanese anthropologists (see Chapter 4)

1. Can you name any well-known manzai duos in Japan right now?
(Please list)
2. Can you think of any manzai duos who are being experimental or whose material is relatively original?
3. How popular is the manzai genre now? When was it most popular recently?
4. Who were the great manzai duos of the previous century?

Appendix 2

Table showing responses given to question 1, Manzai Questionnaire: “Can you name any well-known manzai duos in Japan right now? (Please list)”. The number of members in each troupe is also shown.

Romanized Name	Name in Japanese	Number of Members	Questionnaire Frequency
<i>All Hanshin Kyojin</i>	オール阪神・巨人	2	2
<i>America Zarigany</i>	アメリカザリガニ	2	1
<i>Anjyassyu</i>	アンジャッシュ	2	2
<i>Aoki Sayaka</i>	青木さやか	1	2
<i>Bakusyou Mondai</i>	爆笑問題	2	1
<i>Cream Stew</i>	クリームシチュー	2	1
<i>Dachyuu Club</i>	ダチョウ倶楽部	3	1
<i>DaitaHikaru</i>	だいたひかる	1	1
<i>Downtown</i>	ダウンタウン	2	4
<i>Football Hour</i>	フットボールアワー	2	1
<i>Fukawa Ryo</i>	ふかわりょう	1	1
<i>Gekidan Hitori</i>	劇団ひとり	1	2
<i>Gokurakutonbo</i>	極楽トンボ	2	1
<i>Guitar Zamurai</i>	ギター侍	1	1
<i>Hanawa</i>	はなわ	1	1
<i>Hatayouku</i>	波田陽区	1	2
<i>Ima Ikuyo Kuruyo</i>	今いくよ、くるよ	2	1
<i>Inpalus</i>	インパルス	2	1
<i>Itsumo Kokokara</i>	いつもここから	2	1
<i>Jinnai Tomonori</i>	陣内智則	1	2
<i>Kanningu</i>	カンニング	2	1
<i>Kokoriko</i>	ココリコ	2	1
<i>Kyai-n</i>	キャイン	2	1
<i>Mori Santyu</i>	森三中	3	1
<i>Nagai Hidekazu</i>	長井秀和	1	1
<i>Nakagawake</i>	中川家	2	1
<i>Nankai Candies</i>	南海キャンディーズ	2	1
<i>Neptune</i>	ネプチューン	3	1
<i>Ninety-Nine</i>	ナインティナイン	2	2

<i>Othello</i>	オセロ	2	1
<i>Pappeto Mapetto</i>	パペットマペット	1	2
<i>Shinagawa Shoji</i>	品川庄司	1	1
<i>Summers</i>	サマーズ	2	1
<i>Tetsu & Tomo</i>	テツ&トモ	2	1
<i>Tomochika</i>	友近	1	1
<i>Tunnels</i>	とんねるず	2	1
<i>Ucchan Nanchan</i>	ウッチャンナンチャン	2	3
<i>UnGirls</i>	アンガールズ	2	2
<i>Untouchable</i>	アンタッチャブル	2	1
<i>Yasuda Dai Circus</i>	安田大サーカス	3	1

Appendix 3: Terminology – “sex”, “gender” and “sexuality”; “the west”; “manzai”

“Sex”, “gender” and “sexuality”

This dissertation maintains the following distinctions. “Sex” is used with reference to male and female. (When “sex” refers to sexual intercourse this is always made clumsily explicit). “Gender” is used with reference to masculine and feminine. “Sexuality” is used with reference to heterosexuality and homosexuality. “Sexuality” as used to refer to the quality of having and eliciting sexual desires is recognised as an extension of the latter meaning and used. In ambiguous phrases such as, for example, “her sexuality”, the context is calculated to resolve this.

“The west”

“The west” and “westernised” are used self-consciously with reference to commonalities inhering within the institutions, cultural practices, and values of Euro-America. “The west” cannot be thought about as a monolithic, bounded, homogenous bloc, but the term is retained as a useful “shorthand” form.

“Manzai”

Based on its historical lineage, the term “manzai” should most appropriately be applied to that genre of comic performances characterised by two people on stage performing largely rehearsed material in which the traditional roles of *boke* and

tsukkomi can be distinguished – one performer plays the fool and the other a “straight guy”. However, in present popular usage manzai is used to refer not just to duos performing this genre, but broadened inconsistently to include trios and sometimes solo performers, as well as to include sketch or “skit” comedy (or *konto*, from the French *conte*). I have permitted this elision for the following reasons. Firstly, because I hold to the principle, consistent with the disciplinary approach of anthropology, that it is good practice to adopt emic categories in the field; secondly because the material gathered as a result of the questionnaire responses necessarily yielded a variety of genres of performance in accordance with the colloquial usage; and thirdly because to confine my investigation purely to manzai in the strictest sense would have been considerably to limit the amount of material I was able to work on.

There are several instances of performers in the Japanese entertainment industry achieving crossover between comedy genres and between sections of the industry. Takeshi Kitano epitomises this. Having made his name in manzai alongside Kiyoshi Kaneko as *Two Beat*, he moved into solo stand-up comedy and comic acting before continuing his career in film and television as a non-comic actor, director and presenter. Since their manufacture in 1988 the boy-band *SMAP* have diversified their output to include – amongst other things – sketch comedy and TV cookery. *Drifters*, *Tunnels* and *Downtown* moved from manzai into talk show hosting upon achieving recognition and this career path has been emulated by a recent wave of manzai duos: *London Boots*, *Bakusho Mondai* and *Ninety-Nine*. In this media context the celebrity status or “*tarento*”[talent]-status constitutes the brand. This should help in part to explain how it is that one of texts in this study consists of a programme in which Masatoshi Hamada of *Downtown* comes to be the contestant in a series of sketch-like

set-pieces in a hot spring ryōkan¹⁴⁸ and suggests an explanation for the broadening definition of the term “manzai”.

¹⁴⁸ The text in question is Matsumoto, Hitoshi and Masatoshi Hamada, ‘*Downtown no gaki no tsukai ya arahende!! 5*’, *Downtown*, 29th June 2005 [松本人志・雅功 浜田, 『ダウンタウンのガキの使いやあらへんで!! 5』ダウンタウン 2005/06/29].

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