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Restaging the Spectacular:
Misemono and Kabuki Theater 1700-1900

By

Melissa Dawn Van Wyk

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requirements for the degree of

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in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jonathan Zwicker

Professor Daniel O'Neill

Professor Julia Fawcett

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Abstract

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Japanese Language

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“Restaging the Spectacular: *Misemono* and Kabuki Theater 1700-1900,” traces the intersections among stage spectacle, knowledge, and the body in early modern Japan through an examination of the longstanding relationship between spectacle shows and kabuki. I argue that recovering and attending to the spectacular elements of kabuki—mechanical devices, acrobatics, extraordinary bodies, and so forth—both calls into question existing narratives about kabuki and also reveals the theatrical nature of public discourses of knowledge, medicine, and spectacle in early modern Japan. While primarily focused on the stage, this project both has broader implications that acknowledge the ways in which spectacle can – and historically has – critiqued regimes of knowledge or authority but also interrogates how spectacle was often simultaneously complicit in the production and reinforcement of constructions of the normal by sensationalizing the strange or unusual through exhibition and display.

In Chapter 1, I examine how eighteenth-century playwrights like Namiki Shōza drew inspiration from *karakuri* (mechanical) spectacle shows to develop an aesthetics of hiddenness and wonder in kabuki in the Ōsaka region by fundamentally altering the relationship between front and backstage. I then turn to the career of Hasegawa Kanbei XI in Edo and his large-scale immersive set designs to show how these spectacles document a shift toward the revelation of previously hidden technologies of the stage as the profile of specialized set designers and stage technology rose in the early nineteenth century. Chapter 2 looks at portrayals of the materiality of the stage and theatrical objects in print in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries and the use of illustrative techniques such as decontextualization, cataloguing, dissection, and disarticulation drawn from the natural sciences and illustrated encyclopedias of the eighteenth century. These new ways of looking at the world and its objects inspired a reevaluation of the theater and its techniques of representation and generated a visual language of the stage that would appear in a wide variety of publications throughout the nineteenth century.

In Chapter 3, I address the history of acrobatics and aerial lifts in kabuki in relationship to trends in acrobatic spectacle shows and circuses and argue that the ambivalent reception of the acrobatic tricks of late nineteenth-century actor Ichikawa Kodanji IV, one of the last actors to be known for the use of acrobatics and aerial lifts, was in fact a continuation of criticisms of spectacle that had existed since the late seventeenth century. Considering both more

conventional forms of acrobatics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century performance by *onnagata* (male actors of female roles), and less often considered forms of spectacular embodiment such as *ningyōburi* puppet mimicry, I recontextualize the enormously influential career and writing of the onnagata Yoshizawa Ayame within this history of the body and argue that scholarship on gender performativity has overemphasized Ayame's conceptions of performativity of onnagata at the expense of attention to these lineages of the spectacular body. "Restaging the Spectacular" concludes with an examination of the career of the onnagata Sawamura Tanosuke III (1845-1878) and his experimentation with various stage tricks after undergoing multiple amputations of his legs and hands. The medical spectacle which surrounded his body at the time of his surgeries and the sentimental spectacle which characterized the reception of his performances would reemerge in the form of sensationalized depictions of his life and body in early Meiji illustrated newspapers and fiction such as Okamoto Kisen's Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi (1880).

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Introduction

A curious story claims that in 1778 three “genius” figures from the worlds of theater, literature, and the natural sciences collaborated on a spectacle exhibition in Edo that featured a black cow with the Buddhist prayer “*namu amida butsu*” written in white fur on its back. How exactly the cow’s fur had been bleached to form the phrase isn’t clear, but the spectacle of the cow was advertised with a sign reading, “led on a pilgrimage to Zenkōji Temple by a cow.”¹ This was a reference to a legend of an old woman who, when a piece of cloth she had been drying in the sun on the eaves of a building got caught on a cow’s horns, chased after the cow all the way to Zenkōji Temple and there achieved sudden enlightenment. On one level, this reference to the woman’s story of achieving sudden enlightenment through the most unexpected of means was a humorous reference meant to add to the appeal of the spectacle of whatever chemical means had been used to color the cow’s fur. On another, however, it also meaningfully suggests (perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheekly) that there is in fact no telling what realizations may be had or wisdom be gained from diversions and entertainments such as these.

In addition to the clever framing provided by the legend of the cow, there was at least one other reason why this spectacle was reportedly so well received. The three geniuses of the story are Hiraga Gennai, a prominent figure in Dutch studies in the late eighteenth century and active inventor and fiction writer, Utei Enba, publisher, fiction author and theater aficionado, and Tsuruya Nanboku IV, kabuki playwright known for plays such as *Ghost Stories at Yotsuya*.² In his analysis of spectacle and vision in Edo culture and kabuki, Hattori Yukio describes the story of these “three geniuses” as a “communal fantasy of admiration by Edoites,” persisting from the 1770s through the 1820s.³ Even while acknowledging the unlikelihood that Nanboku actually participated in the scheme, however, as he was both too young and unestablished at the time and only a much later account makes the claim that he was involved at all,⁴ even Hattori himself still

¹ The story appears in several accounts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with slightly varying details, but Hiraga Gennai is typically credited for devising the cow’s bleached fur while Utei Enba supplied the reference to the legend of Zenkōji Temple. Various accounts suggest that Gennai either burned or used some unknown chemicals to bleach the fur. See Nobuhiro Shinji, *Rakugo ha ikani shite keisei sareta ka* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1986), 16 and Hattori Yukio, *Sakasama no yūrei: “shi” no Edo bunkaron* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2005), 262-263 for more analysis of records of the event and their discrepancies.

² About Tsuruya Nanboku’s relationship to *misemono*, especially his inclusion of scenes of *misemono* in his plays, see Gunji Masakatsu, “Misemono to Nanboku” in *Tsuruya Nanboku: Kabuki ga unda mukyōyō no hyōgen shugi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 1994), 144-157. Satoko Shimazaki also briefly mentions Nanboku’s involvement with *misemono* in *Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 104.

³ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁴ Nisōji’s version of the tale is clearly embellished in several other ways, as Hattori Yukio points out (262-263). Satoko Shimazaki also mentions the story in *Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai*

seems to find the linkage of these three figures in a moment of comic spectacle an almost irresistible idea. One reason for the initial generation of the story, and for its persistence and attraction over time, is surely how concisely it encapsulates complex interrelationships between the fields that these three figures represent in the tale: the natural sciences, publishing about the theater and *misemono* spectacle shows, and the spectacular on the kabuki stage.

