

"ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE": TAKARAZUKA REVUE AND ITS THEATRICALISATION OF CULTURE(S)

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ABSTRACT

Founded in 1913 by Kobayashi Ichizō, one of the most significant entrepreneurs in prewar Japan, Takarazuka Revue proved itself along its centennial existence both a faithful mirror of and an influential model for the Japanese society. Simultaneously conservative in its gender representation and progressive in its performance practice, a contradictory symbol of the Japanese modernity and Japan's leading figure in entertainment industry, emerged from the syncretic, cross-gender tradition of the centuries-old classical Japanese stage arts and challenging that very tradition through the creative employment of Western music and dramatic plots, Takarazuka Revue reconstructs in a specific way asymmetric interactions between identity and alterity, model and copy, history and geography, obtrusively displayed in sparkling tunes, fairy-tale-like sceneries and gorgeous costumes. While taking into account the multiple layers in Takarazuka Revue's administration and self-orchestration such as performance politics, the economical supervision of brand-related consumption, the socio-cultural management of actresses and fandom (fans and fan communities) as well as the performances itself, this paper focuses on some of Takarazuka Revue's strategies to construct cultures—indigenous as well as alien—by means of theatrical reproduction. Especially the last 20 years—since the opening of the Grand Theater in Takarazuka in 1993—marked an unexpected tendency in Takarazuka Revue's public appearance, visible, on one hand, in the increasing lavishness of its performances and the intensified commercialisation of the increasingly androgynous otokoyaku figures, and on the other hand, in the highlighting of individuals, societies and empires as key entities in structuring the dramaturgic flow. This paper's aim is, thus, to analyse Takarazuka Revue's position as cultural institution within the Japanese late modernity, possibly carrying deep-going and wide-reaching messages of a new identity paradigm based of "love" in its body as a local mass medium.

Keywords: Takarazuka Revue, Japanese popular culture, theatrical performance, theatrical representation, cultural imperialism

INTRODUCTION: THE THEATRICALITY OF CULTURE

In the aftermath of "3/11" (11 March 2011, the day when the triple catastrophes—earthquake, tsunami and nuclear explosion—occurred), it has become than ever an open secret that Japan is redefining superpower¹—though as cultural issue; a faithful interpreter of its ambitions is the popular all-female musical theatre Takarazuka Revue. Alongside its centennial existence, Takarazuka Revue, Japan's leading figure in the entertainment industry, has proved itself a contradictory symbol of modern Japan, a virtual battlefield between gender, culture and politics. Simultaneously anachronistic in its gender exhibition and progressive in its performance practice, Takarazuka Revue reconstructs in a specific way asymmetric interactions between identity and alterity, model and copy, history and geography, obtrusively displayed in sparkling tunes, luxurious sceneries and gorgeous costumes. While focusing on the last twenty years, since the opening of the new Grand Theater in Takarazuka in 1993, which marked an unexpected revival in Takarazuka Revue's self-orchestration through the increasing lavishness of its performances and the intensified commercialisation of its increasingly androgynous *otokoyaku* figures, the forthcoming analysis underlines some of Takarazuka Revue's strategies to construct cultures—indigenous as well as alien—by means of theatrical reproduction, highlighting individuals and societies in the dramaturgic flow. These strategies employ a new form of cultural imperialism² with love³ as both ideological base and aesthetic structure of late-modern identity, in the process of constructing, developing and eventually implementing Takarazuka Revue's—and by extension: the Japanese—historical perspective on world and life.⁴ As will be shown below, the transition from ethics to aesthetics and from imagination to ideology in the public staging of love reflects Takarazuka Revue's metamorphosis from an insignificant socio-cultural medium to a powerful political-economic message in postwar Japan.

Most academic discussions on Takarazuka Revue tackle the problematic of the androgynous and fascinating *otokoyaku* figures (i.e., female interpreters⁵ of male roles in the Takarazuka Revue) (see Berlin 1988; Kawasaki 1999; Robertson 1998; Stickland 2008).⁶ This paper focuses, though, on the tension between the androgynously charismatic *otokoyaku* figures and the apparently conformist and submissive *musumeyaku* figures (i.e., female interpreters of female roles in the Takarazuka Revue) with the goal to reveal some strategic assertions at the very core of the project of culture construction in the light of its theatrical sublimation proposed by Takarazuka Revue through the stature of its actresses⁷ as embodied by *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku*: On the one hand, there is extroversion and self-confidence; on the other hand, there is cuteness and fragility.

Takarazuka Revue's self-definition as a "dream world of love" stated and displayed publicly as well as its stress on friendship and human togetherness bound by individual excellence for the insiders will lead the focus on disclosing the way cultural phenomena are reflecting and converting, and then again, are being reflected and converted by social, economic and political factors. The analysis is pursued on two levels: (i) the intrinsic level referring to the form and contents of the performances; and (ii) the extrinsic level connected with the cultural, social, economic and politic dimensions of the Takarazuka Revue as historical appearance in the context of the Japanese modernity and of the modern world at large. Böhme's concept of "aesthetics"⁸ and Eagleton's concept of "ideology"⁹ constitute the foundation of the following analysis which employs them both as separate entities and in their dialectic relation to each other, in defining and constituting culture paradigms. Thus, the conscious and highly stylised exhibition and manipulation of love as "atmospheres" (Böhme 1995: 28–35) leads in Takarazuka Revue to new forms of existential orientation that challenge the traditional view of theatre as an entertainment space and is reminiscent of the original meaning of the word "scene"—from the original Greek word *skini*, meaning cottage or temple as "space" for the gods to materialise (Böhme 2001: 19–23). It denotes a space which is separated from the real world and which protects people from real happenings; it designs parallel universes to the experienced reality and stimulates these as possible alternatives.

In this train of thoughts, "culture" as concept emerges from the stress ratio between the classical anthropological view and its "aesthetisation" in late modernity; it is a "highly patterned and consistent set of representations (or beliefs) that constitute a people's perception of reality and that get reproduced relatively intact across generations through enculturation" (Fox and King 2002: 1). Overcoming the homogeneity and continuity assumed by this traditional definition, along with its declared failure to address social inequality and individual agency, culture becomes in late modernity the result of a "theatrical era," the implicit product of a new baroque (Böhme 1995: 18–19).¹⁰ In the process, an important element of this "aesthetisation of reality" is the "aesthetisation of the human being" as cultural phenomenon, occurring, among others, while consciously manipulating commodities as "aesthetic objects" rather than "functional objects," whereas even "perception" is becoming part of a greater "staging project" (Eagleton 1990: 12; see Böhme 1995: 79). As such, the greatest part of the historically determined social structure becomes aesthetic work as "staging work," so that the produced commodities in late capitalism acquire increasingly aesthetic values.

In order to illustrate these statements, I shall proceed in three steps: (i) by elucidating the two main figures of Takarazuka Revue—the androgynously ambivalent and charismatic *otokoyaku* and the apparently

conformist and impersonal *musumeyaku*—in their staging of cultural individuals; (ii) by analysing the performative construction of societies via a love-based cultural paradigm; and (iii) in the conclusion, by examining this emerging culture paradigm as a new form of cultural awareness based on tenderness as an existential attitude. *Otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* are regarded intrinsically, in their on-stage embedding within performances, and extrinsically, as social actors in the public sphere subject to limits, regulations and circumstances generated both by the quotidian Japanese society and by the imaginations and expectations of Takarazuka Revue's specific environment (especially fans' and administrators' prescriptions). The focus lies hereby not on gender staging or display, but on the embodiment of culture as dynamic movement, permanently produced, negotiated, longed for, denied, recovered; it includes a positive attitude towards culture and identity as formative entities beyond social, economic and political obligations and restraints (as opposed to Robertson 1998).

