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Four contemporary Japanese women's theatre groups:
Subjectivity-formation in performance and creative process

Tonooka, Naomi, Ph.D.

University of Hawaii, 1990

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FOUR CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE WOMEN'S THEATRE GROUPS:
SUBJECTIVITY-FORMATION IN PERFORMANCE AND CREATIVE
PROCESS

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IN

DRAMA AND THEATRE

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To my parents
Tonooka Yoshiya and Misako
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ABSTRACT

One's subjectivity is primarily a social, cultural, and linguistic construct. However, theatre artists can present moments of pleasure that induce random responses among spectators. These random responses allow the spectators and the performers to go beyond their normative beliefs. Four contemporary Japanese women's theatre groups reveal that women's subjectivity is constructed and, at the same time, these groups present a potential generation of new modes of subjectivity for women. The groups have been producing critically acclaimed works in Tokyo for at least a decade.

Women have been given increasingly prominent positions in the Japanese little theatre and in popular discourses in the past two decades. In this cultural climate, the Blue Bird Theatre Company shows that women are confined in positions of immobility in its narrative and representation. The Thirty-Zero Theatre Company presents the images of women—the reflection of male desire, disillusioned women, and the artist-creators. The leader and playwright of the company presents herself as the strong female subject of creation. Kishida
Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company presents a view that women's subjectivity is a historically constructed narrative. The company shows that women's sexuality and pleasure may have the power to undercut the restricting effects of society represented by the Japanese family system. Noise presents the theatre of intensity, not unlike the energetic theatre proposed by Lyotard, emphasizing sense perception and random responses that can be induced in the spectators. This company explores a possibility of going beyond language and seeks for the direct encounter with the spectators.

The significant achievements by the women of these groups are: (a) their demonstration of women as subjects of creation, which had been rare in contemporary Japanese theatre until the mid-1970s, (b) their creation of plays that illustrate oft curtailed women's wishes and desire, inviting the audience's understanding of women's realities, (c) and their presentation of theatrical pleasure that undercuts constricting roles assigned to women in Japanese dramatic works. These women artists' presence and creation contribute to changing conventional perceptions of women's roles and expanding available modes of subjectivity for women.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ix

ABSTRACT viii

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Scope 1
Subject and Subjectivity-formation 12
Two Examples of Available Modes of Subjectivity for Women 15
Expansion of the Modes of Subjectivity 19
Justification and Previous Research 23
Methodology 27

CHAPTER II JAPANESE LITTLE THEATRE AND POPULAR DISCOURSES ON WOMEN

Japanese Little Theatre from the 1960s to the 1980s 33
Popular Discourses on Women 54

CHAPTER III THE BLUE BIRD THEATRE COMPANY:

WOMEN IN SEARCH OF THEMSELVES 69

The Blue Bird Theatre Company and the Japanese Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s 72
Collective Creation 76
A Brief Comparison between the Blue Bird Theatre Company and Some Feminist Theatre Groups in the United States 84
Containment of Women in Narrative 91
Women in the Blue Bird’s Plays 107
Subjects of Theatrical Pleasure 117

CHAPTER IV WATANABE ERIKO AND THE THIRTY-ZERO THEATRE COMPANY:

A ROMANTIC AUTHOR 124
| CHAPTER V | KISHIDA RIO AND KISHIDA JIMUSHO + RAKUTENDAN: PLEASURE AND NARRATIVE | 172 |
| A Family as a Representation of Society | 177 |
| A Floating Bridge of Dreams | 180 |
| A Floating Bridge of Dreams: Desire for Power | 185 |
| The Thread Hell | 193 |
| The Thread Hell: Women in Relation to Women | 201 |
| The Cook: Love and Pleasure | 216 |

| CHAPTER VI | KISARAGI KOHARU AND NOISE: TOWARDS AN ENERGETIC THEATRE | 222 |
| Theatre as Encounter | 225 |
| Noise: Its Operation | 229 |
| Noise: Creative Style | 232 |
| A Play of Role-playing: A Table with Romeo and Freesia | 236 |
| Anxiety about Self: Dolls | 239 |
| Disorientation of Spectators: Moral as an Encounter | 245 |
| Towards an Energetic Theatre | 255 |

| CHAPTER VII | CONCLUSION | 260 |

| REFERENCES | 275 |
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Scope

This dissertation will focus on four Japanese women's theatre groups which came into being in the 1970s and in the early 1980s. In addition to describing the general nature of these women's theatre groups, I will analyze Japanese women's plays and performances with theories that have been developed mainly in the West, thus providing the reader with several points of reference in understanding women's theatre groups in a non-Western country. I will also introduce Japanese theories at the points where I consider it necessary.

Before starting to examine this topic, I would like to define the term, "women's theatre group." "Women's theatre" often implies feminism in the context of Western culture. It suggests that a certain theatre group operates under feminist ideologies, produces plays with a feminist consciousness about women's issues, and often targets a mostly female audience. However, the Japanese feminist movement of the 1970s and of the 1980s does not seem to have directly influenced the inception,
operation, and productions of "women's theatre groups" in Japan. Therefore, I will use the term in a more general sense to designate those theatre groups which have female leaders, and which can be placed in the tradition of the "little theatre" (shōgekijō) movement in Japan. Suffice it to say here that "little theatre" is the designation currently given to small-scale, non-commercial and experimental theatre groups in Japan.

In the context of the Japanese little theatre, troupe leaders almost always hold the responsibility of playwriting and/or directing within their groups. This context implies that in the "women's theatre groups" that I am discussing, women have full creative responsibility. In contrast, I do not regard the current famous Japanese all-female theatre troupe, Takarazuka, as women's theatre groups because these four troupes are under the control of a large theatre-entertainment corporation, Tōhō, and authority regarding creation belongs to male directors and managers.¹

The women's theatre groups I have selected to study are: 1) the Blue Bird Theatre Company (Gekidan Aoi Tori); 2) Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company (Kishida

Jimusho + Rakutendan); 3) the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company (Gekidan 300; 300 is pronounced as sanjūmaru, or "thirty-zero" in Japanese); and 4) Noise (written in Roman letters and pronounced noizu in Japanese). The Blue Bird Theatre Company is an all-female company in which the members exercise collective control over creation. The other three groups operate under female leaders: Watanabe Eriko is the leader of the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company, and Kisaragi Koharu is the leader of Noise. Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company operates under a dyadic leadership: the female playwright Kishida Rio and the male director Wada Yoshio share leadership of the troupe. I include this group because I believe that Kishida Rio, as playwright, plays a decisive role in determining the direction of the company's creative imagination. Unlike the Blue Bird Theatre Company, Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company does not place a strong emphasis on collectivity in its creative process. The company is inclined to accept the playwright's script as the foundation of a performance, thus aiming at realizing Kishida's vision on the stage. The group illustrates an example of a close and clearly defined working relationship between a female playwright

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Kishida is the writer's name, Jimusho means office, and Rakutendan could mean "a company of optimists."
and a male director and thus adds a further dimension to my analysis.

Although there are more than fifteen women’s theatre groups operating professionally in Tokyo in 1989, I have selected the above four groups for four reasons: first, they are all early, pioneering groups with female leadership; second, they are critically recognized groups; third, they have been operating for at least a decade, which shows their popularity and staying power in the context of Japanese little theatre; fourth, they create different theatrical works, thus exemplifying a variety of directions that Japanese women’s theatre groups are taking.

First, these companies paved the way for later women’s theatre groups. They either were founded in the 1970s, or their current female leaders began their active theatrical careers in the 1970s.

The early 1970s marks a peak in the Japanese little theatre movement, when male directors like Suzuki Tadashi, Terayama Shūji, Kara Jūrō, and Ōta Shōgo, were actively producing new experimental theatre works. Although the little theatre movement by definition was associated with the spirit of revolt and experimentation, 3 See Nishimura Hiroko, "Josei to geki" ("Women and Theatre," Teatoro (July, 1989): 57. An exact number of women’s theatre groups is not available.
no female directors or writers in the early 1970s had yet formed their own troupes to produce their own works. A number of women artists—writers, stage designers, but mostly performers—were collaborating with male directors at that time, but they were not asserting a full controlling voice in the theatre as the subject of artistic expression. For example, Kishida Rio started her theatrical career by working with Terayama Shūji in the first half of the 1970s. The famous performer Shiraishi Kayoko of Suzuki’s company SCOT was the most important performer in the creation of the director’s work, but she did not move out of the company to create her own theatrical works. The women in the selected theatre companies pioneered in a field where women’s creative voices were still difficult to hear as distinct from men’s voices.

Secondly, the selected women’s theatre companies have been producing critically recognized plays. In

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4 Throughout this dissertation, I will use the word "subject" according to the definition made by Gordon Teskey: "to denote a center of consciousness directing its attention to objects outside it" ("Milton and Modernity" 42). The subject of artistic expression in this sense indicates that women act as a center of creative consciousness rather than as objectified tools of somebody else’s creative consciousness. I will also use the word "subjectivity" to denote "subject" in relation with social and cultural dynamics that determine the position of "subject." In addition, I will use the word "self" in a general sense, to indicate one’s self-perception and the sense of identity, when it is not adequate to use either "subject" or "subjectivity."
addition, the women leaders of the four theatre groups are gaining increasing recognition in the more conservative theatre. Watanabe Eriko of the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company directed Kara Jûrô's play, *The Love Calendar in the Time of Evil* (Ôma ga koigoyomi) at Shinbashi EnBujô Theatre, a large commercial theatre (shôgyô engeki) in Tokyo in October, 1988. Watanabe's play, *The Night on the Moon* (Tsuki no ue no yoru) was produced by Parco which is affiliated with the conglomerate Seibu Group. Kishida Rio of Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company wrote and directed a play, *The Home, and a Temporary Dwelling* (Tsui no sumika, kari no yado) for actress and producer Nakajima Aoi in September, 1988. The playwright's *The Scarlet Company of Asakusa* (Asakusa kurenaidan) was also produced at Theatre Apple, another commercial theatre, in October, 1988.

Besides the theatre, Kishida and Watanabe write scenarios for films and television shows. Kisaragi Koharu writes essays for magazines, records albums, publishes books on theatre, literature, and contemporary culture, and hosts various television shows. Watanabe also writes and publishes essays and short stories, and appears on television shows as a performer. The women of the Blue Bird Theatre Company also write essays and appear as performers on television shows and commercial spots.
Thirdly, the four theatre groups have been operating for approximately a decade. Among the four, the Blue Bird Theatre Company has been in operation the longest, more than fifteen years.

Towards the late 1970s, the number of little theatre groups increased dramatically. Two kinds of figures attest to this trend. In the years of the early 1980s, approximately one thousand productions were recorded annually (mostly in Tokyo), and in 1986, approximately eight hundred theatrical spaces were available for use by little theatre groups (Ózasa et al., "Engeki Bûmu" 56-57). Even in this "theatre boom" (engeki bûmu), which seems to be continuing on into the 1990s, few theatre groups remain operating as long as a decade. Most troupes face constant financial difficulties; they operate on a small scale and receive no government subsidy. Although no statistics are available for the average survival-span among little theatre groups which form and subsequently disband, it is generally said that the average age of their group members is in the twenties (Shonichi, Tokyo 120). This means that the usual little theatre practitioner leaves the theatre for a more stable profession as he or she grows older. This also suggests that constant turnover of groups in the little theatre is the norm. In this situation, the fact that the four women’s theatre groups studied here have survived for at
least a decade indicates their unusual staying power and reputation.

In addition, each of the four groups attracts a diverse audience, attesting to their wide-ranging popularity. The results of simple audience survey (kankyaku ankēto) each company conducts at every production illustrate that both men and women of various ages and occupations attend the groups’ productions. This demonstrates the openness and accessibility of the women’s work to a general audience, which is another indication of the groups’ staying power.

Fourthly, to repeat the point, each of the four selected women’s theatre groups produces distinctively different plays. Thus the four theatre groups serve as examples to illustrate various directions Japanese women’s theatre groups are taking.

Among all groups currently active, these women’s theatre groups best fit these criteria and merit detailed study. In this dissertation, I will devote a chapter to each group, describing briefly the history, operational structure and audience of each theatre group. Then I will analyze selected plays of each group. In both description and analysis, I will focus on the question of women’s subject and subjectivity-formation that is represented through the groups’ operational structure and their plays. In addition, I will examine the women’s
theatrical works as an act to inscribe different modes of subjectivity in representation.

Basing my analyses on this focus on women's subject and subjectivity-formation, I will apply theories that fit into each theatre group. In the chapter on the Blue Bird Theatre Company, I will examine women's position in narrative, using narrative theories developed by the film scholar Teresa de Lauretis, the Soviet semiotician Jurij Lotman, and the Japanese folklorist Yanagita Kunio. This chapter involves some comparisons between the Blue Bird Theatre Company and the Western theatre for two reasons. First, in terms of organization and style of creation, the Blue Bird seems to be similar to American all-women theatre groups. Therefore, I will briefly compare the characteristics of the Blue Bird and those of American counterparts, in order to clarify differences between analogous theatre groups in different cultures. Second, in my application of Western narratology, I will examine one example from the Western theatre, in order to illustrate how I utilize narratology in my analysis of a theatrical work. Then, I will examine Yanagita Kunio's category of Japanese folktale in order to assess to what extent I can apply Western narratology to Japanese narrative. This comparative study of narrative is to establish my perspective in applying Western theories to
the Blue Bird's theatrical works, as well as to determine the limits of such application.

In the chapter on Watanabe Eriko and the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company, I will focus on the playwright's emphasis on the power of creator. Watanabe shows apparently contradictory notions about one's subject in her various essays and in her plays. She believes that one's subjectivity is a social construct, and at the same time, she seems to assert herself as the subject of creation, the source, and the origin. I will examine the structure of, and the characters in her plays in order to describe how she presents the above contradictory notions in her plays.

In the structural analysis, I will apply the notion of surrealism, comparing her plays with the paintings of the Belgian surrealist, René Magritte.

In the character analysis, I will focus on her "dreaming" characters, and her female characters. The playwright equates "dreamers" with artists and creators. Further, she believes that dreaming is not only the source of artistic creation but a means for "underdogs" to endure their lives. Despite the fact that Watanabe is a powerful female dreamer and creator, she often assigns the role of central dreamer to her male characters. She depicts her female characters either as the reflection of the male dreamers' wishes and desires or as those who are
incapable of dreaming, disillusioned by their everyday lives.

Though Watanabe is aware that women’s wishes are often curtailed, the playwright does not seem to be concerned with the difference of gender that may cause differences in creative and dreaming perspectives. I will examine how Watanabe ultimately asserts herself as the subject of creation both in her plays, and in her creative process with, and her operation of, the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company.

In the chapter on Kishida Rio and Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company, I will focus on Kishida’s perception of history, subjectivity-formation, and women’s pleasure. The playwright believes that history is an arbitrarily created narrative, and women’s subjectivity is constructed by this narrative. Often focusing on the Japanese family (ie) system, the playwright illustrates how a woman is positioned in a society, and how her subjectivity is defined by this positioning. Further, in her plays, she suggests that women’s bonding and pleasure beyond language may have the power to break through the effects of societal forces.

I will examine how Kishida visually and verbally presents the formation of history and women’s subjectivity in her plays. Further, I will examine the relationship between power and pleasure, focusing one of
Kishida's play, applying Deleuze's and Lacan's writings on sadism and masochism. In my analysis of women's bonding, I will apply psychoanalytic theories on mother-child relationship, especially of Nancy Chodorow's and the Japanese psychiatrists Kosawa Heisaku and Okonogi Keigo's.

In the chapter on Kisaragi Koharu and Noise, I will base my analysis on Lyotard's notion of "the energetic theatre" (the theatre of intensity beyond language). I will examine Kisargi's theatrical works, her operation of the group, and the process of her creation, focusing how the artist presents subjectivity-formation, and how she emphasizes sense perception that may break the formative effects on one's subjectivity.

**Subject and Subjectivity-formation**

Just as Roland Barthes proclaims "the death of the author" in his *Image, Music, Text* (142-48), theorists like Foucault, Lacan and Derrida have questioned the notion of subject as the center, core, and originator. For example, Jacques Lacan presents one's subjectivity as a creation through language, in the dynamics of desire...
for love and recognition from others.⁵ This premise of subjectivity as a social, cultural, ideological and linguistic construct appeals to my own sense of having been "constructed" in a diverse but still very specific cultural milieu--Japan.

Certain reservations remain: why do I accept this premise in analyzing Japanese women's theatrical work? Both men's and women's subjectivity is conditioned. By singling out "women's" subjectivity, are we not after all setting up an unchangeable, gendered category, "woman," to treat it as distinct from "man"? Moreover, does not this categorization suggest a premise that there is an essential female subject which is different from a male one, apart from all conditioning forces? Does not this premise reduce social, cultural and linguistic effects to a mere question of biology?

First of all, I do not deny the presence of a subject as a core, or a point of reference in each human being. Because a specific, individual body exists, I believe that one's subject exists, receives outer and inner stimulations, and creates a self-image and the images of others. Theorists like Lacan do not deny this

⁵ For a concise explanation of Lacanian concept as to how a human being creates the image of self through others and language, see the translation of Joël Dor's Introduction à la lecture de Lacan (Lakan dokukai nyûmon) (135-145).
indescribable site from which and through which one communicates with outer stimulations, and forms one's self-image (Dor 135-145).

One's subjectivity may be multiple, reflecting all social and linguistic forces constantly flowing and formulating it. However, without a subject, a core and a site, I do not believe that one can receive and reformulate outer stimulations to construct one's subjectivity. Furthermore, without a subject, I do not think that one can create art. Needless to say, art involves copying of and referring to the past and to contemporary culture. This may seem to attest to the validity of the notion that constructed subjectivity does not "create" art; it copies and re-produces whatever is available to it. Then again, do artists "copy and re-produce" differently, because their subjectivities are constructed differently? Moreover, are there not artists who are extremely good at "copying" to the degree that they are called geniuses? Are they, then, only very artistically successful cases of subjectivity-formation? Is it possible, in this way, to deny one's artistic creativity? Art is not only made of quotations and reproductions; it also involves selection and transformation of available materials and modes of presentation. Furthermore, the act of selection and transformation presupposes the presence of a subject
which may have been reduced to an indefinable site of
desire and impulse but nonetheless directs and re-directs
a decision that a constructed subjectivity may make.

Subject, thus, is still a center of a human being
and of creation. However, as a site through which
stimulation passes, a subject cannot be either
essentially male nor female. Gender is inscribed in
subjectivity, rather than in a subject. This is why I
accept the post-structuralist premise of multiple
subjectivity: first, the premise allows a
conceptualization of woman as a created being, as Simone
de Beauvoir points out in The Second Sex (38). Second,
it allows us to consider "the modes of subjectivity
available to different groups at different times," as
Cheryl Walker states in her "Feminist Literary Criticism
and the Author" (563). Third, the premise, by extension,
allows a re-conceptualization of women as historical
beings, thus providing a basis for examining the four
troupes' theatrical work as an act to present different
modes of subjectivity for women.

Two Examples of Available Modes of Subjectivity for Women

In order to gain a clearer picture of modes of
subjectivity available to women, I will draw two typical
examples.
The first example is from Teresa de Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't*, in which she analyzes how historical women's subjectivity is positioned in confining images of a-historical Woman. At the very beginning of the first chapter, de Lauretis makes a lengthy quotation of a passage from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. The passage tells a founding story of the mysterious and labyrinthine city of Zobeide; the city of which was founded upon the same dream dreamed by a number of men. In the dream, men pursued a woman from behind at night. Each man followed her through labyrinthine streets, but all of them lost her at the same spot. The men went out in search of the city, but to no avail. Instead, they created a city in which each actualized the streets and passageways through which he had followed the woman. At the spot they lost her in the dream, they arranged walls and streets differently from the dream, so the woman would never be able to escape (*Alice* 12).

De Lauretis considers Calvino's story a metaphor for human history as "semitic productivity; desire provides the impulse, the drive to represent, and dream, the modes of representing" (13). In addition, the woman in this semiotic productivity is defined as "the moving force of culture and history," because she is "the very ground of representation, both object and support of a desire which, [is] intimately bound up with power and
creativity, . . ." (13). Nonetheless, this woman is absent from the city of Zobeide. No man has ever seen her face. No woman is living in the city; no actual woman is participating in this cultural construction. De Lauretis re-defines the story as a metaphor for woman as both absent and captive in human (Western) history: "while culture originates from woman and is founded on the dream of her captivity, women are all but absent from history and cultural process" (13); she is "absent as theoretical subject, captive as historical subject" in the "discursive space of the city" (14).

The next example is from Japan: a Japanese film titled Eiga jovû (The Film Actress). It was filmed by famous film director Ichikawa Kon in 1987 as a double homage to two renowned Japanese film actresses; Tanaka Kinuyo and Yoshinaga Sayuri. The former was a star actress from the 1920s until the 1960s. The latter is a contemporary star actress who made her ninety-ninth film-appearance playing the role of Tanaka Kinuyo in this film.

In spite of the film's strong focus on the two women, it does not show the women as subject. The director took an extremely descriptive and explanatory style, thus treating the two women as if they constituted a dual specimen of Actress in Japanese film history. The film, in fact, shows an Actress growing by working with
great directors and directors, in this context, are men. By inserting stills of Japanese historical films as well as historical shots of filming, of studio, and clips from films used in early film-making, the director transformed the actress-oriented film into an homage to Japanese film history. Furthermore, through this visually beautiful presentation of the actresses, Ichikawa focused on one of the most influential Japanese film directors, Mizoguchi Kenji. Thus, the film also became an homage to Mizoguchi.

In both examples from creative art, women occupy a paradoxical space in which, borrowing De Lauretis' terms, women are both "absent and captive" (14). In other words, women can be subject-matter, but they cannot be a subject (in a general sense) who can participate in the construction of art and culture.

The two examples illustrate an available mode of subjectivity for women in the West and Japan. Needless to say, the modes of subjectivity available to women are not limited to those contained in these two examples. However, it is still fair to say that the modes available to women are more limited than those available to men. This is why it still seems useful to separate "women's" work from men's work.
Expansion of the Modes of Subjectivity

Because subjectivity is multiple, it also should be possible to expand the modes of subjectivity. This is where my third concern lies—to see the women’s theatrical work as an act to inscribe different modes of women’s subjectivity in representational space.

Judith Butler’s notion of gender as "performative acts" is especially useful in situating an analysis of women’s theatrical works in this context. Taking Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological position, she states that gender is an identity constituted through "a stylized repetition of [arbitrary] acts," which is to be understood "as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (519). Butler’s notion not only includes the concept of performance in the construction of gender, but also allows one to consider both "the existence and facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body" and "the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings" (520). Furthermore, the notion allows for a prospect to eventually change the mode of gender "in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (520).

Because performance is a physical action, and also is distanced from actual everyday-life, the theatre is a
space where it is possible to present imaginative modes of gender and subjectivity in a concrete form.

However, it is not yet defined how and what kinds of subjectivity can be presented in the theatre. Moreover, women artists' subjectivity is conditioned by culture and language; how can women generate different modes of subjectivity distinct from the modes that are already available to them? Does not their work after all result in repeating and reproducing limited modes of subjectivity for women?

Therefore, my analysis of the women's theatrical work will be twofold: first, to see how the women artists' work illustrates limited modes of subjectivity for women; second, to examine at what point and how the artists are presenting "a different sort of repeating" or a "subversive" breaking of the repeated modes.

Sue-Ellen Case and Timothy Murray provide examples for marking out some points of breaking repeated modes. Both Case and Murray draw on the notion of "seduction" (a moment of rapport between the performers and the audience through theatrical pleasure beyond language) for their mapping of "different sort of repeating" in their analysis of theatrical works. In her analysis of a production given by a lesbian theatre group, Split Britches, Case focuses on the seductive atmosphere which originates in a conscious manipulation of appearance and
free play of scenes that cannot be contained in a through-line of narrative ("A Butch-Femme" 282-299). In "Patriarchal Panopticism, or The Seduction of a Bad Joke: Getting Out in Theory," Murray points out how the moments of laughter generated by bad jokes can be seductive, liberating characters and spectators from a stifling perception of social control over an individual (384-388).

Drawing on Baudrillard’s notion of sédaction, Case argues that free play with appearances underscores the function of roles as sign or artifice, thus undermines the notion of "essentialist ontology" behind the roles and the plays (294-298). In other words, Case contends that imaginative theatre as opposed to realistic theatre, with its playful appropriation of "butch-femme" roles as signs as distinct from ontology, creates a seductive atmosphere between characters and the audience, which "transforms all of these seeming realities into semiotic play" (297). The transformation, according to Case, liberates women from "the notion of 'the female body' as it predominates in feminist theory, dragging along its Freudian baggage and scopophilic transubstantiation" (297).

Murray, in his analysis of Marsha Norman’s Getting Out, draws on Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of theatrical and representational signs as operative in
power relationships, because of the superiority ascribed to a signified over a signifier which is, in this case, theatrical representation (Murray 376; Lyotard, "The Tooth" 105). Lyotard also seems to deny what Case calls "essentialist ontology" behind theatrical signs and introduces the notion of "libidinal energy" which flows without anchoring in any single meaning. Lyotard calls the theatre free from ontology as an "energetic theatre," the examples of which are Japanese no theatre, Artaudian theatre of cruelty, Brechtian alienation with its emphasis on indifference of "man towards his work and of work towards its man, of money towards that which it can buy and of the commodity towards its monetary counterpart" (Lyotard, "The Tooth" 109). Along with the French philosopher who calls for "the energetic intensification of theatrical apparatus" (Murray 384; Lyotard, "The Tooth" 107), Murray finds that the moments of laughter arising from "bad" (i.e., anti-social) jokes demonstrate an energetic intensification free from any meanings that are supported by social control (384-388).

In short, the two scholars locate indefinable intensity and seductive rapport as a metaphorical space in which available subjectivities are undermined, and possibly, from which different modes of subjectivity arise. This is one possible way to open up a space for new subjectivity, although it is not clear to what extent
and how long seductive moments can last without anchoring in meanings. For example, both Case's and Murray's analyses of theatrical works settle their meanings in wishes to transform codified subjectivity in the context of seduction and energy.

My analysis of Japanese women's theatrical work will follow the lines of thought taken by Butler, De Lauretis, Case, and Murray. By pioneering in a field where women's voices as creative subject were still difficult to hear, the women of four theatre groups have opened up a possibility for women to be the subject of creation. As Butler states, it is possible to expand available modes of subjectivity through women's concrete gestures as creators, and through a theatrical presentation that is sensitive to limitations to women's subjectivity. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine both the limitations and the possibility of new modes of subjectivity for women represented through and by the four Japanese women's theatre groups.

**Justification and Previous Research**

There is a growing awareness among feminist scholars and theatre practitioners in the United States that the studies into this field should include a consideration of those who are outside of the dominant culture. A general assumption is that feminist scholarship has been
developed among white, heterosexual, and middle-class women who have, to date, not included non-white, homosexual, and working-class women in the scope of their inquiries. As Wendy Brown succinctly states, feminists have begun to realize "the tremendous range in sexual construction and sexualities, a diversity evident even among women of one race, class and epoch, let alone across these variables" ("Consciousness Razing" 62).

For example, Adrienne Rich's questioning of heterosexuality in her "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1983) has been one of the major intellectual forces to re-orient feminist inquiries. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano actively projects Chicana women's perspectives into feminist theatre scholarship in such an article as "Chicanas' Experience in Collective Theatre: Ideology and Form" (1985). Sue-Ellen Case includes sections on lesbian theatres and women of color in her Feminism and Theatre published in 1988.

Among feminist theatre practitioners, At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre in Minneapolis was reorganized in 1984 to include multi-ethnic participants.

An awareness of differences among women has contributed to an expansion of the field of inquiry. Carol Martin introduces her sensitivity to cross-cultural feminist analysis in her "Feminist Analysis Across Cultures: Performing Gender in India" (1987/1988).
Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig’s *Interviews with Women Playwrights* (1987) includes interviews with a Chinese woman playwright, Bai Fengxi and with an Argentina woman playwright, Griselda Gambaro. The International Women Playwright Conference that was held in Buffalo, New York in 1988 also illustrates a rising interest among scholars and theatre practitioners in women and theatre in other cultures. From the four women’s theatre groups discussed in this study, Kisaragi Koharu and Kishida Rio were invited to this conference.

At present, there is an extremely limited amount of information available in English on Japanese little theatre groups. David Goodman is one Western scholar who has done studies on the Japanese little theatre of the 1960s. His dissertation, *Satoh Makoto and the Post-Shingeki Movement in Japanese Contemporary Theatre* (1982) includes an excellent chapter that examines the little theatre as the "post-shingeki" (post-new-theatre) movement. Goodman translates five Japanese plays into English in his *Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods*, published in 1988, in which he includes a woman playwright’s work, Kaison the Priest of Hitachi (originally published in 1965 in a limited private edition). In an introduction to the book, he summarizes the history of the little theatre as the movement involving theatre practitioners’ search for "an


Articles on the famous directors, Suzuki and Terayama, can be found in such journals as *Asian Theatre Journal, The Drama Review, Performing Arts Journal* and *Theater*. James R. Brandon's "Training at the Waseda Little Theatre" (1978) introduced the Suzuki-method of acting to the West. In another article, "Time and Tradition in Modern Japanese Theatre" (1985), Brandon places works by the directors Suzuki and Ōta Shōgo in the tradition of Japanese theatre—nō and kabuki. Frank Hoff, in his "Suzuki Tadashi Directs The Trojan Women" (1980), explores Suzuki's directorial concept. Further, in "Killing the Self" (1985), he refers to the Japanese

For Japanese women's theatre, the only English material available is Ishii Tatsuro's theatre report for The Drama Review, "Noise's Moral" published in 1985.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to a better understanding of the Japanese contemporary theatre, as well as to the recognition of women's works in different cultures and societies.

**Methodology**

Research for this study was conducted in the United States and in Japan. Preliminary research into theatre groups in the United States was conducted from March to April 1988, with the generous assistance of El Téatro de la Esperanza in San Francisco, At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre Company in Minneapolis, Women's Project and Women's Interart Center in New York. This
preliminary study stayed as an important reference point for my analysis and writing about Japanese women’s theatre groups.

Research in Japan was conducted from June 1988 to August 1989 with the full assistance and cooperation of the Blue Bird Theatre Company, Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Company, Noise, and the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company. This research involved observation and study of primary and secondary materials. The primary materials were rehearsals, productions, production videotapes and interviews of the participants of the four women’s theatre groups. The secondary materials were reviews, criticism, interviews of theatre critics, and simple audience surveys.

I was able to attend five rehearsals for the Blue Bird Theatre Company’s She Has Eaten a Green Fruit (Aoimi o tabeta), and four rehearsals for Noise’s The Moon (Mûn) from the beginning to the final stages of the companies’ creation. I was also able to attend two rehearsals for the Blue Bird Theatre Company’s A Die is Cast (Saikoro no sekinin), and the final two rehearsals for Kishida Jimusho’s The Cook (Ryôrinin), both toward the final stage of creation. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the rehearsal for the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company’s The Woods Where the Wind Falls (Kaze no furu mori). I placed more emphasis on operation and creative
process in my analyses of the Blue Bird and Noise than those of Kishida Jimusho and the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company, as a result of this different degree of exposure in research. For each production, I attended from three to four performances.

In addition to attending rehearsals and productions, I also observed the female leaders’ works that were done outside their own troupes: Watanabe Eriko’s directorial work at Shinbashi Enbujo Theatre, The Love Calendar in the Time of Evil (October, 1988); another Watanabe play, The Night on the Moon at Parco Theatre (June, 1989); Kishida Rio’s The Home, and a Temporary Dwelling at Benisan Pitto Theatre (September, 1988) and another play, The Scarlet Company of Asakusa at Theatre Apple (October, 1988). Other outside works such as television shows and essays were observed as they appeared.

As primary materials, I was also able to interview the female leader(s), performers, and administrative staff of each theatre group. Interviews were conducted throughout the year of research. With the theatre groups’ assistance, I collected programs, press releases, published and unpublished scripts, and fourteen videotapes of past productions.

As secondary materials, I studied published interviews with theatre critics, reviews of each group’s
past productions, and articles featuring the selected
groups and the female leaders.

Major journals such as Shingeki (New Theatre),
Teatro (Theatre), Higeki kigeki (Tragedy Comedy), and
Engeki bukku (Theatre Book) were examined. In addition,
I collected "special issues" of: Urika (Eureka), Bijutsu
techō (Art Notebook), Kōkoku hiyō (Advertisement
Criticism), and Tōkyōjin (Tokyo People). The four
companies also provided me with past reviews and articles
which were published in diverse sources such as local
newspaper articles featuring the groups' touring,
privately published, small-circulation periodicals, and
weekly and monthly magazines that sporadically print
reviews and articles related to the topic. The materials
are not indexed at the National Diet Library, and it
would have been extremely difficult if not impossible to
locate them without the companies' assistance. New
publications were collected as they appeared.

Interviews with theatre critics Kawamoto Saburō and
Matsuoka Kazuko were conducted at the beginning stage of
my research. The critics are well known for their avid
interest in the selected women's theatre groups as well
as in the little theatre. They were sources of
generative insight.

Each theatre company conducts a simple audience
survey (kankyaku ankēto) at each production to update a
mailing list as well as to discover general audience response. Contents of the questionnaire vary, but the questions included requests for: name, address, age, sex, occupation and responses (kansō) to a production. I examined samples from each company's past and present surveys in order to see if there are any specific characteristics in the configuration of audience in terms of sex, age, and occupation, possibly as a result of the groups' female leadership.

In order to obtain more detailed information on spectators' expectations and preferences, I requested the administrator of Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan Theatre Company, Munakata Shun, to include four of my own questions in the company's questionnaire for the production of The Cook in December 1988. Because adding questions did not seem to be effective in drawing in-depth responses from spectators (who usually fill in the forms in a hurry after a performance), I decided that it was not fruitful to continue more detailed audience surveys for the productions given by the other theatre

6 The questions were: 1) "How did you like this show? Please mark the following: 'I liked it,' 'I disliked it,' 'I am not sure'; 2) "Please tell us the reasons for your selection"; 3) "What was your expectation about this play?"; 4) "What would you expect in our future work?" The company's original questionnaire includes a question that helps picturing spectators' preference to some extent: "Please tell us the names of theatre company and the titles of play that you like (if you have any)."
groups. In this dissertation, I will present parts of the result of surveys in order to draw a general picture of each company's audience configuration.

Chapter II will briefly discuss the history and current situation of Japanese little theatre as background information. The description will be followed by the brief section on popular discourses in Japan on women in the 1970s and the 1980s, which will illustrate a cultural climate from which women's theatre groups came into being.

Chapter VII will summarize my analysis of each theatre group described from Chapter III to Chapter VI, as a conclusion.

All translations from the Japanese are my own, unless otherwise noted. Japanese names are given in the customary Japanese order: surname first, given name second. Throughout this dissertation the circumflex (^) is used to indicate a Japanese long vowel in lieu of a macron. I will use the female pronoun to describe the hypothetical actor, spectator, and the like, in the interests of economy and style.
CHAPTER II
JAPANESE LITTLE THEATRE AND POPULAR DISCOURSES ON WOMEN

Japanese Little Theatre from the 1960s to the 1980s

The term, "the little theatre" (shōgekijō), at present, is generally understood as a generic term for non-commercial, small-scale, experimental theatre. The beginning of the little theatre goes back to the 1960s in which theatre was inseparably intertwined with politics in Japan as elsewhere.¹ The little theatre, which at that time was often called "the underground theatre" (angura), had its raison d'être as the theatre of revolt. The battle was, in a narrow sense, waged against the Western realistic style modern theatre in Japan.