Early modern spectacle shows (*misemono*) such as this one operated in a fluid space of entertainment and knowledge production and circulation—demonstrating mechanics and technology to the masses, displaying feats of acrobatic and physical skill, exhibiting rare objects or exotic animals, fascinating spectators with the seemingly impossible, and facilitating direct encounters with the foreign. As much as they demonstrated the inventive and entertaining ends to which scientific experiments, knowledge of the natural world, or new technologies could be put, they equally displayed the ludic nature of these enterprises and the centrality of wonder, marvel, and spectacle to the generation and circulation of knowledge in early modern Japan. The identities of these “three geniuses,” furthermore, point to an economy of spectacle and knowledge that extended far beyond the social networks of those engaging with the natural sciences or Dutch learning, or even the ludic spaces of spectacle shows, to not only incorporate the theatrical stage but, indeed, even to center on it at crucial moments in kabuki’s history.

The simultaneous tenuousness and irresistibility of kabuki playwright Nanboku’s involvement as part of this narrative, however, is indicative of how kabuki’s place within this broader ecology has tended to be minimized or overlooked entirely. “Restaging the Spectacular: *Misemono* and Kabuki Theater 1700-1900,” traces the intersections among stage spectacle, knowledge, and the body in early modern Japan through an examination of the longstanding relationship between spectacle shows and kabuki. I argue that recovering and attending to the spectacular elements of kabuki—mechanical devices, acrobatics, extraordinary bodies, and so forth—both calls into question existing narratives about kabuki and also reveals the theatrical nature of public discourses of knowledge, medicine, and spectacle in early modern Japan. While primarily focused on the stage, this project both has broader implications that acknowledge the ways in which spectacle can – and historically has – critiqued regimes of knowledge or authority, but also interrogates how spectacle was often simultaneously complicit in the production and reinforcement of constructions of the normal by sensationalizing the strange or unusual through exhibition and display.

Such a connection between theater and the production and circulation of these different types of knowledge may at first seem counterintuitive or insubstantial. There have been many studies, for instance, that have pointed to the widespread adaptations of technology, especially those imported from abroad, for mass consumption in print or exhibition in spectacle shows.⁵ And yet it can be easy to dismiss kabuki’s uptake of these technologies as an end point, as the

to the *Vengeful Female Ghost* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 104, while Nobuhiro Shinji leaves out mention of Nanboku’s involvement at all. Nobuhiro Shinji, *Rakugo ha ikani shite keisei sareta ka*, 16.

⁵ Timon Screech, *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan: The Lens within the Heart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Yulia Frumer, *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), Uchiyama Jun’ichi, *Edo no kōkishin: Bijutsu to kagaku no deai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1996), and Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu to iu misemono: Abura-e chaya no jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993).

theater simply adapting an already circulating trend, rather than attending to theater's more active involvement in exploring the potential and limitations of these technologies or forms of knowledge, or to the role of theater in either undermining or reinforcing definitions of the normal and strange, average and extraordinary. In almost all of the cases that I examine in "Restaging the Spectacular," however, theater provided a space for a complex mixing of existing mechanics, modes of representation, and conceptions of the body or medicine with these new technologies or forms of knowledge for a viewing audience. Kabuki theater, ever ready and quick to adapt materials from other performance traditions, literature, or other trends in mass culture, creatively integrated new technologies and the representational modes they facilitated into its existing dramaturgy.

Although there have been numerous fruitful studies into the relationship between literature, wonder, science and knowledge in the early modern world,⁶ the connection between theater or performance and the production and circulation of various branches of knowledge has only recently begun to garner more substantial academic attention. This body of scholarship, particularly as it concerns the context of the early modern world, has demonstrated how crucial an awareness of the intertwined nature of performance and the production and circulation of knowledge is to an understanding of the latter. Several studies have focused not only on how frequently scientific content was staged in drama, but also how these "science plays" explored the potentials and limitations of their concepts for new forms of playwrighting and staging, or on the intersection of medicine, knowledge about the body, and the theater.⁷ Taken together, this body of scholarship has furthermore explored the profound ways that the enterprise of science itself was performative or spectacular.⁸

While this focus on the relationship between theater, science, knowledge, and spectacle has been a more recent phenomenon in scholarship focused on Europe or nineteenth-century theater in the United States, the existence and importance of the relationship between kabuki and spectacle shows has been widely acknowledged within Japanese-language scholarship on the history of kabuki to date. This genealogy of scholarship further stands on the shoulders of a legacy of work by eclectic (and at times eccentric) collectors, recorders, and compilers of the

⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), Lorraine Daston & Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), Mary Blaine Campbell, *Wonder & Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), Sarah Tindal Kareem, *Eighteenth-century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realisms, Probability, and Magic* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁷ Kristen Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage: From Doctor Faustus to Copenhagen* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), Enrique Garcia Santo-Tomas, ed. *Science on Stage in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), Kristen Shepherd-Barr, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁸ Al Coppola, *The Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Helmar Schramm, ed., et al., *Collection – Laboratory – Theater: Scenes of Knowledge in the 17th Century* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). To this has recently been added reevaluations of circus performance and acrobatics: Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), Anna-Sophie Jurgens, ed. *Circus, Science and Technology: Dramatising Innovation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), Kirstin Smith, *Stunts of Late Nineteenth-Century New York: Aestheticized Precarity, Endangered Liveness* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

spectacles of *misemono* and kabuki, as well as *rakugo* and other performance traditions, from Utei Enba (1743 - 1822), Utakuni Hamamatsu (1776 - 1827), and Odera Gyokuchō (1800 - 1878) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to Asakura Musei (1877 - 1927) in prewar Japan. In more recent history, Gunji Masakatsu's "Karuwaza no keifu" or "A Genealogy of Acrobatics" in his book *Kabuki: Yōshiki to denshō* (*Kabuki: Style and Tradition*, 1954) and Hattori Yukio's *Sakasama yūrei* (*Ghosts Doing Handstands*, 1989) have renewed interest in just some of the profound and far-reaching ways that *misemono* and street performances shaped kabuki. The relationship between *misemono* and other arts has also recently been generatively taken up by a number of scholars from other fields of study such as *yōkai* studies, art, or literature, including Kawazoe Yū, Yokoyama Yasuko, Kinoshita Naoyuki, and Yamada Kazuhito.⁹