Since its foundation in 1913 by Kobayashi Ichizō,¹¹ Takarazuka Revue has become a symbol of modern Japanese entertainment, consumption and popular culture industry (Kawasaki 2005: 67). Though an imported genre from the West, mainly influenced by the French revue since the 1920s and additionally by the Anglo-American musical since the 1960s, Takarazuka Revue continues the Japanese theatrical tradition emblematically represented by Nō and Kabuki with their highly stylised gender and cross-gender impersonation as well as with their strongly syncretic characteristics.¹² Yet, Takarazuka Revue functions as the ideological and aesthetic base of several genres of Japanese entertainment culture—both those which have recently been recognised worldwide as global(ised) cultural products such as manga, anime, video games and those which are still deeply locally implemented such as TV dramas, TV shows and the *aidoru* (idol) phenomenon (Grajdan 2009: 31). The ideological dimension of Takarazuka Revue's influence upon the domestic popular culture condenses itself in the energy, passion and vitality radiated by most of such products as well as in the denomination of Japanese postwar entertainment culture as a long, uninterrupted history of love, peace and courage with focus on friendship, determination and victory,¹³ features supposedly related to Takarazuka Revue's motto "*Kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushiku*" (purity, righteousness, beauty) (see Saitō 1996: 45; Watanabe 1999: 142). The aesthetic dimension of Takarazuka Revue's influence on Japanese culture, on the other hand, could be observed in the almost obsessive quest for endlessly long legs and incredibly big eyes in Japanese everyday life.¹⁴ Furthermore, Takarazuka Revue's market-connected characteristics cannot be denied as its relevance rests on its saleability—thus, Takarazuka Revue becomes simultaneously subject to an unusually strong dialectics. Takarazuka Revue's re-opening after the war marked an important paradigm shift in its ideological-aesthetic staging of the Japanese

contemporary society and culture according to the re-formulation of its motto "*Kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushiku*," as it evolved from a moral model before the war to a mirror of society after the war. As a local appearance of the early 20th century, Takarazuka Revue contains strong elements belonging to the global market. It continues indeed the Japanese theatre tradition of cross-gender, while having been stylistically imported from the West. Furthermore, Takarazuka Revue profoundly influenced the domestic entertainment and consumption industry, a part of which has been accepted and recognised worldwide during the last decades. This international echo has, in turn, metamorphosed in new Western genres of popular culture, only to be perceived and absorbed by the Japanese public world as Western entertainment forms.¹⁵

THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURE

Takarazuka Revue's emergence as part of the Hankyū Railways Company as well as its development along the tumultuous 20th century up to the present are representative elements of a world moving relentlessly. Constantly, Takarazuka Revue proves the fact that culture is basically the mechanism of a discursive power which manufactures the correlation between social past and individual consciousness not causally, but contingently via historical practices. Due to its function as a subcultural medium striving for mainstream standards and appreciation, Takarazuka Revue has drafted, throughout its existence, diagnoses of Japanese society as the reflection of the Japanese correspondence to what Anderson (1988: 85) calls the "solid, civilised, morally upright bourgeoisie which managed to survive WWII" in performances with concrete reference to classical values and ideals. These classical values and ideals seem to have turned, by the mid-1970s, into an increasingly inscrutable "aquarium of floating, evanescent forms" (Anderson 1988: 86) populated with charismatic, still vaguely unseizable characters, only to be replaced, in the dawn of the 1990s, by blockbuster-like performances celebrating the completed instability of culture as a subversive enterprise in a liquid world at large (see Bauman 2000: 28).

The turning point was *The Rose of Versailles* (1974), which marked the moment when Takarazuka Revue simultaneously gained its *-ness* and lost its *raison d'être* according to Kobayashi Ichizō (1955: 33–41; see Ueda 1997: 48–51). The emergence of individual tensions calls for collisions between the semiotic and the symbolic level of culture construction in Julia Kristeva's (1974: 158) reading of the process, and is reflected in the emblematic figures of Takarazuka Revue's intrinsic and extrinsic world—actresses and audiences—during the economically relevant late seventies and the entirety of the eighties. Individuals rather than societies highlight the liquefaction process of their identities while stressing Japanese

righteousness as a new attitude mode (see Castells 1998: 338). However, starting with 1993, the box-office turns into the focus and beauty develops into a new zeitgeist. Confronted with an increasing socio-cultural fragmentation within the liquid spectrum, the Takarazuka Revue blockbusters of the last twenty years deal with the anonymisation of the masses and the alienation of the individuals within those masses.¹⁶ Not only did the social, economic and political events in the early 1990s induce this general cultural apathy, but so did the gradual loss of centre in an anomic world and the disintegration of social structures. There are no more moral models, but charismatic stars embedded in breathtaking performances to symbolise the death of the ethics and the all-encompassing emergence of the aesthetics, so that the delight of imagination is replaced by the hegemony of ideology. While staging love as the catalyst of culture, Takarazuka Revue productions adapt to the new historical circumstances and hardly allow for illusions. They now reflect the needs and compulsions of a new era lacking centres or borders. The economic disaster and political discomfort, while confronting the international community, correspond to the socio-emotional conditions of disenchantment, dislocation, solitude and cultural confusion. Without attempting to obtrusively display models to imitate or paths to follow, Takarazuka Revue-labelled blockbusters penetrate nowadays more than ever the public consciousness, domestic as well as overseas. This marketing strategy is a consequence of the Japanese fans' disappointment visible in decreasing sales figures and, in turn, calls for a basic reconsideration of Takarazuka Revue's position within the spectrum of Japanese modern culture—possibly as integral part of a larger world culture.

Love, Hope and Nostalgia: The Tender Individual

Throughout Takarazuka Revue's postwar history and its staging of culture, it was mainly the androgynously charismatic and ambivalent figure of *otokoyaku* that transported its ideals. However, compared to the apparently submissive and conformist *musumeyaku*, the *otokoyaku*'s position suggests a strongly dialectical movement between traditional role models and innovative consumption patterns. To begin with, one recalls Kobayashi Ichizō's statement that audiences should desire the *otokoyaku*, but identify themselves with *musumeyaku* (Kobayashi 1955: 37).¹⁷ Furthermore, it was especially during the "exuberant 1970s" (Castells 1997: 228), that current identificatory models became predominant, so that the objectivisation of the *otokoyaku* as an entity of desire and site of projection—to use Julia Kristeva's (1974: 273) terminology—transformed the *otokoyaku* from a model of male presence into a mirror of female identity projections. Starting with Oscar from *The Rose of Versailles*, every *otokoyaku* abandons the sphere of her own identity and accedes to the public space; she

metamorphoses into a symbol for something which she cannot possibly be and she must obey the limits, rules and circumstances imposed upon her from the outside. Like Don Quixote in another spatial and temporal culture—who, in the second part of the novel meets persons having already read the first part of the novel, and who must be faithful to the book which he has himself become and protect it from misapprehensions, counterfeits and apocryphal continuations, to paraphrase Michel Foucault (1966: 73)—an *otokoyaku* must follow her own discourse and transform herself into an object of the process which she herself as a subject had originally created.

An important element in creating the *otokoyaku* as existential alternative is the *otaku* phenomenon regarded as emblematic for the so-called crisis of maleness in late modern, highly industrialised nations. In modern Japanese slang, an *otaku* describes an obsessive fan of different forms of subcultural models and fashions. Contrary to the established cliché, those described as *otaku* seem to have once been ambitious boys who were particularly affected by the loss of faith in science and technology in the 1970s, as Morikawa Kaichirō (2003: 86) observes. Takarazuka Revue's *otokoyaku* presents a credible counter-image to all current relativising social and gender roles, positions as well as sexualities and identities. To the disempowered maleness represented by *otaku*, Takarazuka Revue's *otokoyaku* reacts with romantic maleness clinging to classical elements of male existence. As an ideal of the new male in female imagination, the *otokoyaku* ideologically embodies a male figure which, on a physical level, collects externally all the characteristics of male idols from Clark Gable to James Dean and Elvis Presley (strong bodies, compact attitudes, power and elegance) and possesses internally all kinds of positive qualities (composed, courteous, kind, considerate, faithful and brave). Such an amalgam penetrates Japanese characters as well, exemplified by Hikaru Genji in various productions or Sakamoto Ryōma (*Ishin-kaiten: Ryōma-den!* [Sketches from the Life of Sakamoto Ryōma], 2006).¹⁸ However, an *otokoyaku* may not simply contain all these characteristics like a statue, but she must show weakness along the course of her development and must reach the right decision at the right moment—even when this causes pain, according to the centuries-old samurai codex still present in the consciousness of most audiences (Etō et al. 2007: 184). As a blatant antagonism to the image of the *otaku*, which is by now omnipresent in Japan and from Japan spreading worldwide, the *otokoyaku* version of the male essence appears as a charismatic individual capable of abnegation and sacrifice, as fans repeatedly underline in their statements. The almost irrationally passionate José (*Carmen*, 1946) will be replaced by the down-to-earth personality of Curly McLain (*Oklahoma!* [*Okurahoma!*], 1967, based on Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's musical from 1943) whose role, as a new model of male existence, is to provide material support and moral orientation to his fellows. Starting with Oscar François de

Jarjayes (*The Rose of Versailles*, 1974), one notices a division of *otokoyaku* figures.