(shingeki), but in a broader sense, was waged against the dominant cultural values of the 1960s (Goodman; Gotô; Kan; Nishidô; Ōzasa; Senda); i.e., the values of the modern, which is manifested in Japan's pursuit of progress and economic expansion (Goodman; Kan; Nishidô). Thus, the little theatre movement at its inception was, according to Nishidô, a revolt against modernity,² and also an attempt to retrieve what the contemporary theatre practitioners believed as having been lost from modern Japan (Nishidô, Engeki Shisô 255-260).

The theme of the revolt in the 1960s was "overcoming the modern" (kindai no chôkoku) (Engeki shisô 256). In order to pose doubts about the values of modernity, the practitioners of the little theatre set forth to present body against mind, collaboration against the authority of the author, and a carnivalesque intrusion into the audience against the proscenium arch which divides performers and the audience and puts the latter into the position of passive and voyeuristic viewers (Engeki shisô 250-272).

² As for the concept of modernity and how it has been argued for and against in Japan, see Sakai Naoki's "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism" in The South Atlantic Quarterly 87.3 (1988): 475-504. See also, H.D. Harootunian's "Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies" in The South Atlantic Quarterly 87.3 (1988): 445-474.
Despite the spirit of revolt, it seems that an emphasis on body as opposed to mind after all lends itself into the Western and "modern" dichotomy of body and mind, and nature and civilization. The focus on collaboration and carnival is also, by implication, the denial of the modern, thus the return to pre-modern, which sets up again a dichotomy of nature and civilization. The revolt against the modern, thus from its onset was a part of the modern and had inherent weaknesses which eventually allowed the movement to be submerged into the dominant cultural values.

It must be added here that the submergence of the revolt into the dominant culture was further enforced by academic discourses (Kan, Zoku 94-97), and by commercial and journalistic discourses in the 1970s (Kan, Zoku 91-94; Nishidō, Engeki shisō 206-214). Before elaborating on this enforcement process, however, I would like to follow both Nishidō and Goodman's arguments a little further, because their readings of the little theatre in the 1960s demonstrate their insight into the position of the theatre in Japanese history and society.

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Nishidō points out that the noted directors Kara Jūrō and Suzuki Tadashi searched into bodily images in order to go beyond the modern. Kara's thesis, *On the Privileged Body* (*Tokkenteki nikutairon*) (1968) was extremely influential for its emphasis on performer's body over script. Suzuki's emphasis on collaboration with performers led to the creation of groundbreaking theatre work *On the Dramatic II* (*Gekiteki naru mono o megu tte II*) in 1970. Nishidō states that Kara's use of language with bodily and carnivalesque implications represents the spirit of the late 1960s. He summarizes the spirit as the wish "to positively reconstruct the lost objects=memories" (*arakajime ushinawarete shimatta jibutsu=kioku o kōteitekini hukugen saseru*) (*Engeki shisō* 256). The critics of the time used words such as passion (*jōnen*) and madness (*kyōki*) to describe Suzuki's leading

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4 Kara uses the words such as *shikyū* (uterus), *koshimaki* (traditional Japanese women's underwear), and *kawaramono* (the derogatory designation of performers). The term *kawaramono* originates in the historical fact that Japanese performers were outcasts and were allowed to perform only in the limited areas such as dry riverbeds outside cities. *Kawara* means a dry riverbed, and *mono* means a person. What is implied in Kara's use of *kawaramono* then is his intention to retrieve the carnivalesque power associated with outcaste performers in the traditional Japanese theatre.
actress Shiraishi Kayoko.\textsuperscript{5} Nishidō suggests that the naming also shows the values attached to the bodily and the emotional as the efficacious tool to undermine the so-called devastating values of the modern. The "lost objects=memories" to be retrieved were—the directors thought—the unrestricted power which was considered to be inherent in emotions, body, carnivalesque chaos, and by implication, the tradition of Japanese theatre in which performers were associated with the evil power of enchantment (\textit{Engeki shisō} 255-260).\textsuperscript{6}

In other words, the directors of the 1960s, such as Kara and Suzuki, did no more than enforce the dichotomy of the traditional and the modern. Furthermore, the dichotomy is the paradigm not uniquely characteristic of the 1960s. H. D. Harootunian discusses invisible ideologies behind the visible theme of "overcoming the modern" (\textit{kindai no chōkoku}) which has dominated

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\textsuperscript{6} Hirosue Tamotsu’s \textit{Yugyō/akubasho} (Wandering Priests/The Place of Evil) and \textit{Henkai no akusho} (The Place of Evil in the Boundaries). See also Yamaguchi Masac’s "Kingship, Theatricality, and Marginal Reality in Japan" in \textit{Text and Context: The Social Anthropology of Tradition} (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977) 151-179
\end{flushleft}
intellectual discussions in Japan since even before the World War II ("Visible Discourses"). In pre-War Japan, the modern was closely associated with the Western, and as Harootunian points out, the theme "overcoming the modern" was a variation of war-time propaganda. In post-War Japan, the same theme was pursued as the foundation for reconstructing national pride with an emphasis on Japanese tradition and values. Harootunian writes:

In contemporary Japan there has been a relentlessly obsessive "return" to "origins": an orchestrated attempt by the state to compensate for the dissolution of the social by resurrecting "lost" traditions against modernism itself, and by imposing a master code declaring "homogeneity" in a "heterogeneous present." ("Visible Discourses" 448)

Although the nationalistic implication was minimal in its emphasis on the traditional in the 1960s, a strategy employed by avant-garde theatre directors seems to have been the repetition of the age-old operation of retrieving "the lost objects=memories" in order to canonize them as the tradition, and as the antithesis to the modern (Harootunian, "Visible Discourses"; Ivy, Discourses of the Vanishing 1-32). The little theatre movement in this context was an attempt to retrieve and go beyond the marginalized past, an attempt which was considered efficacious in diverging the current social and cultural values of a Japan which was rapidly growing
as a capitalist society. Thus, we can see that the little theatre movement shows to a certain extent the operational dynamics that would eventually confine the spirit of revolt into the neatly organized scheme of national discourse; i.e., the traditional versus the modern, the marginalized past versus the West.

David Goodman realizes these operational dynamics in a different context in his *The Return of the Gods*. Goodman, in his analysis of the 1960s little theatre ("post-shingeki" in Goodman's term) plays, points out the resurgence of gods as the central metaphor in post-shingeki Japanese theatre. Whereas Japanese modern theatre (shingeki) had developed by discarding the "pre-modern" concept of gods, the "post-shingeki" theatre utilized the metaphorical images of gods from such diverse sources as Christianity, Buddhism, Shintoism, and popular cult beliefs. Goodman finds two reasons for the return of the gods to the theatre: young theatre practitioners' disillusionment in the efficacy of political actions after the failure of the campaign against the US-Japan Security Treaty in the 1960s; the generally shared sense of inability to deal with "post-holocaust" experiences—post World War II, post Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The "post-shingeki" theatre practitioners associated the heroes of their plays with the images of gods, and thus brought carnivalesque
exuberance into their theatre. However, Goodman continues to argue that the use of gods whether as anti-heroes or as saviors predestined their plays to become the celebration, or at the least acceptance, of the ever continuing life cycle which curtails any revolutionary changes. In other words, the return of the gods was return to the traditional way of thinking which had disabled the Japanese from taking effective political actions against World War II in the 1930s and the 1940s, and against the US-Japan Security Treaty in the 1960s and in the 1970s (3-32).

In addition to the operational dynamics of the revolt that ironically repeated the past, academic discourses (Kan, Zoku 94-97) and commercial and journalistic discourses (Kan, Zoku 91-94; Nishidō, Engeki shisē 206-214) contributed to the containment of the spirit of revolt into the dominant cultural values. It seems to me that the journalistic and academic recognition of the little theatre coincided with and contributed to the commercialization of the theatre movement. Radical and influential academics of the late 1960s and the 1970s upheld the little theatre as a
paradigm of knowledge (chi). Especially from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, structuralist anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao and philosopher Nakamura Yūjirō published many works hailing the power of theatre as the Victor Turneresque anti-structure and the theatre’s potential to change the rigid social structure. Noted scholars such as Watanabe Moriaki of French literature, and Takahashi Yasunari of English literature, also found promise in the little theatre movement as a new cultural movement. Journalists and theatre critics Senda Akihiko and Ōzasa Yoshio also contributed to at least partial, if not full, recognition of the "underground" (angura) theatre as a member of the "legitimate" theatre (shingeki and traditional theatre) circle. In this way, both academia and journalism legitimized the little theatre movement as the avant-garde of the cultural movement.

Along with the legitimization, however, the word angura was dropped and the more general designation, i.e., the little theatre, became prevalent. The word angura conjures up images of the ominous power of

7 For example, a journal Gendai shisō (Contemporary Thoughts) devoted an issue to the theatre as a new paradigm of knowledge. The issue Engeki: chi no atarashi senryaku (The Theatre: A New Strategy of Knowledge) includes anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao’s interviews with noted directors of the little theatre, Terayama Shūji, Kara Jūrō, Suzuki Tadashi. The issue also includes director Ōta Shōgo’s essay, "Hyōgen to shite no chinmoku" ("Silence as Expression") (80-84)
outcastes, strangeness, and intrusiveness that fractures the everyday structure. The fading of the word into the background represents the submersion of the power of the little theatre as the cultural antithesis under the dominant cultural values. Another example of the term which has invested a certain power to the little theatre is David Goodman's "post-shingeki." Goodman's term illustrates his optimistic assumption that the little theatre can become an alternative to shingeki, and by extension, an alternative to the cultural values associated with the Western-style modern Japanese theatre. Goodman's use of "post-" even suggests his expectation of the decline and of the possible disappearance of shingeki. However, shingeki has neither declined nor disappeared.

Still more, a general tendency is an ever greater intermixing of performers and directors of the little theatre and those in shingeki in pursuing joint theatrical projects (Ei et al., "Utsuriyuku" 32-36). Performers of shingeki appear in the productions of the little theatre, and vice versa (Ozasa, "Shôgekijô no shômetsu" 134). In addition, critic Ozasa Yoshio points out the increasing difficulty of defining the contour of the little theatre because the term "little theatre" no longer has its original political implication ("Shôgekijô no hensen" 90-91; "Shôgekijô no shômetsu" 132-136).
Acting, especially, which used to define the style of the "underground" (angura) theatre, had become indistinguishable from the style of shingeki by the late 1980s (Ei et al., "Utsuriyuku" 33).

Typical examples can be found among the leaders and performers of the four women's theatre groups. A performer of The Blue Bird Theatre Company appeared in a production of Fernando Arrabal's play given by a commercial theatre Parco Theatre in 1985. Watanabe Eriko of the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company has appeared in many shingeki productions, and has written plays for commercial productions.

The enormous commercial success of a few little theatre groups has also accelerated the tendency. The critics agree that the playwright and director Tsuka Köhei played a decisive role in directing the little theatre toward commercialization in the 1970s. The last production of Tsuka's company before it disbanded in 1980 ran for three months at Kinokuniya Hall in Tokyo, and attracted a total of 100,000 spectators (Nishidō, Engeki shisō 25). A question arises: is it appropriate to give the name of "little" theatre to a theatre group that can attract such a huge audience? Tsuka introduced black humor and parody into the little theatre, and cultivated a new audience which was different from that which attended Suzuki, Kara, Ōta and Terayama. The new
audience mostly consisted of young people who showed almost no interest in the political and cultural revolt, and who only expected laughter and enjoyment from theatre works. Nishidō states that Tsuka's satirical approach to contemporary culture and society was rapidly contained and consumed by these politically apathetic spectators (Engeki shisō 24-33).

Tsuka Kōhei and his new audience were not the only factor that accelerated the commercialization of the little theatre. The inauguration of the magazine Pia in 1972 also contributed much to the expansion of the audience of the little theatre (Ozasa et al., "Engeki būmu" 60; Nishidō, Engeki shisō 207-213). Pia, which is currently published biweekly, provides information about films, theatre, concerts, lectures and other artistic events that are available in the Tokyo area. By making the information readily accessible, the magazine drew a large number of new spectators to the theatre including those who had previously been indifferent to the theatre movement.

Furthermore, Pia Inc. established a groundbreaking ticket sale system in 1984. The freelance writer Tateishi Yasunori emphasizes the contribution of the new system, "Ticket Pia," to the cultivation of a new audience ("Tsutsumi" 243-247). I will briefly summarize Tateishi's points here. Prior to 1984, advance tickets
for theatre, films and concerts were sold at either individual box-offices or through ticket agencies operating in central Tokyo (Shinjuku, Shibuya and Hibiya). A potential spectator would have to make a trip to one of those areas to buy a ticket, or the agencies would charge a handling fee for any reservation made over the phone. In addition to the inconvenience, a potential spectator would often find difficulty in acquiring a desired seat, because tickets for certain productions were usually distributed to those agencies in advance. Thus, it was possible that tickets for a popular production might be sold out at one agency but were still on sale at another agency. In other words, a potential spectator would sometimes end up making a trip to several ticket agencies in order to buy a desirable ticket.

Ticket Pia computerized the ticket sale system and as a result, has succeeded in drastically simplifying procedures to obtain a ticket. A potential spectator can now make a reservation over the phone, and either ask for the ticket to be mailed or go directly to a nearby Ticket Pia Spot to pick it up. Ticket Pia Spots are currently located at more than three hundred places in metropolitan Tokyo. In addition to easier access to a ticket, the system has also made it possible to offer a potential spectator the best possible seat at the time of reservation, for the Pia computer center controls all
ticket-sale and reservation information. In 1984, the attendance of theatre, concerts and other artistic events in Tokyo was said to be 63,000,000. Tateishi states that Ticket Pia has cultivated potential spectators who otherwise would not go to the theatre and concerts.

It is clear that two decisive factors—a new spirit represented by Tsuka Köhei's theatre along with easier access to information and tickets—guided the little theatre movement to commercialization and expansion. Today, Noda Hideki and his company (Yume no Yūminsha; an untranslatable word play) and Kōkami Shōji and his The Third Stage (Daisan Butai) regularly attract 10,000 spectators for each production. The Third Stage has a record of 18,000 spectators for their production given at Kinokuniya Hall in December 1987 (Shonichi, Tokyo 113). The number is almost baffling for a production given by a "little" theatre group.

The popularity of a few little theatre groups has drawn the interest of large-scale enterprises. Academic and journalistic recognition of the little theatre as legitimate "culture" has also convinced those enterprises that they can use it as a part of their strategic moves to promote an attractive corporate identity among consumers. Big businesses thus found that an effective way to achieve this goal was to subsidize the works produced by popular little theatres. Construction of
theatres is another strategic move taken by large corporations (Matsuba 83-88). Critic Senda Akihiko records that in the year 1988 alone, nine new theatre buildings and halls were opened in metropolitan Tokyo. Three more theatres were opened by April 1989, and plans are under way to build four more theatres and halls by the fall of 1990 ("Sôsei" 76-81). The conglomerate Tôkyû opened Culture Village (Bunkamura) in 1989 in which the organization built a theatre, and hired the popular and critically recognized little theatre group, Free Theatre Company (Jiyû Gekijô) to be its company in residence (Uchida "Wakamono no" 61-62). The aim is two-fold: to create a good corporate image at an abstract level and at a concrete level attract spectators to use the railroads, department stores, and other facilities owned by Tôkyû located in and near Culture Village.

Ironically enough, the renowned little theatre artist Ôta Shôgo disbanded his Transformation Theatre Company (Tenkei Gekijô) in September 1988. This occurred in the cultural climate in which a few little theatre groups were selling their work to an enormous number of spectators with the subsidized support of large-scale enterprises. Ôta received no such support. The critics agree that by the fall 1988, Transformation Theatre could no longer pay the expenses of their theatre building T2. Along with this specific financial situation, Ôta points
to the commercialization of theatre as a reason for him to disband the company:

It has come to the point that we no longer can keep the group and our studio theatre. . . . However, our disbandment is not just a result of our failure in management. We have been experimenting in various ways in order to go beyond the time, throughout the seventies and in the eighties. . . . We have realized that we need to stop here to change, to find out some kind of method large enough to enable us to go beyond the time. . . . We are doubting if it is interesting to live in this [Japanese] culture. We feel the contemporary theatre is extremely uninteresting. We feel something is wrong with Japanese culture today. Still, we have to live. We have to find out a way to live—. I feel it’s the end of art. This is a culture of entertainment. (Uchida, "Tenkei" 50)

Ôta’s statement is indicative of his resentment against commercialized little theatre groups. Ôta’s almost ascetic style of theatre sharply contrasts with the work given by some popular little theatre groups such as Yume no Yūminsha and The Third Stage. The general tendencies of the currently popular little theatre companies are: speed, word play, quick repartee, parody, pastiche, kitsch, and the use of dancing, music and games to provide an uplifting atmosphere. Furthermore, they often show the sense of life as a game, indifference to politics and social problems, and sometimes a sci-fi sense of the end of the world. In contrast, Ôta’s theatre, with its emphasis on the intensity of silence inspired by the nó theatre, seems to appeal to a limited
audience, in spite of the troupe's being highly respected.

Books on the little theatre proliferate, which also illustrates the commercialization and popularity of the little theatre. Two books—Tokyō shibai tankentai (Tokyo Theatre Expedition) (1988) and Shibai ga yaritai! (I Want to Do Theatre!) (1989)—draw our attention because they are intended to be a kind of handbook or guide to those who want to form theatre groups. For example, Shibai ga yaritai! includes such practical information as how to find and rent a rehearsal and performance space, how to get tickets and posters printed on a small budget, how to create inexpensive and yet imaginative stage settings, how to enlist help from "professional" lighting and music artists, and so forth. Such books suggest that the little theatre is no longer the theatre of revolt, and that spectators are ready to become practitioners any time.

This situation is what Kisaragi Koharu, the leader of Noise, calls "institutionalization of the theatre" (engeki no seidoka) ("Ima taoyakana" 77). She concisely points out an ironic historical context that may have contributed to what she calls "institutionalization" of the theatre: "I think that only the institutionalized part of the movement in the 1960s and the 1970s has been transmitted to us" ("Ima taoyakana" 77). By the word
institution, she seems to mean the established paradigm of the little theatre as culture, which enhances spectators’ willingness to buy tickets and participate in theatre events.

In addition to the demonstration of extreme popularity and commercialization of the little theatre, the books are revealing in another way. They clearly show that the majority of little theatre groups are operating under great financial strain. The books give us a general picture of the average relatively well-established little theatre group, that can attract approximately 2,000 spectators per production. The number of company members varies, but the usual medium-sized little theatre group collects a "maintenance fee" (gekidan ijihi) from each company member. This fee ranges from 5,000 to 20,000 yen per person and per month, which is approximately US $30.00 to $130.00 (Shonichi, Tokyo 110).

In addition to the maintenance fee, the majority of little theatre groups require company members to sell tickets before a production. The average number of tickets assigned to each member is from fifty to sixty (Shibai Otasuke, Shibai ga yaritai! 83; Shonichi, Tokyo 112-113). This system aims at providing a stable income as well as at cultivating new spectators who might come back after having seen one show. However, if a company
member has a limited number of acquaintances who will buy tickets (which is usually the case), she has to "buy" the remaining tickets for herself. In order to support their groups and themselves, most little theatre practitioners work part-time. They seldom take a full-time job, because they cannot meet the requirement in time and commitment of full-time work; for example, they cannot work just before and during a production.

It should be emphasized here that participation in the little theatre is a voluntary commitment. Thousands of theatre practitioners are committed to work for the theatre even though they are not necessarily rewarded financially nor recognized by the general public. Although a number of theatre practitioners may leave the theatre as they grow older and start to have their own families, new generations of artists constantly come into the theatre to find a venue of creative expression. The turnover may attest to the director Ôta's criticism: "the culture of entertainment." However, is it fair to dismiss the younger practitioners' effort and commitment merely as a part of the "culture of entertainment"?

A number of theatre practitioners show an unwillingness to receive enterprises' financial support because they are afraid of constraints they may be forced to accommodate (Shonichi, Tokyo 117). However, cultivation of new spectators and secure working
atmosphere are basic necessities for the theatre. The director Suzuki Tadashi succinctly states the dilemma of survival and art:

it is sad that writers or theatre practitioners always end up facing the fact that we have to sell, however serious our works may be. This is the structure of today's capitalism. Whatever confession we make, it's bound to be commercial. So, as for Toyama [Suzuki's activities in Toyama prefecture] for example, there are people who criticize me, saying that "Suzuki is just trying to stir up the mass media, though he is covering it over with the words that sound somewhat spiritual." Why shouldn't I? I have to lead the group, I have to manage it and keep it, and I have to attract spectators. It's [to think about the theatre in terms of management] what I should do.

However, we should note that there is something beyond management and business—something serious, something spiritual [in the theatre]. . . . (Senda, Gekiteki 145)

Suzuki's International Institute of Performing Arts (Kokusai Butai Kenkyūjo) in Toga is a rare case of a private art project that receives a governmental subsidy. The ironical fact is that the subsidy comes from depopulation prevention funds (kaso taisakuhi)8 rather than from culture and art funds (bunkahi) (Ei et al., "Utsuriyuku" 30). The subsidy the company is receiving illustrates the lack of governmental interest in supporting art for art's sake. It also demonstrates the

8 Toga village in Toyama prefecture was one of the rural and agriculturally-based areas in Japan which had been facing a problem of depopulation in 1976 when Suzuki Tadashi moved his company SCOT to the village.
governmental recognition that SCOT is contributing to the prevention of depopulation of a remote country area, by its presence, and by the International Theatre Festival which annually attracts a large number of people from all over the world.

Currently, it seems impossible to separate art and economy, creative expression and monetary control. The paradigm of the little theatre as the legitimate avant-garde of culture seems to have completely submerged the spirit of revolt in the movement of the 1960s.

However, as Suzuki says, we want to believe that art is something more than economy. Art should be something that contributes to transforming the rigid structure of society and culture in spite of its eventual submersion into the establishment. Perhaps the fact that so many little theatre practitioners continue even under adverse financial situations attests to the possibility of art resisting the threat of submersion. On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret the same effort as the expression of their hope to be recognized commercially and culturally in the near future. Wish for recognition and the will to go on seem to be inseparably tied to each other.

It should be noted again that the majority of little theatre practitioners at the present do not have political and ideological agendas, agendas that were the
moving force behind the little theatre movement in the 1960s. The lack of ideological commitment makes it more difficult to justify continuous work while in financial difficulty even in the hope for recognition. This is the factor that enables us to see what the director Suzuki calls "spiritual."

**Popular Discourses on Women**

Historicity is the factor that we have to consider when we try to understand a certain phenomenon that comes into being during a specific period of time. By historicity, I mean both the history of the theatre and the so-called zeitgeist that determines a mode of thinking and a perspective. In the former section, I illustrated what I perceive as the history of the Japanese little theatre in order to place women's theatre in the 1970s and the 1980s in its appropriate historical perspective. In this section, I will focus on the zeitgeist of the 1970s and the 1980s that made it possible for women's theatre groups to appear. A point I will make in conjunction with the former section and the present section is that the appearance of the women's theatre in Japan was, in a way, a historically-determined consequence rather than a conscious revolt by Japanese women against the notion of the power of so-called "patriarchy."
The zeitgeist of the 1970s and the 1980s can be perceived in the popular discourses, which carved out an unprecedentedly prominent position for women in Japanese culture and society both in terms of coverage and of placement of women as subjects who act. First, there was a journalistic discourse about the women's liberation movement in Japan (ウーマンリブ) in the early 1970s; second, a feminist discourse over women's reproductive rights; third, a commercial discourse that targeted women as major consumers; and fourth, the proliferation of essays and "special issues" on women in periodicals of various fields. Examples I will describe in this section will be limited because the scope of this dissertation does not allow more extensive studies.

First, let us look at a journalistic discourse about the women’s liberation movement. Japanese feminist scholar Inoue Teruko, in her Joseigaku to sono shūhen (Women's Studies and Its Surroundings) (1981), summarizes Japanese mass media’s responses to the women’s liberation movement in 1970 and 1971 as the mixture of objective reportage and increasingly biased scandalization (156-173). Active participants of the movement were labelled "hysterical" and "egotistic," categories which

9 Throughout this section, I will use the word "subject" in a general sense to denote an agent who can control her acts as opposed to "object.
drastically reduced the influence of the movement both over society and over younger generations of women who would otherwise have joined with their predecessors (Ehara 101).

Inoue suggests that a reason for the malicious responses may lie in the fact that the Japanese women's liberation movement in the early 1970s rigorously questioned the social and cultural structure which had contained women's existence in limited acceptable roles. In contrast with the women's movement (fujin undô) which had developed as part of the civil rights movements initiated by the Occupation following the World War II, the movement of the 1970s presented a radical questioning of social assumptions of women's reproductive roles by its emphasis on women's autonomy of body (194-204). The participants of the movement consciously negated femininity by their use of "dirty" and inappropriate language along with the rejection of feminine make-up and dresses, discarded logical reasoning both in writing and speech in search of "women's logic" (onna no ronri). They refused to marry in favor of women's collectives, asserted the abortion right as well as the right to give birth to "illegitimate" children (Inoue 194-214). Inoue and another feminist scholar Ehara point out that a threatening aspect of the conscious negation of traditional values may have incited ridicule and malice
in the journalistic responses (Inoue 162-170; Ehara 109-111, 135). Particularly, the assertion of the abortion right undermined the Japanese "myth of perfect motherhood,"¹⁰ the myth of which has been placing Japanese women in a position of ever giving and forgiving mothers to their husbands and sons (Ehara 135).

The mass media's malicious responses reduced the political influence the Japanese women's liberation movement might have had on Japanese women and society at large. However, the mass coverage given to the women of the movement carved out the non-traditional and negative, but the strong image of women who could assert their so-called hysterical egotism, in a Japanese journalistic discourse in the early 1970s.

Second, we should look at a feminist discourse on women's reproductive rights, in order to discover what the "hysterical" women were actually saying in the movement, and the resulting expansion of the modes of subjectivity available for women. The women's liberation in the early 1970s evolved by resisting women's created subjectivity, demonstrating that women are capable of

handling the responsibilities associated with men's works (Ehara 102). According to Ehara, most participants of the early women's liberation movement in Japan had experienced strict sex-segregation and role-distribution as activists in the New Left movement of the 1960s in their effort against the US-Japan Security Treaty (Ehara 104-105). Disillusioned by the roles they were given in the political effort—preparing meals and taking care of male activists, women directed their attention to redefining femininity and women's roles. Ehara states that the New Left movement played a germinative role for the appearance of the Japanese women's liberation movement by; giving women a critical perspective against established political sects; training women for political efforts; providing women with a direct motive to develop their own movement (Ehara 105).

Beginning with such simple questions—why are women not given positions of responsibility in offices?; why are women paid less?—women of the early movement set forth to question socially imposed femininity. In 1972, a revision of eugenic protection law was proposed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The ensuing debate redirected women's liberation movement towards the issue of women's reproductive rights (Ehara 105-109; Inoue 202, 211-213; Sakamoto).
The amendment proposed to delete the item from the eugenic protection law that justifies legal abortion on the basis of economic necessity. The two major issues that stemmed from the debate over the amendment were: first, the amendment would no longer allow women to have legal abortion according to their own choices; second, it would deny basic human rights to the handicapped by its underlying acceptance of killing so-called deficient genes (Ehara 126-134; Sakamoto 103-105).

Numerous grass roots women's collectives were founded to carry out the anti-eugenic protection law campaign as well as to discuss related women's issues (Ehara 105-109; Sakamoto 89-102). The campaign directed women's attention to autonomy over their bodies. Furthermore, it also called for women's attention to the issue of peace, because the proposed revision of eugenic protection law would allow the government to have perfect control over reproduction with its proposal of the eugenic consultation center, through which the Ministry of Health and Welfare would provide marriage counselling and birth control methods in terms of eugenic protection (Sakamoto 47-56). Along with the notion of killing deficient genes, the law presented a possibility of the strict governmental control over the individual, especially during war time (Sakamoto 136-148).
The proposed revision of the eugenic protection was repeatedly dropped and re-presented to the Diet in the early 1970s. Ehara summarizes that the early women's liberation movement lost its intensity and motivating force by 1975, by the year the revision of the eugenic protection law seemed to have become unfeasible (108). The radical, grass roots movement was gradually replaced by more conservative but socially recognizable movements such as a consumer movement (shōhisha undō), and a general feminist movement in academia through the appearance of the discipline of women's studies (Ehara 108).

Ehara further maintains that the year 1975, as the International Women's Year (kokusai fujin nen), marked the transition of the Japanese women's liberation movement. Women's issues attained social recognition and gained a place in a popular journalistic discourse as "women problems" (fujin mondai). This new trend was supported by more professionally established women (rather than women active in the early movement). Among new organizations was the Association of Women to Act (Kōdō o Okosu Kai) (Ehara 108).

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11 The amendment of the eugenic protection law was brought up in the Diet in March, 1982 again, and was dropped in May, 1983 (Sakamoto 150, 174).
This social recognition, along with the early negative reaction to the movement, prepared a place for women as more active participants in society than had been the case before. Ehara questions this recognition of "women problems" as a factor that may have prevented the original impulse of the movement to question social creation of femininity from further development. However, it is fair to say that the image of women as active subject was brought in by participants of both the early and later women's liberation movements, through the social ridicule and recognition given to their efforts.

Third, in order to see this growing recognition of women in a general cultural climate, let us look at commercial discourses. A typical marketing strategy in the 1970s targeted women as consumers on an unprecedentedly large scale, thus making women more visible than before. One of the noticeable examples is the former Japan National Railways' "Discover Japan" (disukabâ japan) campaign that lasted for ten years in order to enhance tourism.

The campaign team targeted young women as a moneyed and leisured class, and as potential travellers who will "drag" their husbands on trips in the future. Marilyn Ivy reports on a massive campaign of research into attitudes of young women, which revealed "women's tendency to self-dramatize" (Ivy, Discourses 46).
Consequently, the team created posters depicting young women meeting and experiencing the "marginalized Japan"—such as an unnamed old temple, a market place in the countryside, rather than well-known scenic and tourists' spots (Ivy 52-55). In other words, the campaign tapped into a woman's wish to be a heroine of a narrative in which she discovers a different "self" and a different Japan, by travelling through remote country areas associated with lost Japanese tradition. In accordance with Japanese mass "obsession with origins in the post war period," as Ivy states, the campaign was "wildly successful" (37).

It is notable that the campaign presented a new image of women in representation; i.e., the woman as the heroine of her own narrative. On the one hand, it placed a woman as a heroine in an "authentic" quest narrative by inspiring a desire to retrieve the "lost" Japanese tradition. Thus, it seems that the campaign gave women a position of subject as opposed to that of object and
reflection of male desire. \(^{12}\) On the other hand, by aiming at men along with women, it also manipulated the picturesque images of women in search of the tradition as the model and reflection of men's search for "self" and "tradition." Thus again, it placed women in a position of object and reflection of male desire.

Furthermore, by intentionally providing a schematic narrative in which a woman can be the heroine, the campaign team made women the object of marketing manipulation. In other words, whether or not the targeted young women actually wanted to self-dramatize, the team created a new image of women who wanted to be the heroines. The manipulation illustrates an operational characteristic of popular discourses which at the same time objectify women and provide them with a vicarious position of subject. Consequently, it is possible to say that the image of women as subjects and as controllers of their own stories is equally a creation of discourses as that of the image of women as object and reflection.

\(^{12}\) See Virginia Woolf, *The Room of Her Own* for her succinct statement regarding women as the mirror. The psychological analyses of women as the reflection of male desire are to be found in the works of those theorists such as Irigaray and Gallop to name only a few. Film theorists such as De Lauretis, Silverman, and Kuhn (again to name a few) have been rigorously working on women in representation as the reflection of male desire.
Still, it seems fair to state that the overall effect of the campaign was to provide women in popular discourses with the position of being a subject who initiates her own quest narrative instead of being the object of somebody else's quest.

Fourth, the proliferation of essays and "special issues" on women in periodicals shows further recognition of women. In the 1980s, the image of women as subjects became more prominent than before in popular discourses. Along with the unprecedented visibility of women, women playwrights and directors—including the women of the four women's theatre groups—started to draw recognition in both art and theatre journals in the early 1980s. In 1982, two "special issues" on theatre were published through popular journals; both Kôkoku hihyô (Advertisement Criticism) and Bijutsu techo (Art Notebook) devoted considerable pages to women in theatre, by selecting out a few noticeable women playwrights and directors. In 1987, the theatre journal Teatoro (Theatre) published a special issue on "the young leaders of the theatre" (wakaki engeki kishutachi), which focused on five women playwrights/directors—including the women of the four women's theatre groups discussed in this study. As if to conclude the "age of women" (onna no jidai) commonly associated with the 1980s in Japan,
Teatoro issued another special on "feminism and theatre" (feminizumu to engeki) in July, 1989.

The four issues demonstrate the increasing degree of recognition of the images of women as subjects in popular discourses over a decade. The first two issues focus on interviewing women in theatre, while the latter two demonstrate selected critics' responses to the women's work. The interviewed women in the early issues are: Kisaragi Koharu and Watanabe Eriko along with three male playwrights/directors for Kôkoku hihyô, and Kisaragi Koharu, Watanabe Eriko, and the former member of The Blue Bird Theatre Company Kino Hana for Bijutsu techô. The selection shows the popularity as well as the recognition just about to be given to the women's theatre groups in the year 1982. The issues presented the solid image of women as creators and controllers. Furthermore, the latter two issues demonstrate that the women playwrights/directors had acquired the stable position in critical discourses by the end of the 1980s.

The cultural climate of the 1970s and the 1980s opened up a mode of subjectivity for women; i.e., to be subjects of their own action and narrative. As we have seen in the above four examples—a journalistic discourse on the women's liberation movement, a feminist discourse on women's reproductive rights, a commercial discourse targeting women as consumers, and the proliferation of
popular discourses on women—popular discourses have gradually carved out the socially acceptable images of women as subjects. In other words, the women's wish to be subjects (as represented in the discourse of women's liberation movement) and popular discourses on women have created mutually enforcing dynamics which have resulted in the general recognition of the "age of women," and the presence of women creators.

The appearance of the women's theatre groups in the 1970s and in the early 1980s should be understood in this Japanese cultural climate of the period. To reiterate, increasing social recognition was given to women and to the notion of women as subjects, before the appearance of women's theatre groups as an expression of women's wish to be subjects of creation. However, once the groups started to produce critically acclaimed plays, they in turn enforced the general trend of recognition of women as creative subjects.

Still, unmarried status of most women of the four theatre groups may illustrate the difficulty of women to be creators when they are assuming the possibly constricting roles of mother and wife.¹³ Even in the current climate in which women are considered to be free,

there are a number of factors that both curtail and transform women's wishes and their perception of themselves.