Two terms that have repeatedly emerged in articulations of the relationship between *misemono* and kabuki within this rich genealogy of scholarship are *misemono-sei* 見世物性 ("misemono-ness") and *keren-mi* 外連味 or ケレン味 ("showiness" or "spectacularity"). These terms turn the nouns for spectacle shows or stage tricks respectively into adjectives to describe plots, dramaturgical elements, or a more amorphous quality of exhibition from such shows in kabuki. Developed to compensate for the absence of an all-encompassing term for spectacle until the widespread adoption of *keren* at the very end of the nineteenth century,¹⁰ the convenience of these terms has also skirted a more meaningful consideration of the nature, history, and social meanings of spectacle on the kabuki stage over the course of the early modern period. Terms specifically used to denote and advertise stage mechanics, such as *ōdōgu ōjikake* 大道具大仕掛 were used within kabuki-related publications from the mid-eighteenth century,¹¹ but, most often, spectacle was discussed in terms of its physical effects—how it "shocked the eyes," "curled the tongue," or "stunned audiences to silence." As I discuss in Chapter 3, some of this focus on the bodily experience of spectacle can be attributed to the importance of actor reviews as a source for tracing the use of stage tricks in kabuki, with their structural multivocality marking a longstanding ambivalence in spectacle's reception over the course of the early modern period. This very absence of a single, convenient term is in itself, however, also a powerful indication of the multifaceted, genre-crossing, and fluid nature of spectacle in the Edo period, as is this tendency to account for spectacle's embodied effects rather than its objects.

"Restaging the Spectacular" essentially begins with and repeatedly returns to these questions. What do we really mean when we talk about theatrical "spectacle"? How did its meaning change over the course of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, and how might it relate to other concepts such as wonder or marvel in the early modern world? What new perspectives might emerge—both for kabuki's dramaturgy and for the theatrical nature of public

⁹ Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu to iu misemono: Abura-e chaya no jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993), Kawazoe Yū, *Edo no misemono* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), Yokoyama Yasuko, *Yōkai tejina no jidai* (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2012), Yamada Kazuhito, *Takeda karakuri no kenkyū*. (Tokyo: Ōfū, 2017).

¹⁰ Hattori Yukio, *Kabuki no kīwado* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 165-166.

¹¹ Tricks within kabuki were also at times described (and, indeed, maligned, depending on the context) by referencing the genre of spectacle performance from which they were derived: mechanical shows, various forms of acrobatics, and so forth. When used negatively, this suggests an awareness of and reinforcing of genre boundaries between kabuki and other performing styles, though this was far from consistent across the early modern period.

discourses of knowledge, medicine, and science—by attending to the more spectacular elements of kabuki and its relationship to spectacle shows? What new figures come to the fore in highlighting these lateral connections between kabuki and other performance forms and shows, and how might these alternative genealogies provide new perspectives on existing narratives of kabuki's development and dramaturgy?

In addition to pursuing these lines of inquiry, the study of *misemono* and kabuki's relationship also productively necessitates several crucial border crossings; as kabuki's longstanding relationship to spectacle shows demonstrates, the performance ecology of early modern Japan was an inextricably enmeshed one, in which isolating the development of one tradition or genre from others is largely impossible. Stage technology and performance techniques were especially free-flowing between theaters and street performers, as well as across regions and, indeed, across temporal divides. Although stage tricks and spectacle have been most closely associated with Kansai kabuki in the Kyoto and Osaka region, for instance, and Edo's contributions characterized as derivative, this spacial relationship was in fact much more complicated, necessitating a cross-regional attention to the development of stage spectacle and kabuki's history.

Finally, the Meiji period has remained an important point of transition for both spectacle shows and kabuki. The Meiji period ushered in with it an institutionalization of branches of knowledge that had long been the territory of spectacle shows—the exhibition of curiosities and rare animals was subsumed into museums and zoos, dissemination of knowledge about mechanics, technology, and foreign cultures became the territory of world's fairs and exhibitions. At the same time, certain types of spectacles became more heavily policed or outright prohibited, most often those involved in the display of the human body, such as shows by performers with visible disabilities, or displays of life-like carved wooden dolls depicting all manner of salacious or violent tableaux.¹² This “civilizing” or sanitation of *misemono* in the early Meiji period, however, by no means meant that they lost their potency or relevance. Quite to the contrary, the operating theater, the laboratory, the museum gallery, the sprawling zoos, all not only maintained striking continuities in form and function with their *misemono* predecessors, but concepts of the strange or unusual, developed within *misemono* shows over the course of the nineteenth century, undergirded many aspects of the Meiji project of modernization.

In contrast to this recognition of how entrenched *misemono* and their aesthetics were in Meiji culture, a commonly repeated assumption about Meiji kabuki concerns spectacle's marginalization from its stages. Influenced by western theater and a newly imported dismissal of stage spectacle as superfluous or cheap, Meiji kabuki is supposed to have marked a turn away from stage mechanics or acrobatic spectacle. As will become clear in several of the chapters of this dissertation, however, this narrative is insufficient in at least two ways; first, ambivalence toward certain kinds of stage spectacle had much longer roots in the Edo period. Criticisms of performers being *too* acrobatic or resembling street performers of acrobatics too closely, for instance, not only appear already in seventeenth-century actor reviews from the Genroku period, the decades best known for the ubiquity of acrobatics and spectacle in kabuki, but were also reiterated periodically throughout the Edo period. This was not, however, always necessarily

¹² Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 22-26, and Andrew L. Markus, “The Carnival of Edo: Misemono Spectacles from Contemporary Accounts” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45, no. 2 (Dec., 1985), 539-540.

about the quality of spectacle itself or its role within theater so much as about its associations with street performances or, later on, its occasional association with provincial performance, or an assumed lack of skill or aptitude in other styles of performance on the part of actors. Second, many reforms or innovations to kabuki dramaturgy or performance space in the Meiji period enacted their own sleight-of-hand, as aspects of early modern stage spectacle reemerged in new forms or new spectacles were simply exchanged for existing ones. For as much as spectacle was ostensibly about newness—shocking new technologies, previously unencountered foreign objects, animals, or persons, unprecedented feats of physical skill—its history is composed of repetitions, restagings, and recontextualizations of the old and existing.