On one hand, there is a sensible enfeeblement of male ideals, inaugurated by Hans Axel von Fersen (Marie Antoinette's lover from *The Rose of Versailles*) and his inability to save his pride as well as his lover from the storms of destiny. On the other hand, Rhett Butler (*Gone with the Wind*, 1976) is a pathetic character expressing the dissolution of identity borders and the declining definition of humanity in the consumer society: in spite of his aggressive maleness, he is unable to possess the woman he loves and is eventually compelled to give her up. There is the futile attempt in the 1980s for a last revitalisation of male ideals in the figure of Bill Snibson (*Me and My Girl*, 1987, based on the musical by Douglas Furber, L. Arthur Rose and Noel Gay from 1937); however, he is an import from prewar Great Britain with its artificially preserved aristocracy. The charismatic, extroverted *Tōto* (German: Tod), interpreted as a death god (*shinigami*) in the Takarazuka Revue adaptation *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love and Death* (1996) of the Vienna-premiere *Elisabeth* (1992), expresses the failure to reinforce clear ideals in the here and now, followed by the Shinto god of the sea and storm Susano-o (from the eponymous performance in 2004) who accentuates the crisis of the human being in the era of general liquefactions: of culture, of identity and of gender (Grajidian 2009: 274; see Bauman 2000: 131). Nevertheless, the employment of classical, archetypal characters as symbolised by Shirasu Jirō (*Reimei no kaze: Samurai-jentoruman Shirasu Jirō no chōsen* [A Morning Breeze: The Challenge of Jirō Shirasu, the Samurai-gentleman], 2008), one of the most important businessmen in postwar Japan, means the acute re-actualisation of the *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western knowledge/technology) slogan which he embodies in his synthetic figure. Though educated at famous schools in England, Shirasu Jirō bares his soul for Japan's welfare and defies Douglas MacArthur with the words: "Japan has lost the war, but that doesn't mean Japan has been enslaved." He dashes like a "morning breeze" through the turbulent twentieth century, firmly determined to devote himself entirely to Japan's postwar reconstruction and to the restoration of its sovereignty—as far as the official advertisement of the performance states. On the backside of this official statement, there is the nearly obtrusive message within his character of a world unified by love and peace, where mutual forgiveness and acceptance should constitute the foundation of a new era, as to be argued further below.

Contrastingly, also starting with Oscar from *The Rose of Versailles*, there is the gradual empowerment of female figures impersonated by *otokoyaku*, and not by *musumeyaku*, as had been traditionally pre-assigned. Performed by an *otokoyaku*, Oscar herself is a girl raised and educated as a boy in order to inherit and protect the family's name and wealth. Oscar's failure to define his/her own identity in the tumult of history would be

continued by Scarlett O'Hara (*Gone with the Wind*, 1976) symbolising the strong, self-made woman of modernity and her overwhelming energy which erases prejudices, contradictions and obstacles (Kawasaki 1999: 81). Scarlett O'Hara is a crucial moment in Takarazuka Revue's endeavours to define gender and culture: she struggles for the continuity of family and history, but her struggle itself is a negation of traditionally transmitted family and history. Her inner misconception transforms Scarlett O'Hara into a tragic figure unable to attain her ideals and breaking down under their weight. Beyond the materialistic Jacqueline Carstone (*Me and My Girl*, 1987), Aida (*Ōke ni sasagu uta* [A Song for Kingdoms], 2003, based on Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida*, 1871) represents Takarazuka Revue's attempt—and failure—to reinforce clear models: Aida is caught between her love for Radames, who had attacked her country, and her patriotism; her decision to obey her father's orders to save her homeland and, in doing so, to betray Radames and her love for him leads to a catastrophe culminating in the death of all those involved.

Independently if an *otokoyaku* impersonates a male or a female character, her dualism reveals the impossibility of following classical rules of behaviour and identification. Between Shirasu Jirō and Aida, there is the ambivalence of a strong belief in traditional ideals: basically, *otokoyaku* as ideological model and embodiment of self-styled identity confirms the fact pointed out by the *otaku* phenomenon, on a social level, that is, the identity confusion in postwar Japan (Morikawa 2003: 71). The *otaku* is the individual replication of the historically accomplished transition from premodernity to postmodernity without a sufficient modernisation. The *otaku* culture is marked by the conscious abandonment of message and by the focus on media through the projection of one's own emotion upon two-dimensional, symbolic simulacra constituted by separate elements contained in databases, as Azuma Hiroki (1999: 33) puts it. *Otaku's* reality is the reality of his own hand-crafted metaphorical work, not the reality of the general society. It is indeed a romantic, friendly metaphorical work softly melting fantasy and substantiality into one. Takarazuka Revue's *otokoyaku* as desire object and projection site transforms the *otaku* cliché into a hero. The *otokoyaku* reacts with the reinforcement of her position as a mirror of the self and a window to the other while internalising her position as a female impersonator of male figures; in doing so, the *otokoyaku* metamorphoses into a figure of longing and, paradoxically, belonging.

On the other hand, the *musumeyaku* in her aestheticisation of identity patterns strikes, for once, as the stylised parallel to the *shōjo* concept: it is the tolerated competence to fulfil and to represent oneself as an alternative version of femininity. Literally, *shōjo* means "young unmarried woman"; as concept and social phenomenon, the *shōjo* has emerged since the late 1960s in Japan in the historical context of female empowerment as a consumerist phenomenon, and has become emblematically famous in the West as "girl

power" since the mid-1990s (Ōtsuka 1991: 26).¹⁹ While individualism and aggressiveness seem the main characteristics of the phenomenon in the West, the ambivalent *shōjo* figure as an exponent of "girl power" in Japan undermines the generality of cultural and discursive minimal pairs such as male-female, Western-Japanese, innovation-tradition, mass-elite and individual-collective. It's been often argued that Takarazuka Revue and the *shōjo* culture (*shōjo bunka*) emerged simultaneously and developed in parallel, releasing and absorbing mutual influences, with the *takarasienne* being *shōjo*'s most paradigmatic concretisation, and as such, decidedly the *otokoyaku* in her androgynous appearance and due to the discursive-consumerist fetishisation of that very androgynous appearance (see Anan 2011; Uchino 2009). Though, while Kobayashi Ichizō was definitively no feminist and feminist movements were, for him, devious, he was well aware of the power of the female instance in the Japanese culture (Tsuganesawa 1991: 44). The cultural stylisation of Japaneseness in modernity as *shōjo* meant, in the same time, her isolation and exclusion from all active sectors of public life; as an outsider, she didn't have to obey the usual rules dictating roles and behaviour patterns—like marriage, for instance, as to *shōjo*, marriage equals limitation through maturation. The culmination of Japaneseness stylisation in late modernity as *musumeyaku*'s valid embodiment of the *wakon yōsai* slogan and her transformation into an existential model involved the instrumentalisation of the *takarasienne* as a status symbol: the *musumeyaku* represents herself, she is free in her never-ageing, deep femininity—but, in her case, there is no question of a moratorium or a Peter Pan complex or of the fear of entering the grown-ups' world; instead, there is the profoundly conscious refusal to do so. In refusing the grown-ups' world, the *musumeyaku* attempts—and manages—to stay active, powerful and self-determining (see Ōtsuka 1991: 112). In contrast to the conventional *shōjo* in works of other fields of Japanese popular culture such as anime or manga, the Takarazuka Revue's *musumeyaku* is powerful and self-confident without being sexually objectified and without losing her humanity in the empowerment process, by metamorphosing into a monster or a cyborg (see Haraway 1991: 75–79). The simultaneous exhibition of power and cuteness in Takarazuka Revue's *musumeyaku* relates to both her consumerist and her self-stylising roles as two sides of the same coin: the *musumeyaku* answers with open femininity instead of aggressive, blatant sexuality, as often the *shōjo* does in anime or manga works—and behaves according to her own rules within the crumbling patriarchal system. Herein lies the reason why the *shōjo* alternative as embodied by the *musumeyaku* in Takarazuka Revue may seem strong, but not so strong so that her femininity breaks down. Basically, she must feature the traces of her future motherhood—and this is where her definitive power hides, in contrast to the traditional stereotype, in the West