For example, women's magazines covertly uphold the traditional values—marriage and motherhood—that give women a socially acceptable position in Japanese society, while appraising women's free will in selecting their work, way of living, and ultimately their husbands. Thus shallow middle-class values are handed out to women-readers as the standard of living. I do not intend to degrade traditional values such as marriage and motherhood in pointing out that women should be free from the imposition of these values. However, even the choices women make, believing those to be their own will, often show a huge degree of cultural influence over them.

A recent special issues of the magazine Dakåpo (Da capo) (Sept. 20, 1989: 4-34) on "the first rate woman" (ichiryû no onna), listed a number of successful women in various professional fields who were "first rate" women. Then, who are the second rate, and the third rate women? Where should we find differences between women? Only in performance and the successful operation in professional jobs? Is this the kind of recognition women want in society? Can this so-called recognition in society be an illustration of women finally becoming subject? How many women will be influenced by this kind of issue to try to
become a "first rate" woman? The media coverage of the women of four theatre groups also demonstrates this danger of containing women's work in a limited point of view; i.e., success.

The women of the four theatre groups were not included in the arbitrarily-selected "first-rate" women issue. The theatre, especially the little theatre, still seems to be outside of the social hierarchy, even though the little theatre has been well-established as a cultural movement since the 1960s. The theatre's not-quite-inside-nor-outside position resembles women's position in contemporary culture and society. Women are not quite subject nor object. Although any resistance to nominal order tends to be contained, the little theatre, with its unique status in society as well as its small scale, may be giving chances to the women of the four theatre groups to be more active in asserting their creative energy.
CHAPTER III
THE BLUE BIRD THEATRE COMPANY:
WOMEN IN SEARCH OF THEMSELVES

The Blue Bird Theatre Company (Gekidan Aoi Tori) was founded in 1974 in Tokyo as the first all-women little theatre group in Japan. The group, through its almost sixteen years of successful operation, has paved the way for numerous women's theatre groups to enter the theatrical scene of the 1980s. Japanese theatre critic, Nishimura Hiroko, states that the Blue Bird Theatre Company has encouraged women to be the subject of theatrical expressions, rather than to be the representation of male writers/directors' wishes ("Josei to geki" 59-60).

Since the inception of the group, the members of The Blue Bird Theatre Company have been collectively operating the company, and collaborating in creating plays under the joint pseudonym of Ichidō Rei.\(^1\) The name implies that all members are contributing to the creation

\(^1\) For all bibliographic entries of the works done by the Blue Bird Theatre Company, see under Ichidō Rei.
of plays. With this emphasis on collaboration, the women of the Blue Bird demonstrated their wish to be free from an imposition of roles and character types by central and powerful creators (which were mostly men).

Through collaborative improvisations, the company members have continuously searched into themselves for their most immediate concerns as the resources for creating plays. Their effort touches precisely on one of women's desires; i.e., the desire to be the subject; in other words, the desire to create a narrative in which women can be the active voice.

In studying this theatre group, several questions arise because of the group's characteristics; i.e., its pioneering status as the first professional all-women little theatre group in Japan; its collective organization; its collaborative creation through discussions and the heavy use of improvisational techniques; its inception in the mid-1970s when Japanese women's liberation movement was asserting itself on an unprecedented scale. The group's operational and creational method resembles the techniques used by both the activists of Japanese women's liberation movement (Sakamoto 64-82), and the participants of all-women theatre groups influenced by a feminist ideology in the United States (Case, Feminism 62-81; Keyssar 126-147).
The questions are: how is this group related to Japanese women's liberation movement in the 1970s?; is the group's audience special—for example, are spectators all women?; how does the group resemble or differ from all-women theatre groups which also appeared at roughly the same time in the United States?; are there any specifically "female" factors in their works?; if there are, what are they?. Furthermore, what modes of subjectivity do they present for women as an all-women theatre group.

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the relationship between the Blue Bird Theatre Company and Japanese women's liberation movement, describe the Blue Bird's method of creation, then refer to the similarities and differences between the Blue Bird and groups in the United States. Then, in order to clarify the kinds of subjectivity the Blue Bird is presenting, I will analyze its plays, focusing on women's positions in narrative. This focus is influenced by narrative theories developed by film scholar Teresa de Lauretis, Soviet semiotician Jurij Lotman, and Japanese folklorist Yanagita Kunio.
The Blue Bird Theatre Company and the Japanese Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s

One of the company's founding members, Serikawa Ai, states that it was purely accidental that the company became an all-women theatre group, and the relationship between the company and Japanese feminists has not been a friendly one. For example, the members of the Blue Bird Theatre Company recall an incident when they were criticized by feminist spectators for wearing kimonos on the stage (3 Sept. 1988).

For activists of the Japanese women's liberation movement in the 1970s, a woman wearing a traditional costume symbolized women's subordination to men. As I discussed in Chapter II, the women's liberation movement in the 1970s involved a radical questioning of women's roles, roles that had been conditioned by a socio-cultural structure that positions men in the place of power and control. In other words, women activists' experience with the Japanese New Left movement in the 1960s led them to believe that social reform should be based on the reform of individuals' concepts of women (Sakamoto 17-32). Thus, in addition to tackling

As of 1990, nine performers and three administrators are involved in the Blue Bird Theatre Company. Among them, five performers are core members—Kasai Saki, Serikawa Ai, Uemura Yuriko, Amagi Orime and Izawa Maki. The first three performers are the founding members who still remain with the group.
particular issues, such as the revision of the eugenic protection law, women in the movement tried to "re-examine all problems related to sexism in daily life" (Sakamoto 23).

This re-examination was directed to women as well as to men. Women activists believed women's self-image had to change; as a result, some women activists took an extreme stance by dogmatically examining women's life styles and activities that should be left to individuals' choice.

This attitude is reflected in the criticism against the Blue Bird Theatre Company's work. It seems some women of the liberation movement expected the company to present strong role models for women who were trying to bring about a change in women's subjectivity. They wanted to see characters in costumes that appeared

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3 For example, Japanese feminist scholar Ehara Yumiko cites an incident in which a pregnant activist-woman was criticized by other activist-women for her decision to give birth to a child. Some Japanese activists took the rejection of women's traditional roles including motherhood to the extreme, thus did not take into consideration an individual woman's choice for self-fulfillment (Ehara 140-141). These women activists conflated daily, personal activities and political activities, without giving much consideration to the implication of the notion of "the personal is political." This notion calls for an analysis of socio-cultural structure which determines women's roles and positions in both personal and social life, but does not imply a dogmatic criticism of a woman's personal choice (Ehara 140-143).
positive in the activists' eyes, and say lines that defied any hint of women's subordination. The result was the almost nonsensical criticism that "sexism"--lines, costumes, and other minor details--appeared in the company's works.

Refuting such criticism, company member Serikawa Ai emphasizes the power of art to possibly induce social and personal change, by associating art and the women's liberation movement with an act of lighting up candles:

The feminists' endeavor, probably, is like a work to light up candles one by one, but you can imagine that by the time they have lightened up the tenth candle, the first light is dead. When artists truly pursue their work, . . . they can light thirty candles all together. . . . (3 Sept. 1988)

Thus, Serikawa negates the relationship with the women's liberation movement by emphasizing the efficacy of art as distinct from a political struggle. She states that the Blue Bird does not wish to "declare 'women should not be subservient to men' on the stage" because the company is "not doing political theatre" (3 Sept. 1988).

In spite of this statement, the Blue Bird Theatre Company's work seems to demonstrate the concerns similar to those presented by the Japanese women's liberation movement in the 1970s; i.e., women's roles and subjectivity, and a wish to be an autonomous subject.
By expressing the founding members' wish to be the subject of creation, company member Uemura Yuriko states that they wanted to create their own plays in their own group because they felt the women depicted in most playscripts were alienated from actual, living women. Serikawa Ai also points out that women were often depicted as types in modern Japanese drama—a hysterical woman, an intellectual woman with a pair of thick glasses, a mother, a daughter, and a beautiful woman who gently sees off a man who is departing for a journey (3 Sept. 1988). In other words, the founding members of the Blue Bird Theatre Company were against prescribed women's role types.

Further, they needed an environment separate from men in order for them to become the subjects of creation. This was similar to many activists in the liberation movement resorting to women's collectives, such as the Shinjuku Liberation Center (Shinjuku Ribu Sentâ), in order to re-examine and question their roles in society (Ehara 107-108). In founding a new theatre group, the founders of the Blue Bird Theatre Company left a theatre school associated with a renowned shingeki troupe, the Tokyo Theatre Ensemble (Tokyo Engeki Ansanburu). Because their male colleagues did not want to join them, the company "accidentally" became an all-women troupe.
(Serikawa 3 Sept. 1988). This beginning of the troupe may illustrate both men’s resistance to female leadership and the women’s determination to secure an environment in which they could search for their own style of theatre, as well as for characters and plays that would demonstrate "real" women.

Thus, though the company members deny a mutual supportive relationship with the Japanese women’s liberation movement, it seems fair to say that both the Blue Bird Theatre Company and the liberation movement came about as a result of women’s wish to be the autonomous subjects of action and creation. In addition, it seems unfair to allow dogmatic activists to represent the Japanese women’s liberation movement, the effort of which must have contributed to the expansion of the professional fields in which a woman could join as an active participant.

Collective Creation

Today, collective creation is not rare in little theatre groups in Japan. However, the practice was totally unprecedented when the Blue Bird Theatre Company

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started it in 1974. In this section, I will briefly describe the company’s method of collaborative creation, then illustrate an actual process of play-creation as an example.

The members of Aoi Tori have employed the method of collective creation since the inception of the company. According to the founding members, they started to develop this method simply because there was no writer among them. Thus, the performers began creating a play by writing down scenes, stories, characters, and settings in which they wanted to perform. By trying out various daily exercises, including those of Stanislavsky and Grotowski, the company members gradually developed the improvisational method of creation, through which they felt that they could create their own plays and speak their own words (3 Sept. 1988).

For the first six months from the inception of the Blue Bird Theatre Company, the performers created various short plays as training exercises without planning to stage them for the public. The six members divided themselves into two or three groups, discussed general story lines, then created sixty-minute plays through improvisation. According to Uemura, the performers could not imagine how one would act and speak in a certain situation without actually trying it out through
improvisation. Serikawa also states that they felt words from their own mouths were living and true to them. Furthermore, Serikawa continues that they experienced an unexpected energy-flow during improvisations, because each performer did not know how other performers would react to her (3 Sept. 1988). Thus, the improvisational technique seems to provide the performers with a way to look for their "own words" and "own feelings", as well as a way to heighten the energy of performance.

Along with improvisation, the creation of a new play involves extensive discussions by the company members. Usually, the company members start with an extensive but not too specific conversation regarding what they are most interested in at the moment of creation. The exchange of ideas may last several days, since they try to keep their minds as open as possible in order to allow their thoughts and interests free rein. Diverse topics are covered, a great amount of trivial concerns are mentioned, then gradually, a theme that concerns all the company members emerges from the mass of trivia.

During this brainstorming, each performer keeps presenting images and scenes she wants to enact in the new play, even before the company settles on a theme. Once a theme is set, the performers start by sorting out bits and pieces of the ideas that had been presented
during the discussion. This also helps them decide on a general story line. After this intensive work has been done, they begin to expand each scene, idea, and character through improvisation. Each performer acts as writer and director all through the process of creation. This method of creation requires approximately three and a half months before a play is ready for a public performance (3 Sept. 1988; 4 Nov. 1988).

In order to draw a clearer picture of the creative process, I will summarize how the company created the award-winning play about aging, Aoimi o tabeta (She Has Eaten a Green Fruit)\(^5\) basing my description on records kept by the company members.

In July, 1986, the five company members held a six-day retreat, to discuss images and a title for the next show. They discussed various elements of a play, such as costumes, props, settings, and scenes. Some of the ideas presented were: enveloping a theatre auditorium with a large cloth; inserting a scene at a harbor because the acting area of the theatre in which they were planning to perform was shaped like the deck of a ship; presenting a scene with a miniature garden.

\(^5\) The play was awarded the prestigious Kinokuniya Theatre Award (Kinokuniya Engekishô) in 1987.
Finally on the fourth day, they discussed a title of the show. They tried to find a title that touched on their unconsciousness. By giving a title to an unwritten play even before they decided a theme for it, they felt that they could escape from the constricting realm of content, logic, consciousness, and language.

They selected *Aoimi o tabeta* from among many other suggested titles. The adjective *aoi* in Japanese indicates both "blue" and "green and young." I imagine that they liked the images of the blue sky and a fresh, green, and sometimes bitter fruit.

Upon their return from the retreat, they started extensive meetings to discuss a theme for the play. The discussion took the form of carefree chatting, touching on various issues and topics that had recently impressed them. During this process, each member constantly tried to reach into her unconscious to touch on an essential concern (8 Aug. 1989).

During the second meeting, the company gradually realized that "aging" was in the center of their interest. On the third day, they began to see that their interests were evolving around a woman’s perception of herself in the process of aging. Finally, they decided a theme: how an old woman perceives herself in the present and looks back on her past.
During further discussions, the members looked into their personal resources—their own pasts, their prospects for the future, and the stories of their mothers and grandmothers. The specific stories and concerns led them to decide details about the heroine: the heroine was to have a mild case of senile dementia; in her confusion of time, place, and surrounding situations, she was to live in a delusion of her childhood; she was to re-experience her growing-up before and during World War II as it appeared to her eyes as a child.

Following a nine-day holiday, Uemura brought in a diary that her mother had kept when she was taking care of her senile grandmother. The diary revealed how an old woman’s memory moved from one memory to another without logical connections, and this became a precious source for further consideration of the relationship between one’s memory and identity.

Within the next ten days, they constructed a rough sequence of scenes: 1) the theatre is enveloped by a cloth; the cloth is taken off at the beginning of the show; a band and small animals come on stage through several doors; 2) then, a scene at a harbor; 3) the heroine refuses to board the ship and escapes; people run after her; 4) the heroine’s reflection on her past (as a
daughter of an upper-class family); 5) a black car appears in the fog; people come out of the car and start making speeches loudly (but all the speeches are about personal concerns and meaningless); 6) something terrifying passes (terrifying and beautiful); 7) a miniature Japanese house--small, but still allowing people to move in and out; 8) the departure of the old woman; the heroine goes up the stairs that leans towards the top of the wall of the theatre (the use of the wall as if it were a ship). Finally, they named the heroine Toyoko, and cast the youngest member, Izawa Maki, for the role.

Toward the end of the first month of this creating process, the company added more details to the above eight scenes, and carved the heroine into a more specific character: Toyoko is an old woman who cannot accept the fact of her aging. As a result of her strong desire to live in the happiest days of her life, she escapes into the delusion of her childhood. Although she refuses to depart for a trip to her hometown at the beginning of the play, in the end, she accepts the elderly state of her life. The play concludes with Toyoko's metaphorical departure for the life of acceptance.

At this point, the company took a second retreat for intensive improvisational work. They needed to tighten
dispersed fragments into a dense piece of work, and to find elements to add to the basic story line. Furthermore, the company explored characters' psychological states and transitions, by improvising scenes that would not be included in the play. For example, they improvised the meeting of characters which precedes the beginning of the play. The company members tape-recorded their improvisations, selected lines out of the recordings for use in the script, then improvised again with the lines they had selected. The process continued until the image of each scene expanded and lines and actions became clearer.

This long-term process of creation involved a search for adequate movement, blocking, costumes, props, and scenery in consultation with a scene designer. Following this, rehearsal with the "script" was less than a month. By this time, the performers had already created their roles and knew characters and the direction of the play quite thoroughly (Ichidō, Nakayoshi 100-108; 3 Sept. 1988; 4 Nov. 1988).

It is notable that the company's description of creation hinges on the word "unconscious" and the notion of touching on the core and essence deep down in the members' psyches. For the company members, improvisation and discussion of their interests are ways to reach to
this unnamed core and essence from which they believe that their true desire, unconditioned by external realities, eventually emerges. The validity of the notion will be questioned later in an analysis of the group's plays. Suffice it to say here that their creative method is self-referential, and in this sense, shows a clear difference from collective works informed by a feminist ideology which requires distinct references to external realities.

A Brief Comparison between The Blue Bird Theatre Company and Some Feminist Theatre Groups in the United States

The Blue Bird Theatre Company's method of creation, touching on the company members' personal experiences, seems to resemble the consciousness-raising activity utilized by some American theatre groups influenced by radical feminism (Case 62-81; Keyssar 126-127).6

6 For example, At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre Company in Minneapolis utilized the consciousness-raising method both in creation and in operation of the group. The efficacy of the method was questioned by some members during a brown bag meeting held on 30 March 1988 for women from Minneapolis/St. Paul-based collectives. Some women seem to have felt that the method could be used for psychological manipulation of the group members by a few powerful women.
However, the Blue Bird is essentially different from feminist theatre groups in the United States in its self-referential and non-ideological characteristic. In this section, I will briefly compare the characteristics of the Blue Bird Theatre Company and those American feminist theatre groups, that are analogous in collective organization and collaborative creation in order to clarify the contour of the Japanese group. The comparison will focus on four major points: the method of discussion in relation with the consciousness-raising activity; themes of plays; theatrical techniques; and audiences.

As Elizabeth NataliE and others have pointed out, consciousness-raising was developed by activists of the women’s movement in the United States as "a method for

At the Foot of the Mountain is also influenced by what Sue-Ellen Case defines as radical feminism. To summarize Case's definition briefly, radical feminism is based on the belief that the patriarchy is the primary cause of the oppression of women. A radical feminist emphasizes the notion of women's culture as distinct from men's culture, asserts that women's oppression is sexual, and associates women's biology with "certain mental and spiritual states" (68). Among radical feminists, the consciousness-raising is used to "validate the experience of the category called 'woman'" (65). Thus, a theatrical work informed by radical feminism tends to utilize consciousness raising, emphasizes women's sexuality, body and spiritual power, and sometimes involves events (often called "a ritual" focusing on goddesses and witches) outside the traditional theatre. For further discussion of theatre and radical feminism along with materialist feminism, see Case, *Feminism and Theatre* 62-94.
arriving at the truth [of women's life] and as a means for action and organizing" (Natalie 16) and has informed feminist theatre groups' operative and creative processes. Natalie even considers that the creation of feminist drama is itself a part of self-persuasion for the participants to commit to a feminist ideology, thus, "the action and organizing step of the consciousness-raising activity" (17). Thus, in the feminist theatre influenced by radical feminism, consciousness-raising and discussion are supposed to be the methods reaching toward both women's inner "core" and outer realities that condition women's existence.

The themes of the plays presented by various feminist theatre groups in the United States illustrate the major concerns in consciousness-raising activity; "sex-role stereotyping," "abortion," "pregnancy," "motherhood," "rape," "mothers and daughters," "lesbianism," "domestic violence," and "historically important women" (Natalie 17-18). In other words, women's experiences in relation to men and men's culture and reclaiming women's body, history, and tradition were the major concerns.

In contrast, in the Blue Bird's play She Has Eaten a Green Fruit, the company does not present the heroine's experience in relation with men and men's culture. In
spite of the play's poignant theme, "aging," the heroine's possibly painful experiences are glossed over by the presentations of her beautiful childhood. For example, the heroine's marriage and childbearing are simply mentioned in brief sentences. The experience of World War II is presented imaginatively and grippingly, but it is not shown to explore the relationship between men's political power and women's life. The treatment of a war in *She Has Eaten a Green Fruit* reveals a sharp contrast with, for example, *Ashes Ashes We All Fall Down* presented by *At the Foot of the Mountain*; the latter play illustrates the fear of a possible nuclear holocaust and relates it to a woman's life and death (Chinoy and Jenkins 277; Natalie 118-119).

Considering this non-ideological nature of the Blue Bird, it may be natural that we do not see the techniques often used by analogous American feminist theatre groups—"sex-role reversal," "use of historical figures as role models," "satire of sex roles, and "the direct portrayal of women's oppression" (Brown 86-113)---in the plays of the Blue Bird.

The improvisational creation the Blue Bird utilizes is a way to search for the "core" and "essence" deep in the company members' unconsciousness apart from ideological concerns. Their use of improvisational
techniques on the stage is solely to heighten the energy of performance. Thus, as I discussed in the previous section, the Blue Bird's improvisation is self-contained.

In contrast, improvisational techniques are used by some American feminist companies in order to make a ritualistic communion with the audience, in addition to its use in creation (Natalle 19-22). For example, At the Foot of the Mountain used improvisational techniques when performers invite audience responses and involvement in plays like Raped (spectators' testimonies of their experiences of being raped) and The Story of a Mother (spectators' naming and recalling their mothers) (Natalle 20-21).

In only one exceptional case has the Blue Bird Theatre Company used improvisational techniques to allow for a spectator's direct involvement, as in the American examples. This was in their fifteenth anniversary production, Appare (Well Done) in 1988. The company members invited an audience member onto the stage to talk with him/her and shared some food. The scene was inserted purely as what might be called a "communion scene." It was not an integral part of the play (the company members were ready to delete the scene at any time)(4 Nov. 1988); thus, it did not determine the play's direction in any ideological sense. This fact presents
another contrast with improvisational scenes with the audience done by some American feminist theatre groups. For a theatre influenced by a radical feminist ideology, the "ritualistic" scenes are integral to a play, perhaps the most important.

Furthermore, compared to the clarity of American troupes' aim of "persuasion," the members of the Blue Bird describe the communication with the audience in vague terms, "something like love that envelopes the auditorium, and permeates into the sphere outside the theatre building" (Serikawa 3 Sept. 1988).

As the above statement illustrates, the Blue Bird Theatre Company does not target a specific audience; "something like love" cannot be too specific. The result of past audience surveys (kankyaku ankēto) shows that the Blue Bird's audience (averaging 7,000 per production) consists of both women (approximately 70%) and men (roughly 30%).

On the other hand, the theatre of persuasion in the United States, like The Women's Experimental Theatre, mostly aims at an all-women audience (Coss 27 April 1988).

Thus, in contrast with analogous all-women theatre groups in the United States, the Japanese all-women theatre Blue Bird seems to aim at a general audience.
Even during the process of creation, the company members do not try to direct their discussions and improvisations in a way that may relate their work to a specific group of people. The company members state that they enjoy a variety of responses from spectators during a performance; they can hear both male and female voices from the auditorium, perceive a three-year-old child reacting, and see an elderly lady shedding tears (3 Sept. 1988).

The company members seem to emphasize that their plays are accessible to a general audience. Because of this emphasis on accessibility along with the denial of ideological intention (the denial of having a mutually supportive relationship with the Japanese women's liberation movement), the Blue Bird Theatre Company seems to call for an analysis that is not influenced by a feminist perspective.

Indeed, the company's non-ideological and self-referential characteristic points towards a different direction from that of the Japanese women's liberation movement and American radical feminist theatre groups. However, the Blue Bird Theatre Company still questions socially prescribed roles for women, by strongly asserting a wish to be the autonomous subject. This assertion may be reflected in their refusal to
present women in relation to men. 7 As in She Has Eaten a Green Fruit, women's experiences are presented without reference to men. Furthermore, in the ensuing theatrical freedom from social "realities," the Blue Bird Theatre Company pursues women's interests and desires to the farthest limit.

Though I do not believe it is possible to separate women's experiences from men's experiences, the Blue Bird Theatre Company's work still invites a further analysis, in its rigorous search for the "essence" and the "core" of women's experiences, and in its belief that the search can generate a work that will welcome spectators of different sexes and generations.

Containment of Women in Narrative

The members of Aoi Tori mildly and playfully criticize Japanese critics' attitude of labeling their works "feminine," in the introductory section in their anthology of plays, Monogatari: ifûdôdô (The Story: The Storm and Stress):

It seems that there are people who think it unnatural that all-women's work can inspire the emotions of both male and female, the young and the old. They believe that there is a deep and dark river between being all-women and being

7 I owe this perspective to James R. Brandon's provocative comments on the notion of "women in relation to men's culture."
natural, and are surprised to see that spectators "accept the unnatural naturally." However, I do not think that human beings' emotions are so distinctively separate and incommunicable [between men's emotions and women's emotions]. . . . It's a sad outcome of the history in which no all-women group has ever created plays and performed them--while all women's work is also natural, people say it is unnatural. (7)

In spite of this emphasis on accessibility to a general audience, the Blue Bird Theatre Company gives an impression of "exclusion" of men to some spectators. For example, Japanese theatre critic Sasaki Mikio states that he feels "men are excluded" from the Blue Bird's plays, in his review of a play Aruhi sesse to sesse to (One Day Busily and Hastily) ("Shûdan to iukoto" 28). Although the Blue Bird presents two characters in male suits in this play, Sasaki states that he cannot perceive men in them, nor in any capacity is it possible to feel men's presence in the work. Another critic Kawamoto Saburô also states that the Blue Bird "shuts out the gaze of the opposite sex," in its exclusion of men's presence in theatrical works, thus is able to allow its characters to be "free and independent" as one (both a man and a woman) would dream to be (a review of Natsu no omoide 32-33).
The critics' comments are not demonstrations of bias against an all-women theatre company. Though the lack of male characters is a practical result of the fact that the company consists only of women, we also should note that the Blue Bird does not try to emphasize masculinity nor does it try to explore relationships between men and women even when the company presents male characters. The Blue Bird's plays, in other words, evolve around the no-men's world.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the Blue Bird Theatre Company is successfully presenting women in relation to women completely out of the framework of outer social realities. For example, in the company's play The Story (Monogatari) (1984), a woman acts as the hero who saves the world from an invisible enemy. In spite of fantastic and heroic adventures by the woman-hero, the ending illustrates that the enemy is still watching the world, and that the fight against it will continue. Along with the use of Goethe's Faust as a

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8 An extreme case of a bias towards an all-women theatre groups was perceptible in the mid-1970s. The company member Uemura Yuriko recalls the incident when an interviewer from Playboy Japan came to ask the company members whether they were going to do striptease on the stage (3 Sept. 1988). The Playboy Japan's response may illustrate a typical response that any all-women theatre groups could expect from general, male audience members in the mid-1970s in Japan: 'erotic curiosity before any artistic expectations.'
framework, the play seems to demonstrate a woman's fight against the notion of the "eternal feminine." In another play, Cinderella (Shinderera) (1985), a story evolves around a motif of a woman waiting for Prince Charming forever. Further, in the play One Day Busily and Hastily (Aruhi sesse sesse to) (1987), three women act out Waiting for Godot and thus generate the sense of waiting and unfulfilled wishes. The use of Chekhov's Three Sisters as a framework also reinforces the sense of containment and curtailment in this play.

Before examining these plays in more detail, I will discuss woman's position as it is prescribed in a traditional narrative space both in the West and in Japan. My premise in analyzing the Blue Bird Theatre Company's plays is that the company illustrates Japanese women's positions and the modes of subjectivity in its narrative space.

Theories of narrative show a clear picture of a systematic conditioning of women as object in a narrative space. After having made a meticulous analysis of narratives, Roland Barthes concludes his "Structural Analysis of Narrative" with the sentence, "at all events, without wanting to strain the phylogenetic hypothesis, it may be significant that it is at the same moment (around the age of three) that the little human 'invents' at once
sentence, narrative, and the Oedipus" (A. Barthes 295).
As Teresa de Lauretis points out, the sentence displays
the close relationship between language and
psychoanalysis, between narrative and
cultural-psychological conditioning (Alice 103-105).

Peter Brooks maintains that the beginning of a plot
presupposes the end; a textual maneuver involves an
institucional drive toward meaning, i.e., "completion of
the codes in a 'plenitude' of signification," thus "this
passion appears to be finally a desire for the end"
("Freud's Masterplot" 282). The end illuminates the
middle and the beginning, as death illuminates life.
Brooks, by superimposing Freud's theory of the pleasure
principle and life's final goal as death to his analysis
of narrative, argues that narrative involves a drive
toward the mastery over the unavoidable--death--the end.

There is Freud's well known example of a child's
play--throwing away a toy and pulling it back by a
string, while alternately exclaiming fort (gone) and da
(back). Similarly, Brooks argues that repetition,
remembering, and re-enactment of an un-pleasurable event
are ways to subvert the event and insist on a person's
mastery over it (285-286). Kaja Silverman also points
out that the child's play involves language--the
verbalization of the un-pleasure (the disappearance of
the child's mother)—which attenuates un-pleasurable affect by discharging it through the thought process. Because, as Silverman quotes Freud, language permits "the highest, securest form of cognitive thought process," it is farthest removed from affect, thus the most effective way to abate un-pleasure (The Subject 71).

A recent Western play demonstrates an example of this desire to achieve the end and thus achieve mastery over unpleasure. In Marsha Norman’s 'night, Mother, the heroine is asserting her mastery over her own life when she declares that she is going to commit suicide. By talking over her life, the heroine seems to demonstrate a wish to have control over her own life—ironically showing her determination to end her life. Her decision to die illuminates her life, and she appears to elevate herself to one of those tragic figures who heroically accept their own ends.

Nonetheless, the heroine’s desire for mastery shows an inherent contradiction in a woman’s wish to be the subject of control. As Jenny S. Spencer points out, Jessie’s low self-esteem derives from her need to be recognized by men, and her determination originates in the contradiction between her wish to have a strong sense of self and her need to have male recognition ("Marsha Norman’s She-tragedies" 147-165). Thus, her wish reveals
opposing desires: a desire to be a subject of control and a desire to be the desirable object of male recognition.

Moreover, her final, decisive move toward the action of taking her life ironically demonstrates the futility of her life and her decision. Though the wish for the end is the need for fulfillment as Brooks argues (the fulfillment of a story, i.e., the assessment of the meanings of the story--the full masterly over it), Jessie's termination of her life does not seem to fulfill anything. As Spencer states, at the final evening of her life, Jessie wants to "speak and hear only truth, to establish with certainty the meaning and consequences of her act," to no avail, because her mother is not ready to assess their lives truthfully (150). The conversation between the mother and the daughter stops short, and "the promised emotional catharsis is undermined" by the ending "without solving the problems, a structure that reinforces the very irresolvability of the problems as they are posed" in Norman's play (Spencer 156).

With her wish for assessment and meaning being curtailed, Jessie seems to move in a closed circle, from which she has no other way to exit except through death. In order to understand this confinement of women in a closed circle, I need to direct my attention to Jurij Lotman's theory which delineates a woman's place in
narrative as a place to be traversed by the male protagonist. The Soviet semiotician maintains that

... characters can be divided into those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with regard to plot-space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic topologic feature of this space, and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space. ... Looked at typologically, the initial situation is that a certain plot-space is divided by a single boundary into an internal and an external sphere, and a single character has the opportunity to cross that boundary; this situation is now replaced by a more complex derivative. The mobile character is split up into a paradigm-cluster of different characters on the same plane, and the obstacle (boundary), also multiplying in quantity, gives out a sub-group of personified obstacles—immobile enemy-characters fixed at particular points in the plot-space ("antagonists" to use Propp's term). ("The Origin of Plot" 167)

Lotman includes women in the category of an immobile "obstacle" that is placed in the plot-space through which men are to cross. According to Teresa de Lauretis, Lotman finds the elementary sequence of narrative functions as "entry into a closed space, and emergence from it" (Lotman 168; cited by de Lauretis, Alice 118,) thus cyclical and "endlessly repeatable" (Lotman 168; cited by de Lauretis, Alice 118). A closed space, Lotman states, "can be interpreted as 'a cave', 'the grave', 'a house', 'woman' (and, correspondingly, be allotted the features of darkness, warmth, dampness), entry into it is interpreted on various levels as 'death', 'conception',
'return home' and so on; moreover all these acts are thought of as mutually identical" (Lotman 168; cited by de Lauretis, Alice 118).

Applying Lotman's theory to 'night, Mother, one realizes that the heroine is not only confined in a closed space, but represents closure. Thus in this context, Jessie exemplifies a narrative function assigned to a woman by Lotman: a space traversed by a man who is the only initiator of action; because her subjectivity, her wish and action are determined by absent male characters as Spencer points out (147-165).

Although Jessie seems to be the central character of the play, thus being the initiator of action, her position as a space and closure is unalterable. Because "the cave," "the grave," "a house," and "woman" can be "identical" in Lotman's theory, Jessie's suicide only transforms her (metaphorically) from "woman" to "the grave," thus leaves the plot-space still to be traversed by absent male characters. As Spencer aptly points out, Jessie's movement is toward "an invisible extension of the same set" (158), the movement of which does not change her position in, and as, closure.

Jessie is not the only example of a woman as closure. Teresa de Lauretis argues that the heroine of folktale, even when she is the central character,
functions merely as the promised one for the hero to discover, because "the boy has been promised, by the social contract he has entered into at his Oedipal phase, that he will find woman waiting at the end of his journey" (Alice 133). Thus "the itinerary of the female’s journey, mapped from the very start on the territory of her own body (the first ‘task’), is guided by a compass pointing not to reproduction as the fulfillment of her biological destiny, but more exactly to the fulfillment of the promise made to ‘the littleman,’ of his social contract, his biological and affective destiny--and to the fulfillment of his desire" (133).

In other words, a woman’s journey is predetermined by the position she occupies in narrative as an object, thus as an immobile locale toward which and for which a man journeys: Sleeping Beauty for Prince Charming, and the Sphinx and Jocasta for Oedipus. The Sphinx and Jocasta can be interpreted as identical in their function, according to Vladimir Propp’s Morphology of the Folktale (cited by De Lauretis, Alice 113-116).

Although Lotman does not explore women’s place in the modern plot-texts, he illustrates the recurrence of the elementary, cyclical structure in the modern plot-texts. Lotman maintains that "the modern plot-text
is the fruit of the interaction and reciprocal influence of ... two typologically age-old types of text" (163), i.e., the cyclical narrative and the linear narrative (such as historical texts, chronicles and annals,) which is the unfolding of the cyclical narrative into linear temporal motion in order to fix "the chance occurrence" (163). Although the Soviet semiotician discusses a developmental aspect of the cyclical narrative, he does not seem to perceive a change in "the principle" of a woman's position as immobile obstacle. For Lotman, women characters seem to be fixed either as obstacles or the doubles to be conflated with a single protagonist even in the linear texts, according to "the principle" of the cyclical narrative.

For example, in his analysis of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, he states that Rosalind and Celia, in addition to Oliver de Boys and Orlando de Boys, can be interpreted as doubles to Duke Frederick and the old duke living in exile. Duke Frederick can also be interpreted as the double of the old duke; thus according to Lotman, the play illustrates the elementary sequence of the cyclical text---"entry into closed space--emergence from it"--the endlessly repeatable cycle of death and resurrection (165-167). We may add that Rosalind and Celia also function as the "promised ones" for Orlando and Oliver,
and thus conclude that the play is repeating the structure of a folktale pointed out by de Lauretis.

Now I will turn to a Japanese elementary plot-structure discussed by the folklorist Yanagita Kunio. The reasons why I refer to Yanagita here are two-fold: one, the folklorist was the founder of Japanese ethnological studies, and he left a substantial amount of "classic" work both in his collection and analysis of Japanese folktales; two, theatre critic Sasaki Mikio points out a similarity between the Blue Bird's plays and a group of Japanese folktales which Yanagita Kunio has categorized as "chisago" (literally a small child) ("Momotarō" 33). Sasaki's reference to Yanagita does not show speculative precision. However, it invites an interest in this category of folktales for two reasons: because the associative reference to the specific category of stories does not seem merely accidental; second, the narrative structure of chisago stories may reveal one of the "principle" positions for a woman in a Japanese narrative space. This may also lead to an assessment of the applicability of Western theoretical disciplines in an analysis of an Asian phenomenon.