Chapter 1, “Kabuki’s Mechanical Revolutions,” examines how eighteenth-century playwrights like Namiki Shōza drew inspiration from *karakuri* (mechanical) spectacle shows to develop an aesthetics of hiddenness and wonder in kabuki in the Ōsaka region by fundamentally altering the relationship between front and backstage. Shōza’s greatest contributions to the development of stage mechanics came not so much only from the advances in technology, scale, and the capability of stage machinery, as from how he used these technologies to alter theatrical time. Speeding up transitions between scenes, slowing down the action of a play to reveal the previously hidden consequences of characters’ actions by lifting up a portion of the stage, and dynamically expressing a new simultaneity to stage action through the revolving stage, Shōza capitalized on the longstanding relationship between *karakuri* and timekeeping technology to revolutionize the use and meaning of stage mechanics.

Decades after Shōza’s career, this association between time and stage machinery continued in the development of a new staging practice known as *makunashi* or “curtainless” performances. Becoming a spectacle in their own right for their speedy execution of scene transitions in view of the audience without closing the main stage curtain, they also generated independent spaces of exhibition for large-scale stage machinery, launching the career of set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XI. Kanbei was active in both kabuki and *misemono* shows, introducing *makunashi* staging and kabuki mechanics to broader audiences while also incorporating the immersiveness and scale of these spectacles back into the theaters of kabuki. Considering the complex economic factors and performance trends behind Kanbei’s extravagant and immersive mechanical tricks on stage and in spectacle shows, I argue that the profile of specialized set designers and stage technology rose to entirely new heights in the early nineteenth century, but were also the object of ambivalent attitudes about the value of spectacles and the classes of audiences who patronized them.

Chapter 1 concludes with the consideration of another ubiquitous technology of time in the theater—lighting. New lighting technologies such as gas chandeliers, gas-based neon signs, and reflective spotlights featured prominently in Meiji theater space and in news stories about reforms to the theaters. Part of a larger effort to reform and “sanitize” the theater space in early Meiji, the transition to gas, and later, electric lighting was meant to signal an end to kabuki as both a conflagration risk and source of moral corruption within the city. In actuality, however, the spectacle of these new technologies of lighting in Meiji theater reforms were more of a continuation of the associations between spectacle and lighting technologies than a departure from them.

Chapter 2, “Theater as Technology: Illustrating the Stage in Print,” turns to portrayals of the materiality of the stage and theatrical objects in print in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth

centuries and their use of illustrative techniques such as decontextualization, cataloguing, dissection, and disarticulation drawn from the natural sciences and illustrated encyclopedias of the eighteenth century. These new ways of looking at the world and its objects inspired a reevaluation of the theater and its techniques of representation and generated a visual language of the stage that would appear in a wide variety of publications throughout the nineteenth century. As the hidden mechanisms behind not just mechanical spectacles but also the theater stage itself became a widespread subject of depiction and description in print, new visions of the theater appeared in which the actors and action on the stage were imagined as only one part of a much larger whole. Although the applications of encyclopedic illustration techniques to polysemic theatrical objects would seem to suggest that the playful nature of theatrical representation and stage objects uniquely positions them to critique the stability of representation found in illustrated encyclopedias such as *Kinmō zui* 訓蒙図彙 (1666) and *Wakan sansai zue* 和漢三才図会 (1712), it ultimately points to something quite different: the ludic nature of knowledge found in these illustrated encyclopedias themselves.

Turning ultimately to iterations of encyclopedias of the theater in the Meiji period, I track how the nostalgia for the kabuki of the late Edo period motivated a return to these much earlier print models for illustrating the stage and its spectacles as means to represent and experience an increasingly distant theatrical past. Part of a larger trend of nostalgia for the Edo period to emerge in mid-Meiji, the prints demonstrate not only that theater was a central locus for this longing, but also that the illustration of the stage machinery and props, established in encyclopedic books on the theater and on the pages of fiction in the early modern period, were themselves a means to experience this theatrical past. This expression of nostalgia, however, was accompanied by a flattening of the development of Edo kabuki in which the relatively short years of kabuki's confinement to the outskirts of the city in Saruwaka-chō in the final decades of the Edo period came to represent early modern kabuki, effectively collapsing nineteenth-century kabuki into a single moment of stage practices.

The subsequent two chapters argue that an appreciation of the spectacular elements of kabuki offers a new understanding of the relationship between spectacle, social identity, the body, and kabuki in early modern Japan. In Chapter 3 begins with the career of Ichikawa Kodanji IV, whose career represented the greatest heights for aerial lifts (*chūnori* 宙乗り) in the late nineteenth century. Kodanji's development of this aerial physicality was widely acclaimed by audiences at the time, but he also repeatedly faced criticisms that his use of spectacle was compensation for the shortcomings of his physical appearance, that he was no different from a street acrobat, or that it made his style too provincial. Coinciding with a boom in the popularity of acrobatic troupes in Edo in the 1850s, this ambivalent reception of Kodanji's acrobatics and spectacular performances, while seeming to mark a decline in the acceptance of spectacle within kabuki's dramaturgy, in fact constituted a continuation of criticisms of spectacle that had existed since the Genroku period. On the cusp of a reinterpretation of *misemono* and, especially, acrobatics, in light of an influx of foreign circus acts in the late 1850s and their adaptations on the kabuki stage, the criticisms of Kodanji's use of stage tricks signaled an already shifting landscape of spectacle and its place in kabuki's dramaturgy.

I then turn to the early history of acrobatics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century performance to argue that spectacular portrayals of femininity referenced not an observed everyday "femaleness" but instead an aesthetic of acrobatics which emphasized the physical

virtuosity of the actor's body. By recontextualizing the enormously influential career and writing of the *onnagata* Yoshizawa Ayame within this history of the body, I argue that scholarship on gender performativity has overemphasized Ayame's conceptions of performativity of *onnagata* at the expense of attention to these lineages of the spectacular body. While in some cases these acrobatics signaled a rupture into the extraordinary from the everyday (in the manifestation of vengeful female ghosts, for instance), acrobatic tricks were also about spectacles of verticality, leaps of faith, and imagined aerial perspectives. How and why these expressions of transformation or precarity came to be coded as predominantly female on the stage has often been attributed to the relative lightness and flexibility of the bodies of early *onnagata* actors, but it also had much to do with the association between transformation, spectacle, and dance, with gendered performance, a linkage that would continue to influence the development of *onnagata* performance long after this early stage of development.