as well as in Japan, that motherhood and sexual satisfaction equal disempowerment.

Musumeyaku's cuteness and submissive appearance as a female identity ideal could be interpreted as a response to the crisis of femininity in late modernity corresponding to the previously mentioned crisis of masculinity in postwar Japan and spreading worldwide. As precursor of socio-cultural phenomena, Takarazuka Revue strove to design a fresh femininity ideal backed by traditional concepts embodied in the *musumeyaku*: dignified submission, intelligent discretion, physical beauty and moral purity. *Musumeyaku* was supposed to be a reflection of male desire and, as such, more of a remembrance in the male memory than an active presence (Kawasaki 2005: 18). However, the performance practice transformed *otokoyaku's* cool reticence and *musumeyaku's* cute submission into behaviour models and identification ideals without including resistance as an alternative existential model. Until *Marie Antoinette (The Rose of Versailles, 1974)*, female characters followed the classical pattern of supporting their male counterparts. *The Rose of Versailles* presented, for the first time in Takarazuka Revue's performance history, a forbidden love story, doomed to fail due to social and historical hindrances. Marie Antoinette's execution—the execution scene is, in itself, a milestone in the history of the aestheticisation of reality—would represent a crucial moment in the ideological turnover of moral ideals (Ishii et al. 1996: 28–31). Thereupon, Melanie Hamilton (*Gone with the Wind, 1976*) unconsciously supports and leads her weak, though charming, husband Ashley Wilkes, but her premature death leaves him in a state of complete prostration, unable to continue living by himself. The transition from this motherly female figure, incapable yet of developing herself and protecting those around her, into a self-confident, egoistic and self-centred person would be attained in the figure of Elisabeth (in *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love and Death, 1996*) who, as cult-empress Sisi, derives her power and charisma from the rejection of traditional images and roles and defies both her husband, emperor Franz Joseph and *Tōto* (i.e., death) while determining her destiny and status. However, her incompetence at saving her own son from suicide in spite of her political visionarism transforms her into a pathetic figure; successful fulfilling of state-relevant attributions does not compensate for her failure to accomplish basic motherly tasks which are—the audience is indirectly told—the real function of a woman (Kawasaki 1999: 142). This return to the *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideal, while staging Western performances, continues with Christine's character (*The Phantom, 2004*); here the lover is patterned upon the image of a deceased mother. Still, Erik's obsession with superimposing these two beloved appearances—his own memories of his deceased mother and the real existant figure of a beloved woman—hinders Christine's efforts to drag him out of his world of darkness and hatred and leads ultimately to her failure to save him—and to his death.

This process of staging the inability of female individuals to support and save a beloved partner would eventually reach an end point in Gubijin's character (from the eponymous re-staging of the 1951 performance in 2010) where Gubijin prefers to kill herself when there is only slavery left as a possibility, thus compelling Kō U (aka Xiang Yu) to accept his defeat and to commit suicide, as well. The loss of faith—in self and in others—seems to be a crucial standpoint in a world where the dissolution of centres and the enlargement of borders induce the effacement of individual actors within masses.

The enfeeblement of the female characters as interpreted by *musumeyaku* compensates for the empowerment of female characters performed by *otokoyaku*. Gradually, *musumeyaku* female characters would metamorphose into bare decoration, lacking their own will, ideas or personality. However, in combination with the *otokoyaku* female characters, the *musumeyaku* would develop, propagate and implement a new form of femininity to compete with the insufficiency of ideological models and aesthetic credos in late modern Japan: this femininity ideal as staged by the *takarasienne* and as an alternative to the prevalent *shōjo* model is, though, simultaneously anti and pro establishment (Ōtsuka 1991: 184). Her ideological ambivalence relates to the potentially subversive plots and conformist solutions. In an increasingly disenchanted world, the possibility became obvious that *musumeyaku* could represent an emotional ideal to using her own feelings as engine of self-fulfilment. This is a very important switch which confers women as potential mothers and educators a previously underestimated power most evident in *musumeyaku*'s discreet elegance and composed submission: they are the Takarazuka Revue-like—and by extension: the Japanese—versions of Meinhard Miegel's (2007: 29) new forms of "assiduity and modesty" (*Fleiß und Bescheidenheit*) as basic principles of an innovative, future oriented interaction with the middle-class ideals.

Pragmatism and Solidarity: The Strategic Society

Otokoyaku is an ideological construction mirroring female desires and expectations—and as such, she is an illusionary identity which can never be attained. Fans' fulfilment in the imaginary world should confirm to the *otokoyaku*'s magic, but also place them on the *musumeyaku*'s level (Kawasaki 2005: 105–108). In recent performances, the overcoming of a capitalist human ideal ("[someone] who is prudently restrained in the office and wildly anarchic in the shopping mall," Eagleton 2003: 28) and the turning of the spotlight towards more normative concerns like the integration of the individual within the community, the importance of the family, the nostalgic depiction of one's homeland, the enhancement of

money and career as a means of making a living and not as an ultimate existential goal, and the moderate patriotism—however arguable they might be elsewhere—gradually led to the formulation of a fresh culture paradigm as a self-reflexive project to harmoniously unify lucidity and compassion, courage and perseverance, sincerity and respect: this seems to be the core structure of the *homo tener*, the tender human, calling for a (more) affectionate relationship with the self and the other. The emergence of a new identity paradigm based on tenderness (*yasashisa*) calls for a fresh, dynamic manipulation of middle-class ideals through the restructuring of emotional values; simultaneously, the fundamental reconsideration of Takarazuka Revue's position within the spectrum of Japanese modern culture as a possibly integral part of a larger world culture rests upon its administrators' awareness that incorporative isolation is no alternative to indiscriminate internationalisation. This dialectic handling of the self and of the other requires, according to the existential model promoted by Takarazuka Revue, a re-evaluation of humanity, not as a competitive undertaking, but as a playful togetherness.

It is perhaps too early to connect Appadurai's hopeful vision of a political future of imaginary communities based on global, medial reception to the ability to move from individual imagination to collective action and to develop convergent lines within translocal social action. The prevalent question—by which means individual subjectivities, already challenged in the global medial environment, should be channelled towards collective, imaginary or not, communities—persists unanswered (see Appadurai 1996:11). Nevertheless, even the implication within global media texts or within discursive entities of the role played by remembrance and imagination to create alternatives to the present means political implication in a personal, still effective way, in the era of on-going turbo-globalisation—as Takarazuka Revue performances do. In the late-modern age and from the other end of the world, Takarazuka Revue as popular-cultural phenomenon tells stories about identity awareness and about the inevitable necessity to internalise historical impulses in order to nudge the locomotion of culture, as culture no longer emerges in the material world, but rather within the individual, and is stored as the expression of repressed drives and desires deep within the individual subconscious (see Bauman 2002: 32; Eagleton 2003: 88). Takarazuka Revue resists to the repression tendencies of culture in its historical progression and lends a mode of expression to the suppressed action in the performance practice; in doing so, it mediates between Marx's class struggle and Freud's doctrine of the drives conflict; it appeases the altercation between individual and society, nature and culture, drives' requirements and drives' denials, ultimately between eros and thanatos (see Bauman 1997: 90, Satô1992: 66).