The basic plot of the chisago stories involves an extraordinarily small child who grows rapidly (such as in a three-month period), solves problems or accomplishes
difficult tasks, and either marries a princess and/or brings fortune back to his/her poor foster parents. If the marriage takes place, this suggests that the unusual child becomes the founder of a great family ("Momotarô" 32-42; Monogatari 3-28).

In spite of numerous variants of the chīsago stories focusing on a "from rags to riches" motif, Yanagita contends that the original emphasis was on the unusual birth and growth of a child. The folklorist maintains that the child must have been associated with a god, thus was recognized to have super-human power either as a god or a demigod. Born out of a non-human body (from a peach, or in a rare case, from a woman's thigh,) the child with heavenly power was seen to establish order, bring fortune, and accomplish super-human deeds ("Momotarô" 21-42).

Although Yanagita does not specifically refer to the cyclical nature of the chīsago stories, the folklorist's emphasis on an aspect of Japanese folk religion demonstrates the stories' mythic quality. In addition, the basic story line of the chīsago stories reinforces an interpretation that this category of narrative is one of the elementary plots in Japan, with its recurrence and pervasiveness throughout the long history of oral and written transmission.
It is possible to suggest that the unfolding of the *chisago* stories can be summarized in a way similar to that of the Soviet semiotician: emergence into a human sphere—entry into difficulties—emergence out of difficulties. In this Japanese plot-text, the hero also has to cross boundaries in order to achieve difficult deeds with which he restores order and fortune.

However, a noticeable discrepancy from Lotman's scheme lies in the fact that the Japanese *chisago* stories do not specify the heavenly child to be male or female. Therefore, I will examine how a female *chisago* is placed in the Japanese elementary plot-space.

Two of the most well-known variants of the female *chisago* stories are Princess Uriko (Urikohime) and Princess Kaguya (Kaguyahime). Both Princesses are born out of non-human objects (Princess Uriko is found in a gourd, and Princess Kaguya is found in a bamboo); both grow rapidly to become beautiful women under the care of old foster parents. A difference lies in their achievement: Princess Uriko becomes an excellent weaver, and Princess Kaguya becomes an object of fascination and marriage proposal from princes.

Yanagita emphasizes the notion of weaving as gods' work in ancient Japan, and argues for Princess Uriko's possibly older status compared to another variant of the
male chisago story (the story of Momotarô) which focuses on the child's adventures and gaining fortune. To summarize briefly the story of Princess Uriko, one day, during her foster parents' absence, a mountain devil (amanojaku) deceives her and either kills her (though this variant is rare) or hangs her from the top of a tree deep in the mountain. In the latter case, the foster parents save her, but in the former case, Yanagita conjectures that the Princess was possibly resurrected in older stories. In either case, Yanagita emphasizes the Princess' status as a wife to a god, because of her sacred skill of weaving ("Momotarô" 104-147).

The story of Princess Kaguya must have gone through a drastic transformation during the long process of oral transmission before it was finally written down as a sophisticated Japanese courtly romance Taketori monogatari sometime between the late ninth and the early tenth centuries (Katagiri 29-31). The well-known story illustrates Princess Kaguya as a woman from the moon, who rejects princes' marriage proposals and finally goes back her home. The Princess' miraculous birth and the association with the moon demonstrate the story's original emphasis on godly power. Nonetheless, in this well-known variant, the focus is shifted to the foster parents' becoming miraculously rich, and the adventures
the princes have to go through to win Princess Kaguya's hands.

In both cases, the heroines' position in the story is fixed in a closed space: deep inside the foster parents' house. This is in spite of their heavenly origin and their power to bring wealth to the poor parents. Both Princess' fortunes are, in spite of differences in the degree of secularization, delineated as "the promised one" to somebody. In addition, actors of major deeds in the stories are, a mountain devil (usually male) in the case of Princess Uriko, and male suitors in the case of Princess Kaguya. Both Princesses are immobile in the plot-space, and function as the obstacle to be crossed over by other male characters. In other words, in spite of the stories' emphasis on female characters as the center of interest, the women still are given a position of immobility.

Thus, the chisago stories reveal the same agenda for a woman in a Japanese plot-space as the one prescribed in the Western plot-space. In this context, it is worth noting that theatre critic Sasaki Mikio emphasizes the plot-structure in his association of the Blue Bird's play One Day, Busily and Hastily with the chisago stories. According to Sasaki, the imaginative unfolding and the rapid growth of a story in the play reminds the audience
(perhaps unconsciously) of the familiar stories of chisago, thus incites the "common emotions" (kyōtsū kanjō) embedded in each spectator's mind ("Shūdan to iukoto" 28). In other words, the critic points out that the rapid expansion of women's fantasy in the Blue Bird is similar to the rapid growth of chisago. It should be noted that the critic also calls attention to the impression that at the play's end, fantasy converges into a closed space ("Shūdan to iukoto" 28). Besides the point of a possible stimulation on spectators' psyche (a reference to Jungian collective unconsciousness?), the criticism shows the accurate association between the Blue Bird's play and the Japanese elementary narrative, in terms of its indication of the sense of growth and of the sense of containment at the same time.

Women in the Blue Bird's Plays

The women characters in the Blue Bird's plays assert themselves as the center of interest. The Blue Bird Theatre Company focuses on women's experiences, wishes and desires in its plays. Thus, in the company's theatrical works, women's wish to be the subjects of actions, adventures, and creation is presented with full force.
Nonetheless, as the critic Sasaki Mikio's comments testifies, the women's wishes are often contained in the very frame of the presentation; i.e., the Blue Bird Theatre Company presents women in a prescribed position of immobility, while strongly asserting their wishes to go out of the closed space.

In this section, I will examine three plays--The Story, One Day, Busily and Hastily, and Cinderella--as presentations of a specific mode of subjectivity for women; i.e., immobile objects. All female characters in these plays turn out to be contained in a closed space, in spite of their strong wish to be the subjects who cross the space.

At first glance, The Story (1984) appears to be an exception to the idea of containment of women in a narrative space. In this play, a daughter of an ordinary family departs for an adventure to conquer an enemy (invisible and unspecified to the end,) and thereby restore peace and order to the world. This adventure story is framed by quotations from Goethe's Faust, the story of a man's great quest for the ultimate knowledge and mastery of truth. As opposed to the great aim associated with Faust's quest, the woman's immediate aim is to restore peace in her family. We know that Faust's quest involves a number of trivial experiences in spite
of the greatness of his aim; the woman's adventure also consists of a series of trivia.

First of all, the woman sets forth to buy green tea leaves. Because of a trivial argument between family members at the dinner table, the family members need cups of tea to calm themselves down. The daughter heroically departs her home into the night to buy tea, to find no tea in any shops in her town, nor in any other shops in other towns. It turns out that a conspiracy is going on to conquer the world by hiding all tea leaves from the world. Thus, the woman's adventure along with several companions hinges on the search for lost tea leaves. The search for tea seems to be exceptionally trivial compared to Faust's quest for truth and mastery. Nonetheless, this trivial adventure illustrates the heroine's search for her identity. Difficulties she faces are presented in the manner of children's games. While going through a mysterious place which is under the enemy's control, the heroine's companions go through several transformations and change their identities; the key for the heroine to save them and herself is to name her friends--to identify her companions in whatever forms they are in. In the most critical situation toward the end, the heroine is forced to identify who she is; she names herself as the "hero" who takes risks to save her friends, family, and
the world. Her act of naming and actually taking risks in an attempt to save her companion miraculously restore both tea and order to the world. Finally, the heroine goes back home dressed as the "hero"; her family awaits her, also dressed in heroic (Wagnerian, to a certain extent) costumes. (The family members and the companions are double-cast.)

This almost fairy-tale play expresses a woman's strong wish for autonomy. The heroine is given a position of the active protagonist who crosses the plot-space, rather than being crossed by others. Thus the play is a reversal of the "principle" of the elementary plot-text, and shows men to be immobile obstacles in this plot-space. Along with references to Faust, the play seems to demonstrate the company's refusal accept the image of the "eternal feminine," the image of which traditionally prescribes a role of passivity and immobility to women.

However, as the last stage direction indicates that "the war goes on" (212), the heroine still has to fight. This is a fight against an enemy which has never been identified in this play. The enemy's power and control seem to permeate the world, therefore, the heroine's fight will be an extremely difficult one although she
wins this time with her courage and love for the people surrounding her.

This final situation represents a woman’s position in a plot-space; no matter how active and heroic the heroine’s deeds may be, she is still in a closure under the control of unnamed power; the only way for her to win in a series of difficulties is to name and identify herself, her family, and her friends, the act of which symbolizes her search for a more autonomous mode of subjectivity (though still conditioned by her experiences of social realities) than the present one.

In Cinderella (1985) and One Day, Busily and Hastily (1987), the Blue Bird Theatre Company puts a stronger emphasis on a closure as a woman’s place than in The Story. Both plays are essentially variants of the search-for-the-self story as exemplified by The Story. These two plays also reveal the pattern of elementary plot-texts in which the hero enters into a closed space and emerges out of it. In both plays, women seem to take over the hero’s position and action, thus cross the plot-space which ironically reveals that there is no way out of it at the end of the plays.

Cinderella features two young women, Kôko and Tetsuko. The play evolves around Kôko’s search for Tetsuko, who has disappeared from her apartment one
evening. The search through several mysterious locales reveals confusion in two women's self-perception. This confusion is represented by the fact that both Kōko and Tetsuko have several roles or attributes: for example, Tetsuko has the role of Cinderella, and Kōko has the role of benevolent Witch.

Kōko, while looking for Tetsuko, slips into the "mystery zone" (misuteri zon), the entrance of which somehow opens into Tetsuko's apartment, and where anything can happen. Through this "mystery zone," Kōko/Witch's search for Tetsuko and an object which will save Tetsuko/Cinderella and the Witch herself. A premise of the story is that the Witch failed in her spell, and a shoe Cinderella left at Prince Charming's castle returned to its original shape at midnight, while a shoe Cinderella took with her remained as a shoe. Thus, Cinderella, in this mystery zone, is placed in a position where she has to wait for Prince Charming who will never come for her.

The object Kōko/Witch finds to save Tetsuko/Cinderella turns out to be a part of kitchen utensil (nukadoko no kugi) that is used to make Japanese pickles. When Kōko finds the object, the mystery zone disappears and Tetsuko is back in her apartment. There she keeps her diary calmly. She writes about Cinderella,
wondering why only the pair of shoes remained as the shoes while others returned to their original forms. Then she goes on to write about her pickle-making, and about the object needed for making pickles.

Tetsuko’s last few lines about the endless repetition of pickle-making—the recipe of which is handed down generation by generation from mother to daughter—demonstrate her sense of wonder, and of weariness about the seemingly never-ending cycle: a woman is born and placed in a closed space, makes pickles/waits as a "promised one" as if she were one of those pickles waiting for somebody’s care, then finishes her life as an immobile obstacle.

The final tableau shows Tetsuko/Cinderella trying on a shoe in the blue light, being surrounded by beautifully dressed attendants. The tableau illustrates a woman’s fantasy to be the "promised one". The scene’s poignancy lies in the fact that Tetsuko knows its futility—the dream will never come true, moreover, it is self-destructive to wish to "get out" by somebody else’s power.

In One Day, Busily and Hastily, the mobile characters are a doctor and a patient dressed in male suits (though they have women’s names). The immobile characters are three sisters; Oriye, Masako, and Ikuko
(their names suggest the names of Chekhov's three sisters--Olga, Masha, and Irina.)

The play takes place in a nando (storage room) and never moves out of it. The general story line is simple: the three sisters come to the nando to look for things necessary to prepare for a Buddhist memorial rite for their deceased parents; while sorting out objects in the nando, the sisters find things that incite their memories of childhood, such as a child's hat, a toy piano, and a wig that probably belonged to their mother; the sisters talk over their childhood and rehearse for the memorial rite; the doctor and the patient visit the nando, apparently from nowhere; the characters re-enact some of the sisters' past memories; the mobile characters leave, and the immobile characters remain.

The nando is surrounded by three walls, with the fourth side open towards the audience. The space for the nando is slightly smaller than the length of the stage area. As the story progresses, and the sisters' memories expand, the walls are taken off, thus the expanded stage space gives the impression of unlimited freedom for the sisters' fantasy. The critic Sasaki's association of the play with the growth of chisago derives from this impression given by this staging and by the story line that gives free rein to memories, fantasy, and
imagination. The doctor and the patient seem to come through the space where one of the walls used to be at the beginning of the show.

The plot-space of the play can be divided into two areas. One is the doctor/the patient area and one is the three sisters' nando. The doctor/the patient area seems to contain the three sisters' nando, because the play begins with the doctor/the patient reading from Chekhov's Three Sisters, and ends with their reading from Chekhov again. In addition, the patient's monologue that begins with the line, "there are three sisters living within my heart," seems to suggest that the three sisters are her fantasy. In this context, the heroine who crosses the plot-space is the patient, and the story appears to illustrate her search into interior to face several aspects of her subjectivity. Although this interpretation seems logical, "reality" and expansiveness of the three sisters' plot-space support the impression that the heroines are the sisters who are confined in the closed space.

The two plot-spaces merge temporarily in the nando, in which the mobile characters and the immobile characters re-enact a play about Joan of Arc--the play which the sister Oriye acted in her high-school. The scene depicts Joan and her followers (the three sisters)
trying to break through the wall of the enemy (the doctor and the patient). With exuberant music and song as background, Joan and her followers march and break the wall, only to find that there is another wall behind the broken wall. With this discovery, joy and playfulness is gone, then, the three sisters start re-enacting Waiting for Godot in which Masako acted in high-school. The lengthy acting out of Waiting for Godot intensifies the mood of helplessness, suffocation, confinement in a place where there is no way out. The last lines for the three sisters are: "Are they all we need (for the memorial rite)?"; "turn off the light."

After a short blackout, the light comes up on the doctor and the patient. They wrap up the show with a short scene of "hide-and-seek": several times, the patient goes into a closet and comes out of it in different dresses and identities. This gradually tones down the intensity of the action to the point that the two characters read from Chekhov. The hide-and-seek scene seems to represent a woman's identity crisis; the reading of Chekhov which follows again illustrates all the women's (the patient's, the three sisters' and Chekhov's sisters') unfulfilled desire to go out from the closure.
Thus, as the three plays demonstrate that, in spite of refusing the "male gaze" (Kawamoto, Rev. of Natsu 32-33), the Blue Bird Theatre Company represents a closure of the plot-space in which a woman is placed. The Blue Bird's women are incapable of going out into a limitless sphere where they can enjoy total freedom of imagination and action. Two critics, Sasaki Mikio and Kawamoto Saburō, call attention to this fact. Sasaki states that "the play [One Day] eventually comes back into the nando enclosed by the four pillars on the stage however it may seem to expand into the limitless sphere outside the stage" ("Shûdan to iukoto" 28). Kawamoto also points out that imaginative journeys in the Blue Bird's plays stop short at the boundaries within the neighborhood (Rev. of Natsu 33).

Subjects of Theatrical Pleasure

Despite its presentation of the containment of a woman in the plot-space, the Blue Bird Theatre Company produces the sense of pleasure and exuberance in its plays. In The Story, there is an improvisational "family dinner" scene at the very beginning of the play which generates the sense of theatrical pleasure with its energy (a small dinner table is set in the middle of the spectators). And a character, Passionate Impulse, rushes
in to recite from *Faust* during the family’s argument marks a parodical beginning to this "grand" quest-story with excessive heroism and triviality. In *Cinderella*, a variety of dancing scenes are inserted throughout the play which attract the audience as "seductive" (Hasebe "Shinderera" 58-59). They abruptly shift from one style to another (e.g. from ballet to modern dance) and play with the audience’s expectations. In this play, the scene of fairy-tale frogs is inserted, in which the frogs re-enact their version of *Cinderella*. The scene produces a hilarious moment of theatrical pleasure. *One Day, Busily and Hastily* presents scenes of plays within a play, for the sheer pleasure of play-acting. The "Joan of Arc" scene is exuberant with music and song by a chorus of approximately thirty singers dressed in white, located above the stage area and in surrounding the auditorium. The scene of Waiting for *Godot* played by an all-female cast is effective in its illustration of women’s helplessness. And the scene of an improvisational "rehearsal" of a Buddhist memorial rite is hilariously done.9

The Blue Bird Theatre Company’s emphasis on the pleasure of play-acting puts women’s containment in the

plot-space in quotation marks. It shows another mode of subjectivity for a woman: to be a subject of theatrical pleasure. The Blue Bird’s theatrical pleasure, with its playful, exuberant, and parodic moments—the reversal of roles in The Story and parody of a man’s great quest; dancing that undercuts audience’s expectations, and along with the frog scene in Cinderella; re-enactment of "classic" theatrical works with all-female cast as well as parodies of everyday-rituals in One Day—produces seductive moments of rapport with the audience, both involving and distancing with its mild criticism of social and representational normativity at the same time.

Sue-Ellen Case’s argument that séduction in Baudrillard’s term may be able to transform a woman’s subjectivity ("Toward a Butch-Femme" 295-298) applies to the Blue Bird’s use of theatrical pleasure. In their plays, seductive moments of theatrical pleasure undercuts the age-old female mode of subjectivity as immobility and closure.

A total transformation of female modes of subjectivity may be extremely difficult because seductive moments do not last long, as discussed in Chapter I of this study. Nonetheless, the sporadic transformative moments of the Blue Bird can contribute to a gradual change. As Edward Pechter suggests, seductive moments
incite random responses in a spectator, which may possibly contradict her normative beliefs. Pechter presents an example of such random response in a Venetian ambassador in London in the early seventeenth century. The ambassador refers to his experience of viewing a theatrical performance apparently of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*. While the Venetian, who is Catholic, and from the Venetian ruling class, feels that English people insult and condemn Catholicism, he cannot help writing down the details of the staging of the Franciscan Friar's decapitation that, according to him, made the whole thing turn out to be a tragedy (296-297).

According to Pechter, the ambassador's response exemplifies the mixture of the responses of "ants" (i.e., responding to art in the context of an ideology and a power structure that condition an individual) and the "grasshoppers" (i.e., playing "in a condition of random responsiveness to the incoherent variety of cultural phenomena that constitute us" (303)). Why does the ambassador have to mention the staging, or the genre of the play, if we assume that the ants' way is the only response possible when we are aware of the power and structure of society? Pechter emphasizes the power of "random responsiveness" that may break spectators' normative beliefs, though he admits that it is impossible
to assume that "random responsiveness" is totally free from ideology and social interrelationships. This power of "responsiveness" clearly applies to the theatrical pleasure produced by the Blue Bird's plays. The breaking of normative beliefs induced by the theatrical pleasure in the Blue Bird's plays may contribute to the expansion of the modes of subjectivity available for women.

However sporadic "random responsiveness" may be, any change of perception in the theatre requires the audience's participation and critical understanding as Jon Erickson argues in "Appropriation and Transgression in Contemporary American Performance" (223-224). Seductive moments are not free from the danger of regression, as Erickson argues. He questions Baudrillard's seduction as possibly a way to an unquestioning regression, stating that "the liberation that such deconstruction promotes can also be a mask for a slavery to tropes" (235). The Blue Bird's award-winning play She Has Eaten a Green Fruit (Aonomi o tabeta) seems to illustrate this danger. In this play, the heroine is shown confined in her old age and is

incapable of changing her situation. Nonetheless, her regression into the past is presented in a way that arouses the audience's "nostalgia" rather than critical understanding of the aging woman's social realities. Focus is on the heroine's re-enactment of childhood memories—games, the sense of security with her mother, and the fear of a war experienced without recognition of its underlying political implications. The Blue Bird does not give a definite reason for the aging woman's partial dementia except for a suggestion that the heroine feels a vague anxiety. Furthermore, the heroine's acceptance of her aging towards the end, though illuminating and beautiful, does not invite any questioning of her life, self-perception, or the realities that surround her, because it is presented without any context of logical explanation.

Seduction in this play lies in its affirmation of life and the joy of living. This seduction undercuts the sense of containment and helplessness, and invites the audience into a nostalgic fantasy about childhood, arousing sympathy and affection for the aging heroine as a reflection of one's possible self.

11 "Nostalgia" (nosutarugia) is the key word repeatedly appeared in the spectators' responses to audience surveys (kankyaku ankēto) conducted both for the 1986 production and for the 1989 production.
In spite of any negative implication this seduction may have, the Blue Bird Theatre Company's work is important because it is presenting and asserting woman as a subject of theatrical pleasure. Seductive moments of the company's plays invite spectators' recognition of female artists' works. This recognition, in turn, will contribute to a gradual change in the audience's perception of modes of subjectivity prescribed to women.
WATANABE ERIKO AND THE THIRTY-ZERO THEATRE COMPANY:
A ROMANTIC AUTHOR

Watanabe Eriko, woman playwright, director, and performer, founded the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company (Gekidan 300; 300 is pronounced as sanjūmaru or "thirty-zero") in 1978, with three other male and female performers. With two other female performers joining force in 1979, the company soon drew critical acknowledgements. In 1980, the company’s fourth production, Kaiteiban ta-i-mu (Time: Revised) received the important Theatre Green Award (Shiata Gurin Shō). During its first ten years of operation, the company was awarded two Theatre Green Awards (in 1980 and in 1981), and the prestigious Kinokuniya Theatre Award (Kinokuniya

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1 The Theatre Green Award is an award given by Shiata Gurin (Theatre Green) to a production of a promising little theatre group. Theatre Green is a small theatre space dedicated to producing and encouraging the growth of promising little theatre groups. A number of now critically-acknowledged little theatre groups grew out of the experiences they received at this theatre.
Engeki Shō) in 1987, and Watanabe Eriko received the Kishida Playwriting Award (Kishida Gakyoku Shō)² in 1982.

Originally, the company operated collaboratively. The members' roles in creation and in operation of the group were not clearly defined, except that Watanabe was the writer. In 1988, three of the founding members left the company. Watanabe became the only founding member of the group, because two others had already left the company prior to that year. Currently, the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company operates in a clearly defined, hierarchical style. Watanabe holds the leadership both in terms of creation and operation of the group.

In 1989, the company consisted of nineteen performers (both male and female), including Watanabe Eriko, and two directing staff. Male members slightly outnumber female members. The oldest company member is over sixty-five years old, while the youngest is nineteen, and most members are in their late twenties or early thirties (Toyokawa 26 Nov. 1988). The company produces Watanabe's original plays under her direction approximately twice a year. It attracts roughly 7,000 spectators per production (Toyokawa 26 Nov. 1988).

² The Kishida Playwriting Award is the most prestigious playwriting award given to a promising writer.
Watanabe Eriko creates plays with a strong focus on the dreamer and the dreaming-process. In her plays, she emphasizes the power of dream, creation, and art, that affects one’s life. She often depicts "underdogs" and losers who cannot help dreaming in order to endure life’s sufferings. Dreaming, for her, is the source of artistic creation and a means for survival.

Despite the fact that the playwright herself is a strong female subject of creation, she does not, except in a very few plays, present women as the central dreamers. Her dreamers are often male, and her female characters are often depicted in the periphery of her plays. Women are frequently portrayed as the reflection of central male characters’ wishes and desire. For example, in the play Yoru no kage (The Shadow of Night), an image of "sister" functions as the ideal woman for three different male characters. Women are also repeatedly presented as middle-aged and disillusioned housewives. In Yumesaka kudatte ame ga furu (Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls), housewives make meta-commentary on the central (male) dreamers’ dreams, bring day-to-day actuality of middle-aged Japanese women’s lives into the play, thus undercutting the male characters’ strong but sometimes self-indulgent dreams.

Watanabe accurately captures two commonly assigned modes of subjectivity to women: i.e., the ideal
reflection of a man's desire and a hag who is outside beauty, creation, and power. The playwright shows her sympathy for the middle-aged female characters by presenting that they also wish and dream, and that their dreams are often curtailed by their everyday lives of survival, taking care of their families.

Because Watanabe emphasizes the power of dream and often assigns the role of dreamer to men, she seems to accept the notion that creative power is associated with men. On the other hand, she seems to assert herself as the subject of creation, the source and the origin (as in the romantic concept of author)\(^3\), in the operation of the company and the creation of the plays.

Watanabe seems to demonstrate her desire and awareness as a woman playwright in her plays and in her operation of the group: a desire to be the subject of creation, and an awareness that a woman's wishes are often curtailed and disillusioned. The playwright's presence as the strong female leader may contribute to opening another possible mode of subjectivity for women: the author and the center of creation.

In this chapter, I will discuss the typical structure of Watanabe's plays; her seemingly contradictory notion of artist and

\(^3\) See Furst, *Romanticism* for a further discussion of the notion of author as the center and the origin.
subjectivity-formation; her surrealist emphasis on a subject’s (both the dreamer and the audience) thought-process as the major force of artistic creation and effect; a recurrent motif of the return of the repressed (disillusioned women, the sense of guilt, and one’s lost identities) which undermines the image of all-powerful, self-reflective artist/dreamer. As a conclusion, I will briefly discuss the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company’s organizational structure, because I perceive it as a reflection of the playwright’s assertion of herself as creative subject.

The Structure of Watanabe Eriko’s Play:

Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls

Watanabe Eriko writes structurally complicated plays. A spectator cannot discern a single, well-defined story line. Nor does she single out a character as the protagonist of a play. The playwright treats concrete everyday occurrences and daydreams on the same level, throws the past and the present onstage without chronological consideration, and shifts the locus of perception from one character to another. In this section, I will briefly describe the characteristics of Watanabe’s plays, then examine the plot and structure of a play Yumesaka kudatte ame ga furu (Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls), as an example. This examination
of dramatic construction will reveal the playwright's fundamental approach to art, subject, and subjectivity-formation.

One of the audience members writes in an audience questionnaire (kankyaku ankēto): "I felt an arbitrariness in the differences between reality and dream, between what is actually present and what is fiction. I could not foresee how the play would end. I was confused when the character I thought was the protagonist turned out not to be the protagonist in the end. I was extremely moved, though I don't know why" (Sept. 1987). This response summarizes a general impression that a spectator receives from Watanabe's plays. Her plays force the spectators to change their perception of what is real through her unconventional use of time and space and her imaginative combination of concrete objects with imaginary objects, and of realistic characters with imaginary characters.

In Watanabe's plays, a new scene often reveals that the previous scene was somebody's daydream. The revelation constantly undercuts a spectator's perception of what she thought was real in events, characters, and relationships among the characters. The critic, Matsuoka Kazuko, calls this effect on a spectator's perception "collapse of thoughts" (kan-nen no yatai
The multiplication of daydreams causes the intermixing of actuality and dreams, blurs the boundary of real characters and imaginary characters, and of real events and imaginary events. The constant yatai kuzushi of thoughts leads a spectator to the recognition of arbitrariness in our concepts of time, space, event, and human beings.

Watanabe’s frequent quotations of characters and episodes from fairy tales and from popular cartoons further affect a spectator’s perception. Peter Pan and Little Red Riding Hood, and Gegege no Kitarō (the hero of a popular Japanese cartoon), appear on the stage as they are, interact with other characters, and cause the intermixing of the real and the unreal. They remind a spectator that a play is a play, and that it is unreal, dream, and fiction. Watanabe puts quotation marks around events, characters, and even around her own plays. Characters comment on their situations, and explain their dream-mechanisms. The company’s staging also emphasizes the quality of the unreal: the acting style is often exaggerated and songs are inserted to either heighten or undercut the emotional intensity of a scene. Watanabe does not seem to give any chance to a spectator to have

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4 Yatai kuzushi is a spectacular staging technique used in kabuki theatre. A large-scale set collapses in a second to reveal a totally new set.
what Brecht calls "illusionistic" identification with a character.

While Watanabe constantly challenges a spectator's perception, her plays always reveal the presence of central dreamer. The dreamer is essentially a middle-aged person who is burdened with his unfulfilled desire.

**Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls**

The English *Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls* is a direct translation of the Japanese title, *Yumesaka kudatte ame ga furu*, and correctly conveys the sense of obscurity and of movement in the Japanese (though the translation does not carry the original sense of poetry). The title conceals who is going down the dream-hill, in other words, who is dreaming, and why the rain falls. This opacity is a kind of summary of the play. The play is about dreamers, but who and why--the subjects of dreams, the relationships between the dreamers, the causes and the results of the dreams--sink into the shadowy background of the "rain." Watanabe seems to associate the rain with thought-process, or dream-process, in which there is no clear distinction between real and unreal, or between cause and effect, and in which the contours of objects are blurred as if by the gray, drizzling rain.
There are roughly three sets of characters in this play. The first set of characters are two dreamers who keep dreaming and who create their own reality by pushing their dreams to the extreme. They are given the role of fathers to the second set of characters—a daughter and a son—who are closely involved in the dreamers’ dreams. They support the dreamers’ created reality by enacting the roles the dreamers have given them, although they are aware of the fictitiousness of the creation. They try to see what is actual beyond the dreamers’ created reality, but to no avail. The second set of characters is so closely involved in the dreamers’ dreaming process that they cannot dissociate themselves from the process. The final scene suggests that the second set of characters are the creation of the dreamers’ thought, and also, that they are the symbolic representations of what the dreamers have disregarded and sacrificed in order to keep their dreams alive at the expense of others. The third set of characters are servants and housewives. They are relatively down-to-earth and mediate between the dreamers’ created reality and actual, everyday existence. They are servants and housewives. They also dream in order to escape from their everyday life, but they never seem to lose connection with practical day-to-day problems even when they are dreaming. The three sets of characters meet and intermingle until there is no clear
distinction between created reality and everyday-existence.

The play can be structurally divided into four spheres. The first sphere is a play within a play in which one of the dreamers enacts the role of his wife who has left him. He identifies himself with his wife, Jessie (pronounced as Jeshî in Japanese,) and makes his butler and daughter collaborate with his enactment.

In the second sphere, there is the other father-and-son pair, whose lives seem to be more realistic, but whose relationships to each other are no less unreal than those of the characters in the first sphere. The father, Minoru, is a zoologist, obsessed with his half-broken toy-duck. He insists that there is a mysterious rapport between the toy and himself. The toy stops moving and looks at him when he extends his hand to it, which, according to Minoru, demonstrates that he and the duck belong to each other. The relationship between the duck and the father correlates with that of the father and the son; i.e., the father-son relationship is arbitrary and imaginary. There are the four generations of men in this family, the great grandfather, the grandfather, the father, and the son, Kôichi. There is even an adopted son, who is at least fifty years older than Kôichi. Later in the play, Kôichi discovers that the generations of fathers and sons have no blood-relationships.
The eldest actor of the company plays this role of adopted son and other actors--all in their twenties or early thirties--play different generations of the family. None of them attempt to simulate their characters’ ages. The characters insist on the "unity of fathers and sons" (chichi to ko no ittai,) and create a sense of incongruity and the ridiculous through their enactment of regressive, childish behavior that demonstrates their interdependency. The absence of mothers underscores the fictitiousness of the family.

The third sphere consists of fairy tale characters: Peter Pan, Wendy, six Little Red Ridinghoods, a duck who speaks, three bad wolves collectively named Bad Thoughts (yokaranu kangae), to name only a few. All fairy tale characters are played by the performers who play other roles in the two other spheres. The fairy tale characters show a trace of the characters in the other spheres, thus demonstrating that this illusory world is a collectively-created imaginary space.

The three spheres are not mutually exclusive. The great grandfather acts as the butler in the play within a play. One of the spectators who watches the play within a play turns out to be the wife of Minoru. All the

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5 I have consulted with the company’s videotape of the 1982 production for the description of the play, performance, and the stage setting.
characters participate in the fairy tale sphere, which the son, Kôichi, travels through in order to find his missing father, who has disappeared to look for his toy-duck. The presence of this space in which characters of two different spheres meet further blurs the distinction of who is dreaming and who is dreamed.

The fourth shows the dimension of the author and the spectators, thus, pointing towards the exterior of the complicated circulation of dreams and dreamers in the play. I will come back to this aspect later.

This play of dreams hinges on the son’s quest for the father and for truth. The son, Kôichi, sets out to look for the father in the "woods of thought" (kangae no mori) when his "mother" tells him that the four generations of men do not have any blood relationship. The mother states that although she is legally the wife of his father, the son was brought back home one day from somewhere by the father. After this revelation that the "unity of fathers and sons" is only an adopted unity, the son wanders into the labyrinthine woods of thoughts to find out who he is and how he is related to the father and to the others. Kôichi tries to see the truth because he believes in what the father has taught him: Minoru has professed that he had been a failure because he thinks too much. He had been beaten and betrayed by others, but he cannot understand why. The father has told Kôichi not
to think, not to believe in anything other than what he actually sees with his eyes.

The further Kôichi goes into the woods, the more confused he becomes. He starts to realize that even what he sees with his eyes is not grounded in reality. Kôichi tells one of the Bad Thoughts (played by the butler/great grandfather):

I don’t know what is a lie and what is true. You told me not to think. Somebody else said the same thing to me, and I decided to believe in only those things that I actually see with my eyes. But the harder I try, the more I get confused. Why, why does everything I see with my eyes become so uncertain? The somebody is my father. But I don’t even know if he is my father. I have believed that he was the father, but it becomes uncertain when somebody tells me that he is not. . . . If everything is like this, how carelessly I have been watching things without knowing what they are. But what should I see? Father disappeared exactly when I decided to see him with my eyes. Then, who am I? I won’t be able to see others unless I can see myself. . . .

Bad Thought replies that nobody can see what he tries to see, because everything is transient in time, and leaves only the trace of it: "Can you grasp one of those uncountable drops of rain when you see them? . . . Do you think you can get truth by seeing them?"

In the fairy-tale sphere in which anything can occur, Kôichi finally meets his father only to find out that the image of father was another creation. The

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6 Quotations are from the company’s unpublished acting script.
father, Minoru, has projected the image of a person who thinks too much, who is beaten and betrayed because he is too sensitive and good. Then, a man who calls himself Background appears, in the guise of Minoru's dead brother. He reveals that Minoru has actually been a person who acts before thinking, who betrays and beats others. The toy-duck turns out to be the father's projection of his wish that the world should be like the duck, who stops and looks at him according to his movements.

Kōichi's quest for truth in the fairy-tale sphere results in utter confusion. The father even tells Kōichi that the woman Kōichi thinks his mother is, in fact, Mrs. Nitta, someone else's wife. Minoru's words dissociate Kōichi from a normal family relationship. The stage blacks out at this point and Kōichi murmurs, "I can't understand . . . I can't."

In the final scene of the play, Minoru takes Kōichi into the sphere of the play within a play. The father tells the son that this sphere is where the son comes from, suggesting that Kōichi was after all the creation of the dreamers' thoughts. In this same scene, the daughter finally tries to awaken her father by pointing out that the father is only acting a play. She also confesses her fear that she may be drawn into the father's dream and will never be able to get out. The
father, Jessie, rejects the daughter’s final appeal and keeps acting the role of the wife waiting for her husband’s return.