Although the kind of overt acrobatic tricks of *onnagata* performance of the Genroku period declined in the decades following, other forms of spectacular physicality, which ultimately trace their roots back to this early developmental stage, continued to form an essential part of *onnagata* performance. One such style is a mode of movement in which an actor, at times supported by other actors in the role of "puppeteers," physically enacts a role in the manner of a puppet. Known as *ningyōburi*, or "puppet-likeness," the style emphasized restrained, precise, and exaggeratedly stilted movements, a far cry from the dynamic flips, jumps, and highwire acts of Genroku acrobatics. Emerging from the close relationship not just between kabuki and puppet theater but also mechanical dolls and spectacle shows, *ningyōburi*, like these earlier acrobatics, developed over time into a primarily *onnagata* form of metatheatrical expression for the intense emotion of female characters divorced from narratives of supernatural or extraordinary transformation.

"Restaging the Spectacular" concludes with an examination of the career of the *onnagata* Sawamura Tanosuke III (1845-1878) and his experimentation with stage tricks after undergoing multiple amputations of his legs and hands. By considering the various prosthetics that Tanosuke employed or commissioned—one imported from the US, one made by a carver famous for his life-like wooden dolls (*ikiningyō*)—alongside his use of stage tricks and machinery, I argue that Tanosuke's use of conventional kabuki stagecraft and performance practices called into question the notions of somatic lack behind these other early prosthetic limbs.

Ikinizingyō in particular were an important public space in which conceptions of the body were performed, especially through depictions of somatic difference, the exposed and sensual body, or the body in pain, but they were also transitioning toward more sanctioned uses as anatomical or ethnographic models for world's fairs and exhibitions. The survival of sketches for Tanosuke's prosthetic leg among *ikiningyō*-carver Matsumoto Kisaburō's anatomical drawings provides a material trace of its reinforcement of an attitude of physical difference as absence or lack that could be replaced with visually approximate anatomical models, at times sacrificing mobility gain for appearance.

In contrast to these conventional prosthetics, Tanosuke collaborated with set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XIV and playwright Kawatake Mokuami to modify existing stage tricks or performance techniques, such as the *chūnori* aerial lift or *ningyōburi*, to develop ways not only to support Tanosuke on stage but to do so in ways that conformed to longstanding conventions for kabuki stage spectacle. These innovative uses of existing theatrical stage tricks and

mechanics such as these assistive technologies in his early years back on the stage critically reimagined prosthetics as generative integrations between actor and technology rather than medicalized somatic replacements.

The legacy of the exhibition of nonnormative bodies on *misemono* stages also shaped public reception of Tanosuke's body and performances in other ways as well, most notably in how Tanosuke's life, career, and the medical spectacle surrounding his surgery and prosthetics were taken up in the sensationalized print media of early Meiji. *Misemono* spectacle shows had long served an important function in disseminating knowledge about the human body through anatomical models, displays of virtuosity, and the exhibitions of bodies with visible disabilities, but the ethics of spectacle were more strongly called into question in the early Meiji period, particularly as it concerned the exhibition of the body. Early depictions of Tanosuke in illustrated newspapers and related fiction, such as Okamoto Kisen's *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* (1880), adopted and built upon the same language of the curious or strange and displays of the body that had been the territory of these spectacle shows, sensationalizing Tanosuke's body on their pages. How his performances were ultimately received and represented in print demonstrate how spectacle could at once present opportunities for challenging the public's expectations while also lending itself to the reproduction of other narratives and tropes of exhibition, strangeness, and curiosities. This potential for both print and the theater stage to become spaces for public exhibition and sensationalism for someone with a physical disability, however, did not always remain unmarked, even within the pages of this fiction itself.

Chapter 1: Kabuki's Mechanical Revolutions



Figure 1: Amusements at the Dry Riverbed, Shijō. Kanbun era (1661-73)
Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Our best visual sources concerning kabuki's early beginnings on the riverbed at Shijō in Kyoto at the turn of the seventeenth century are folding screens such as this one, painted with lively scenes of the various entertainments there. Often when such scrolls appear in scholarship on kabuki, they've been cropped down to focus attention exclusively on these early kabuki performances and their audiences, isolating them from the other entertainments and activities depicted in the full paintings. As Hattori Yukio has suggested, however,¹ if we zoom out, in other words, if we reconsider these performances in their original contexts—both in these painted scrolls and on the riverbed itself—what comes into view is a much more multifaceted performance space comprised not only of kabuki and puppet theater but also of a variety of *misemono* spectacles. These painted screens, of course, represent idealized versions of the performance space of the Kyoto riverbed, and as such, we should be cautious of taking them at face value as accurate illustrations of the relationship between kabuki and a broader performance landscape. Yet these images and their production tell an important story about kabuki's history and its development, enmeshed within these complex performance spaces in which dance, music, and theater operated alongside spectacles of acrobatics, exhibitions of exotic animals, or displays of mechanics.

¹ Hattori Yukio, *Sakasama no yūrei: "Shi" no Edo bunkaron* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2005), 239.

Restaged within this larger context, the central role of kabuki's more spectacular elements in its history—its large-scale stage mechanics, supernatural apparitions, and displays of physical virtuosity—come to the foreground in new ways. While the physical proximity or distance of kabuki theaters and spectacle shows would change over the course of the Edo period, as would the nature of the spectacles upon which kabuki would draw for its own innovations, this relationship between kabuki and spectacle shows, born on the riverbed in Kyoto in kabuki's earliest formative years, was one of the most consistent and lasting sources of influence on kabuki's spaces and spectacular facets of performance. Playwrights such as Namiki Shōza in the mid-eighteenth century, professional set designers such as Hasegawa Kanbei XI in nineteenth-century Edo, and theater managers such as Morita Kan'ya in the early Meiji period, all contributed to recurrent reinterpretations of kabuki's stage spectacles. Kanbei's career in particular, both on the kabuki stage and in *misemono* shows, points to a larger, overarching, narrative which is crucial to understanding the theater of the nineteenth century in Japan but which has often been overlooked and ignored: that the history of nineteenth-century kabuki is not only one of great actors like Ichikawa Danjūrō VII and Nakamura Utaemon III or even of great playwrights like Tsuruya Nanboku IV and Kawatake Mokuami but the rise to prominence of the physical stage itself as an object of curiosity and spectacle, a prominence that could sometimes dwarf the actor and the dramaturgy and emerge out of margins to assume center stage. As this chapter attests to, however, often what emerged onto the scene ostensibly as a new phenomenon or technology was in fact something of a sleight-of-hand, revealing even kabuki's most dramatic revolutions to be echoes from its past.

First Revolutions: Playwright Namiki Shōza & Karakuri Mechanics



Figure 2: Namiki Shōza *kyōgen zarae*. (1785)
Special Collections of the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library.