While observing the newest tendency of Western popular culture—disillusioned, cynical, disenchanting, in one word: intellectualised—it

becomes obvious that the function of the popular culture as a means to carry and transmit general ideals reached a problematic anti-climax by the second turn of the millennium, as the dreams of the New Economy definitively imploded and the illusion of the never-ending economic growth and political empowerment dissipated for good. Individuals within the societies of late modern, highly industrialised nations—and Japan, par excellence—were compelled to take notice of the side-effects of the material wealth, which had got out of control and had led to ignoring important issues (Miegel 2007: 124): not only the great area of the philosophic, religious and playful dimensions of life, but also the apparently inconspicuous domains of the family, friendships, neighbourhoods, the societal structure altogether—and somehow paradoxically, the individual as a specific self. The monomaniac fixation on the technical and economic field had led, indeed, to an unprecedented cumulation of material wealth, while simultaneously impoverishing the individual person exactly on the field of those things which cannot be bought with money (Bauman 2001a: 36; 2001b: 22): in his material and ideological independency, the sole individual became emotionally more dependent than ever before on issues he—and the society—cannot pay or afford any longer, such as love, family, the feeling of belonging and security as opposed to economic and political achievements (see Miegel 2007: 160). The exhibition of these parameters on the Takarazuka Revue stage, on one hand, and the meta-theatrical family-like structure of the Takarazuka Revue institution, on the other hand, leads to the reconsideration of the "freedom within security" ideal (see Doi 1981: 24): freedom implies respect towards the former generations and responsibility towards the next generations, loyalty towards one's fellowmen, and most of all, a respectful consideration of life as the most important thing one possesses. Thus, Takarazuka Revue represents love and the love of life as investments into the future and tells of a possible re-enchantment of a sober, rather than disenchanting world. This process started shortly after the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1968) had experienced an unusual success during the boom of the 1968s movement together with its rationalisation of the myths as the climax of the Enlightenment ideology in the West. Back then, in 1974, the performance *The Rose of Versailles* was staged as world premiere and registered a huge success. It has been argued that the resulting overwhelming popularity of the Takarazuka Revue was a consequence of the specific return to the aesthetics of the baroque as a world of colourful, round forms and of superficial, accessible contents (Kawasaki/Watanabe 1991: 27, see Robertson 1998: 77f.). Yet, more than simply returning to past aesthetics, *The Rose of Versailles* as a typical product of media transfer, from manga to theatre performance, followed by anime and live-action movie, marked that irreversible U-turn in Takarazuka Revue's postwar development, leading instantaneously to the transformation of the Takarazuka Revue into a intrinsically syncretic medium, more than

ever highlighting its emergence and evolution at the dialectic intersection between classical Japanese stage tradition(s) and Disney's fantasy worlds.²⁰ In an era in which identity as a dynamic conglomerate permanently negotiated on an individual and national level progressively became a scenic issue, flamboyantly displayed in the all-encompassing consumption society, Takarazuka Revue followed subsequently its route of a pragmatic medium, creatively coping with the overwhelming flows of information while distinctly encapsulating solid patterns of knowledge. Thus, Takarazuka Revue's visuality as a medium being potentially, infinitely enhanced by means of musical formulation(s) evolved gradually to the status of a messenger of Japanese cultural assets to the world at large, while simultaneously reflecting the increasing historical-geographical awareness of an inter-Asian spiritual community.

Thirty years after the world premiere of *The Rose of Versailles*, in 2004, the main character Susano-o in the eponymous performance designs a temporal-spatial extension of Oscar's multi-layered ambiguity: (old) Japan as link between the East and the West, most obvious in the title song *Yamato*²¹ —*The Departure (Yamato—Tabitachi)*. Though deep-going developments during last decades left an ineffaceable trace on the Japanese society, Susano-o, the Shinto-god of the wind and the sea, speaks in times of dissolving identities of the unifying power of mythological Japan, proving that culture, as morality or love, as well, is a purely socio-historical concept and in no way a transcendental vision of the universe. Particularly the Takarazuka Revue productions since the beginning of the new millennium seem part of a bigger project of the myths and illusions revision (see Azuma 2001: 21; Satô 1992:14). They resist to configure the human being as a dual structure composed of a positive and a negative, of a rational and an emotional side; they don't dwell any longer on the question where culture ends—or begins—and where its other, the disturbing and the destructive unknown, begins—or ends. Instead, such Takarazuka Revue productions as *Lucifer's Tears (Datenshi no namida, 2006)* celebrate the evil within the human: the tone of the eponymous title song evokes the failure of the culture, the incompatibility between human impulses and culture's requirements, and speaks in a melancholic, dark mood reminiscent of Arthur Schopenhauer of the loss of the collective consciousness as a journey towards one's most intimate self (see Etō et al. 2007: 299). It reminds of what had been long forgotten until "3/11": In the aftermath of major conflagrations or natural disasters, the hardship of reconstruction included the chance to revise the importance of the community, and to gather common memories in the process. Such experiences of common hardships were long lost, until "3/11" occurred, as it seemed there was indeed nothing to fight for. Lost was, however, the fascination of the ascension, as well (see Bauman 1992b: 87; Miegel 2007: 78–80). In deep melancholy, one used to look back and felt uneasiness in front of the future as a long and unfulfilling

journey, as if there were no more sunrises and, apparently, the sun was only setting at night. The explicit, basic message of the performance *Gone with the Wind* as transmitted by the song *Tommorow, I Shall Be Sad Tomorrow* (*Kanashimi ha ashita ni shiyō*) becomes in the light of recent incidents more acute than at the time of its premiere (1976), reminding that the sunset is the fundamental condition for the sun to rise the next morning, and underlining the fact that, in order to survive spiritually, the human being needs love and hope as well as the consistent feeling of belonging.

While the repressive power of culture insists on the internalisation of aggression as a form of "I"-constitution and on the naturalisation of fear due to loss of love as a survival mechanism, the resulting solitude of the individual within the social network is dynamically challenged by Takarazuka Revue as a system developed historically and integrated organically in the space of the Japanese society. In a world acclaiming more than ever the ephemeral momentum, as if there would be no future, Takarazuka Revue and its protagonists—actresses as well as fans—celebrate in advance its 100th, 200th and even 1000th anniversary. Basically, it doesn't share the disbelief in the future typical for late modernity (see Miegel 2007: 171). In the same way as in the past, when people all over the world could be fairly sure that their descendants would complete the churches, monasteries, temples and palaces initiated by them, the Takarazuka Revue managers and fans as well as *takarasiennes* are firmly positive that their efforts would be continued in that small location north-west of Osaka: "This is the system in which one takes over the responsibility not only to teach [the contents] to the junior students [*kōhai*], but rather to communicate it" (Fukagai 1997: 75). In opposition to the typical volatility of late modernity, this is the faith in the continuation of a traditionally transmitted system which had been constructed with respect, responsibility, loyalty—in short: with mature, self-confident and self-reflexive love—as well as with assiduity and foresight.