After the brief blackout, both the son and the daughter disappear. The disappearance again suggests that the children are the creation of a dream, and that they are the representation of what the dreamers have been repressing. At the end of the play, the two dreamers meet; Minoru, appearing from the sliding door of the back stage center, invites Jessie towards him with a "horrifying smile" (playscript 135).

The fathers’ dreams submerge the son’s quest. They deny the son and the daughter the position of the subject who dreams. However, Minoru and Jessie are also in a precarious position as the subjects of dreams. The final meeting of Minoru and Jessie intensifies the sense that the two fathers are mirroring each other. Watanabe theatrically represents this mirroring in the scene of Jessie’s birthday party in the first half of the play. The performer who plays Minoru appears as a man who says that he is Jessie’s husband. The man and Jessie slowly dance, reflecting and mirroring each other’s movements in the dim light.

Thus, in this play, the playwright presents two dreamers and other peripheral characters who may dream, but essentially act as they are desired by the central
dreamers. This play seems to be a manifesto of the power of a dreamer. Nonetheless, Watanabe depicts the two central characters as a mirror and a reflection to each other; the point which may undermine the playwright’s assertion of the power of dreamer, because the creative dreamer is presupposed to have a strong self, that is, be a strong subject.

**Romantic Subject and Subjectivity-formation**

In responding to my question regarding one’s subjectivity, the playwright states:

I think that one’s self (jibun) is present only in other people (tanin).... There is no other self than the one that is seen by other people.... I think that a human being is fundamentally a relative being. You become present when somebody else says that you are a certain kind of person. You can see yourself only through somebody else’s eyes. (15 June 1989)

This statement seems to explain the dramatic construction of Going Down the Dream-hill, and the paralyzing treatment of the dreamers infinitely mirroring each other. Further, in this statement with its touch of Lacanian mirroring, Watanabe seems to deny the notion of an essential subject independent of social and cultural construction. However, this statement needs closer examination.

In a description of the source story of the play Going Down the Dream-hill, the playwright discloses her
version of subjectivity-formation as being essentially related to artistic creation: subjectivity is a creation of the artist as a man.

Watanabe found her source story in a Japanese magazine for adolescent girls. The story goes that a man in a foreign country, after his wife's death, lived the rest of his life in his deceased wife's dress. Watanabe recalls the strong impression she got from the story and the illustration of the man dressed as woman attached to the story ("Subete wa yume" 35-36).

The playwright reveals her interpretation of the source story in a program note to the 1982 production of *Going Down the Dream-hill*:

> Probably, the man was much more afraid of losing himself than he was in love with the deceased wife. . . . His self disappered at the point of his wife's death, because it was created by her gazing at him, and by his gazing at himself with her. . . . he identified himself with the wife, so that he could look at himself . . . and create the image of the husband--himself--who was desired and loved.

Further, in the same program note, Watanabe states: "This is not just a story about a self-centered man. Doesn't this story somehow remind us of the spirit (tamashi) of those people who try to create something?"

The playwright interprets this man's act as a presentation of desire of a creative artist: the artist creates the image of himself as a desired--and thus ideal--being through the reflection of the absent wife.
In order to idealize himself, he idealizes his wife, and re-enacts the image of ideal woman who devotes her love to the artist. The artist's creation hinges on his desire for recognition by the absent woman. This interpretation reminds us of Italo Calvino's parable of the construction of human history; desire as a motivating force, rather than an actual, material presence of a woman.

Thus, Watanabe's seemingly Lacanian notion of subjectivity-formation turns out to be a parable of artistic creation. The playwright emphasizes the subject who desires, rather than the Lacanian notion of ever-moving process of desire that forms one's subjectivity. In the play Going Down the Dream-hill, the playwright re-creates a man whose wife has left him. His double, Minoru, wants the toy-duck to mirror back to him the image of himself as the desired being.

However, this emphasis on the subject who desires again seems to contradict the fact that Watanabe re-creates a double to the creative dreamer. In order to explain this doubling, despite her emphasis on the subject who desires, it is necessary to examine her plays again in terms of her surrealistic notion on thought-process.
Thought-Process as Art

The play Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls opens and closes with a character named Man (Otoko) directly addressing the audience. At the opening of the play, Man suggests to the spectators that they evoke an imaginary painting:

There is a painting. Do you say there is no painting? Right, there is nothing here. Imagine, however, things come into being from where nothing actually exists. Think, that there is a painting here. Then you will see the painting. . . . This is a toy-duck. . . . But the name of the toy is in your thoughts. Can you see a painting now? Think, because everything is in your thoughts. (playscript 1)

From the beginning, the playwright sets up a scene which shows the following scenes to be imaginary, to be something in somebody's mind. Man's direct address involves the spectators in the thought-process of this play, encouraging the spectators to participate in the play, by thinking and imagining that "there is a painting" on the stage.

With this evocation, Watanabe seems to be saying that there is nothing objectively "real," except what is perceived in one's thoughts. In this play, a character's thought creates another character, and the created character dreams into existence another character. Thoughts and dreams multiply, meet and intermingle with one another, until it becomes impossible to figure out who is a real, living character and who is not, nor is it
possible to tell which scene is reality and which is a
dream. Man closes the play, saying:

Well, now, we are totally confused. This is
the end of the play. As the saying in my
family goes; "don't over-believe in people and
in a refrigerator." Mark this, this means not
to believe too much. There is nothing more
painful than being betrayed, after you have
committed yourself to your belief. What you
can believe is in here, that is, what you
actually see in the woods of "thoughts."
Everybody is free in this wood. Do not try to
close the wood too hastily. Just for the sake
of this painting. Farewell. (playscript 136)

As Man acknowledges, the ending of this play is
confusing. Watanabe does not leave clues for the
spectators to decipher the play. The play is open-ended.
The dazzling multiplication of dreams and thoughts leaves
the spectators totally confused. The playwright seems to
be saying that to believe something too much is to try to
attach a material meaning to it. Meaning is arbitrary,
and it is only the creation of a thought-process.

This emphasis on dream and thought-process reminds
us of surrealism's focus on dream-process. In his
Surrealist Manifesto, André Breton says that surrealism
"rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain
forms of association neglected until now, in the
omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play
of thought" (Ades 122). In fact, images from
surrealistic paintings abound in Going Down the
Dream-hill. In describing one scene from the play, the
playwright states that she wanted to produce the same effect that she receives from seeing the Belgian surrealist René Magritte's "Golconde" (Kisaragi et al., "Ima taoyakana" 72).

In Magritte's "Golconde," an uncountable number of men dressed in black and wearing bowler hats are statically suspended in the air. Watanabe creates a scene in Going Down the Dream-hill that is remarkably similar. The two dreamers' (Minoru and Jessie) spheres intersect, and six men who are dressed in black suits with bowler hats slowly appear from the opening up stage center and quietly flood onto the small stage. In the dim light, their gentle, almost static movements, and their black umbrellas, mark the scene as something illusory and mystical.

Watanabe could put onstage only six men with bowler hats due to spatial limitations, but her effort to simulate the effect is further illustrated by the two-dimensional stage setting and the static, picturesque opening scene of the play within a play. Up stage center is a sliding door of a large Japanese cabinet that is usually built in a wall (oshi-ire), and bunk beds stage right and left which can be hidden or revealed. The sliding door opens now and then to reveal new characters, unusual images, and to serve as the opening into a sphere beyond the stage. The setting frames the acting area and
demarcates the flexible edge of the interior and the exterior of a character’s thoughts. This framed stage evokes images that structurally resemble the surrealist’s paintings.

Further, in her description of this painterly scene, the playwright states that she wants to create a play which evokes the spectators’ images, rather than imposing a theme or a meaning on them (Kisaragi et al., “Ima taoyakana” 72; Kazama, Engeki no koya 77). The statement also resembles the Belgian surrealist’s refusal to impose a theme or a meaning on his paintings. Magritte repeatedly stated that his paintings of simple objects (a hat, a bell, an apple, a bird, or a street lamp) in unusual combinations (sometimes the hat is resting on the apple, the bird is made of stone) "are not themes. These are images that come together, that impose themselves upon me" (Torczyner 202).

In addition, the unusual combination of objects in Magritte’s paintings helps in explaining the complicated structure of Watanabe’s plays. Gazing at the surrealist’s painting, the spectator is denied the possibility of interpreting the relation of objects to each other in spite of their materiality, because of the unreal combination of their presentation. The combination "evokes" images, but does not invite a spectator into thematic speculation because it does not
give her a solid point of reference. Watanabe’s plays effect a spectator similarly, with their constant shifting and doubling of identities, scenes, and imaginary spheres.

Magritte’s "Decalcomania" (Décalcomanie) serves to clarify the structural dynamics in Watanabe’s play, as they seem to give the same sense of dissociation to a spectator. A man with a bowler hat, back to a spectator, is gazing at a landscape of sea, sky, and sand. To his right, occupying two thirds of the painting, a red curtain hangs from above. Strangely, a portion of the curtain is cut out in exactly the shape of the man, and the spectator can see through the curtain the portion of the landscape that is hidden by the man. The scrap of red curtain is attached to the right shoulder of this human landscape, and the scrap corresponds to the part that is hidden by the man’s right shoulder. Looking at this painting, the spectator feels a sense of suspension and dissociation: the visible and the invisible, substance and non-substance interchange places. The scrap, a material substance that is attached to the human landscape, reinforces the sense of transference, but fails to indicate the origin and the destination of the transference.

The title, "Decalcomania," according to James Harkness, embodies a complex play of three ideas. First,
the title can mean transference, or decal; second, it is
a painterly technique "in which pigment is transferred
from one side of a painted surface to another by folding
over the canvas"; third, it refers to a species of
madness "bound up with the idea of shifting identities"
(This Is Not a Pipe 62).

In this sense, Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain
Falls is a "decalcomaniac" play. The sphere of each
dreamer's (Minoru or Jessie) is "folded over" and
transferred from one to the other. Jessie, as a character
in a play within a play, corresponds to the human
landscape in "Decalcomania." The human landscape is
hollow, but by showing the invisible through its
hollowness, and through its exact human shape, it exudes
an uncanny sense of presence. The scrap of curtain
material is also attached to Jessie, in the shape of his
ubiquitous butler. The man turning his back is no less
unreal. Just as the painting denies a spectator a
reference point by which she can decide whether the man
is cut out of the curtain, or if landscape has escaped
his gaze and slides into the curtain, the play does not
allow the audience to decide whether Minoru is a cut-out
from Jessie's dream, or vice versa. The scrap of the
curtain which is hidden by the man and slides back into
the human landscape corresponds to Kōichi. Kōichi is the
scrap of his father's dream with a material existence to
some extent and at a certain point in the play, and he slides back into the play within the play. Characters' identities never become definite, and a spectator's identification with a single character never happens. The spectator experiences a maddening transference of identification from one character to another.

In other words, the anxiety the spectators feel while watching this play arises partially from the fact that characters reflect each other, but that no single character emerges as the real subject of the reflections. Even Kōichi, the diluted hero of the quest story, turns out to be a reflection. Neither Minoru nor Jessie seem to be real. The uncertainty puts the audience in the position of constant wondering. The spectators lose any point of reference with which they can identify; thus they cannot help feeling an unstable sense of suspension: they cannot pinpoint the ground on which they can securely stand to interpret the play.

Thus, Watanabe's doubling of the central dreamers seems to point to the ultimate creators who are present outside the play, the playwright and the audience. In Man's prologue and epilogue, the playwright seems to be asserting that this play is about the power of dreamers, and moreover, it is about the artist/playwright's and a spectator's thought-process by which art is given a final form.
The playwright’s focus on thought-process (especially of the artist/playwright) demonstrates her notion of the author as the ultimate origin. Watanabe’s surrealistic construction of plays does not contradict this notion of the author. Surrealism, in spite of its emphasis on thought and dreaming-process, upholds the romantic notion of the author as the center and origin. In his "Letter to the Chancellors of the European Universities," Antonin Artaud states:

Further away than science will ever reach, there where the arrows of reason break against the clouds, this labyrinth exists, a central point where all the forces of being and the ultimate nerves of the Spirit converge. In this maze of moving and always changing walls, outside all known forms of thought, our Spirit stirs, watching for its most secret and spontaneous movements—those with character of revelation, an air of having come from elsewhere, of having fallen from the sky... [my emphasis] (Ades 123)

This statement, with its emphasis on "a central point" where forces and the "Spirit" converge, demonstrates that surrealism is ultimately a version of romanticism, as Lilian R. Furst points out in Romanticism (63).
Thus, Watanabe stands as a romantic author who claims the power and the "spirit" (tamashi) of artist as the ultimate center of creation.\(^7\)

The Return of the Repressed: Women in Watanabe’s Plays

Watanabe’s emphasis on "the spirit of dreamer" as the ultimate center and source of artistic creation seems to conceal the presence of others who are dreamed by the artist, and who are not allowed to assert their own dreams, being trapped by somebody else’s dream. For example, Jessie’s wife, while being a motivating force for Jessie’s re-enactment and creation, is absent throughout the play. No revelation is made as to the reason why she left Jessie; in other words, a "real" and living woman is not required in this play of dreaming-process.

Overall, women in Watanabe’s plays seem to be presented as mere reflections. In Yoru no kage (The Shadow of Night) (1981), three men keep looking for the image of a woman as their deceased sister. Though the men do not have blood relationships and are of different ages, the image of the same woman as the "sister" invites

\(^7\) I owe this perspective to see Watanabe Eriko as a romantic author to film scholar Darrell W. Davis who pointed out that Watanabe’s seemingly contradictory notions of subject (i.e., subject as social creation and subject as the center) can be interpreted as an expression of romanticism.
them into the sphere of dream and fantasy. As in
Calvino's city of Zobeide, the men's fantasy about the
"sister" expands, while the sister, being pursued from
behind, never comes back to them.

In reviewing this play, Japanese theatre critic
Senda Akihiko refers to the "power of the sister" (ane no
chikara) as the ultimate protective power for men, thus
idealizing the pursued "sister." The critic writes that
women have the power of love that can give wholeness to
men who are fragmented by the "power of the mirror." The
critic does not define the "power of the mirror," but it
is relatively clear that he is setting up the dichotomy
of women's power to restore wholeness and men's
fragmentation:

We can never escape from the dynamics of
conflict between the evil "power of the mirror"
and the "power of the sister" which works to
keep the primordial wholeness (genshoteki
tōgō). (We need the "power of the mirror" to
consciously re-construct the self, but this is
not the place to argue about this.) In this
sense, Watanabe Eriko's play is rooted in the
essence of our life. (Gendai engeki no kōkai
304)

The term, the "power of the sister," also comes from
the folklorist, Yanagita's studies into the
sister-brother relationships in ancient Japan, focusing
on the religious power the sister was believed to have to
help her brother. Yanagita's original phrasing of the
"power of sister" (imo no chikara; imo signified both
sister and wife in old Japanese) has inspired a number of reinterpretations of the concept. Senda uses the term out of Yanagita's religious context, and bases his review on a reinterpretation, stating that the "power of the sister" is, "in short, the image of the eternal woman for men" (Gendai engeki no kokai 304). Senda seems to be idealizing this position for a woman--an eternal reflection of a man's desire, "the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to men" (De Lauretis, Alice 15).

Thus, in this play, a woman is again idealized as the absent but strong motivating force for artistic creation, though at the expense of an actual, living woman.

However, Watanabe's plays often reveal a dimension beyond her stated emphasis on the "spirit of dreamer." In this dimension, an idealized and repressed woman comes back, asserting that she is a living woman who also wants to be the subject of desire.

In Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls, living women are presented as middle-aged Japanese housewives. The housewives are revealed behind the sliding door upstage, right after an extremely theatrical scene, in which Jessie enacts a wife waiting for her husband.

Their appearance as spectators upstage also reveals that the Jessie's play is a play within a play. The four
worn-out Japanese housewives make an off-hand commentary on the play within a play, complaining about the uncomfortable seating, gossiping about a neighbor’s son who is supposed to be in the play, criticizing "a fashion" of the recent theatre that makes things intentionally too difficult to understand. They establish a down-to-earth perception and their downright negation of the play within the play as something that is "not understandable" is a view the spectators can share and enjoy.8

The appearance of the housewives undercuts the exaggerated theatricality of the previous scene. They ridicule self-conscious play-acting, and bring to the highly theatricalized space day-to-day problems that housewives would face. Although the interplay of perceptions becomes more complicated as the scenes progress, Watanabe never loses hold of the material reality of the common housewives. For example, one of them, Mrs. Nitta, says:

8 The housewives’ commentary also work as a meta-commentary on the play Going Down the Dream-hill, and on the contemporary Japanese little theatre. The seating in a spatially-limited theatre in Tokyo can be extremely uncomfortable. Spectators are often enlisted from performers’ friends if a theatre group is not popular enough to attract a sufficient size of audience, and an original play of a little theatre group can be extremely complicated to understand. The housewives’ comments tap the audience’s shared experience and attract hearty laughter.
Again, the night has come, while I was thinking and planning what to do. I have always been unhappy because I have too many plans to carry out. I have naturally ended up having to call myself hysteri (histeri kishitsu). Dreams keep breaking up, the night comes before I do anything. My plan was to play a harpsichord in Den-en chôfu, but I ended up pushing a baby buggy in this town filled with chimneys. Oh, no, no, I’m starting to feel helpless. I’m gradually going to die quietly like this.

(playscript 61)

These lines are extremely funny, first because of their rhythmic quality and the humorous pun, and second, because of the sense of incongruity they bring to the play. The lines touch on the sense of failure, or the acceptance of life with resignation, of which people—except for those who are fortunate—generally share. Her plans are materialistic—an elegant life in a chic area in Tokyo—which, in a way, directly point to a parameter of a generally shared dream for success, and also, illustrate a kind of dream a common housewife would have.

The character speaks these lines in the bright light, right after the scene in which Jessie and his "husband" slowly mirrored each other in the dim light, as if she was awakening from a dream. The materiality of the lines sharply contrasts with Jessie’s unrealistic

9 An elegant residential area in Tokyo.

10 There is an untranslatable pun in this line. She uses the homophonic verbs, hiku, to say "to play a harpsichord (hâpusnikôdo o hiku)" and "to push a baby buggy (ubaguruma o hiku)."
commitment to his reflection of himself. The lines are funny because they sharply contrast with Jessie's dream, and because they illustrate a stereo-typical Japanese housewife who is often associated with down-to-earth materialism, and add a tint of existential anxiety ("I'm gradually going to die quietly like this") to the stereotype. The lines inspire laughter also because a stereotypical Japanese housewife is not supposed to experience an existential anxiety. They also touch on the spectators' experiences of disappointment and give them a chance to reflect on the ridiculousness of their own dreams.

Watanabe demonstrates her critical distance from the spirit of the dreamer by constantly inserting down-to-earth characters (women and servants in this play) in her plays to comment, unmask, and ridicule the notion of artistic creation as something beyond day-to-day existence. For example, Jessie's servants work part-time as construction workers, in order to support their master. This is not so much an expression of their loyalty to Jessie, as their wish to keep a "legitimate job." The inversion of the logical relationship between the master and the servants is ridiculous in itself, but moreover, the playwright seems to be saying that art comes into being from the spirit of the dreamer, but at the expense of other people who are
not allowed to be the subjects of creation (including women).

In this context, *Going Down the Dream-hill. Rain Falls* appears to be a parody on the creation of art which erases those people--including women--who also wish and dream. Though Watanabe puts a housewife into a position to inspire the spectators' laughter, the playwright's sympathy seems to be with this character who could not pursue her dreams. Watanabe depicts in her play women and those who have been denied their own dreams, that is, the son and the daughter who are partly the creation of the dreamers' desire, and the housewives and servants who are only tangentially involved in the reflective process of the dreamers' thoughts.

The dynamics of Watanabe's play lie at this intersection between her impulse towards upholding the value attached to artistic creation at the expense of others and her sympathy towards people who are erased from the process of creation. In this play, the playwright seems to be torn apart by these two impulses, which may have contributed to the structure of the play that does not allow a spectator to have any identification with a character. Transference--of characters, of dreams, of the real and the unreal, and of the spectator and the stage--illustrates Watanabe's split impulses. Her insistence that the self is relative,
which seem to contradict her belief in the spirit of dreamer (yumemiru tamashi), may in fact be demonstrating this split: the playwright is aware of those whose selves are erased by others, while she still identifies herself as an artist who inscribes her desire into her text, thus reflecting herself back to her.

Return of the Repressed 2: Gegege no ge

Gegege no ge: ōma ga doki ni yureru buranko (Gegege no ge: Swings in the Time of Evil) is a play about remorse and negation, about the past that no one can ever take back, the life that is bitter and unforgivable. In this award-winning play, the playwright again focuses on a dreamer who is disillusioned and in despair. Dreaming, for such a dreamer, is the only way to save himself from the pain of his life in despair. This play illustrates Watanabe’s deeply felt sympathy for “underdogs” who have failed to fulfill their lives and desires. It also demonstrates the playwright’s belief that the act of dreaming is not only the process of artistic creation, but also the ultimate normalizer of one’s collapsing life, at least in the dreamer’s imagination. I will examine this play as an example of these kinds of belief and sympathy towards a “failure,” who may be a man or a woman.
The untranslatable title of the play, Gegege no ge evokes two images—Gegege no Kitarō, a popular Japanese comic-book hero and the image of an uncanny experience, because "Gegege no ge" can be a child's exclamation (though rare) in a game to express surprise and disgust when she encounters something unexpected. (An adult may say a simple "Ge" to express disgust, but in an extremely informal situation.)

Further, the subtitle of the play, Swings in the Time of Evil (ōma ga doki ni yureru buranko,) succinctly illustrates that the play is about uncanny encounters. Yoshida Teigo defines the time of evil (ōma ga doki) as follows: "Twilight or dusk is traditionally regarded as a mystically dangerous time because supernatural monsters are about. . . . The evening, just before night falls, is called ōma ga doki, which means the time when one encounters demons" ("The Stranger as God" 96). The play abounds with ghosts and monsters (yōkai) and the comic-book hero, Gegege no Kitarō, is called up and fights against the evil spirits that afflict the weak.

The play basically has the same complicated structure we have seen in Going Down the Dream-hill, Rain Falls. There are two dreamers, characters who are either dreamed or remembered, and another character who is also dreaming outside the two dreamers' spheres. The two dreamers' spheres reflect and transfer to each other and
thus create the intermixing of the two spheres in which anything can happen.

The central character is a middle-aged man, Makio, who keeps dreaming of his miserable childhood. He was the target of his classmates' constant bullying. The play hinges on Makio's childhood memories, and his wish for somebody to save him from this plight. Makio's counterpart dreamer is another middle-aged man who tries to grow loquat trees in the barren land of northeastern Japan in order to affirm his life of "negation" (Gegege no ge 71). The man was sent to this far village during World War II as one of the school children who were evacuated from Tokyo. After the war, he was finally sent back to Tokyo only to find that all was gone--his family, his hometown, and a loquat tree in a small shrine ground where he used to play with other children. For him, loquat trees seem to symbolize plenitude and lost happiness.

The man suggests that he married early, in order to restore his lost family, but in the end left his wife and child because he felt that having a new family could not compensate for his loss. His act of negation (of fatherhood, and of his life in a city) relates him to Makio, who is a negated child. Makio's father left his family when Makio was three years old. Makio is negated by his family, and by his classmates. This association
(although an indirect one) establishes a connection between these two dreamers who mirror one another.

Watanabe saves the revelation that Makio is actually a day-dreaming middle-aged man until the last scene of the play, so that from the beginning until nearly the end of the play, the spectators see the child, Makio, experiencing other children's cruelty and hoping for the hero, Gegege no Kitarō, to save him.

Gegege no Kitarō appears and fights battles against Makio's classmates who turn out to be monsters. Watanabe theatrically presents a child's simple association of bullies with monsters. The appearance of the popular hero on stage and the hilarious battle scenes invite the spectators' enjoyment and laughter (Kazama 75). Yet a sense of uncanniness arises when the spectators gradually realize that Kitarō is representing Makio's dead friend, Tokihiko. Tokihiko seems to have been the only friend who stood up for Makio. The spectators further realize that Makio, being frightened, left Tokihiko lying unconscious after he was accidentally injured, trying to protect Makio. The injury seems to have been fatal, though Makio never admits that Tokihiko is dead.

Makio's fantasy also hinges on another death. Makio's twin sister, Kazuha, died when they were born, strangled by his umbilical cord. Makio, realizing that he has killed two people who were the closest to him,
says: "I destroy those, a very few, warm things that are around me without knowing what I am doing. Why, why is there such an ugly part hidden in me?" (Gegege no geki 139).

Towards the end of the play, Watanabe shows middle-aged Makio, wearing Gegege no Kitarō’s sleeveless coat, riding quietly on a swing in twilight. Makio murmurs Kitarō’s words, "Somebody called for me. The heaven stirs and the wind howls when I am angered. Come on, those of you who don’t want to keep your life . . . ." (145), suggesting that Kitarō is the creation of his wish to compensate for the loss, and to forgive himself.

The sense that no one can take back the past does not allow Makio to forgive himself. Makio and his counterpart dreamer meet in the twilight where they have to face actions and events of the past that they cannot ever take back. In this twilight, Makio’s deceased sister accuses him of killing her, telling him to give her back the loquat she has offered him to eat. The eaten fruit—the past—cannot be restored. Makio says: "I will not forgive myself." Makio’s counterpart says: "I will not forgive myself. The sour loquat I ate at that time, has become ripe inside me, behind this life of negation of mine, here, so hard, now, no more, (breathes deeply), I can’t, I can’t spit it out any more . . . ." (125). They are to stay in the twilight, in a life of
negation and remorse, being unable to restore the loquat of life.

In the time of evil, the dreamers meet their repressed past. The dead and monsters haunt them: the spectators see the familiar--the comic-book hero--become unfamiliar. In other words, the repressed sense of guilt, remorse, and the fear of death return to afflict both the characters and the spectators.

**Gegege no ge as a "Fairy Tale"**

Watanabe, in an interview with a radio station just after receiving the Kishida Playwriting Award in 1982 for this play, states that she tried to write about "monsters inside everybody" (daredemo motteiru uchigawa no yōkai mitai na mono) (Kazama, Engeki no kōya 74). In the same interview, the playwright talks about her own experience of being bullied as a child, then states that children's bullying the weak is "a microcosm of society." She further states that she wanted to present it [children bullying the weak] as a kind of "original experience (gen taiken)" for everybody (Kazama, Engeki no kōya 74-75). Watanabe's statement demonstrates that the playwright is aiming at experience which is common to everybody, those experiences of deeply felt fear, anxiety, hatred and remorse.
Thus, monsters in Gegege no Ge, after all, seem to represent one's sense of guilt and a possibly unintentional tendency to do harm to others. The characters—the deceased sister who invites Makio to the sphere of twilight, Tokihiko/Kitarô, and the man who plants loquat trees—finally seem to converge on a single dreamer, Makio. The characters are reflections of Makio's sense of guilt, and his wish to compensate for the past.

The playwright's statement also demonstrates her interest in the function of "monsters" that incite one to hate oneself and others, and that also motivate dreaming. The motif "Gegege no Kitarô" is an appropriate choice. Kitarô is a hero who is closely associated with death, anger, and the negative forces that one may encounter in life and in oneself. At the same time, the image of the anti-hero, Makio, functions like an old fairy tale, in the sense that Bruno Bettelheim describes: "The strange, most ancient, most distant, and at the same time most familiar locations which a fairy tale speaks about suggest a voyage into the interior of our mind, into the realms of unawareness and the unconscious" (63).

The play, in other words, functions like a fairy tale that speaks to one's deeply felt fear and anxiety. Japanese critic Ei Norio associates the play with legendary tales of anti-heroes in the northeastern
Japan—Tokiwabō Kaison and Tōno monogatari (The Tales of Tōno), the association of which also points to this function of the play ("Biwa no hayashi 28-29). Tokiwabō Kaison is a legendary person who has to wander for hundreds of years as a result of his sin; The Tales of Tōno (1910) is a collection of the folk tales about murders, encounters with ghosts, supernatural events, and cruelty, gathered by the folklorist Yanagita Kunio from Japan’s northeastern region of Tōno. The play presents fear and anxiety similar to these stories: Makio is, in a way, an anti-hero who has to wander through twilight with his guilt and remorse, like Tokiwabō Kaison and many other guilt-stricken people from The Tales of Tōno. Gegege no Kitarō, as a double to Makio, provides the play with a framework which reinforces this function of the play as a "fairy tale."

Women in Gegege no ge

The playwright does not attribute the position of a guilt-stricken dreamer to a woman in this play. Though Watanabe’s sympathy seems to be with the weak and failed, the central "failure" who creates and weaves a dream to compensate for the loss is a man, Makio, and by extension, the man who plants loquat trees in the barren land. Women characters appear in this play, but as the
deceased sister exemplifies, their function is to reinforce and motivate Makio’s dream.

An aspect that calls for attention in this play is the presence of the female dreamer outside the sphere of Makio and his doubles. The woman appears both at the beginning and end of the play, as an elderly person who has been lying unconscious in bed for a long time. The playwright tries to make a connection between the elderly woman and Makio’s dream by writing in her stage directions that "it seems that the woman faintly murmurs the name of Makio" (Gegege no ge 13). This would suggest that the story of Makio is the creation of the woman’s dream. Yet, the spectators do not hear the woman’s voice in actual performances (Kazama, Engeki no kōya 84; Ei, "Biwa no hayashi" 29). When the critic Ei comments that the connection between the woman and the story of Makio is unclear, he seems to represent the general response of spectators.

Thus, in spite of the woman’s presence in the periphery of the play, she seems to be too passive and weak to be the central dreamer who can be the moving force of Makio’s fantasy. Moreover, the play does not show a connection between Makio’s fantasy and this dreaming elderly woman, except for casting. One performer plays both the sister and the dreaming woman, thus linking the sister with the dreaming woman. This
suggests that the woman dreamer is after all a reflection of somebody else, like the sister who turns out to be the reflection of Makio's sense of guilt and his wish to compensate for the past. The double casting seems to illustrate the marginalized space in the play in which women are positioned.

Watanabe's explanation of the play supports this point:

There is a woman who never comes into consciousness in Gegege no ge. The dramatic arises when we imagine what the woman may be thinking. . . . The woman may not be thinking anything, but people taking care of her imagine [that the woman is thinking something,] which generates a drama. ("Subete wa yume" 35)

If we accept this explanation, what we see in the play is, again, the endless reflection of thought-process, the notion of which upholds the playwright/artist and the spectators who "imagine" and give a certain form to an imaginary dream associated with the dying woman.

Thus, women in Gegege no ge hold a precarious position. They may be dreamers, or dreamed, but even when a woman is presented as a subject of dream, she is not central. The two central dreamers are men—Makio and the man who plants loquat trees—whose despair is intended to speak to the spectators' "original experience."
Watanabe Eriko and the Thirty-Zero Theatre Company

Watanabe Eriko's plays demonstrate the assertion of herself as the subject of creation. Though the playwright always directs her attention to those "underdogs" whose sense of failure and despair incite them to dream, her emphasis is not so much on the escapist quality of dreaming as on the power of dream and creation. The relationship between the playwright and the company also demonstrates this belief in creative process and her assertion that the spirit of artist/dreamer is the ultimate motivating force of art.

The creative interchange between the playwright and the performers exemplify her belief and her assertion. Compared to the operation of the group prior to 1988, Watanabe states that the current style of creation is hierarchical (15 June 1989). Watanabe shows her bewilderment about the discrepancy between her original idea of collaboration and the current hierarchical operation. She states that the company operates much better with the current hierarchical structure than the previous "equal" structure in which operational guidelines and responsibilities were not clearly defined. Nonetheless, she feels that her ideal of creation with the dynamic exchange of ideas is difficult to realize in the current hierarchical organization (15 June 1989).
In 1982, Watanabe stated that she and other founding members started their own theatre because they did not like to work in a hierarchical structure with a charismatic person on the top. Her statement referred to the structure that was generally found both in the little theatre and in the so-called commercial theatre. It was a direct response to what the director, Suzuki Tadashi, was said to have stated at a symposium, "Now, on the Dramatic" (Ima gekiteki naru mono o megutte,) which was held in Tokyo in 1982. Suzuki, according to the critic, Matsuoka Kazuko, stated that a group equals a hierarchy (Kisaragi et al., "Ima taoyakana" 81).

In contrast, in 1989, Watanabe states:

I am now becoming a charismatic [karisuma teki] leader. I am thinking what to do now. We started out working collectively, but I have been the spokesperson, I had to learn, I had to change. Other members didn’t change. A gap [between the playwright and others] came in, misunderstandings came in, and I ended up becoming a charismatic leader, though I didn’t have any control over the process. Younger members came in, I became more isolated. The group is now moving towards a direction that is far from the original ideal. I now understand what Mr. Suzuki said. He couldn’t help becoming an all-powerful leader. (Interview 15 June 1989)

In terms of her vision for an ideal structure, she states that she thinks that a "charismatic operation" is the most efficient. At the same time, she expresses her reservation, stating that the charismatic operation makes a group a religious organization out of which
participants cannot draw their own pleasure. She is
still looking for a kind of organizational structure in
which operational function and creative dynamics
coordinate well (15 June 1989).

Watanabe seems to take this position of an
all-powerful leader with a certain reservation. In the
process of creation, for example, Watanabe makes massive
changes during the rehearsal period, suggesting the
presence of creative interchange between the writer and
the performers. She re-wrote the entire first half of a
play during the rehearsal period of the recent
production, The Woods Where the Wind Falls (Kaze no furu
mori) in May, 1989 (Watanabe 15 June 1989). In addition,
the playwright writes lines with specific performers in
mind. The playwright states: "I create miseba [a scene
in which one performer can attract spectators' attention]
for each performer. I write [a script] in order to give
a performer a chance to give long speeches" (Kisaragi et
al., "Ima taoyakana" 71).

This creative interchange seems to be a limited one
as company member Maeda Hiroyuki puts it: "We seldom give
our opinion (about a play) to Eriko-san. She asks what we feel. We sometimes tell her that the structure of a play is too complicated, or that the play is difficult to understand. After hearing our responses, Eriko-san may rewrite the script, or she may not rewrite it at all" (28 July 1989). Maeda’s remark demonstrates that aesthetic control totally belongs to the playwright/director.

In spite of her reservation, her position as the leader of the group seems to be suitable for an artist who asserts herself as the subject of creation, and who believes in the power of dreaming. Watanabe Eriko, by identifying herself with the power of imagination, acts out a mode of subjectivity that has rarely been assigned to women; i.e., the creator, the source, and the origin. This mode seems only to reinforce the value so far associated with male subjectivity. However, her open assertion to be a subject and the source demonstrate a possibility of a new mode of subjectivity for women.

In addition, her ironical distance to the self-indulgent dreamers (like those in Going Down the Dream-hill), adds another dimension to her assumption of

11 Calling somebody with her first name suggests a certain intimacy or friendship in Japanese context. Adding "san"—roughly an equivalent of those titles such as Mr. and Ms. in English—after the first name shows politeness, the sense of respect in the context of a friendly relationship. Therefore, "Eriko-san" implies that Maeda keeps a certain degree of distance and respect to the leader of this closely-tied group.
subject. In other words, the playwright shows her sensibility towards those who are ignored in the dreamer's narrative. The fact may illustrate Watanabe's possibly contradictory wish and awareness as a woman playwright, that is, a wish to be the creative subject and an awareness of disillusionment often attached to women's desires. By showing disillusioned women who wish to dream in vain, the playwright captures another mode of subjectivity assigned to women; i.e., women as being outside of artistic creation.