This oft-reproduced illustration of Osaka playwright Namiki Shōza, found in a posthumous biography titled *Namiki Shōza ichidai banashi* 並木正三代噺 (1785), perfectly encapsulates how the text characterizes Shōza’s playwrighting throughout: as an impressive and harmonious, perhaps even natural, merging of play crafting and invention.² Rays of light radiate in a semi-circle from Shōza’s head as he reads what appears to be a playscript laid out on his desk before him, illustrating his ingenuity as author. Scripts of some of his most famous plays are stacked on shelves behind him, thick volumes like the one he is presently examining: *Keisei ama no hagoromo*, famous for its pioneering use of the stage lift in its climactic final scene, *Sanjikkoku yofune no hajimari*, in which Shōza revolutionized the structure and use of the rotating stage to widespread acclaim. The publication of *Namiki Shōza ichidai banashi* thirteen years after Shōza’s death undoubtedly contributed to the solidification of Shōza’s reputation as a genius of both mechanical invention and playwright, even while acknowledging the profound ways that the diverse and fluid performance district of Dōtonbori shaped his contributions. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Shōza would be credited as the originator of some of kabuki’s most central stage machinery.

Yet Shōza was far from the original inventor of stage lifts, the revolving stage, nor the first to attempt improvements or innovations to these established technologies. Despite the discourses of novelty or innovation that so frequently characterized the advertisement or reception of kabuki’s spectacles, and which appears clearly in this image of Shōza as well, this development was largely a restaging or recycling of the basic mechanics that had been developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to new purposes or effects. If, however, Shōza’s own contributions can be seen as a rehashing of existing mechanics of the stage given this context, why did Shōza become so singularly associated with the invention of stage machinery, at times overshadowing what was in fact a slow development process occurring over the course of the 1730s and 40s and through the efforts of multiple playwrights and several theaters?

The precise origins of the revolving stage and other machinery remain murky, but the most accepted narrative, proposed by later texts such as the *Kabuki kotohajime* 歌舞伎事始 (1762), the *zuihitsu Nansui manyū* 南水漫遊 and others, locates their invention with an Edo playwright, Nakamura Denshichi, sometime in the 1710s or 20s.³ Denshichi was active as both an actor and playwright, and several pre-Shōza innovations to stage mechanics are attributed to him, including early forms of *hiki-dōgu* 引道具 and *seri-dashi* せり出し (what came to be known

² This provides an interesting contrast with how the work of earlier playwright Nakamura Denshichi, who similarly pioneered large-scale stage machinery, is described. Referred to as being “like grafting bamboo onto a tree” in *Kabuki kotohajime*, the implication is that it was the very unnaturalness of the merging of seemingly inharmonious or unlike things that made Denshichi’s plays so compelling to audiences. Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6 (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1973), 132.

³ Hamamatsu Utakuni claims in *Nansui manyū* that Denshichi had developed several scene-change techniques, the *oshi-dashi*, *hikikaeshi*, and the revolving stage (then called *bun-mawashi* ぶん廻し), possibly for a play titled *Yome-iri Sumidagawa* at the Nakamura-za. So far, however, no contemporary written record has emerged to collaborate this claim and no title of that play has been definitively identified to confirm Utakuni’s narrative.

as the *seri-age* せり上げ stage lift).⁴ The technology was then subsequently adopted in Kamigata theaters as well. In contrast to many other cases in which stage mechanics or performance styles were developed in Kamigata and imported into Edo (which has at times giving rise to a derision of Edo's stagecraft as largely derivative of Kamigata trends), Denshichi's career and stage tricks are an early, if isolated, testament to the existence of Edo's own contributions. Humorously, this recognition of Edo's influence on Kamigata stagecraft could be something of an annoyance for later Osaka writers such as Hamamatsu Uta-kuni, the author of *Nansui manyū*, who would demean Denshichi's large-scale scene change using a moving platform in the play *Yome-iri Sumidagawa* as rather "simple" in retrospect: "He used a *hiki-dogu* to stage the riverbank of as much as 4 kilometers [1 *li*] from the Ryōgoku Bridge to the embankment by Mimeguri Shrine. The performance was well attended because it was of such grand scale and such a rare sight, but as it was merely a flat background affixed to wooden frames and it was a simple trick to think back on it now."⁵

While few records survive which describe or reference the mechanics used in Denshichi's early version of the rotating stage, the terminology for it (*mawari dōgu* "revolving prop" as opposed to *mawari butai* "revolving stage") and the explanation how Shōza's revolving stage differed from it suggests that earlier versions involved an additional platform on wheels that would then be rotated by hand on top of the stage itself, possibly by up to 3 or 4 stagehands.⁶ Similarly, with *hiki-dōgu* or *hiki-dashi* tricks, both of which involved the movement of large platforms on, off, or around the stage with props, sets, or actors on them, the stagehands responsible for pushing or pulling the platforms were typically in full view of the audience. As with the flourishing of acrobatic spectacles in kabuki, the appeal of these tricks, while still amazing audiences with their newness or innovative applications in the plays, was not incongruous with the visibility and exhibition of their mechanics and means nor reliant on their concealment.

Given these characteristics of existing stage machinery at the time, there are several aspects of Shōza's career and his redeployment of stage tricks that begin to provide an answer to the question of why his legacy of stage machinery has come to be so emphasized over these earlier developments. Shōza's first notable contribution was a grander scale and greater complexity to the incorporation of mechanics within his performances, achieved both by combining several tricks within the same play or scene and by designing tricks with multistoried buildings. In 1753, for instance, he closed the play *Keisei ama no hagoromo* with a massive stage lift that raised up not just a building from below the stage, but also with it a number of performers who were standing on each of its two levels as the structure rose up into view. Although such stage lifts had been in use for raising up both actors and built structures already

⁴ The invention of the *seri-dashi* has alternatively been attributed to the playwright Higuchi Hanemon who was active at the Yamamura-za during the Hōei period (1704-1711) in *Nansui manyū* and other texts. While the details of Hanemon's use of the *seri-dashi* remain unclear, his plays frequently featured spectacular scenes of acrobatics and other tricks and developing something like the *seri-dashi* would be in keeping with the nature of his plays.

⁵ Hamamatsu Uta-kuni, *Nansui manyū* in *Shin gunsho ruijū* Vol. 4: *Engeki II*, ed. Kokusho Kankōkai (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1908), 611. The section of text before the final criticism is copied almost exactly from *Kabuki kotohajime*, to which Uta-kuni tacked on his dismissive comment.