Both through its pragmatic acknowledgement of socio-cultural realities and its clear promotion of solidarity as solution to politico-economical adversities, Takarazuka Revue displays an alternative type of Enlightenment on the historical stage celebrating the epic story of individual life as unique and unrepeatable event: the basic module of thematically very different Takarazuka Revue productions such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Lucifer's Tears*, *The Restoration's Change: [Sakamoto] Ryōma's Biography*, *Akechi Kogorō's Incident Report: The Black Lizard (Akechi Kogorō no Jikenbo: Kurotokage, 2007)* or *A Kiss to the Flames (Honō ni kuchizuke, 2005)* is the request "Live!" ("Ikero!"). Starting with the basic philosophy of the Takarazuka Revue performance *Higher than the Sky over Paris (Pari no sora yori mo takaku, 2007)*—live in community and re-build the future together—until the casual humour of the Takarazuka Revue performance *Secret Hunter (Shikureto hantā, 2007)*—"How about having

fun on living?"—there is the leitmotiv bluntly vocalised in the performance *A Magician's Adventures* (*Majishan no yūtsu*, 2007): "At any rate, let's have faith!" It is an unusual type of Enlightenment, acclaiming by means of a warm humanism the human being in its unrepeatably uniqueness, in spite of its errors and defeats, highlighting its joys, hopes and dreams, within the repeatable circle of eternity. Unlike classical Enlightenment, this particular form of Enlightenment promoted by Takarazuka Revue doesn't banish the animalistic part within the human by over-sizing the rational part, but rather strives to harmonise them organically (see Miyazaki 2002: 11): it is, in its own specific way, a very radical type of Enlightenment.

The *enfants terribles* of the Takarazuka Revue, with whom an important section of the Japanese and, lately, of the Western audience identifies, are opponents to a generalised social disenchantment movement. In their attempt to liberate the human being from any external, socio-economic, as well as internal, psycho-emotional compulsions, both Marx and Freud militated against the impossibility of real acts and feelings—and proclaimed the virtue of veritably being "oneself." They presented the "logos"—the language, the knowledge, the perception—as the "missing link" between the social reality and the individual subconscious, so that eros and thanatos became two sides of the same coin: love could challenge the death, and thus, activate the positive quest for an authentic solution to the latent conflict between the individual impulses and the social obligations (see Bauman 1991: 85). Neither left nor right in its orchestration of historical reality, Takarazuka Revue displays a world in which theatrical performances go beyond politico-economical convulsions to articulate socio-cultural uncertainties. While one can be anthropologically pessimistic and personally optimistic according to past experiences and present events, the future is still open for positive changes, as humans can still make decisions upon their own destiny. In its dramatic endeavours, Takarazuka Revue takes over the imagination, but not necessarily the voice of the eccentric life, and translates it on the stage. In its performances, the most extreme, individualistic and uncontrollable expression modes and artistic contents circulated through and within the Japanese postwar media: as such, these performances represented a filtered assimilation of controversial feelings and attitudes as euphoria, desire, disappointment, longing, exhaustion, ambition, depression, solitude, weirdness, satire, in a world frowning on the public display of emotions, especially negative ones (Hosokawa 1998: 37; Kawasaki 2005: 39; see Ashihara 1979: 14). In its plots and especially in its characters with their hopes, frustrations, bad tempers, ill-feelings, insecurities, their exaggerated face features as well as their obviously highly stylised body characteristics and reactions—losing consciousness, sweating, bleeding, being obviously excited, shocked, embarrassed, amused—there has been a momentarily glimpse into the contemporary Japanese environment with its over-human self-discipline

mechanisms and strictly controlled mimic expressions (see Sugimoto 1997: 27). Simultaneously, it set into motion an ephemeral liberation movement of the individual from within a social system in which any degree of information and intellectual attention are rather focused on national ideology, corporative organisation, technology and consumption, so that the "real" humans in the immediate reality as well as their creativity are completely overwhelmed. Thus, more than being a parallel dimension to the palpable world, Takarazuka Revue gained truly humanist value and potential through the realistic communication of quotidian attitudes and the artistic examination of subjective issues—in itself an enlightening act beyond consumerist calculations.

CONCLUSION: CULTURE BETWEEN SIGNIFICANT AND SIGNIFIÉ

I started this paper by stating that Japan is redefining superpower as a cultural issue. In the light of its findings, I should reformulate this statement by adding that Japan is redefining superpower through the re-invention of culture as a transcendent endeavour and an orchestration of tenderness as an emergent identity paradigm. The starting point of this analysis was the assumption of Takarazuka Revue's ability to reflect and convert the socio-cultural tendencies of postwar Japan. As a self-proclaimed mirror of the Japanese world, Takarazuka Revue absorbs the current historical tendencies in Japan and transforms them artistically; on the basis of Takarazuka Revue's sketched stages of late modern Japanese culture as well as on its ideological and aesthetic achievements, further forms of canonically accredited mass industries—such as anime, manga, video games, fashion, J-Pop music, SUPERFLAT art and design—generate, propagate and implement new identity paradigms similar to Takarazuka Revue's original model (see Murakami 2000: 11–12). In turn, Takarazuka Revue takes over the current tendencies of Japanese society which had been previously molded by renowned mass industries and develops them artistically, only to be subsequently perpetuated by other forms of Japanese contemporary culture. This appears as an endless, spiral-like process. The arrival point of this analysis seems to be the issue that the stress ratio between *signifié* and significant while dealing with identity paradigms based on tenderness as a new existential mode and as promoted by Takarazuka Revue both in its performances and in its public commercialisation, emerges as the ideological and aesthetic core of a fresh cultural system, to be adopted, reproduced and perpetuated by approved mass-media.

Indifferent as to whether the world described as "a comedy to those who think and a tragedy to those who feel" (in a letter from Horace Walpole

to Sir Horace Mann, 1769, quoted in Bauman 2001b: 54) moves towards its self-orchestrated destruction, and then, again, emerges purified by the apocalyptic experience, Takarazuka Revue stubbornly continues designing cultural patterns as aesthetic-ideological formulations and concretisations of tenderness in its performances and its public exposures. Thus, tenderness as an answer to hatred and war becomes the Japanese contribution to worldwide altercations. Through tenderness as an existential attitude one could re-discover one's own humanity due to a soft(er) interaction with the self and the others; the re-discovery of this lost or forgotten humanity might lead to the regaining of control over one's own life, in opposition to George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (see Bauman 2001b: 97). During the last five years,²² tenderness configures as the symbolic core of a new, dynamic culture paradigm both in Takarazuka Revue's performance practice and in its marketing strategies, leading to the development of fresh life patterns. It is a progressive return to the creatively loaded early 1930s when Kobayashi Ichizō compiled and introduced the Takarazuka Revue motto "*Kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushiku*" as existential slogan. If, as culturally presented in Takarazuka Revue's productions recently, discreet elegance and composed submission become the new social paradigms, then responsibility and courage, assiduity and modesty become the political-economic paradigms implementing the Japanese solution as a life model; balanced by nostalgia as an emotional layer, these existential patterns conditioned by tenderness are the catalyst of cultural revitalisation and the basic principles of a liberal, optimist regeneration of middle-class aspirations (see Miegel 2007: 189). Ultimately, Takarazuka Revue reinforces tenderness emerging from the rightful handling of compassion and hope, lucidity and perseverance as a solution to current problems and misunderstandings within the international community, a correct manipulation of love that can propagate and implement peace, prosperity and happiness. The Japaneseness of such solutions is less stressed in the plots and in the construction of the characters of recent performances; rather, the universality of these aspirations and the necessity of stable culture paradigms in clear historical contexts seem the main issues displayed on-stage and in the marketing campaigns carried publicly. Beyond its stylistic cacophony, ideological inconsistency and aesthetic contradictions, Takarazuka Revue blossoms out incessantly as a romantic world—and first of all, as a world full of longing for romantics. As a dynamic alternative to the modern Japanese everyday life, which is infused with Western influences, dominated by consumerism, suffocated by excess and surplus, Takarazuka Revue offers through the overwhelming display of these parameters—the Western-like appearance of the actresses, consumption-driving marketing strategies, excess and surplus celebrating performance practice—the model of a rigorous, disciplined lifestyle as a means to experience fulfilment focused on important tasks. This model is

concretised in the slender, fragile, shy *takarasienne* attempting a parallel option to the *otaku* figure and an alternate version of the *shōjo* figure as a positive, dialectical, still clearly outlined entity.