In Watanabe's plays, women as reflections and failures appear and re-appear, attracting the spectators' attention to those who cannot dream. On one hand, like the sister in The Shadow of Night, women as reflections invite the spectators' longing for the "eternal feminine"; on the other hand, those disillusioned housewives in Going Down the Dream-hill reveal women who are unable to pursue their desire, while inciting laughter and pleasure among the spectators with the familiarity of the women's disillusionment. These women--both the reflection and the disillusioned--represent women's repressed desire to be the subject who dreams.
CHAPTER V

KISHIDA RIO AND KISHIDA JIMUSHO + RAKUTENDAN:
PLEASURE AND NARRATIVE

The female playwright and director, Kishida Rio founded a theatre group, Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan in 1983, with the male director and scene designer, Wada Yoshio. Since 1983, Kishida Rio has been acting mainly as the playwright for the company, while Wada Yoshio has been taking the directing/actor-training responsibility. The group functions extremely well considering that the foundation was actually the union of two previously separate theatre groups; Kishida’s Kishida Jimusho and Wada’s Rakutendan. Twenty company members—all of them are performers including Munakata Shun who takes administrative responsibilities—work closely with Wada and have been exclusively presenting Kishida’s plays since the union. The group consists of an even number of
male and female performers, and attracts roughly an even number of male and female spectators.¹

Kishida Rio began her theatrical career in 1974 when she joined the famous director Terayama Shûji’s company, the Tenjosajiki Laboratory of Theatre Play. She worked with Terayama as a co-writer of films and theatrical works until his death in 1983. She also started to pursue her theatrical interests both similar to and different from Terayama’s with her own group in 1977.

Terayama is well known for his denial of the notion of a unified subject. He considered that subjectivity was a constructed narrative, and thereby rejected a theatre focused on communicating stories to the audience. He believed that narrative entails an illusionistic sense of a unified subject as a result of its structural

¹ The result of the audience survey conducted during the production of Ryôrinin (The Cook) in December, 1988 shows that 52.4% of the audience is male, and 46.2% female. The past record kept by the company shows that 42.66% of the audience attended Ito jigoku (The Thread Hell) in June 1987 is male, and 56.42% female.

Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan attracts a fairly small number of spectators. Average attendance is roughly 800 for an average run of 10 performances. Even the award-winning The Thread Hell attracted only 1,300 spectators for its first production in 1984, then 1,400 spectators for its revival in 1987. Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan is a critically acclaimed theatre group, but does not seem to have a so-called "popular appeal." Kishida Rio says that a general audience expects to enjoy laughter, singing and dancing in the theatre, rather than have the immediate and serious experience this group offers (16 October 1988).
necessity of having beginning, middle, and end. Thus, he tried to create the theatre of immediate encounter not too different from that of the Artaudian theatre of cruelty.²

Kishida Rio's work demonstrates similar concerns regarding subjectivity. She also believes that subjectivity is a socially constructed narrative, and that history is also an arbitrary narrative created by those who are in a position of power. However, as opposed to Terayama's total denial of a coherent narrative in favor of fragmentary impressions and experiences, Kishida considers herself one who writes narrative from her own perspective, that is, from a woman's point of view. Kishida states: "I am woman, and I can understand and feel women's pain and pleasure.

better [than Terayama did],” and that is why she "started to write plays about women" (16 October 1988).

Thus, Kishida Rio’s theatrical work involves re-writing of history and narrative about and for women. For example, in her recent play Tsui no sumika kari no yado (The Home and a Temporary Dwelling)(1988), she illustrates a historical woman, Kawashima Yoshiko, who is well known as a Chinese collaborator with the Japanese government before and during World War II. Kawashima was famous for her beauty and male clothing she wore. The image of "gorgeous female spy dressed as a man" is still associated with her name. Rather than expanding the image of mystery associated with this woman, Kishida reveals how Kawashima was manipulated by both Japan and China before and during the war, because of her birth as a princess of a royal family of the Qing dynasty. The princess was "given" for adoption to a Japanese with questionable character. The man was a "friend" of her father and possibly had the power to work for the Chinese royal family in Manchuria. Kishida illustrates that Kawashima’s male dresses and collaboration with the Japanese government were results of her fear of the step-father who may have raped her, and also of her emotionally complicated attachment both to China and to Japan. In this play the playwright focuses on her fear, anxiety, and attachment, thus illustrating a woman whose
life and subjectivity were created and manipulated by the historical situation.³

Thus in her theatrical works, Kishida Rio questions a social narrative that curtails and conditions women’s existence. Further, she constantly asserts a woman’s wish to be a subject of her own narrative. In this assertion, the playwright presents those women outside societal norms, thus possibly being free to have narratives and modes of subjectivity of their own. For example, the playwright presents vampire sisters in her gothic play Kyûketsuki (Vampire) (1984), and, in other plays she shows numerous women who breach law with their unusual assertion of love, sexuality, and desire.

In this chapter, I will examine three of Kishida Rio’s plays—Yume no ukihashi (A Floating Bridge of Dreams) (publ. 1985); Ito jîgoku (The Thread Hell) (prod. 1984); and Ryôrinin (The Cook) (prod. 1988). This examination will show how Kishida perceives history and society as a narrative, how she tries to find a way for a woman to attain fulfillment free from societal conditioning, and how she feels that this woman’s wish for fulfillment can be both destructive and constructive.

³ Kawashima Yoshiko is said to have been executed for treason by the Chinese government after the war, because she was never legally adopted into the Japanese family, thus being unable to prove the “legitimacy” of her working for Japan.
for a man and a woman. The playwright summarizes these concerns in a few sentences:

Subjectivity is a narrative. Talking about oneself makes it clear that self is empty. Women in my plays realize this emptiness in the course of the plays and stop seeking for their "self." They deconstruct and try to reconstruct the ordered world in the context of modernity, by reversing causes and effects and by the medium of allegory attached to them. (Gensō yûgi 151)

In believing that subjectivity is a constructed "narrative," Kishida tries to unmask what constitutes "the ordered world in the context of modernity," the world which defines a woman's narrative in certain limited modes.

A Family as a Representation of Society

In presenting a woman who breaches law, Kishida Rio often examines the Japanese family structure (jie). The playwright seems to regard this family structure as the most immediate system that constrains and defines a woman's existence. Partly because of this focus on the family, the playwright often sets her plays in the 1920s and the 1930s when the Japanese family system and its structural constraint of a woman was much stronger than today. In addition, Kishida seems to feel that the rising militarism of the period and its nationalistic rhetoric of the nation as a family were adding a factor of political control to this system.
In *Sutego monogatari* (*A Story of A Discarded Child*) (publ. 1982)—her first play focusing on a female character—Kishida presents a woman who looks for her father. The heroine was "discarded" by her father, and so is unable to tell other people her past and her identity in a coherent narrative. The playwright presents fragmentary and non-coherent scenes to demonstrate that this woman without personal history has no subjectivity of her own. In addition, Kishida presents the heroine in various stages of her life but not chronologically, reinforcing the sense that the woman's subjectivity is totally confused and fragmented as a result of her being "discarded" by the father. Furthermore, by indirectly associating the father's authority with a Japanese emperor's authority in the 1920s, the playwright illustrates that one's (especially a woman's) subjectivity is constructed not only by a biological father, but also by a general paternal authority in society. Thus, far from being free from social conditioning as a result of being "discarded," the heroine of this play keeps looking for the father who can define her subjectivity in relation to society. This treatment of the heroine clearly demonstrates that Kishida considers subjectivity in a purely relational way.
This play is important because the playwright demonstrates her notion of a woman’s subjectivity for the first time in her theatrical career. In addition, the playwright seems to start out to search for a way for a woman to be a subject of her own narrative, during writing this play in which the heroine is totally at a loss as a result of her being separated from the father’s authority. Further, she develops her "synchronic" (kyōjiteki) dramaturgy in order to reveal a woman’s point of view with this play.

The playwright writes about the play: "A discarded child does not have history behind herself. The self that the discarded girl narrates is bound to be fictionalized from the beginning; thus, it illuminates the past and the present, the cause and the effect at the same time" (Rōgetsuki 1). What she means by a "synchronic" narrative seems to be a kind of narrative that "illuminates" the discrepancy within a causal, linear perspective. The constant modification and alteration of a previously stated/enacted event is to be the major strategy in her "synchronic" theatre (Gensō yūgi 146). This dramaturgical principle stands in the playwright’s other plays, in which she also tries to "illuminate" from a woman’s point of view what is hidden.
A Floating Bridge of Dreams

After writing a play with the heroine at a loss, it may have been natural for the playwright to direct her attention to a daughter's relationship with a father who defines her subjectivity and positioning in the Japanese society. With her identification of the father as authority and power, Kishida begins to write about a woman's wish to internalize the father's power.

Further, the playwright's concern with a woman's "pain and pleasure" directs her towards a sensual assertion of a woman's subjectivity. Kishida allows her female characters to have power to voice their fragmentary narrative, sexuality and pleasure, the expression of which is not allowed in a traditional Japanese family structure. 4

Yume no ukihashi (A Floating Bridge of Dreams) is a gothic play based on the triadic relationships between daughter-father-mother as the motivating force of action. In this play, a daughter who is in love with her father kills her mother "with hatred," and finally kills her father "with tears" (Kyūketsuki 62). The acts of love, hatred, and killing are presented as a play within a

play, with a character named Detective as a spectator who searches for the causes of these horrible crimes.

The presence of this spectator provides a framework of narrative, a structure with beginning, middle, and end, within this short and otherwise episodic play. The spectator somehow slips into this space of re-enactment and acts as the sole witness of the events. The first scene in which the detective appears (the second scene of the play) is with the father and the father's brother. The scene sets the position of this outsider: he is an intruder, and above all, a listener to each character's narrative of her/his own, and one who re-constructs the line of events.

Episodic events illustrate the father's hatred of and masochistic relationship with the mother who is a calendar-maker (she is named Kami which literally means a sheet of paper), thus symbolically representing the law of the continuity of the family on the surface. The daughter identifies with the father, and directs strong hatred to the mother. The alliance of the daughter-father culminates in the killing of the mother, who feels that she is doubly betrayed, by the daughter who denies her the position of mother and wife, and by the father who denies her sexuality by loving the daughter and by imposing the image of enforcer of the rigid law on her.
The father's description of the mother to the Detective illustrates this denial of the mother. At the beginning of the play, the father describes the mother as a "monster" with staring eyes and dried up skin and hair (Kyûketsuki 17). However, this image of a powerful "monster" who beats the father is gradually revealed to be the father's creation. In the middle of the play, the mother discloses that the masochistic relationship was based on a marriage contract. The mother says: "It was the contract. You made me wear costumes, taught me to speak the language that I didn't even want to speak. Yes. You wished the language from my mouth" (30). The father denies the presence of the contract and the mother's accusation of his demand, and ascribes the relationship to her sadistic impulse, saying: "I don't want to have anything to do with your disease any more" (30). In concluding the argument, the father defines the mother as "the snail carrying the shell named 'the house'," totally negating her and her sexuality (Kyûketsuki 31).

This argument does not necessarily show whether the father or the mother is right. Nonetheless, this scene shows that the character who is actually holding the power to direct their relationship is the father, who is able to negate the mother.
The mother's helplessness is further revealed in short scenes between the mother and the daughter, and between the mother and the Detective. In these scenes, the daughter asserts her sexuality and cruelly denies the distracted mother, stating that "he took the body and tore the calendar. . . . the future took you [your husband] but you are still looking for the past" (kyūketsuki 42). In the following scene, the Detective encourages the mother to leave the house, to which the mother responds that she is going to stay because she is "like an apparition that is going to disappear soon" and that it was partly her fault to have allowed herself to become "an apparition" (45). In despair and resignation, the mother expresses her wish to lose her reason, and to tear all calendars she has made in order to set fire to them and to the house (46). These short scenes show that the mother, in spite of her symbolic function as a representation of law, cannot have a place in the house (another representation of order,) nor can she live as a woman outside her assigned function.

After the matricide, the daughter's all-consuming desire for the father seems to be fulfilled. However, after having successfully taken her mother's place, the daughter kills her father as the final consummation of her desire and love. She declares her wish to have a baby by the father, suggesting that the patricide is the
way to tie herself to the father: "If possible, I wish to conceive you, wish to conceive you hundreds of times, and sleep with you. Father, please die, then, I wish to feel you being reborn in me" (Kyûketsuki 61). This play seems to conclude with this daughter’s strange notion of identification with and internalization of the father’s power.5

In the final scene the daughter is arrested, but she is triumphant. The Detective realizes sensual pleasure in the act of binding the daughter’s hands with a string of hair that she has offered him. The daughter, with a seductive smile, says: "You too, are trapped now, aren’t you?" (Kyûketsuki 66). This is the last line of the play, and the lights—according to the stage directions—slowly fade on the two characters who are left onstage, with a strong resonance of eroticism and fear attached to the sensual pleasure so far unknown to the Detective.

Thus, the space of re-enactment totally engulfs the Detective, who acts the actual and symbolic role of finding out what is happening in the family. The

5 See Senno Kôichi, "Shikyû wa subete o nomikomu" ("A Uterus Engulfs Everything"), for his discussion of the daughter’s incestuous wishes (including her wish to conceive the father) as the expression of a desire for supreme power.
daughter’s desire and sexuality seem to infect this outsider who is also a representative of social law.

A Floating Bridge of Dreams: Desire for Power

In spite of the fact that A Floating Bridge of Dreams is a love story, the play curiously lacks tender and affectionate feelings among characters. Attraction is presented as desire, which is all-consuming, and is closely linked with a sense of control, mastery, and power. For example, Kishida subtly reveals the father’s mastery over the daughter in the course of action. In one scene, the father manipulates the daughter’s movement by holding an imaginary rope that binds the daughter. In addition, he constantly stands behind the daughter and does not allow her to see his face. These acts illustrate that the father is the ruler and the daughter is the ruled. This complete mastery over the daughter is broken when the daughter stands behind the father to kill him. He murmurs, "I can’t see you for the first time in my life" (62). The daughter believes that her patricide is the consummation of her love. At the same time, her action shows that she has completely internalized the father’s authority and power. In other words, she has supplanted the father.

Thus, the daughter’s desire for the father has a hint of a symbolic strife that can be perceived between
the father and the son. As Alexander Mitscherlich states in his *Society without the Father*, the father-son relationship holds a special position in "a paternalist society," because this society assumes "omnipotence-impotence relationship between father and son, God and man, ruler and ruled, to be the natural principle of social organization" (141). Kishida frequently cites Mitscherlich's work in her collection of essays *Genso yûgi* (*Plays of Illusion*), to show that she accepts this notion of the father-son strife as an organizing principle. Furthermore, by replacing the son with the daughter in this play, the playwright seems to be asserting that a woman can join this strife and supplant the father.

In this sense, the daughter in Kishida's play appears almost Sadeian, to follow Gilles Deleuze's definition in his *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*. Deleuze, citing Pierre Klossowski, maintains that "the sadistic phantasy"

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ultimately "rests on the theme of the father destroying his own family, by inciting the daughter to torture and murder the mother" (52). He emphasizes the maternal character's influence over the institution of the family and the law, and points out that the father, as a primitive anarchistic force, can be the father only by overriding the law and destroying the family. Sadism is, according to Deleuze, "an active negation of the mother and an exaltation of the father who is beyond all laws" (52). The sadistic daughter, then, can have a kind of power only through an incestuous alliance with the father.

This description of "sadistic phantasy" seems to be directly applicable to Kishida's play. In its overriding of law, A Floating Bridge of Dreams seems to be Sadeian. Further, not only the heroine of this play, but numerous other heroines of Kishida's plays can be Sadeian in this sense. They triumph over the negation of social norms in their pursuit of their desire, thus becoming the enforcers of their own law (for example, A Floating Bridge of Dreams, The Thread Hell, and Vampires). Kishida's statement regarding the father seems to support this interpretation of the play as Sadeian. The playwright states that during a certain period of her playwriting career, "the father represented something
absolute," thus he was power to be internalized and

However, this play demonstrates aspects that cannot
be contained in Deleuze's formula of "sadistic phantasy":
first, Sadeian daughters do not kill their fathers--they
internalize the father's power, but do not try to become
the origin of the power themselves; second, the son, even
in their act of negating the father, enforces the
father's law by becoming the father himself and
reasserting the paternal order.

Robert Con Davis' argument about the father-son
relationship supports my second point. Davis effectively
argues for the regenerative aspect in the negation of the
father by the son, citing the example of Zeus and Kronos
("the all-father who pre-dates and is the origin of
time"). Zeus successfully institutes paternal law though
he overthrows Kronos, because he does not castrate the
father as Kronos did to his father, Uranus, and he
prohibits the eating of children. The prohibition
preserves Kronos' domain (fatherhood in time), and
ultimately reinstates the father as protector of fathers
and children, thus preserving the family in which
children are ruled by the father in time. Therefore, the
son's desire is to be eventually bound by the paternal
law. This union of desire and law is the sublimation of
the Oedipus complex of the son (*The Fictional Father*
11-13).

Kishida's daughters either bring anarchy or redefine order from a standpoint far away from a paternal one. The daughter's patricide in *A Floating Bridge of Dreams* demonstrates both her active "yes" to the father's supreme power, and "no" to his mastery. Kishida's daughter cannot be bound by the paternal power nor the law that require her to be ruled forever.

In this context, Kishida makes another illuminating statement regarding her use of the father-daughter relationship as one of the major motifs of her plays. The playwright states:

> Behind the father, there are, somebody said, the emperor system, or society, or the universe. The relationship between a father and a daughter is a kind that illustrates the relationship between a man and a woman, in which both [concrete] physical [presence] and [symbolic] distance can be perceived. (16 Oct. 1988)

In other words, the playwright seems to say that the father, with his concrete body and the symbolism assigned to him, can be the most emotionally and symbolically charged character when he is presented in relation to his daughter. Here, Kishida is displacing the notion of omnipotent father—though she certainly agrees with that notion to the extent that she perceives a societal system behind the symbol of father—by inserting the presence of
a daughter, and deleting a son, and by generalizing the father-daughter relationship into a man-woman relationship.

Kishida's daughter not only replaces the son but also displaces the father. Should we call the daughter the phallic daughter who has become the father herself? Instead, let us remember that she kills her father "with tears," she wishes to conceive her father to repeat his life in her, regenerate and intensify the relationship with him. Her wish is impossible. The daughter's desire is anarchic in the sense that it negates the family structure, the father's power, and the paternal law. And most of all, in the sense that it is self-contained, her desire is non-generative.

Kishida's interest ultimately seems to reside in this impossible, self-contained, and non-generative desire. The fact that the daughter is arrested demonstrates that she cannot go beyond the boundary of paternal law in a larger societal framework. Nonetheless, she is triumphant with pleasure at the end for having consummated her desire. And her sensuality affects even the Detective, who is a representation of the paternal law beyond her family.

This kind of pleasure in desire for the impossible cannot be described in the intricate pattern of prohibition and negation in the symbolic strife between
the father-son (daughter). Because Sadeian desire is ultimately linked with the notion of father's law and power, desire captured in this scheme cannot escape from the idea of the structural relationship between omnipotence and impotence, the father and the son, and the ruler and the ruled.

In fact, Jacques Lacan perceives the limitations of Sadeian desire in negating the law. In "Kant and Sade," Lacan points out the fact that Sade never shows the triumph of sensual seduction: Sade's victim, to the end of her life, never agrees with her torturer's intention--the agreement which would allow her to join the side of the torturer. In other words, Lacan continues, human beings are always either outright good or evil in Sade's schema, and no matter how anarchic the evil becomes, anarchy itself does not undermine the good versus evil schema. Thus, in a paradoxical way, Sade allows the good to win, by asserting the too self-evident formula of "suffering of goodness." Sade's anarchic desire ironically supports the presence of law, because law, for Lacan, is the same as repressed desire (Écrits 787 in Editions du Seuil, 287 of vol.3 in Japanese translation).

In contrast, the daughter's desire in A Floating Bridge of Dreams does not ultimately support the presence of law. Her desire is directed both to the physical
(sensual and seductive) father and to the symbolic father who is power and law. Her ultimate desire, however, points to the impossible—something more than the attainment of the father's power. She desires to "conceive the father," which is, after all, the intensification of sensual pleasure in her own body. Thus, the daughter's ultimate desire, in its impossibility, self-containment, and above all, its emphasis on sensual satisfaction, displaces the Sadeian dyad of desire and law.

Pleasure and seduction, as Lacan points out, can subvert the dyads of desire and law, of sexuality and power. This is what Jane Gallop suggests in her "Impertinent Questions: Irigaray, Sade, Lacan". She suggests that what Luce Irigaray calls "phallocratic

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8 I am using the term pleasure with sensual and sexual connotations. For Lacan, according to Alan Sheridan, pleasure "obeys the law of homeostasis that Freud evokes in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', whereby, through discharge, the psyche seeks the lowest possible level of tension" ("Translator's note" to Écrits: A Selection [NY: Norton, 1977] x). Pleasure I am referring to here is closer to the French term, jouissance, which "transgresses" the law of homeostasis, and in that sense, "it is beyond the pleasure principle" (Sheridan x). Lacan, after having described the evasiveness of the subject, states: "If the living being is something at all thinkable, it will be above all as subject of the jouissance; but his psychological law that we call the pleasure principle (and which is only the principle of displeasure) is very soon to create a barrier to all jouissance" ("Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever," The Structuralist Controversy [1970; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972] 194-195).
"woman" in Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Saint-Ange) "renders homage" to the paternal dyads of desire and law, "yet escapes formal feudal bondage by giving homage for her pleasure" (Gallop's emphasis, 66).9

In other words, the woman who seems to be on the side of the father's desire and law, is most subversive when she appears to be faithful to the father but does so for her own pleasure. Her sensual pleasure blurs the division of the ruler and the ruled, omnipotence and impotence. By the same token, the daughter's pleasure, with its infectious sensuality, ultimately disrupts the father's power when she seems to have supplanted the father.

The Thread Hell

In Kishida's plays, insofar as a woman relates herself to a man, she seems to be unable to escape from a social definition of her subjectivity as a subservient being. As we have seen, even though she forcefully disrupts the father's law, the daughter of *A Floating Bridge of Dreams* is arrested, and is ultimately contained

9 See Irigaray, "Cosi Fan Tutti" (86-105) and "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids" (106-118) in her *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985). As for the victim's pleasure, see Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography* (NY: Pantheon, 1978) 127-129. Carter's argument seems to be a more straightforward development of Lacan's perception, compared to Irigaray's and Gallop's.
under societal control. Her sensual pleasure seems to have seductive influence, but only on those who immediately surround her. In award-winning *Ito jigoku* (The Thread Hell), the playwright seems to search for a bonding between women as a possible way to re-define a relatively autonomous mode of subjectivity for women. In addition, in this play the playwright emphatically reveals an arbitrariness in woman's subjectivity. Kishida emphasizes that both history and subjectivity are narratives controlled (apparently) by men, and ultimately by indefinable social forces.

In *The Thread Hell*, all men are given names that represent their social function: Nawa (literally rope), Himo (string) and others directly signify the men's function, as the playwright perceives it, of binding women. The heroine is called Mayu (literally, cocoon), which suggests her symbiotic tie with her mother, and also, her symbolic journey to become a subject of her narrative, by spinning out a thread of past stories of herself, her mother, and many other women in the play.

Twelve other women's names are also arbitrary. They are given names that signify seasonal beauty--Sakura (cherry blossoms), Ame (rain), Tsuki (moon)--and which also signify the pictures of *hanafuda* (literally, flower

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10 Kishida Rio received the prestigious Kishida Playwriting Award in 1984 for *The Thread Hell*.
cards), a Japanese card game. The identities of these women seem to be ruled by chance in the same way that a card game is subject to chance occurrences. Further, the male characters in the play give the women their names, which shows that the women arbitrarily controlled by the male characters’ will.

The Thread Hell opens with a prologue which features four male characters alternately speaking seductive lines to recruit young women for jobs at a cotton mill. The male characters are on stage and in the auditorium in the complete darkness. Alternately they light their faces by striking matches at the time they say rapid sugar-coated speeches to lure women to a spinning company, and extinguish the matches as soon as they finish their speeches. Then the male characters say short sentences about the misery of the female workers in the Japanese spinning industry in rapid succession. The maltreatment of young female workers in the spinning industry in Japan in the early twentieth century is a well-known fact. The male characters’ two kinds of speeches demonstrate the split between a socially accepted narrative and female reality. This prologue effectively sets the tone of the play. It suggests that social discourses are arbitrary and that women are manipulated by them. This sense of discrepancy between social discourses and personal reality is reinforced, because the time is set in 1939
when Japan was rapidly moving into a militaristic expansion and when the dominant discourse suppressed all other voices.

Following this prologue, the heroine, Mayu, appears "from the sea" without knowing her origin, her past, or her future. She only knows her name. She looks for her "home" (is), the word which suggests warmth, rest, and peace. The four male characters direct her to a thread shop, in which twelve women sell thread in the day and their bodies at night.

Mayu's appearance on a platform set above the space of the thread shop incites the women to engage in the act of storytelling about themselves (minoue banashi). Their stories unexpectedly unfold emotional complexity and suppressed anger--all the stories the women tell are somehow related to death and killing of men. Because none of the stories appear to be true, the women's storytelling reinforces the sense that even one's personal narrative is fictitious and arbitrary.

The women's storytelling gradually reminds Mayu of her past. Mayu remembers that she is looking for her mother who has betrayed her by taking and murdering her lover. However, when "betrayal" by her mother is enacted on stage, as if to represent Mayu's memory of what she thinks she saw, it is done simultaneously in two versions with the male characters acting as puppeteers. One
version shows the mother (wearing an eyepatch over the right eye) seducing Mayu's lover and being rejected; the other version shows the lover seducing the mother (wearing an eyepatch over the left eye) and being rejected. Therefore, even Mayu's memory turns out to be arbitrary. Both versions end at the point that suggests the killing, but whether or not the killing actually happened is left unclear in the both versions. This representation demonstrates the partiality of one's perception as well as indefiniteness of one's memory and interpretation of the past.

The master of the thread shop, Nawa, tells Mayu that nothing happened and that she is entrapped in her delusion and hatred of her mother. Mayu replies that she is there to kill the mother, whose presence affects her state of being so much: "I came here to kill my mother. To cut the thread. My mother is there. She is spinning a thread. I end up dancing because she is spinning the wheel. I came here to cut the thread" (90). Mayu's reply demonstrates an ambivalent tie between the mother and the daughter, which is unexplainable by mere hatred or by the daughter's will for vengeance. The reply reveals Mayu's feeling that she is ultimately under the

11 The quotation is from The Thread Hell (Tokyo: Shuppan Shinsha, 1984). The subsequent quotations will be taken from this text. The number in the parenthesis shows the page number in the text.
mother's control, and that in order to attain autonomy, she has to cut the bond with the mother.

The daughter discovers her mother among the twelve women, not by the arbitrary stories they tell, but by the "smell" of the mother. Because after all, all the stories the women tell are fictitious, the almost physical sense of tie such as "smell" gives Mayu the only clue.

The "killing" of the mother is presented in symbolic stylization. Mayu and the mother face each other, holding each end of one red thread. They slowly move towards each other while they are speaking to each other, ever increasing the tension of the thread they are holding, until their faces are almost touching one another. Mayu tells her mother that she wants to kill her because the mother is a "woman" who took her lover and killed him, and who discarded her.

Against Mayu's accusation of betrayal, the mother tells her that she has given the daughter a body, which suffices for the mother's obligation. Mayu, in response to the mother, blames the mother for not giving the daughter a family genealogy. The mother mysteriously replies that mothers do not have family registers, and that only women are recorded in the family genealogy: "You see only mothers' faces [in the genealogy]." Mayu asks; "What about you? Do you not have your family
register?" The mother replies; "No. The worn out thread of blood from my mother’s mother’s mother’s . . . is just connected to you. Behind the blood, there is always the father without the face" (138).

The mother’s reply suggests that women’s position and motherhood in the paternal family system are always unstable,12 and that the bodily genealogy of women—the connection through the thread of blood—is the only thing that affirms women’s presence, however unreliable it may be. Mayu’s search for the mother shows the necessity for a woman to have a connection to her mother, however stifling it may be. A woman can never be just "free zero" as the mother calls Mayu (133); she can never be totally free from bodily nor from societal ties.

"Faceless fathers" always have control over mothers and daughters. The mother calls for attention to the "father" standing behind Mayu. Nawa and the male characters appear from the dark where they have been

12 Kishida explains the mother’s position in the paternal family structure as the "other" in her collection of essays, Genso Yūgi (Plays of Illusion) 194. The anthropological studies done by Marilyn Strathern on women’s roles in Mount Hagen, New Guinea illustrates the curiously pervasive nature of women’s (or the mothers’) position as being the "other" of a family—being "in between" two allegiances—across cultures. See Strathern, Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World: Mount Hagen, New Guinea (London: Seminar Press, 1972).
quietly hidden all through the scene and act as puppeteers to manipulate Mayu to "kill" the mother.

After the "killing," Mayu seems to realize the tie with her mother beyond hatred: "In the shining, dark eyes of my mother, there was a bottomless swamp. I saw mothers' faces in the swamp. The dead faces, melting like wax-works, were floating, white, and smiling, gently. There was my mother's face, and my own face" (140).

Thus, Mayu realizes the thread of blood that ties her to many mothers. At the same time, she recognizes how her emotions, memories, past and present have been influenced by societal norms. The male character symbolically represent this control, by acting as puppeteers. The frequently used words, family register and genealogy, also indicate that a paternal society positions a woman in a "house" (ie).

Mayu, upon realization of her bodily tie with mothers and daughters, blinds Nawa and other male characters. The women now take control and manipulate the blinded male characters. For example, Mayu, holding a thread, jumps off from the upper platform to the ground-level stage area among the other women, the male characters and Nawa. Simultaneously, Nawa is pulled up and hung in the air. This is a striking visual
presentation of the reversal of roles—the controller and the controlled—and of Mayu joining the other women.

However, the ending of the play shows the women in an ambiguous state. A new woman appears on the upper platform, looking for the thread shop exactly as Mayu had done at the beginning of the play. The actress who played the mother role plays this woman, thus suggesting that the new woman is Mayu's daughter, looking for the mother—Mayu who had also discarded her. In the end, what we see is the endless repetition of the same love-hate relationship between mothers and daughters.

The Thread Hell: Women in Relation to Women

The Thread Hell is an allegorical play about a woman's search for identity and a revision of history from a woman's point of view. Towards the end of the play, the women start to live on a sphere completely separate from a society controlled by men. However, the ending of the play makes spectators/readers twice rethink the efficacy of the separate value system in defining women's subjectivity, with its presentation of the endless cycle of love and hatred between women.

In this play, the women do not have family registers. They do not have a family, house, past, or history within the system and are thus officially outside the system. This does not necessarily mean that they are
actually "free zero" to create their own stories and own modes of subjectivity. Their occupations--spinners and prostitutes--demonstrate their ambiguous state: they are not-quite-inside-the-system-nor-outside-it. As the prologue effectively sets up, spinning is an image of women under manipulation, because of the association between the Japanese spinning industry and the manipulation of young spinners in the 1930s. Further, the women's other occupation, prostitution, shows that their bodies are at the mercy of men and money.

The playwright shows this manipulation of women both in visual presentation and through naming and storytelling, verbal presentation. Naming forcefully presents men's control over the women. It should be noted that naming shows that both male and female characters do not have autonomous subjectivities. For example, the male characters are named according to their social function. However, by showing that women are named by men, the playwright seems to demonstrate that women's subjectivities are defined in relation to men. It demonstrates that women are at the mercy of men, and that men, in turn, are at the mercy of larger societial forces. In other words, these women seem to be at the bottom of a social ladder. By defining female arbitrariness as a male project, the playwright seems to
underscore the hierarchical structure which reinforces a woman's effacement of self with men on a higher level.

Further, in the twelve women's stories (minoue banashi) the master of the brothel, Nawa (rope), has perfect control over these women's pasts and presents. In this "thread shop," the women are taught several versions of minoue banashi (a story about one's past) to tell their clients. But these are not valid stories. When a family registration officer visits the brothel, no woman can tell him a story of her past which gives her a position in the societal system, that is within a Japanese family genealogy (ie). The women's stories show that they are outside the socially acceptable place (ie) for women and that their identities are arbitrarily controlled by the brothel master, Nawa.

Kishida adds a visual presentation of this control over the twelve women's identities contained in their minoue banashi. When Nawa and the male characters have each woman tell a "taught" story, they pull and manipulate strings attached to the women. Furthermore, when the women start to tell "untaught" stories about the deaths and killings of men, the attached strings are tangled, thus visually illustrating the men's confusion.

In this motif of storytelling, the playwright seems to say that a woman has to "lie" to live in this society in which her narrative (subjectivity) is defined in
relation to men. She has to tell a number of minoue banashi which are not her own, but the ones that she is expected to tell. The only rebellious woman among the twelve women--she is the only one who has her family register, who has an officially recognized background and age--challenges the puppeteer-men, saying that she has 6,205 stories. She declares that because she is seventeen years old, and she can tell 365 different stories per year, the number of stories she can tell amounts to 6,205. This episode seems to show how many lies--or, socially accepted stories--one has to tell in the system, and how a woman can be rebellious only by underscoring arbitrariness, fictitiousness, and control hidden in her act of storytelling.

Even this rebellious woman, who joined the women at the thread shop out of her curiosity, cannot cut the controlling thread that is tied to her. A puppeteer-man lets go of the thread that is tied to this woman after her challenge, and she, giving him a fierce glance, falls down on the ground. The scene suggests that even this woman, probably the youngest in the shop and rebellious though she may be, is under control, and will gradually be molded into a docile body like all other women who have no family registers.

In addition, the male puppeteers control the stylized "killing" of the mother from the background. In
this "killing" scene, Kishida seems to indicate that a woman's hatred of her mother may be a result of a complicated social structure which determines both positions and emotions of generations of women. It is a "myth" which reinforces hatred and often neglects love and attachment in the mother-daughter relationship. In other words, it is a "myth" similar to the symbolic strife between the father and the son, which originates in a specific Judaeo-Christian symbolism (Bellah 95). This symbolism has been mis-recognized as something that proves the omnipotence and power of father/phallus. It has caused the mis-apprehension of a woman as a mother-hater, only because the mother cannot provide her with the "power of phallus" (Freud, "Femininity" 126-127).