⁶ Mimasuya Nisōji, *Mimasuya Nisōji kejō kakitome* in *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei* Vol. 6, 567.

prior to this, the size of this building and the inclusion of several actors standing on it as it was lifted up represented a considerable increase in scale and required manpower to achieve the trick.

It's important to remember here that increasing the scale of a trick, while seemingly a simple enterprise, could in fact pose a significant engineering challenge. While sources about the precise nature of the machinery behind these early tricks are extremely limited, transitioning from lifting up a single actor or smaller structure to supporting multiple actors or multistoried structures with actors on them could likely not be accomplished straightforwardly by adding more stagehands for increased power—every aspect of the mechanics, pulleys, and space would have to be reconfigured to account for the greater demand for force and stability. *Namiki Shōza ichidai banashi* records that Shōza introduced a rotated pulley and ropes in order to account for the considerable increase in weight, seemingly bringing the mechanical structure closer to what would be visually depicted and described in later texts at the turn of the nineteenth century. Shōza's achievement with *Keisei ama no hagoromo* established his reputation as playwright both for its impressive mechanics themselves, as well as their successful incorporation within the play itself.⁷

Rather than being raised in a single motion, the action of the scene progresses as a building is raised in stages from below. A fight takes place on the roof of a building and, when one character kills another and then himself, their blood mingles as it flows downward. The action of the stage then follows the trickling blood, with the structure rising to reveal an entire additional floor and tableau below the previous scene, where a character below collects the blood to use as medicine to heal another. Not only does the timing of the raised building shift the focus to the staged blood and the way that it forms the intersection between the narratives of these two sets of characters, the stage lift also functions as a method of narrative revelation. As the structure rises and the scene progresses, more of the context and the way in which actions in one storyline unwittingly impact another quite literally come sequentially into view and apprehension of the audience. Although scene-change mechanics are typically used to speed up transitions, the time needed for the mechanics and stagehands to raise the additional level of the building into view also likely meant that, in this case, there was a coincidental slowing down of the theatrical action as the blood made its journey downward. This slowed progression was coupled with the surprise at the sudden emergence of another level to the building, which had appeared as a given on the stage at the opening of the scene, and the marvel of the building being lifted up from below the stage with seven actors standing on its two levels.

⁷ It's worth noting that the stage lift was not the only clever aspect of this play to contribute to its success. Shōza also incorporated a widespread trend of affixing a plaque to a house's door with the nonsense phrase "*Kino nino yano hano mono*" (キノニノヤノハノモノ) to ward off a recent plague into the play. The phrase came to so associated with the play and with the stage lift that *kino nino no seri-age* was occasionally used to refer to this particular structure of stage lift itself. Takaya Shin, *Nihon butai sōchi-shi* (Kyoto: Butai Sugatasha, 1952), 64.



Figure 3: Illustrated playbill *Keisei ama no hagoromo*.
Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

In addition to expansions of scale such as this one, however, Shōza's most memorable contribution to the development of stage mechanics, and the one which most clearly demonstrates his approach to spectacle in kabuki dramaturgy, is found in his reforms to the revolving stage in 1758. During a climactic stage fight in the final scene of *Sanjikkoku yofune no hajimari* 三十石艦始, Shōza had devised a way to conceal the mechanics of the revolving stage by sinking them and the stagehands pushing it to the space below the stage, making the rotating platform flush with the surrounding boards. The sets or actors on the stage would seem to rotate effortlessly, with the labor and mechanics enabling it inaccessible to audience view. As with the trick for *Keisei ama no hagoromo*, this important change to the mechanics of the stage made a spectacle not of the labor and visible mechanics which had enabled such tricks previously, but instead of the seeming effortless of the trick itself as sets, props, and performers revolved by means entirely hidden from the audience's view.

This dynamic, of aiming to inspire surprise at the trick's hidden mechanics, had underpinned earlier developments of lifts or smaller mechanics to a certain extent already, but this innovation of Shōza's for the revolving stage borrowed even more directly from the aesthetics of mechanical spectacle shows such as the Takeda Shibai. In 1662, Takeda Ōmi held his first performance in what would become the entertainment district of Dōtonbori in Osaka, near the Naka no Shibai kabuki theater that had opened just the year prior. Specializing in performances which featured alternatively child actors and mechanical dolls, the Takeda Shibai flourished in Osaka until the 1760s, when it partially transitioned to traveling performances through the end of the Edo period.

Part of what made the Takeda Shibai, and other mechanical shows like it, so successful was their concealment of the means behind tricks to inspire responses of surprise in the audience. Takeda Shibai and its role in the popularization of mechanics and clockwork technologies in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been the subject of a number of studies already,⁸ but what is most relevant here is how not just its mechanics, but also its aesthetics of hiddenness and wonder more generally were deeply grounded in the performance landscape of Dōtonbori. There is a tendency to consider the performance of mechanics in contexts such as the Takeda Shibai as more secondary to an interest in mechanics, in other words, as one way to make profitable (and by extension, useful) a knowledge of mechanical technologies, and less as a more integral component and more primary end goal for their development. It's true that, certainly by the mid-eighteenth century but also beginning much earlier, Takeda Shibai had incorporated many theatrical elements – particularly actors and narratives borrowed from kabuki or puppet theater – which blurred any potential divisions between spectacles of mechanics or clockwork technologies and theatrical performance. Yet performance and entertainment had always been at the heart of the development of these mechanics themselves, a close relationship which, by the mid-seventeenth century, had contributed both to Takeda Shibai's development into an elaborate theatrical performance and to its integration into the broader performance economy of Dōtonbori.

Given the extent to which any boundaries established between kabuki, puppet theater, and mechanical theater as they developed into more elaborate and distinct genres and spaces of performance remained highly permeable well into the eighteenth century, it's not at all surprising that the mechanics developed in one, if successful, would be quickly adapted into the others. This proximity between puppet theaters, kabuki, and the Takeda Shibai was also more than simply spacial—plays, dramaturgy, and personnel flowed between the theaters in a way integral to kabuki's development of stage spectacle. *Namiki Shōza ichidai banashi*, for instance, narrates how Shōza's childhood escapades in the backstage of the Takeda Shibai inspired later inventions in kabuki stage mechanics: “When still a child, the backstage of the kabuki theater was his playground. He would go and help out at the puppet theaters, and enter the annex backstage of the mechanical theaters, watching and learning how the strings for the mechanical elements were done.” Later, in reference to a performance of the stage lift for *Keisei ama no hageromo*: “He devised a stage lift of three approx. 5.5 meters square at the close of the play, delighting the entire city of Osaka. It had surely been inspired by all of his childhood observations of *karakuri* and the workings of mechanics”⁹