Takarazuka Revue synthesises the nowadays world, contradictory in itself, in its symbolic characters: from Oscar and Scarlett O'Hara to Elisabeth and Aida, who are not existing in reality and correspondingly cannot win their struggle for life—but whose fictional victories confer hope for individual battle in here and now. It is an "here and now" located beyond prevailing lifestyle models, where neither the absolute dualism originating from the Western, Jewish-Christian influenced world nor the polytheist complexity of the Asian space might co-exist, so that redemption, eternity and love appear as repeatable phenomena within the circle of imaginable history writings. Love as "security within freedom," as protection in times of turmoil and of excessive challenges, is by no means a one-time issue, but rather a complex, multi-layered experience within the repeatability of life as liberation endeavour, as Sartre had famously put it: "*L'homme est libre, l'homme est liberté. [...] L'homme est condamné à être libre. [...] Agir sans espoir. Mais agir. L'homme est engagement, responsabilité pour l'avenir, doit choisir et rester derrière son choix*" (Sartre 1970: 47–54).

The *takarasienne*, the credible alternative to late-modern diluted versions of femininity and masculinity as represented by *shōjo* and *otaku*, is the main agent of this message: individual freedom and individual responsibility as the foundation of a social structure based on love, and replacing the cold, rational primacy of culture with a warm humanism celebrating tenderness as interpersonal bond. When, in the disenchanted Japan at the dawn of the new millennium, the romantic tale of *The Rose of Versailles: Fersen and Marie Antoinette* (*Berusaiyu no bara: Ferusen to Marî Antowanetto*, 2001) was performed again, the repeatability of stage representations became, eventually, the denial of the final escape from reality and death, and included the message of Japan's quotidian state of alert after the brutal events of the 1990s. One of the title songs, *Pilgrim of Love* (*Ai no junrei*), from the era of Japan's marvellous economic growth, played the active witness of the faith, back then, in the pink-coloured future of the country (see Ashihara 1979: 126). The sad bitterness of this song, though, exposes the status quo—so "cool" that it borders to cruelty—sent in a symbolic gesture by an unsettled Japan via Oscar's complex character to the dreamy Japan of the 1970s: Japan's faith in its own missionarism in the world seems to have been dissolved by a brutal awakening process along with unforeseeable historical events, being replaced by indifference in the name of cultural self-preservation (Orihashi 1981: 239).

Beyond the desire and the quest for a dialectically totalising and unifying "experience" *à la* Hegel, there is the question whether it is possible in the contemporary world to strive for a common, homogeneous goal of history and for a unique, subject-coherent-in-itself. The world coined by

Takarazuka Revue represents a clear and ambitious ascertainment form of the illusion that a primordial subject and an uni-dimensional history are possible—and both of them have their roots in a mythical past and carry their fruits into a "pure" future: "[It] is the proof that there is no [empty] illusion, but rather that one can aim [as individual or as nation] at the 'Japanese dream' [via Takarazuka Revue]." (Etō et al. 2007: 29). The Takarazuka Revue's dramaturgic contradictions as well as its consistent aesthetics confront the spectator with the fragmentation of the culture and its separation from life in the modern world, obvious in the abyss between the discourses of knowledge, ethics and politics—an abyss which, as Habermas once thought, could be overcome through arts and the "experience" mediated by arts (Habermas 1981: I/28; Lyotard 1979: 88). At the same time, Takarazuka Revue functions as counterforce to current liquefaction tendencies of identity-building mechanisms due to the solid foundation of its ideology to re-evaluate "life" as the most important "thing" one possesses. At the confluence of these parallel processes, there is Japan's position as popular-cultural Mecca, highly disturbing in its confusing diversity: between the supporters of the cultural mixture of Japanese and Western styles and the supporters of the cultural direct import—*wayôsetchô* respectively *hokuyunyû* (Watanabe 2002: 127)—between Asia-phily and Asia-phoby (*Ajia he no hen'ai* respectively *Ajia kyôfushô*; Kusanagi 2003: 23f.)—the utopia of mutual acknowledgement emerges and challenges both the illusion of a history-coherent-in-itself and the hope of a contradiction-free constitution of the late-modern individual.

Within the task of culture stylisation in contemporary Japan, Takarazuka Revue operates via its main agent, the *takarasienne*, who appears simultaneously as the essence of the Japaneseness and as a chaos-driving force within the traditional patriarchal order, and this in spite of her traditional, familist education, due to the powerful liberation symbols she is loaded with. However, for the creation of a singular, univocal, autonomous cultural paradigm compatible with late-modern challenges, such a disturbing instance is inevitable. The disorder permanently insinuated by the *takarasienne* in the tension between *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* on an individual level and then extended on a national and global level, mirrors the instability and ambiguity of the Japanese modernity as a reputed monolith. Eventually, 100 years after its foundation, Takarazuka Revue seems to have become what its founder Kobayashi Ichizō dreamed of: the self-conscious icon of modern Japan, a unique synthesis of Japanese spirit and Western technology/knowledge, emblematically embodied by the ambivalent, fascinating and mysterious figure of the *takarasienne*.

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NOTES

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¹ "Superpower" is referred to as a nation-state able to propagate and protect its own interests on a transnational level within the increasing multilateral interdependence between nation-states at the turn of the millennium—via cultural assets (Castells 1997: 262–269; see also McGray 2002: 45).

² "Cultural imperialism" here refers to the process by which nation-specific cultural elements and structures are propagated and implemented via cultural assets in and outside the geographical borders of that very nation. The basic difference between this and classical soft power endeavours consists of the stress on culture, and not on nation, which is in contrast to Japanese wartime (cultural) imperialism.

³ In a basic assumption, "love" is to be regarded as a catalyst of "rites of passage" (Willem van Genep/Victor Turner) and as a foundation of human existence. Love guides initiation trips for overcoming the self and liberation from one's own, self-inflicted immaturity through the separation