Thus, in this "killing" scene and later when Mayu realizes the tie with the mother, Kishida seems to be negating these societal and symbolic definitions of women as mothers and mother-haters. Instead, the playwright emphasizes the necessity of bonding between two women beyond the mother-daughter roles, in order to realize a mode of subjectivity distinct from those "taught" by men, and defined by societal forces. As the daughter in A Floating Bridge of Dreams illustrates, as far as a woman accepts and internalizes the "power" attached to a man, the end-result is hatred and negation of another woman who is the closest to herself.
However, the bonding is difficult to accomplish, as both *A Floating Bridge of Dreams* and *The Thread Hell* illustrate. For example, Mayu's wish to kill her mother originates in her discovery that the mother is a "woman" who "took" her lover (136). Mayu's sense of being betrayed and discarded is aroused by her realization that her mother is another "woman" who has a separate identity and desire. Mayu's speech demonstrates her anger against the mother who has led the daughter to know that she no longer has the tie with the mother which had been giving her security and peace. Mayu says: "The 'smell' of you told me--that you betrayed me twice. The first one is fictitious, and the second one is the true betrayal."

The mother replies: "A fictitious betrayal?" Mayu responds: "You gave birth to me--," the mother asks, "the true betrayal?" the daughter answers, "and you discarded me" (135). It seems as if Mayu was angered more by the mother's rejection of her than by the mother's having/having been seduced (by) the lover.

The mother's replies demonstrate more explicitly the position of a mother in the family structure and how it is difficult to keep autonomy both for a mother and a daughter. The mother says to Mayu: "I gave birth to you twice," "I conceived you in my woman's body and gave birth to you in the house, then, I conceived the house and gave birth to you in the seken (a down-to-earth
Japanese word that signifies society, or the world, and connotes social interactions and human relations)" (134).

The mother seems to be saying that a "mother" is both a living body and a symbolic bridge for a child to cross in order to learn societal rules (seken). In other words, the mother implies that motherhood is "institutional" as Nancy Chodorow and others perceive, and that the seken always imposes on a mother a task to secure the continuity of both the child and the house.

Nancy Chodorow's exploration of motherhood as a social institution seems to apply to this woman's perception. Chodorow examines functions of motherhood in a society, then a resulting ambivalent tie between a mother and a daughter in her The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Chodorow questions the notion of motherhood originating in maternal instinct, and instead, she argues that motherhood is the institutional fiction that allows the patriarchal structure and discourse to function with the authoritative father, the caring mother, and the son who learns and internalizes the structure by obeying the father's prohibition and law. Motherhood, also, is a result of child-caring being imposed by the same structure only on the mother. The result of the institutional function of motherhood is, according to Chodorow, is the overcharged importance of the mother as
the sole care-taker of children (both sons and daughters). The symbiotic tie between the mother and the child is both the result of this specific social structure and the basis for reproducing the structure.

This function of motherhood seems to apply to a Japanese family as the playwright explores in this play. In a Japanese family, however, motherhood's function can become possibly more complicated than in a Western family, because a Japanese "mother" is overloaded with a symbolic value of being "sacred." Japanese psychiatrists Kosawa Heisaku and Okonogi Keigo point out that a child's symbiotic tie with a sanctified, all-forgiving and self-sacrificing mother is a basic organizing principle of Japanese society. Kosawa, as Alan Roland points out, "dismissed the Oedipus complex as not central to the Japanese psyche, and substituted the Ajase complex, taken from a Buddhist myth." The focus of the Ajase complex, according to Roland, "is not so much on the son-mother-father triangle, as in the Oedipus myth, but rather on the son-mother dyad, wherein the son rages over feelings of loss of his symbiotic tie with the mother, but later repents after realizing her great sacrifices for him" (78-79). Thus, Japanese motherhood imposes an image of all-forgiving and all-accepting, self-sacrificing, in another word, "sacred" mother on a woman. Because one's mother is a sacred being, as Okonogi succinctly states, a
child’s discovery that a mother is a "woman" can cause a fundamental crisis in the child’s mind. The child suffers from the sense of being betrayed and discarded, because the mother, as a woman, shows that she has another allegiance and object of love (Okonogi 42-43).

In The Thread Hell, the daughter’s anger seems to stem not so much from the loss of a lover as from the loss of the "sacred" mother, because she repeatedly states that the mother "discarded" her. This demonstrates that Mayu is more attached to the mother than hating her, and that hatred arises from Mayu’s symbiotic tie both with the living mother and the symbolic mother. Roland calls attention to the fact that the emphasis in the conceptualization of the Ajase complex is on the so-called pre-Oedipal mother-child symbiosis, stating that “this is obviously of another order not only from the Oedipus complex, but also from the much more recent work on separation-individuation” (78-79). Another Japanese psychiatrist, Kitayama Osamu also emphasizes the importance of the mother-son symbiosis and of the process of separation-individuation in Japanese context in his analysis of Japanese folktale (173-186).

Thus, although the Ajase complex does not refer to a daughter’s relationship with a mother, it explains the daughter’s anger in The Thread Hell, because this
symbiotic relationship between a mother and a child also affects a daughter's sense of self. As Chodorow argues, a mother, by treating a son and a daughter differently, influences the development of children's self and recreates socially acceptable masculinity and femininity in the children. She further states that the son in a Western society formulates his sense of identity and independence by rejecting the symbiotic tie with the mother. The daughter, on the other hand, tends to keep the tie for a prolonged length of time, because the mother tends to perceive her daughter, by virtue of being the same sex as she is, as the extension of herself.

The son's case may not apply to a Japanese family, if we accept the Ajase complex as an organizing principle. However, the function of mothering seems to be applicable, along with the daughter's prolonged attachment to her mother. Social anthropologist Takie Sugiyama Lebra observes that her informants (Japanese mothers) show a tendency to "recycle their childhood experiences as daughters and sisters into rearing their own daughters and sons in such a way that the culturally standardized sex polarization perpetuates itself over generations although the standard is less rigid" (Japanese Women 185). Further, Lebra points out a mother's tendency to "see a mirror image of herself" in her children (Japanese Women 165), in spite of the fact
that "the traditional mother . . . embodied the conflict between the structural prescription for impersonal, collective sharing of a child on the one hand [a child belongs to an ie, a Japanese family system, rather than to a mother], and the more 'natural' and yet equally culturally reinforced tie between mother and child, on the other, which forms the core of the mother's personal identity" (Japanese Women 164). Lebra further states that the abolition of the legal status of the ie in postwar Japan may have reinforced an "increasingly exclusive nature of the mother-child bond" (Japanese Women 164).

Considering this strong tie between a mother and a child in a Japanese household, Mayu's matricide demonstrates the daughter's split between resentment against the mother who did not live up to the traditional expectation and a strongly-felt attachment to the mother. Thus, killing the mother in The Thread Hell illustrates this culturally defined relationship between the mother and the daughter, and the daughter's painful attempt to cut the tie with the mother in order to become free from this circumscription of her subjectivity in relation to the mother, family, and ultimately men and society.

The words genealogy and family register occur repeatedly in this play, illustrating this definition of a woman's subjectivity in relation to the mother and
family. In fact, the mother took the family's genealogy with her when she left Mayu and the house. By doing so, the mother has denied the daughter and has refused to accept the prescription of her subjectivity as the "mother." The mother's reply to Mayu's accusation--"You are zero--You are free zero" (133)--implies that the mother is suggesting to Mayu that motherhood is fictitious. The mother seems to state that there is something beyond the "institutional" and symbiotic tie between the mother and the daughter, and that the women need to acknowledge the bonding to each other which enables them to carve out a new mode of subjectivity.

Only after she has "killed" the mother, Mayu realizes the tie with the mother beyond the culturally defined relationship. Her speech over the mother's body--"In the shining, dark eyes of my mother, there was a bottomless swamp. I saw mothers' faces in the swamp. The dead faces, melting like wax-words, were floating, white, and smiling, gently. There was my mother's face, and my own face" (140)--curiously resembles French feminist scholar Luce Irigaray's statement: "You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother" ("And the One Doesn't Stir" 63). The two speeches from different cultures call attention to the bonding of women beyond cultural circumscriptions.
Irigaray further writes: "And the one doesn’t stir without the other. But we do not move together. When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground. When the one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" ("And the One Doesn’t Stir" 67). This passage seems to be an adequate description of the relationship between Mayu and the mother: in order to realize the tie with the mother and accept both the mother and oneself as women, one has to "kill" one’s mother. 13

Mayu seems to have freed herself from cultural circumscription of herself by both cutting the tie with the mother and realizing the bond with her as a woman. However, one wonders how efficacious this "freedom" can be. As if to question Mayu’s painfully attained freedom.

autonomy, the mother, before death, says that Mayu is "pregnant"—the daughter is again involved in a close but painful mother-daughter relationship.

As the ending of the play shows, Mayu's painfully attained autonomy has already curtailed that of her daughter, and the heroine's struggle is only one phase of the endless cycle of mother-daughter hatred; as Irigaray laments, in order for the one to survive, the other one has to go underground. Is this a real autonomy? The play ends with a questioning note; between the mother and the daughter, what is Mayu? What change has the taking of control made? Did the women really take control of themselves? Endless questions linger—as Irigaray questions; "You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, what are you? What space is yours alone? In what frame must you contain yourself? And how to let your face show through, beyond all the masks?" ("And the One Doesn't Stir" 63).

In this play, there is no glorifying of the community of women as the reconstructors of a disordered community. Instead, we see the necessary, but painfully symbiotic, ties between the women which do not allow either mothers and daughters to live autonomously. The play is, in this sense, a painful statement about the positioning of women in a society; in order to attain any
autonomy, women must separate themselves from men; women must realize the bonding—the thread of blood—with mothers who gave life to them. However, Kishida seems to say, women, then, must kill mothers to live as themselves, and must be killed by daughters to allow them to live.

Mayu’s statement to Nawa just after she has blinded him illustrates this painful situation Kishida’s women are in: she states that Nawa’s "kingdom" is lost, and is changed into anoyo (the nether world)—the world beyond, the place where the dead live (147). Then, the women are dead—not physically, but socially. After they have cut men’s threads that have manipulated them, they live in a deadly comfort of a womb which engulfs them and does not give them new birth. Mayu and other women wish the wind to blow, to blow them out of the place, lightly, freely, to somewhere else—but in vain. All they can have is a quiet comfort, with no way out. The image of wind abounds in this play. Kishida’s wind suggests freedom, expansion, and sensuality. The heroine of *A Floating Bridge of Dreams* goes beyond the paternal law through her sensual pleasure, however momentary her crossing of law may be; but the women in this play do not even have the same chance. The wind never blows, except inside their bodies, there breathing the repressed wind of wish, which can never blow strongly enough. In the end, the daughter
comes to the womb, to discover her mother, her self, not knowing that she can never get out.

The Cook: Love and Pleasure

The Thread Hell demonstrates Kishida's ambiguous attitudes towards women's and men's subjectivity. In a more recent play, Ryōrinin (The Cook) (1988), the playwright seems to focus not only on women's but on men's existence under societal control. In this play, the playwright exposes the absurdity of law (another narrative), and asserts a woman's sexuality, a complex need for autonomy, and her need to love and to be loved. Ultimately, the playwright seems to favor the power of pleasure and sexuality, "libidinal" power as Lyotard would call, in going beyond the constraint of social forces.

The Cook deals with a society in which food is abolished in the pursuit of ultimate efficiency. Producing, marketing, cooking, and eating food imposes time-consuming effort on human beings. This society seems to have accomplished unprecedented competency by turning the so-far wasted time on food into more "productive" effort (nutrition is taken through pills). However, as one would expect from this kind of situation, the sense of hunger permeates the society. Characters in this play—they are nameless and without personal
traits--attenuate the sense of hunger by playing with language. They repeat the names of food, quote passages that describe meals from books, and act out the ceremony of eating to occupy their time.

Eating and sensual pleasure are closely tied together in this play. In the pervasive sense of hunger, characters seem to have lost interest in finding pleasure in each other. A woman beats a man, an act which turns out to be play-acting, and the man goes back to his work, to the disciplinary society when the time comes, without trying to answer the woman's need for intimacy. Parenthood has become something obligatory rather than a joy. For example, allusions are made to eating babies, the only available food. Two pregnant women almost angrily shout out nutrients that are necessary for them and for the fetuses to grow, as if they were growing plants. In their speeches; the joy of pregnancy and of the expectation of motherhood are nonexistent. Further, a husband and a wife play with a babydoll, exasperatedly playing at parenthood.

In this play, the characters seem to live a vicarious life through language--through descriptions and play-acting. Sensual pleasures (except for vicarious ones) do not exist in this play. The play ends with a scene in which a wife offers her husband canned food--real food the wife has somehow found and acquired.
The husband refuses to eat (since eating is illegal), but then gradually gives in to the wife's seduction. The eating scene, with its full seductive sensuality, reveals the absurdity of this law that defines people's lives only in terms of efficiency, and of clinging to that absurdity at the expense of pleasure.

Women in this play know and wish for the power of pleasure, love, and intimacy. Men, even when they are attracted to pleasure, try to keep and enforce the law—the law of prohibitions. Kishida's emphasis on women's pleasure could result in the age-old biological dichotomy, men as reason and women as nature. However, the playwright shows her awareness that pleasure has its limitations. For example, the play ends with a scene in which the other men and women enviously close in the wife and the husband. The ending demonstrates that the power of pleasure is a tentative one. Nonetheless, pleasure is infectious, as we have seen in A Floating Bridge of Dreams, and Kishida's plays invite both men and women towards the realm of pleasure beyond social constriction however tentative it may be.

Summary

Kishida Rio writes that she names her male characters according to their social function: "men are named in society," and "they are to be swallowed up by
women" (Gensho yugi 151). The playwright seems to be saying that men are too tightly molded into social and functional beings, and they are not ready to meet women without repressive and functional notions of themselves and of women. By the same token, women are either too docile and cannot break out the position which is imposed on them (although they wish to), or even if they break out, they are bound to create their own ecstatic "kingdom" without allowing the presence of men. In order to keep autonomy, women need to be by themselves and need to recognize the bonding between each other. However, this is another repressive scenario. Women’s wishes cannot come true by themselves alone. In Kishida’s plays, a uterus may swallow up everything, as the Japanese critic Senno Kôichi points out ("Shikyû" 62-68)—men, law, and narrative—showing women’s power. But her plays also indicate that the same uterus engulfs women.

The triumphant note of the ending that we see in a number of Kishida’s plays blurs the fact that the playwright is actually presenting questions. Does this triumph really give new birth to a heroine? Can the comfortable, symbiotic bonding between women really "reconstruct" the disrupted order of a community? Women’s sensual pleasure is disruptive, but what will be beyond that?
These are unanswerable questions. But at least, the playwright is presenting a radically different view of a woman's subjectivity from those modes that have traditionally defined her in Japan. The playwright asserts a woman's desire for power, pleasure in sexuality, need to be autonomous, need to be beyond a mere function in a society, and ultimately need to love and to be loved. Kishida "deconstructs" history and official narratives by focusing on women's needs, positions, functions, and perspectives, and by revealing arbitrary, functional roles men have to play (often without knowing it) in society.

The playwright invites the audience to the moments of theatrical pleasure--through sensuality of words, kaleidoscopic narratives, and performers' bodies. The performers of the theatre group exude magnetic "presence"; they seduce the audience to join their realm of senses. Kishida's sensually charged, and often emotionally charged, plays with taboo-subjects both

Fuchs writes: "The notion of theatrical Presence has two fundamental components: the unique self-completion of the world of the spectacle, and the circle of heightened awareness flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the world. (The magnetism that a particular performer may exude, what we mean when we say a performer has "presence," is included in this definition)" (163).
alienate and attract the audience. Sometimes absurdly hilarious lines, situations, jokes disrupt overcharged poetic language, taboo contents, and the emotional ambiances of her plays.15

Thus, Kishida Rio lets the mother’s and the daughter’s voice sound in the theatre but not without ambiguity, the ambiguity which, in a way, represents the actual situation of the women living in contemporary Japanese society. The playwright presents a woman’s self-assertion, desire for power, need for autonomy, and the denial of being a mere function. And ultimately she poses the more profound questions of how to love and be together without reducing or "killing" the others.

Kisaragi Koharu is a playwright, director, and composer, who also feels that subjectivity is constructed. In her theatrical works, Kisaragi expresses two apparently contradictory feelings--anxiety about her "subject" (jiko) that is "empty," and desire to assert herself as the center of artistic creation. Kisaragi clearly presents these two impulses in her several essays and interviews about subject and contemporary Japanese society, and her statements about being a woman artist.

The artist feels that artistic creation is a contradictory act, because it requires the presence of a subject, in spite of the fact that she feels that her subject is empty. Thus, she defines her theatrical works as "a game of searching for myself":

When you are involved in art, that means you have to express yourself. Then, WHO is expressing yourself when you do not have a definite "self"? ... What I am doing is a game of searching for myself... in this situation in which "I" have only the empty "center" with many faces on my "facade"... I am constantly trying to fill this emptiness.
While trying to fill in the emptiness, "I" try to express "myself" to the outside at the same time. So, the directions of my effort are two-way, and I think these two-way directions epitomize the situation I am in, and the direction my work is taking right now. (28 Mar. 1989)

This statement clearly shows the artist's awareness that being a subject of creation is difficult, her wish to create in order to re-define her subject beyond the sense of "emptiness," and ultimately her wish to communicate to others herself as-one-who-desires to others.

Kisaragi further explains this notion of subjectivity in relation to her being a woman artist. According to Kisaragi, she realized her way of being a playwright had been nothing but "feminine" when she was attending the International Women Playwrights Conference held in Buffalo, New York, in October, 1988. Further, she states that creation of theatrical works is an approach toward independence as a woman and as a human being, thus again, suggesting her notion that art is her way of searching for herself (28 Mar. 1989).

Kisaragi describes the "feminine" aspect of her work with clarity:

I think most women at the conference were not, and I was not, either, aware of the biological fact that we were "women" in our early childhood. As you grow up, you realize that society expects you to be a woman. When you realize that expectation, what you try to do at first is to play a role that is expected by society. When you realize that you can't really live up to that expectation, you can't really keep playing the role of "woman," what
you would do is to wonder WHY it is so painful to play the role, and HOW you can get out of the situation. These two questions, I believe, generate the impulse to express yourself. The impulse gives birth to playwrights, when it comes through the medium of theatre. I, myself, went through that process, and other playwrights did, too. So, we are directing towards self-expression, using as a springboard that pain and anxiety of not being able to play the expected role. This is not the case for men. It is very rare for a man to start writing because he feels it painful to be man, and to play the role of man. . . . I think I have been "feminine" in a broad sense when I consider my impulse to write as coming from that pain and anxiety. (28 Mar. 1989)

Kisaragi feels that every human being must wear masks and play several socially expected "roles."

However, as the statement demonstrates, a woman is doubly subject to this game of role-playing, because "femininity" is often associated with passivity and prescribes to a woman the role of an object. As Kisaragi suggests, this prescription of "femininity" leads a woman to feel that she is unable to be a subject all the more glaringly, because compared to a man, she has less chances to actively define her life, and herself. For Kisaragi, a woman's creative act is an active effort to re-define her subjectivity and to attain "women's independence."

Thus, in spite of her notion that one's subjectivity is arbitrarily constructed, she seems to believe the presence of a subject as the "center" and "origin" (though she says it is empty) that influences one's
creation and one's sense of existence. Her statements on women and creation clearly demonstrates her single desire to become the whole and self-sufficient subject as a woman. In her effort to fill in the "center" of herself, she hopes to discard all the masks she has been wearing.

Needless to say, irony in the artist's position resides in the fact that no human being (man or woman) seems to have the authority associated with the subject in contemporary society. Kisaragi's theatrical works illustrate her awareness of this situation, and also her wish to be a creating subject. In this chapter, I will describe Kisaragi Koharu's perception of the contemporary theatre, and the organization and her method of creation which illustrate her awareness of subjectivity as construction. Then, I will examine three of her theatrical works—Romio to Frigia no aru shokutaku (A Table with Romeo and Freesia), Doll (Dolls), Moral (Moral)—as expressions of her awareness and desire.

Theatre as Encounter

Kisaragi Koharu feels that the contemporary Japanese theatre is conditioned by the necessities of current economic structure, firmly stating that contemporary theatre in Japan is "institutionalized theatre" (seidoka sareta engeki) ("Ima taoyakana" 77). The artist seems to
regard the economic structure as a representation of restrictions and controls one feels in contemporary society. But further, because she perceives her creative work as "a search for herself," Kisaragi seems to find in her theatrical act certain spiritual meanings that go beyond the economic structure and its influence over the theatre.

The history of modern Japanese theatre as perceived by Kisaragi presents a process of this economic and social "institutionalization" of the theatre, with a revolt against the trend in the 1960s in the form of the little theatre movement. According to Kisaragi, what separates the modern Japanese theatre (that is, the pre-World War theatre in Kisaragi's definition) from the pre-modern theatre, is its loss of communal festivity. The artist regards the rapid industrialization of Japan that began in the Meiji era (1868-1912) as a direct cause of this loss. As a result of industrialization, the theatre became centralized in a few large cities, thus alienating people and community from the theatre. This tendency has been accelerated in the contemporary (post-World War II) theatre (28 Mar. 1989).

Kisaragi perceives that the little theatre movement in the 1960s was partly a reaction against this tendency of industrialization and alienation. Kisaragi states that this movement was an attempt to influence this
centralized and dehumanizing modern Japanese society. It was, the artist further states, also an attempt to fill in the gap between the commercialized theatre and the people's theatre, and an attempt to unite the traditional and the modern.

Kisaragi considers this movement to have reached an end around 1985. By that time, the major motivating forces of the movement--Suzuki Tadashi, Ōta Shōgo, and Kara Jūrō--had gone through re-organization of their companies and/or changes of directions in their theatrical works. For example, as discussed in Chapter II of this study, Suzuki Tadashi's group, the Waseda Little Theatre (now called SCOT) moved to Toga village in 1976. Since then, the director has been working with increasing public recognition, presented his works for several large-scale commercial productions, and has received the prestigious national award given to prominent artists (Geijutsusenshō Shinjinshō) in 1982. The famous writer and director Kara Jūrō built a theatre building, Shitamachi Karaza, under the sponsorship of the Saison Group conglomerate. In contrast, another famous director Ōta Shōgo had to disband his Transformation Theatre in 1988, epitomizing the loss of the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s within the movement. These examples show us that even the alternative theatre cannot exist outside social and economic reality.
Kisaragi talks about the situation as follows:

To do theatre today means that you are trapped in this economic flow of information, as it represents the whole structure of society. In this situation, you cannot get out of that flow and I think I called it "institutionalization" at that time (1982, in "Ima taoyakana" 77). However hard you try not to be involved in the situation by saying that you do theatre to retrieve the subjective realm, you need to be right in that economic flow in order to produce one play, and make it successful. You have to think about attracting audiences through Pia magazine, you have to determine a theatre to use, you have to consider spectators' access to the theatre, you have to think about how company members make their living--you have to think about everything, and everything is related to the economic structure, and you can't get out of it. (28 Mar. 1989)

Kisaragi seems to be pointing out the social and cultural restrictions over the theatre as represented in economics, in the same way as Jean-François Lyotard argues in his "The Tooth, the Palm":

...the present experience of growth economy teaches us that so-called economic activity has no anchoring in an origin, ... Everything is exchangeable, reciprocally, only under the conditions inherent in the law of value: work is no less a sign than money, money no more than a house or car, there is only a flux metamorphosing into billions of objects and currents. ... (111)

In contrast with this current situation of the theatre, Kisaragi implicitly rates highly the notion of people's theatre and of the theatre of communal festivity, expressed in her description of the little theatre movement in the 1960s. In fact, the artist
states that she is creating theatrical pieces because the theatre involves communal endeavor:

In the theatre, "I" speak, and "my" words go through a director and actors until they reach the audience. Thus, the theatre is a process of "my words" becoming "our words." . . . The theatre is a medium that involves plural subjects. . . . I can say that I chose the medium of theatre, because I wanted to move towards "We." (28 Mar. 1989)

Although she is aware of difficulties involved in communal endeavor, Kisaragi seems to appreciate community and festivity associated with theatrical works. In addition to her notion that theatre is a way to search for herself and to communicate to others, this appreciation demonstrates that she is directing towards making contacts with others, including both theatre artists and spectators.

Noise: Its Operation

After having written and directed plays for an amateur company of students beginning in 1975, Kisaragi founded in 1983 a professional theatre group, Noise (written in Roman letters, and pronounced noizu in Japanese). The company's operational structure illustrates the artist's concerns about "empty subject," and her appreciation of communal endeavor.

Noise is a flexible theatre group, the operational system of which allows Kisaragi and participants to
pursue their interests freely. The company is basically a production company consisting of Kisaragi and two other administrators/directors as the permanent members. In addition to these core members, eight performers regularly perform for Noise, thus having the status of company members. The core people, including both permanent members and the eight performers, may invite other people to work with Noise, allowing for free exchange of ideas and creative energies (28 Mar. 1989).

Although the core people form a closely-knit group, performers are exempt from obligations such as the group-maintenance fee (gekidan ijihi) often required of a company member in the average little theatre group. Further, Noise's working style is flexible, with the participants meeting only at times of production and only in the evenings. Compared to an average little theatre group in which the members meet regularly (almost every day) and during the daytime, Noise's style allows participants to lead individual and independent lives. Kisaragi explains this style:

If you work with one particular company without expecting financial security out of it, that demonstrates your passion for the theatre. [However,] in this kind of circumstances, you are bound to face the contradiction between "living" and "doing theatre." You grow older, and you naturally have to live up to your age--you may want to marry and have a family, or you may have to go home and help your father's business. I want to keep Noise as flexible as possible so that people can deal
with the contradiction more easily—for example, one can come back to work with us again after the leave of one or two productions, or even one or two years, or if one has babies and cannot leave them home, she can take them with her to rehearsals, and we somehow try to mind the babies during the rehearsals.

I can’t pay them much, in fact, I pay a very small amount of money. And there is a huge amount of money you have to spend for a single production. What I can do is to try not to make them take any financial responsibilities in maintaining the group, or in producing a play—such as the rent for rehearsal spaces, production spaces, and other expenses for costuming, setting, and so on. I can pay for those expenses, and ticket sales also can cover them to a certain extent. (28 Mar. 1989)

In addition to performers’ freedom to lead their lives and follow their artistic interests without being bound to the company, this operational style gives artistic freedom to Kisaragi, if not financial stability. Kisaragi describes the artistic advantages she gains from this flexibility:

I started Noise because I wanted an environment in which I can work with diverse people from diverse age groups, with diverse interests and talents. I happen to write, and happen to be interested in music, so I decided [when I founded the company] to ask people with different artistic skills to work with me. So, Noise is not necessarily a permanent theatre group. People come and go, and each time people gather to work with me, we call it "Noise." Because when diverse people gather together to work, you’ll have a "noisy" and creative situation. (28 Mar. 1989)

Further, with this operational style, Kisaragi states that she can write at her own pace, without
feeling the "pressure to write and produce plays" (28 Mar. 1989).

Ultimately, this operation seems to allow creative and participatory flexibility and diversity for both the writer/director and performers. Although this style does not directly reflect Kisaragi's concept of subjectivity as social construct, it illustrates her less despotic attitude in creating theatrical pieces, compared to the image of all-powerful leader/director often associated with the Japanese little theatre.

**Noise: Creative Style**

Kisaragi demonstrates her anxiety about being an "empty" subject along with her desire to be a creative subject both in her styles of creation and in production. Kisaragi poses a question: "What can an artist do when her 'self' is undefined?" She tries to answer the question by stating that a contemporary artist creates art by choosing various styles. In productions, she often changes the styles of presentation. For example, Kisaragi states that she may create a play that looks like shingeki, or she may create a mixed-media piece. The artist further states that she cannot select a single style as "her" style, because the basis of stylistic determination is "her" identity.
Kisaragi’s style of creation also reflects her sense that one’s subjectivity is constructed. She has developed the method of collaborative/improvisational creation since she presented the mixed-media play, Dolls (Doll) in 1983. In order to pursue a communal endeavor to create a play, at the beginning of the rehearsal period she usually brings in a script with no stage directions written in it. Then, she asks performers to act out scenes in any way they like. She does not cast at this phase of trying-out, so every performer has a chance to act various roles in various ways. Kisaragi explains the process as follows:

I see how they--actors and designers--react to a script. I may ask actors to act without my directions, or I may ask them to present their plans for the script. I may make a new directing plan after I hear and see their reactions, and sometimes I rewrite parts of a script. (28 Mar. 1989)

She wants performers and designers to present ideas that are unexpected, and may be totally different from hers.

Further, Kisaragi, emphasizing the fact that she does not write stage directions in a script at the beginning stage of rehearsals, says:

You can do so many things so freely if there are no stage directions written on a script. Of course, directions are printed on the pages of my published plays, but they are the descriptions of what actors actually did on the stage. You may not consider directions that important, but in fact directions determine the ambiance of a space [in which a play takes
However free the performers and designers may be in creating a play together, Kisaragi holds the ultimate authority to determine the final course a play should take. For example, during a rehearsal held on April 18, 1989, performers acted out several scenes, taking various roles, experimenting with various ways of acting them out. Sometimes men took women's roles, and women took men's roles. During these exercises, one short scene transformed into many kinds of scenes projecting totally different ambiances. In this process of kaleidoscopic transformation, Kisaragi encouraged performers to stretch their imagination further, by saying, "you may want to play [with a role] some more." She sometimes gave hints as to a kind of ambiance she wanted to project in a part of a scene, or as to the role of a line in making a transition in a scene. Performers reacted to her vague hints, and adjusted their ways of acting immediately towards the still uncertain image Kisaragi had for a scene.

She seemed to be observing and waiting for performers to fill in a deliberately left emptiness in her imagination. This act of filling-in appears to serve as a catalyst which enables Kisaragi to stretch her own imagination and to unearth aspects which otherwise would
be impossible to reach. Kisaragi explains this attitude as follows:

I cannot perceive myself as a solid entity. I constantly have to objectify the things born from the subjective realm, or from "I." And the subject itself is such empty stuff, so it has to be ready to absorb a lot of things. As for the structure of the organization, I cannot say, "'I' think this and this, so follow me." I myself am not defined, and the others are undefined, too, and I think we can only create something by throwing ourselves at one another. (28 Mar. 1989)

Thus, the company's way of creation seems to reflect the playwright/director's concern about subjectivity as a construct. However, as the rehearsal on April 18 demonstrates, Kisaragi holds the ultimate artistic control over the company's theatrical work. Kisaragi admits the fact that people try to accommodate her wishes, because Noise is a group in which she writes, and she asks people to work with her. Kisaragi sets up a project, selects performers, and determines the artistic course a play should take. For example, after the rehearsal on April 18, 1989, she told me that she had the casting in mind. She was just suspending the open casting, to avoid a situation in which the performers get closed and tightened up in their roles, before stretching their imagination and flexibility to the degree that allows creativity to grow. As this example shows, in Noise, Kisaragi is the subject of creation. In spite of this control, Kisaragi believes that the process of
creation at Noise is flexible enough to allow performers to exercise a greater degree of creativity, compared to the process taken at an average little theatre group with a powerful leader.

Thus, although Kisaragi shows her sense that one's subjectivity is constructed and limited through her style of presentation, of creation, and of operating the group, she has the status of being the subject of creation. In addition, for Kisaragi, artistic creation is a way to "search for herself," in other words, a way to fulfill her desire to be a subject. Nonetheless, she constantly seems to question her qualification to be the creating subject, not so much because she is a woman, as because she does not believe that one's creation of art can be free from socio-cultural conditioning. Kisaragi's theatrical works demonstrate both her desire to be a subject and her questioning of a possibility of one's attaining total control over oneself and one's surroundings.

A Play of Role-Playing: A Table with Romeo and Freesia

As early as 1979, Kisaragi drew critical recognition with her Romio to frigia no aru shokutaku (A Table with Romeo and Freesia), in which she focuses on the notion of subjectivity being restricted by social role-playing. The basis of this play is Romeo and Juliet, as the title
suggests. The playwright successfully recreates from this Shakespearean tragedy a piece that illustrates what she perceives as contemporary experience.

When the play opens, stagehands dressed in black (kuroko), who are conventionally supposed to be "invisible," bring in five dolls with a set of furniture. At their signal, the dolls come to life and start acting as human beings. The characters are the Kyapurettos (Capulets) who are playing the game of "pretending" to live the story of Romeo and Juliet. A twist that surprises the audience is that the game turns out to be a festival at a shrine given by the residents of Nakano, Tokyo. They are drama fanatics who are trying to make Nakano the "capital of tragedy." Finally young people assigned the roles of Romeo and Juliet refuse to continue play-acting. At the climax of the festival, the residents murder a part-time delivery boy working for the large Mitsukoshi Department Store who has been forced to play the role of Romeo. Thus, the curtain falls and performers bow, each being introduced to the audience. Then, the stage assistants come in, in order to carry off the performers who turn out to be dolls again.

In the review of the revival of the play in 1982, Japanese critic Senda Akihiko writes that it is a play about "institutionalized role-playing." He states that the role-playing is a necessary method to balance one's
self perception (jiko), especially in this contemporary society where one can no longer believe in the existence of absolute truth. It is, in other words, an ideology that determines the course of history, as well as the relationship of human beings with the world. In this situation, everyone has to re-locate oneself in society, by acting as playwright, director, and performer. However, this self-consciousness, when taken to the extreme by a number of people, can lead to a dangerous situation in which one can neither act as playwright nor as director. A balancing act of "role-playing" becomes "institutionalized" (seidoka sareru). Then, one cannot select a mask to wear by oneself anymore. She ends up acting a "role" that is given to her by "invisible" kuroko, while she believes that she herself has selected the role. In the play, a woman who plays the role of Juliet finally refuses to participate in the festival, crying, "I don’t want to be forced to act anymore." Thus, the critic Senda states, "Romeo" and "Juliet" in Nakano, Tokyo, represent individuals’ refusal to participate in the operation of "institutional role-playing" ("Burikko kankaku" 21).

The critic seems to be adequately describing the playwright’s concern about one’s subjectivity, although he overlooks the fact that Juliet’s refusal of playing a role is written in the "script" for the players within
the play. The act of refusal of "institutional" demands usually represents one's personal and moral decision and thus indicating her control over herself. In this context, Juliet's "refusal" is determined by the script from the beginning of the play, and seems to illustrate that an apparently moral and personal decision is also conditioned by one's surroundings. Kisaragi seems to show her critical view of this "institutionalized role-playing" through the character (a part-time delivery boy) who cannot act because he does not know the script, and through his subsequent death (which does not seem to be written on the players' "script"). His death seems to indicate that there is no way out for one who does not know the rules of a game. This character, who is incapable of either joining the players or escaping from them, demonstrates the absurdity of extreme "role-playing."

Anxiety about Self: Dolls

In 1982, Kisaragi presented a mixed media production Dolls (Doll) as her first theatrical work with Noise. Having made numerous experiments in various media to search for possibilities of expression in voice, sound, body, music and lighting, as well as in other visual arts, such as slide, film, and video art, Kisaragi Koharu
felt ready to present a piece that utilized diverse media to illustrate her anxiety about being an "empty" subject.

Kisaragi presents two points of view in Dolls, the individual's and the institution's. The play is about suicide and a search for its meanings. In brief: five teen-age girl friends commit suicide together. Nobody can understand why they took their lives. In an attempt to search for the reasons, police lieutenants reconstruct the girls' lives from the girls' diaries, photo albums, and personal belongings. The series of episodes reconstructed are so ordinary that they do not give a single hint as to why the girls wanted to die. In the final reconstructed scene the girls gloriously march into the sea, the lieutenants watching in the background unable to comprehend the meaning of the act.