- from the real world, and temporary admittance within a liminal space before being accepted in a new order (Grajdian 2009: 33; see Turner 1968: 72).
- ⁴ However, as to be shown in the latter part of the analysis, there is a sensible shift from the historical manifestation of cultural imperialism in the prewar era, consisting of intensive efforts to "Japanise" Asia and the world, turning in the postwar era, especially in its late phase, towards Japan's consciously active, gradual integration within Asia as a spiritual community, bound by historical and geographical conditions (see Azuma 2012: E65–E68).
- ⁵ According to the prevalent terminology, the *otokoyaku* could also be called "male impersonator" as a counterpart to the description "female impersonator" often used when a male actor is impersonating a female (e.g., the *onnagata* in Kabuki), but the formulation "female interpreters of male roles" in *otokoyaku's* case might be clearer in this context.
- ⁶ My own previous publications on Takarazuka Revue dealt with different aspects of this phenomenon: its historical-systematic delimitation within the context of Japanese stage arts while employing Judith Butler's gender theory (2005); the in-depth analysis of the concept of "love" as staged by Takarazuka Revue as catalyst of a new identity paradigm in late modernity on the basis of socio-philosophical findings by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jean-François Lyotard, Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells (2009); the project of identity (re-)solidification based on Zygmunt Bauman's idea of "liquid love" or "liquid modernity" (2011a) and the concept of "temporary authenticity" as means to negotiate identity patterns within the dynamic conglomerate of the modernisation process in Japan (2011b) as well as the determination of *otokoyaku's* formation from a musical perspective while employing ethnomusicological theories and methods (2012) were further research focuses of my examination of Takarazuka Revue, so far.
- ⁷ In the following lines, I use the word "actress" to refer generally to Takarazuka Revue performers. The Japanese word used in the Takarazuka Revue specific terminology is *seito*, usually translated as "pupil" or "student"; the employment of the *seito* notion to describe the Takarazuka Revue actresses alludes to the fact that, while active in the Takarazuka Revue enterprise and on its stage, the actresses' status is equals to beginners in the traditional order—a status which they can only overcome when they finish their career as *takarasiennes* and enter the "real world" of the grown-ups (Ueda 1976: 37). "*Takarasienne*" is another name for Takarazuka Revue actresses introduced by the director Shirai Tetsuzō who compared the cute Takarazuka Revue actresses with the beautiful Parisiennes at the Moulin Rouge (Hashimoto 1999: 11).
- ⁸ I refer to the term "aesthetics" as employed by Terry Eagleton and later completed by Gernot Böhme. In this reading, aesthetics connects less to beauty as an abstract, independent principle, but as the perception and processing of that very beauty as expressed in the concept of "atmosphere" (Böhme 1995: 35–47; see Eagleton 1990: 19).
- ⁹ I use "ideology" as referred to by Terry Eagleton and further enriched by Slavoj Žižek: the fetishisation of the logos—that is, of the language and of the ideas behind the words—to the disadvantage of the practical, quotidian dimension of life (Eagleton 1990: 16; Žižek 1989: 78).
- ¹⁰ The four basic theses of this "new aesthetics" to define "culture" in late modernity are to be conceptualised as it follows (Böhme 1995: 18–22): (1) Late modernity is a theatrical era, a new baroque; (2) "Atmospheres," as to be perceived via ambiances, things and human beings, are the main topic of aesthetics as the research of the correlation between the qualities of ambiances and existential orientations; (3) Art loses its status as the primary focus of the aesthetics and becomes solely a special form, among others, of the aesthetic work; and (4) In late modernity, the relation between theory and practice revolves: architects and designers inspire through their work the aesthetic theory, instead of using aesthetic theory as foundation and orientation.
- ¹¹ Kobayashi Ichizō (1873–1957), Japanese industrialist and politician, was one of the most influential and progressive entrepreneurs in prewar Japan. He is best known as the founder of the Hankyū Railway Company in 1907 with its main terminal at Umeda station in Osaka and for his successful development of the railway infrastructure in an adverse region in the northern part of Kansai (West-Japan) through the implementation of residential areas along the railway line, an amusement park, a department store at the railway terminal as well as, in time, the main attraction: the Takarazuka Grand Theater in Takarazuka (Iwahori 1972: 47; Watanabe 1999: 39).
- ¹² Within the conglomerate of Japanese classical stage arts, Nō and Kabuki are important reference genres, with their highly stylized gender representation, cross-gender performance and syncretic display. When Kobayashi Ichizō settled the groundwork for Takarazuka Revue as popular

- entertainment institution, he took into account multiple cultural tendencies which dominated his time. Thus, he was not strongly influenced by the concept of "Gesamtkunstwerk" ("total work of art," made famous by and attributed to Richard Wagner), but also conceived Takarazuka Revue as a reaction to the so-called "movement of the citizens' theatre" (*kokumin 'engekiundō*, represented mainly by Ōyama Isao and Iizuka Tomoichirō; see Takaoka 1943: 194): indeed, Takarazuka Revue was often described as "new citizens' theatre" (*shinkokumingeki*). While Kobayashi strictly dismissed traditional Japanese music as inappropriate to carry the modern Japanese life ethos, he incorporated in his vision of a people's theatre the idea of *daigekijōshugi*, the principle of the grand theatre as building, so that the combination of Western performance technology and Japanese performance contents resulted into the extremely eclectic Takarazuka Revue, a sparkling entertainment form emerging from the world of *koten* (Japanese classic) and overcoming its limitations, historical as well as geographical (Grajdian 2005: 77–78, 115; Tsuganesawa 1991: 26–35).
- ¹³ While it is true that Japanese popular culture—especially anime and manga—abounds with dark, depressing, even psychotically tinged visions, fans and experts repeatedly mentioned the subliminally omnipresent message of "love, hope and trust" transported by Japanese subcultural products (see Drazen 2003: 36).
- ¹⁴ Especially Tezuka Osamu's works, in which this aesthetics predominates, functioned as the main means of propagating and implementing the "long legs and big eyes" beauty ideal in the Japanese everyday life. I argue that besides his undeniable affinity to American animation (Walt Disney, Max Fleischer), it was rather the pre-existence of this aesthetic in the Japanese cultural environment, specifically represented by the strong popularity level that Takarazuka Revue had already attained, that induced Tezuka Osamu—a declared fan of Takarazuka Revue—to take this aesthetic over and transform it into a national hallmark, as repeatedly stated by anime producers/directors and fans in interviews (see Tsuganesawa 2006:11).
- ¹⁵ For a detailed history of Takarazuka Revue, see Robertson 1998: 28–36 and Grajdian 2009: 365–383.
- ¹⁶ There is a permanent disenchantment process downwards to an increasingly pessimistic worldview and existential vision, culminating in such technical-formal productions as *Hi no tori* (The Phoenix, 1994, based on Tezuka Osamu's manga), *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love and Death* (*Erizabēto: Ai to shi no Rondo*, 1996, based on Michael Kunze and Sylvester Levay's musical from 1992), *The Phantom* (*Fantomu*, 2004, based on Maury Yeston and Arthur Kopit's musical from 1991 inspired by Gaston Leroux' novel *The Phantom of the Opera*, 1910) or *Gubijin* (The Beautiful Gu, 2010). The few rays of hope and light in such performances as *Kokkyō no nai chizu* (The Map Without Borders, 1995), *Puraha no Haru* (The Spring in Prague, 2002) or *Paradaisu purinsu* (Paradise Prince, 2008) are unexpected exceptions in an ideological-aesthetic environment dominated by lack of enthusiasm and courage, inspiring the experience of culture, momentarily and individually (see Bauman 2001a: 35; Bauman 2001b: 74).
- ¹⁷ Though Kobayashi's original intention was to develop Takarazuka Revue into an entertainment place for the whole family, the audiences, intriguingly enough, eventually became 95 percent female (e.g., the Takarazuka Revue theatre in Tokyo was nicknamed *katei kyōraku no dendō*, a temple of family entertainment; Hashimoto 1999: 29).
- ¹⁸ The fact that approximately two-thirds of the performances are Western-influenced and one-third refers to Asian sources is in particular reflected in the costumes and scenery designs, but the characters' inner and outer configuration stays basically unchanged: their ethnical affiliation and historical contextualisation are to be extracted from the plot and the audience's background expectations rather than from the obvious stage representation and public commercialisation.
- ¹⁹ The *shōjo* meaning "girl" as a delimited social group emerged at the dawn of the 20th century in Japan; a range of *shōjo* magazines aiming mostly at educational goals via comic strips were published as early as 1902 *Shōjo-kai* (Girls' World), 1906 *Shōjo sekai* (Girls' World) and 1908 *Shōjo no tomo* (Girls' Friend). As WWII progressed, magazines containing comics, and especially those referring to *shōjo* readership, perhaps regarded as frivolous, began to disappear (Takarazuka Revue itself was called between 1919 and 1940 Takarazuka Shōjo Kageki[dan]: Takarazuka Girls Revue [Company]). In the postwar era, the *shōjo* concept underwent an abrupt revitalisation followed by a spectacular re-semanticisation process in domestic subcultures, in the course of which it was loaded with the current meaning of "liberated, empowered young unmarried woman." The *shōjo* was originally represented in anime and manga works and subsequently migrated to other fields of (popular) culture(s) (see Schodt

1986: 32). In this paper, I refer exclusively to the postwar semantic sphere of the *shōjo*, unless otherwise noted.

²⁰ The performance *The Rose of Versailles* itself is a quite complicated issue as a case of media transfer, being originally a manga work published between 1972–1973 by Ikeda Riyoko, transformed by Takarazuka Revue in a theatre performance under the direction of Ueda Shinji in 1974, to become in 1979 a popular TV anime series directed by Dezaki Osamu, and to be taken over, eventually, by the French director Jacques Démy who released the live-action movie *Lady Oscar* in 1979.

²¹ "Yamato" is the official denomination of Old Japan.

²² Approximately in 2006 ended the last "golden age" marked by a cluster of high-quality *topstar-otokoyaku* actresses. Ever since, Takarazuka Revue seems to experience a pronounced decline, leading to the obvious aesthetic-ideological crisis of the last three years.