In this play, Kisaragi seems to be saying that an institutionalized society determines an individual's way of living. In an interview with a Seibu Museum representative, Kisaragi states that she wants to show differences in views between the ones who are on the side of institutionalized society and the ones who are not (Kisaragi, "Engeki to pafōmansu"). The girls are deliberately stereotypical--innocent, sweet, pretty, and sensitive. In a way, they are "ideal" girls without any serious problems, in the eyes of the institution. The institutionalized eyes cannot see that in each of the
girls, there is anxiety, a sense of being confined, and a sense of being incapable of doing something for others. Kisaragi believes that their suicide is their way to save themselves from this emptiness and isolation. The lieutenants—the eyes of institution—just watch the girls’ living and dying without being able to draw meaning out of the acts.

In this play Kisaragi downplays the importance of words, in addition to focusing on young women’s anxiety about being empty subjects and the social definition of each woman’s subjectivity. In the Japanese newspaper Asahi the playwright states that she began to do performances because "she lost what, until then, seemed to be the relationship between words and the human body" (Kondo, Tokyo Journal 15). Kisaragi explains what she felt at the time:

Until then, all my work was verbal. With what might be called an inflation of words, I felt that the actors were being crippled into merely throwing them around as signals, not making sense, through them, of what the body was performing. So I threw out all the words. (Kondo 15)

Theatre critic Hamamoto Kaoru’s review of this production seems to support what the playwright describes:

With this Dolls, I believe that Kisaragi Koharu presented a strong doubt about the way she had been writing as playwright. The plays such as A Table with Romeo and Freesia and A Factory Story (Kōjō monogatari) (1982) were, if I can
Kisaragi explains how she "cut the relationship between 'I' and words" in an interview with the Seibu Museum in 1983. She states that the act of living itself is the act of theatre, and her concern is, then, how to present "living" human bodies on the stage rather than puppets. As a partial answer to this concern, she discarded entertaining and explanatory words and focuses on performers' existence as human beings. Her intention to discard words led her to an improvisational and collaborative method of creation. For Dolls, she did not write a script beforehand. She went to rehearsals with a general outline of the play in her mind, and asked performers to do a number of improvisations in accordance with the outline. The performers developed their characters through improvisations and interactions among themselves. Kisaragi waited and observed until she could see the map of relationship among performers/characters, before writing lines for each of them.
Kisaragi states that she would not ask performers to be "good" actors, because her theatre is close to documentaries in which the focus is performers' being there and doing what they are doing. Thus, improvisational creation for her is a method of inducing this sense of "performers' being there." She gave lines to the performers in accordance with the map of their relationships, that is, with the ways of their being there (Kisaragi, "Engeki to pafòmansu").

This is a radical stand to take. In other words, Kisaragi is seeking "the moment when actors and audience look at each other directly and bring an active relationship into being. Then, finally, words can come to life through the detail of the body's movements, without having to articulate them" (Kondo 15). As this statement demonstrates, Kisaragi seems to seek for the theatre of encounter not unlike the one the famous Japanese avant-garde director Terayama was pursuing.

The critic Hamamoto Kaoru describes succinctly how spectators can perceive this kind of theatrical work that focuses on encounter. In his review of Dolls, the critic states that the play does not call for interpretation because it does not offer excitement in seeing unexpected turns in a story line, nor does it offer the pleasure of watching words structuring fictional worlds and
destroying them in a moment. What, then, can the audience enjoy? Hamamoto answers this question:

The pleasure of watching a human being who is playing a role of performer, and of watching the one being clothed in visual and aural media, such as setting, lighting, music, photographs and films. We should try to see whether all the media rose to converge into a single "environment." It is whether the play offered the moment in which this "environment" embraced the girls and even the audience, that determines our evaluation of Dolls. ("Tokyo tawâ, chigau!" 23)

This review illustrates what Kisaragi is pointing towards with her first full-scale, mixed-media production. In Dolls, words no longer act as the creative force in structuring and destroying fictional worlds. Being scooped up by Kisaragi from the actual lives of performers, words stop "representing" anybody other than the performers. By cutting off the relationship between "I"-Kisaragi and words, Kisaragi gives up part of her authority as the author and as the subject.

Kisaragi is moving towards the destruction of "nihilism" in the act of theatre, as Jean-François Lyotard states:

Theatre places us right at the heart of what is religious-political: in the heart of absence, in negativity, in nihilism as Nietzsche would say, therefore in the question of power. A theory of theatrical signs, a practice of theatrical signs (dramatic text, mise en scene, interpretation, architecture) are based on accepting the nihilism inherent in re-presentation. Not only accepting it:
reinforcing it. For the sign, Peirce used to say, is something which stands to somebody for something. To Hide, to Show: that is theatrality. The modernity of our fin-de-siecle is due to this: there is nothing to be replaced, no lieutenancy is legitimate, or else all are; the replacing--therefore the meaning--is itself only a substitute for displacement. . . . Is theatrality thus condemned? ("The Tooth" 105)

Kisaragi seems to be aware that words are incapable of communicating one's inner thoughts and feelings. It should be noted that Kisaragi mentions that in the inflation of words, she felt the alienation between performers' bodies and words. Performers function in this flood of words like puppets which are constantly changing their characters upon the signals given by the kuroko. With Dolls, the artist seems to start to seek for a way of theatre that does not reduces performers to puppets.

Disorientation of Spectators: Moral as an Encounter

In her productions of Moral, Moral 2nd, and Moral 3rd presented respectively in 1984, 1985, and in 1986, Kisaragi Koharu further questions the efficacy of words in communicating one's inner feelings, and she continues to search for a way to theatrically present the formation of one's subjectivity.

The three plays follow the same basic outlines: a man fails to come to his office one day, without even giving notice to the office. His colleagues visit his
home, wondering if there may be something wrong with him. They find the man has committed suicide with his family. Instead of going into the question of why death takes so prominent a place in Kisaragi's plays, I will focus my analysis on how Kisaragi presents death.

In Moral, Kisaragi installed ten video screens in the acting area. Further, in Moral 2nd, she installed twenty-nine huge video screens towards stage left, in a vertical, irregular pattern. As spectators entered the auditorium, they saw on the huge video screens pictures that were difficult to draw meanings from--Kisaragi talking, a bird's-eye view of Tokyo, and huge eyes staring and blinking. The stage was bare, with several platforms arranged like islands floating in the acting area.1

According to the "complete version" of Moral published in 1987, the play consists of twenty-nine scenes: 1) White Man; 2) Manifesto; 3) Information; 4) School; 5) Diary; 6) Image A; 7) Family (I); 8) Office; 9) Family (II); 10) Family (III); 11) A Department Store; 12) Image B; 13) Rumor; 14) Family (IV); 15) Response; 16) Kitchen; 17) An Airship; 18) Image C; 19) Brothers; 20) Order; 21) Quarrel; 22) Language; 23) Here & There;

1 The description of the visual elements of Moral 2nd is based on the company's production videotape.
Each scene focuses on one or two characters who express their feelings, without being able to communicate to others. In the scenes titled "Family", each family member is alienated from the others. For example, scene 9, Family (II) features an ordinary conversation within a family circle, between Mother and children (named Psychology and Economics). Mother, while she is automatically responding to her children, lets slip her own thoughts: "Oh, did your teacher say so? Yes, liquor is not good for you. In addition to that, if you drink it every day, it becomes difficult for you to stop drinking, and you will finally go mad. You become mad, and you keep smiling the whole day, while your heart is sore as if you had needles stuck inside your heart" (Moral 25). The mother’s irrelevant reply shows that she is suffering from depression which has made her become a mild alcoholic. The causes of her depression are not defined, but her suffering shows in her distracted attitudes and seemingly gentle smile to her children.

In the next scene, Family (II), the Father is shown depressed. His son Economics comes in to say hello to the father. Apparitions (kehai) of office workers enter the stage one by one, surround Father, and urge him to give them orders until they finally close Father in a
tight circle. Father cannot recognize his son's voice and words, being so distracted by the unseen apparitions surrounding him. Father tries to listen to his son, but in vain:

Economics: Hello, Father.

Father: Father? Am I a father? Has it been possible for me to be somebody's father?

Economics: Father, I'm going.

Father: Don't, don't go. I can make a sense out of this in a while. Something is calling for me. Once more, please, call me once more.

Economics: H-E-L-L-O!

Father: I'm sure I can hear somebody saying hello to me. Then where am I? Where am I? Where, am I?

Economics: Oh, well! (leaves).

Father: I can't hear the voice anymore. I was almost going to understand something. Who am I, where am I, what am I doing here? Please, tell me!

Six Apparitions: Give us your order, captain! (closing a circle, vehemently).

Father: Tell me, somebody! (Moral 27-28)

The Six apparitions keep closing the circle, urging Father to give them orders until Father is completely lost. The father seems to be a typical Japanese office worker who has been working so hard that his whole life is now influenced by his work.

In scene 14, Family (IV), Grandmother seems to be intently listening to her grandchildren's—Psychology's
and Economics' voice. Psychology 1 comes onto one of the platforms, says hello, and like any Japanese child coming from school, asks his mother for food. Then, Economics 1 comes in, and the two brothers talk briefly about the tea they are going to have, about what to do before tea, and, as any brothers in an ordinary Japanese family would, chatter, "You have to wash your hands before tea," "Oh, I know," etc.

Then, Psychology 2 comes in and says exactly the same line Psychology 1 said. Economics 2 comes in, and brothers 2 repeat exactly the conversation of brothers 1. The number of Psychology and Economics multiplies, until the stage is full of them. The audience hears exactly the same words, and exactly the same conversation every time a new set of brothers Psychology and Economics comes in. Grandmother keeps interrogating the grandchildren, from the beginning to this point of the scene. These numerous Psychology and Economics repeat the simple conversation without responding to her. Grandmother feels she is alienated from the family and is hated by the grandchildren. The spectators gradually realize that these Psychology and Economics are in her imagination, in which she thinks that they are stating the words of hatred under the guise of ordinary conversation. Grandmother keeps throwing in words such as: "What did you say?," "How dare can you say such a thing?," "I heard
"You don't have to hide it if you think like that," "Why don't you say that louder, I know," "I know, I will leave this house," "Oh, you finally said it!," "You hate me."

Ostensibly irrelevant, ordinary conversation gradually starts to correspond to Grandmother's words, though these children never react to her accusations, and lines are never changed. Grandmother's self-pity rises until she falls into silence. In her silence, the spectators hear the group of apparitional brothers repeating the words, "I hate Grandmother," in a low and deep tone.

Soon after the moment, another Psychology, who seems to be "real" this time, comes in and says hello to Grandmother. Grandmother starts saying the same lines as those she was saying to the Apparitions, and her self-pitying attitude intensifies as Psychology denies her accusations, being totally embarrassed and lost.

(Moral 36-43)

In these scenes, Kisaragi depicts the interrelationship between family members who cannot communicate with each other. These scenes demonstrate the playwright's disbelief in the power of words for communication, and her sense that real human communication is lost in our society. Because of her negative view of contacts among people in life, Kisaragi
tries all the harder to establish the meeting between human beings in her theatrical work.

Scenes such as "White Man," "Manifesto," and "Language" demonstrate her wish for human contacts. For example, in "Manifesto," each video screen starts to show a huge eye gazing at something intently. The twenty-nine video screens show eyes and other images alternately. Then staccato sounds come in, and performers, having run into the acting area one by one, start vocalizing the line: "I WANT TO LET YOU KNOW THAT I AM HERE." A performer starts to utter the line, cutting it short into a number of fragmented sounds. Other performers join in the first performer's utterance one by one, until the fragmented utterance of "I want to let you know that I am here" rises and overpowers the whole performance space. While vocalization and staccato sound/music are rising, the video screens keep showing the twenty-nine huge eyes, moving and staring at unspecified objects. The images of gaze--the eye, a bird's-eye view of a city, and an airship--appear from time to time throughout the performance along with other images and blank screens serving as sources of light. In the published text of Moral, Kisaragi writes that an airship in the air gives her the sense that it is watching and controlling people (49-50). Thus, the scene seems to be the playwright's "Manifesto" stating her wish to tell people her own
presence and the existence of people, no matter how restricting contemporary society may be.

Further, in "Language," spectators see a man running into the acting area, trying to say, "I just saw that right there, what shall I do?" The man utters the line, stammering, without being able to pronounce the words properly. Kisaragi notes that it took three and a half minutes for a performer to deliver this single line in actual production (Moral 62). This scene suggests that there is something astounding or terrifying beyond description by mere words, thus further suggesting Kisaragi's emphasis on direct communication with spectators through sense perception rather than through words.

However, this wish of the playwright did not seem to reach the audience in performances of the play. For example, Kisaragi quotes several reactions from the audience members in her "Moral aruiwa":

There were times when I could not see the stage, being distracted by the video. The location of video and the sequence of pictures on the screens should be adjusted so that the audience can keep the pictures in the sight without trying to watch them. (male, twenty-four years old)

It was hard to watch both the stage and the video at the same time. (female, fifteen years old)

I think the video was distracting. (female, twenty-two years old) (277)
These responses, directed to the use of video screens, suggest that spectators are confused and distracted from understanding the playwright's "manifesto" as a result of the use. Furthermore, in the above article, Kisaragi writes that these short scenes are interchangeable in sequence. This rejection of narrative coherency may have reinforced the difficulty the spectators felt in interpreting this play.

Hasebe Hiroshi’s review of Moral 2nd captures this difficulty. He writes that he felt as if he had been suspended in the air. He points out that the play does not evoke any feelings, does not tell any stories, does not show any associative images, and that the amalgamation of media--performers, video, music, lighting, and setting--does not lead the audience anywhere. Admittedly, the audience expects the stage to lead them somewhere. When Hasebe realizes that he is fixed in his seat in Parco Space Part 3, and that he is self-conscious about his watching Kisaragi Koharu’s play, boredom seems to be the result of his unfulfilled expectation. At the same time, he questions his way of interpreting a play: "why do I have to try to evaluate the play by words, or by the degree to which actors' performance impresses me?" Then, he states that this play calls for a new kind of interpretation: the spectator needs to accept fragmented images as they are,
and should not attempt to construct a coherent whole from the pieces. Further, the difficulty the audience members feel in watching both video and the stage, Hasebe suggests, may derive from the fact that they try to grasp all pieces of the image in one glance, in the attempt to construct a meaningful whole. He tells himself that it does not matter if he misses one or two elements. He needs to just try to accept images—theatrical elements or scenes—coming into himself as they are, however fragmented they may be ("14 kai" 66-69).

As Hasebe rightly suggests the need for a new mode of interpreting theatre, Kisaragi aims at the audience who can act as "witness" ("Ima taoyakana 76). She describes her ideal audience as "the eyes of whom happen to be fixed on the events on the stage and eventually have to see some devastating events . . . to fall upon stage," like the man in "Language," who says, stammering, "I just saw that right there, what shall I do?" (28 Mar. 1989).

With this description, the playwright seems to be saying that her audience experiences the intensity of her theatre rather than identifying with characters onstage. By denying the power of words to fully convey one's inner feelings, Kisaragi seems to try to achieve a direct contact between her theatre and the audience. However, the spectator as "witness" who cannot intervene into the
events onstage (by the means of identification) seems to be precluded from the contact that Kisaragi desires. What, then, is the theatre Kisaragi is pointing toward? Not only does Kisaragi deny the author’s authority, she also refuses to allow the audience the power of interpretation. In contemporary society, in which one’s sense of subject cannot be concretely felt, is the contact, or meeting, or communication toward which Kisaragi is aspiring, possible?

Towards an Energetic Theatre

Kisaragi Koharu is seeking communication with spectators through a means beyond words. The playwright seems to feel that words can cripple performers’ potency to express something through their bodies. In other words, Kisaragi’s theatre is an attempt to revive the potency of presence/existence.

For Moral 2nd, Kisaragi wrote with the simplest possible words that are used in everyday life. As the scene of Grandmother and the apparitions of her grandchildren illustrates, even extremely simple, conversational words can convey hatred, self-pity, loneliness and alienation.

In order to convey the intensity of emotions, Kisaragi requires performers’ bodies to have a strong "presence" that can directly contravene words. Kisaragi
asks performers to train their bodies to the degree that they can perform unusual movements in difficult positions (28 Mar. 1989). She also requires them to deliver the same line in turn during rehearsals ("Moral aruiwa" 274). The delivery of the same line by various performers generates creative energy that allows each performer to keep searching for her own ways of performing a role. In addition, each performer says the same line in different ways, stretching the imagination until finally the actor finds an acting style that derives from one's personal, everyday-life. Through these practices Kisaragi expects the performers to attain bodies that are fully capable of expressing emotions. Referring to the acting style of expressionist theatre, Kisaragi states:

I want that acting style [of the expressionist theatre] in which emotions within come out into the form/style in exaggerated ways. By doing so, I want to combine the emotions and the body, I want to express them together. . . . I want to express strongly that the body is not separate from the soul. . . . To do that, I need the trained body, the body that can project strong emotions and delicate waves of feelings with a certain articulation. . . . The body that comes out is, well in short, like an objet d'art. I want to express the body as an astonishing objet d'art, rather than as the one that can intrude into the audience. (28 Mar. 1989)

Kisaragi emphasizes here the experience of emotions rather than understanding of them through reason and words. The idea of performers as objets d'art suggests the intensity of emotions Kisaragi seeks to express.
through performers' bodies. With this intensity of the body, words and the body can break against one another with the same force, and other media can also be activated in intensifying this struggle.

Kisaragi cuts down words to the simplest form, trying to create a "glorious absence" (ōinaru yohaku) ("Moral aruiwa" 274) in her theatre. The "glorious absence" is to be filled in by the body, by other visual, aural, and sensory media, and also by the audience who does not intrude, but experiences the events in the theatre. Kisaragi writes that the theatre generated from the "glorious absence" is chaotic, violent, and holding a number of contradictions within it, which epitomizes the chaotic city of Tokyo (274).

What Kisaragi constantly seeks as a theatre artist is:

the intensity or color of a space when it is filled by audiences. . . . I want to create a piece that can control the intensity of the space and the sensation felt by the audience's bodies. . . . In order to achieve this aim, I utilize voice, sounds, lights--and I think of them as dynamics, or kan-kyu [fast-slow]. I am always concerned about the rhythm of a play, and how to control kan-kyu. I try to generate that rhythm and dynamics in everything--in words, in movements, and even in staff's work--and this dynamics can control the sensation in the audience's bodies. (28 Mar. 1989)

The above quotation describes the kind of communication Kisaragi wants to make with the audience.
She wants to create vibration in the theatre by utilizing the body, words, visual, and aural media in order to affect the audience's bodily sensation. It is the experience, not the understanding, of this vibration and sensation she seeks to generate in the theatre, and for her, the theatre is this experience.

One of her predecessors, in the fifteenth century, already seems to have pointed towards the same theatre of sensation and intensity. In "The Tooth, the Palm," Jean-François Lyotard describes Zeami's no theatre as the theatre of desire for potency. In his treatises, Zeami encoded the art with his meticulous description of dramatic text, role types, acting style, levels of acting, training of actors, and even of programming, audience, and of performance space. According to Lyotard, the material is "every semiologist's dream" (106).

In spite of the minute prescriptions of the form of theatre, Lyotard points out that the semiotics of Zeami seems to be thwarted by "a very different drive, a libidinal drive, a search for intensiveness, a desire for potency" (107), and that "the name of flower (fleur) is given to the search for the energetic intensification of the theatrical apparatus" (107). He continues, "the signs are no longer looked at in their representative dimension . . . they do not present, they permit
'actions,' they operate as the transformers, fueled by natural and social energies in order to produce affect of a very high intensity" (107).

Kisaragi's theatre, also, is the theatre of desire for potency. By attempting to create dynamics to affect the audience, Kisaragi is also pointing toward the theatre of intensity, of energy, and of potency. "A glorious absence" is to become the most powerful sign in its nothingness, in its signifying potential, and in its capacity of being filled in both by the theatrical apparatus and by the audience.

Kisaragi's theatre does not represent coherent, usual social configurations; instead, it allows actions, vibrations, and sensations. Yet, nihilism is inherent in this absence that points toward potency. Kisaragi's theatre aims at "controlling" the dynamics of space and the sensation of the audience. To "control" is to "dominate." Kisaragi writes that the theatre is the expression of her impulse to let others know that she is here. Thus, the potency of absence is constantly thwarted by this wish to be a subject. The contradiction is never to be reconciled, however, Kisaragi keeps creating the theatre with her subversive spirit, endlessly pointing towards an energetic theatre, the business of which is to produce the highest intensity of theatrical experience to be felt by the audience.
In their own unique way, the four women's theatre groups in Japan are demonstrating the precarious position of women's subjectivity in both narrative and representative spaces. In this study, I have traced how the four groups' plays illustrate the difficulties for women to attain the position of subject, and how their performance and creative process show a certain possibility of break-through in social conditioning of women's subjectivity. Although the two approaches appear contradictory at first glance, these are the questions and struggles that I believe are shared by a number of contemporary thinkers, writers, and artists.

My text has been influenced by the work of the theorists Lacan, Lyotard, and others. On the one hand, I consider Lacan's work on subjectivity-formation and Foucault's concept of "author-function" persuasive in situating a contemporary person's subject and its function as well as its position. On the other hand, I also cannot disregard the sense that "I" or at least "my body" exists--in a unique way. Subject may not be the
precious center, or the core of existence from which everything develops. Subjectivity is formed by custom, culture, society, and above all, language. Nonetheless, our individual bodies exist. As Teresa de Lauretis points out, historical women, rather than abstract Woman, exist (Alice 1-11). Subject vibrates with body, and with sense perception,\(^1\) rather than being just an empty container of self that passively awaits stimulation and transformation by outside forces.

When Lyotard discusses the "energetic" theatre, and Baudrillard mentions "seduction", these ideas seem to reinforce the connection between subject and body. Although their interest is semiotic, and I may be stretching their notions too far, this is the point to which I relate my-self and my thinking.

This is not to argue that I believe that body and sense perception are capable of breaking up the rather stifling effect of subjectivity-formation once and for all. Still, I consider that body and sense perception, with their random responses to outside stimulations, can be a point of resistance to the effect of subjectivity-formation.

\(^1\) A Japanese philosopher Nakamura Yūjiro mentions the Japanese thought on body being proximate to soul in his Jutsugoshū (96-100).
Theatrical works often produce seductive moments in which the audience is totally involved and fascinated by the stage, in spite of one's ideology and concerns. When Lyotard discusses the energetic theatre ("The Tooth and the Palm," he upholds sense perception as perhaps beyond and below language (which he defines as the network of meanings based on power-relationship). Thus the theatre which focuses on libidinal energy (the energetic theatre) rather than on producing meanings, or on making sense for the audience, can provide a way to escape from these kinds of power-relationship. Artaudian "cruelty," Brechtian distancing with a focus on indifference, and the silence of the Japanese nō theatre are Lyotard's examples. Indeed, the energetic theatre is a very charming idea. However, it is uncertain how long both performers and the audience can hold the energetic sense perception without recourse to meaning. The Artaudian theatre of cruelty has never been fully realized. Brechtian distancing often enhances the audience's illusionistic emotionalism rather than stimulating critical thought. The silence of Japanese nō theatre is loaded with meanings through theatrical conventions and rich poetic allusions. Libidinal energy can be easily transformed into meanings, which, according to Lyotard, prescribes power-relationship. Thus, to what extent we can consider that those seductive moments can undercut
cultural codification of subjectivity is still open to
discussion and criticism.

I would like to reiterate Edward Pechter's argument on two ways of responding to literature and art which I outlined in the chapter on The Blue Bird Theatre Company. Pechter argues that the two ways--the ants' and the grasshoppers'--are not mutually exclusive. It is too naive to think that an individual can be in any way out of cultural/ideological conditioning (the ants' way); it is also too rigid to think that there are no random responses that are not affected by ideology (the grasshoppers' way). By the same token, Lyotard's "energetic theatre," with its emphasis on sense perception is a way to induce the grasshoppers' responses, though this theatre may also be influenced by the ants' responses.

Creating art is a deeply contradictory act when we consider that we no longer have a so-called subject that is the center or the source of everything: creation presupposes the presence of subject. Pechter says, we cannot be naive any more to the extent that we can deny the overwhelming effect of language, culture and ideology over the formation of our subjectivity. Being female creators makes the situation worse, as director/playwright Kisaragi Koharu states, because there are extra factors that condition and curtail women's
wishes to be subject. Nonetheless, Pechter also states that art has the power to induce the grasshoppers' responses, that allows the spectators (and the performers) to go beyond their normative beliefs.

The four women's theatre groups' work show how women's subjectivity is conditioned by societal norms and how women's desire to be a subject is curtailed. However, the four groups produce the theatrical pleasure which induces random responses among spectators. This responsiveness produced by theatrical pleasure may be a way to break normative beliefs among spectators, and thereby contribute to presenting new modes of subjectivity for women. Women's creative art should be analyzed from the points of view that include both the ants' and the grasshoppers' ways: we need to see both how women's subjectivity is formed and how women try to search for their possibly imaginary but difficult-to-discard subject, a certain core of their existence and of their creative expression.

Kisaragi Koharu (Noise) and Kishida Rio (Kishida Jimusho + Rakutendan) are aggressively demonstrating the precariousness of subject and subjectivity-formation in their plays. Since the beginning of her career in the late 1970s, Kisaragi's immediate concern has been subjectivity-formation. She has emphasized role-playing in extremely theatrical and critical works that show how
men and women are conditioned by social and cultural expectations. In her recent theatrical work, Moral, Kisaragi downplays the importance of words, and emphasizes mise en scene and rhythmic quality that affect the spectators’ sense perception. In this way, the artist demonstrates her wish to create the theatre of immediate encounter with her audience through sense perception rather than through words. This piece is her manifesto to challenge socio-cultural conditioning of one’s subjectivity.

In her latest work, Escape, the playwright shows a much more resistive stance to societal effects on one’s life than in Moral. Moral was a criticism and representation of social codification that denies the presence of subject to an individual. Escape is a demonstration of resistive body and sense perception that cannot be contained by a normative order, as is represented through the heroine’s almost sensual pleasure of touching a computer keyboard, of operating a system to make the system serve her personal wish, and her final death "to destroy everything, to reconstruct something new."\(^2\) Death, in this play, is depicted as the most resistive act rather than as a symbol of defeat, though

\(^2\) The line is taken from the performance of the play on June 29, 1990 at the hall of Tsukiji Honguanji Temple.
the interpretation may invite criticism. I regard as persuasive Jean Baudrillard's argument that contemporary life is contained in a system of exchange because it is alienated from death: the value of life can be and should be assessed only through death, and not through material values. ³

Kishida Rio also shows her interest in women's subjectivity-formation. Although Kishida has written a variety of works through several phases of her career, her most persistent interest concerns the fictitiousness of history and of Woman. In her plays, the playwright illustrates how a history is created, and how both men's and women's subjectivity is formed by a societal system. While critically viewing the relationship between one's subjectivity and a society, Kishida seems to believe that women's sensual pleasure has the power to go beyond the societal restrictions, and that it may contribute to changing both men's and women's perception of society and themselves.

She often emphasizes women's desire and sensual pleasure to a degree of immorality, which is extremely anti-social in the context of her plays. Incest, patricide, and matricide, are the motifs that have repeatedly appeared in her works. In spite of the ³

³ See Baudrillard, Shôchô kôkan to shi (L'échange symbolique et la mort).
emphasis on the most immediate and often repulsive sexuality, the playwright’s work manifests her uncompromising and lucid perception of the relationship between women, sexuality, and society.

For example, her award-winning play, Itojigoku (The Thread Hell), is a striking visual presentation of the playwright’s notion of subjectivity-formation and women. In this play, the heroine searches for and kills her mother who has discarded her. Kishida presents the male characters as puppeteers who manipulate the heroine and other women by the threads attached to the women. The killing scene is presented as a stylized puppetry by the men, thus indicating that the heroine’s hatred of her mother is caused by complicated societal expectations to women. At the end of this play, the playwright suggests that women’s bonding may be a way to discover a mode of subjectivity that is not conditioned by societal control.

In quite different ways, Kisaragi Koharu and Kishida Rio are tackling the question of our--men’s and women’s, but especially women’s--subjectivity. Although the two playwrights are aware that it is extremely difficult to "escape" from the conditioning network, they still try to break through, and to demonstrate that "I am" and "We
are" here, existing, capable of feeling sadness, pleasure, and pain.4

The approach taken by the Blue Bird Theatre Company differs from Kisaragi and Kishida's. The Blue Bird, as the first all-women's group, practices collective creation. For the women of The Blue Bird, collective creation first of all is a method to deny the imposition by a single author of a certain role and character type. The method also gives them opportunities to search for what they want, and by extension, what they really are. In other words, the aim in carrying out the method is two-fold: to reject ready-made roles and normative subjectivity given to them, and to look for the uncertain core of their existence, which they feel can be located by honestly pursuing their wishes, interests, and desires. In a way, their approach is limited. Personal wish, interest, and desire are also conditioned by

4 Kisaragi's latest play, Escape, presents a striking scene in which performers utter overlapping lines rhythmically in unison and separately: "I am here . . . am I? . . . Do you know . . . I am . . . here . . . here." The short scene is presented twice, at the beginning and toward the end of the play. The simple sentence and rhythmical utterance with staccato movement of performers' bodies leave a strong impression on the audience.
culture, society, and language. However, their collective pursuit accurately locates the positioning of women in society and in narrative. In spite of the playfulness and often wild fantasy found in their plays, their work often demonstrates women's subjectivity that is trapped in formative effects of culture and society.

Nonetheless, the theatrical pleasure in the Blue Bird's plays—jokes and the sense of sheer pleasure of pursuing fantasy, wish, and desire—undercuts such curtailment represented in their work. The most seductive moments in their work involve the joy of fantasy and a perhaps vicarious but unmixed sense of wish-fulfillment (for the audience and the performers) through the pleasure of play and play-acting. Even in such a serious play as Aoimi o tabeta (She Has Eaten a Green Fruit) which deals with aging, fantasy and the pleasure of living prevail in the play in such a way that the heroine finally realizes the kind of joy she can have as an old woman. Without too much psychological explanation, the heroine shifts her focus from recalling her happy childhood to realizing the happiness of living at her present elderly state of life.

See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Reading The Satanic Verses" in Public Culture 2.1 (1989): 79-99, for her lucid analysis of subjectivity-formation in which she questions the notion that personal wishes, interests and desires can be out of the formative network.
I should add here that The Blue Bird’s scripts never really call for any psychological explanation, though their work constantly touches on the audience’s psychology by showing scenes that inspire the viewer’s sense that one has seen and experienced the same feeling, emotion, and action. The Blue Bird’s work appears to rely heavily on the assumption that audience members have certain commonly shared experiences, especially childhood memories—an excitement of childhood adventures, an unnamable sense of fear and anxiety, a gentle feeling of security with one’s mother, a sense of wonder in the world. The Blue Bird affirms pleasure; the pleasure of living, fantasy, and sometimes a little bit of indulgence in one’s wishes and desires. The Blue Bird allows the audience to be an accomplice to fantasy and wish-fulfillment.

Unlike the women of the other groups, Watanabe Eriko of The Thirty-Zero Theatre Company takes a romantic stance in her assertion of the power of imagination. The playwright has been concerned with the dreamer, the imaginator, or the creator, as the major organizing subject of her plays. Watanabe structures her plays around a dreamer dreaming somebody dreaming. A multitude of dreamers and dreaming-processes intermingle in her

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plays until the audience becomes unsure who is a dreamer and what is dreamed. Still, it is possible in each play to single out one or two central dreamers around whom the playwright organizes the dreams. Through the central dreamers, Watanabe emphasizes the power of dream and imagination that can both save a dreamer from the plight of real life (however temporarily) and devastate one's actual life with its escapist tendency. This focus does not seem to invite a speculation into subjectivity-formation, since her assertion of imagination presupposes the presence of a solid subject. In addition, Watanabe does not seem to be concerned with dreamers' gender, and how their subjectivity is formed. Watanabe's central dreamers are often male, and female dreamers are depicted in the periphery of her plays. She seems to emphasize how one wishes and creates, rather than why. The playwright is not making an effort to present women as subjects in her plays, nor is she trying to set up the question of gender as something that concerns the dreamers in her plays.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the women of the Blue Bird, Kishida, and Kisaragi demonstrate a focus on women characters more than does Watanabe. In Watanabe's plays, women seem to be merged with men, through the constant shifting of characters' identities and through cross-gender casting. However, like the Blue
Bird, Watanabe captures women's positions both in imagination and in actual life, especially through references to absent Woman and the presentation of solid, down-to-earth women right in the middle of a central character's powerful but self-indulgent dream. For example, in Yumesaka kudatte ame ga furu (Going Down the Dream-Hill, Rain Falls), Watanabe presents a middle-aged man as a dreamer, and makes effective visual references to absent Woman as his reflection. At the same time, she introduces middle-aged Japanese housewives into his dream, which undercuts his self-indulgence. The housewives are aware that they are trapped in pathetic day-to-day life, while they make meta-commentary on the theatrical dreaming-process presented in the play. The accurate depiction of disappointed women (often middle-aged) illustrates the playwright's awareness that women's wishes are often curtailed, and that women are often incapable of becoming the central dreamer who can command the involvement of other people in her dream.

Watanabe contends that one's subjectivity is formed through other people's perceptions. However, she does not seem to feel the same sense of enclosure that is felt by the women of other groups--especially Kisaragi and Kishida. She challenges the audiences' perception through surrealistc techniques, which seems to support her notion of subject as reflection at first glance. She
constantly shifts the identity of the characters and scenes, at the expense of the coherency of a storyline. This seems to be indicating that human existence is nothing more than a constantly shifting thought-process. However, the playwright’s reliance on the dreaming subject as an organizing force ultimately places her among romantic authors who believe in a creator-subject whose imagination is the center of the world. Watanabe is one who wishes, dreams, and creates, in spite of all of the possibly disappointing factors of a woman’s existence.

Watanabe Eriko, by identifying herself with the power of imagination, acts as the creator, the source, and the origin, a mode of subjectivity that has rarely been assigned to women. Her open assertion that she is the subject and the source demonstrates the possibility of a new mode of subjectivity for women. The playwright states that she is now "a charismatic [karisuma teki] leader" (15 June 1989). Nonetheless, she keeps an ironical distance from the self-indulgent dreamers thereby adding another dimension to her assertion to be the subject. In other words, the playwright shows her sensibility towards those who are ignored in the dreamer’s narrative. The fact may illustrate Watanabe’s possibly contradictory wish and awareness as a woman playwright; i.e., a wish to be the creative subject and
an awareness of disillusionment often attached to women's wishes. The playwright both upholds and refutes the power associated with the subject and the creator.

The four women's theatre groups have been operating and producing critically acclaimed plays for at least a decade. Considering the financial difficulties associated with the small-scale theatre, the sheer staying power demonstrates the women's achievement in the artistic fields. The women of the four theatre groups are the subjects of creation, thus presenting a mode of subjectivity that has rarely been assigned to women. Further, the four women's theatre groups are constantly challenging social conditioning, through their illustration of women's subjectivity-formation, and through the intensity of theatrical pleasure and sense perception that leads the spectators to go beyond their normative beliefs.
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