Building on this earlier episode in Shōza's biography, *Nansui manyū* further claims that Shōza's inspiration for the revolving stage struck him while watching children playing with a simple toy spinning top, expanding on the earlier narrative's linkage of observation, childhood play, and mechanical invention.¹⁰ Despite this claim about the child's top seeming to be of considerably later creation, it has remained one of the most frequently recounted anecdotes about

⁸ Yamada Kazuhito, *Takeda karakuri no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ōfū, 2017), Timon Screech, *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan: The Lens within the Heart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Yulia Frumer, *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁹ Namiki Senryū, *Namiki Shōza ichidai banashi* in Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6, 556. Shōza's early reported familiarity with the Takeda Shibai, for instance, would also be longstanding, as attested to by a playbill for performances at the Takeda Shibai in 1767 for which Shōza provided a printed speech. See Tsurumi Makoto, “Namiki Shōza to ‘karakuri’ shibai to no kankei” *Shirayuri Daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 7 (Dec., 1971), 4.

¹⁰ A shorter version of the story also appears in *Zuiho shibai ichiran*. See Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6: *Kabuki*, 389.

Shōza and kabuki's revolving stage, attesting to the longstanding attraction of Shōza's image as inventor-cum-playwright.

This anecdote also points to another way in which Shōza's own career and reputation followed a similar trajectory to Takeda Ōmi I's, whether or not the borrowing was intentional: the rhetoric of invention. Such narratives of revelation for technological innovation found in astute observation of the world were something of a cliché, but their application to Shōza demonstrates how his career (and posthumous hagiography) intersected with and built upon the idea of playwright-as-inventor which had similarly developed in reference to Takeda Ōmi's legacy. In its description of Takeda Ōmi's theater the *Settsu meishō zue*, for instance, recounts that Ōmi was first inspired to create an hourglass clock (*sunadokei*) upon witnessing some children gathering to play with sand.¹¹ This initial observation and insight then became the impetus for Ōmi's subsequent inventions of clockwork technologies.

This linkage between mechanical invention and childhood entertainments is deeply suggestive of a feedback loop that recurs repeatedly not only in this history of machinery on the kabuki stage, but also in the development of mechanics, and indeed the production of knowledge much more broadly. Entertainments, here exemplified by the simplicity of childhood play, could inspire revelations in technology and design that had far-reaching and revolutionary effects, such as timekeeping or agriculture. As will become clear in the next chapter in the context of books about mechanics and the stage as well, cultivating a particular eye for this mode of observation and inspiration was a valued component of the intellectual process of invention. These legends of Shōza and Takeda Ōmi as just such insightful inventors furthermore complete the circuit back to the applications of these technologies for entertainment purposes.

Just as Namiki Shōza's own legend as playwright-inventor participated in the same narratives of mechanical invention that emerged around Takeda Ōmi over the course of the eighteenth century, his development of mechanical spectacles for the theater, as examined above, likewise drew on the techniques and aesthetics of the Takeda Shibai. Shōza's biography especially seems eager to emphasize this aspect of his playwrighting and his connections to the mechanical spectacles. It's tempting, then, to interpret kabuki as yet another outlet for these technologies, and, furthermore, a derivative one. And certainly at points in its history the relationship between spectacle shows and kabuki in terms of the mechanics or tricks themselves can appear to be a largely unidirectional flow of influence, with kabuki borrowing freely from the tricks of *misemono*. Kabuki and puppet theater may have contributed significantly to the development of Takeda Shibai and other spectacle shows as theatrical performances, but it's true that, at these early stages at least, kabuki more often copied mechanics or techniques from *misemono* than the reverse. This is not to say, however, that, even in these instances, kabuki's adoption of these tricks would stop at being merely imitative. Quite the contrary, playwrights such as Namiki Shōza found new applications for the mechanics and aesthetics of spectacle shows within kabuki dramaturgy, opening up not only new possibilities for staging, but, in the process, new potentialities for theatrical narrative as well.

Nowhere was this symbiotic relationship between Shōza's stage mechanics and dramaturgy more prominently displayed than in his use of the revolving stage. In addition to the

¹¹ A similar anecdote is also recounted by Morishima Churyō in his introduction to Hosokawa Hanzō's *Kikō zui* together with another legend of invention about Chuko Kongming (Zhuge Liang), though it doesn't specify that it was an hourglass. See Frumer, *Making Time*, 158.

new design of its mechanics, Shōza use of the revolving stage introduced a notion of simultaneity to the action of the play's narrative in a way that had not been staged before.



Figure 4: *Ehon sanjūkoku yofune no hajimari* (1842).
Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University.

As this depiction of the scene from a later illustrated playscript of the play *Sanjikkoku yofune no hajimari* attempts to capture in its double register, the scene featured two distinct fights occurring in two locations, with the stage revolving back and forth between the two. The implication of the movement and the progression of the action on stage is that the fights are occurring and progressing simultaneously, continuing even while out of the sight of the audience. As the stage revolved between these two independent fight scenes, the seamlessness of the stage's rotation thus facilitated a new temporal experience of the world of the play in which time no longer progressed in a solely linear direction. Inspiring both new expressions of theatrical time and, in turn, new strategies for attempting to capture that simultaneity in print, Shōza's use of the rotating stage demonstrated how stage mechanics could generate new possibilities for dramaturgy when combined with innovative playwrighting.

How crucial Shōza's merging of machinery and play-crafting was for his career and legacy can be further highlighted by contrasting him with some of his contemporary playwrights, who likewise strove to make names for themselves with dramatic spectacles. A rivalry between Shōza and another contemporary playwright, Takeda Jizō, in particular drove a fierce competition to develop more dramatic and large-scale tricks, some introduced from puppet theater, some more directly from mechanical spectacle shows. Despite the fact that some contemporary sources speak of Shōza and Jizō as equals in terms of their fame and achievements, however, Jizō's legacy was almost completely forgotten from later written record.¹² Refusing to be outdone by Shōza's tricks, Jizō innovated the *gandō-gaeshi*, a scene change technique in which scenery or even buildings are rotated backwards or collapsed forward 45 degrees to reveal a new set on the bottom dimension or top of the structure. Reminiscent of

¹² Ota Hiromu, "Kyōgen sakusha Takeda Jizō" *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 44 (Jun., 1967), 1.

reports of Shōza's observations of toys inspiring mechanical innovations, Jizō reportedly got the idea for the structure from a toy called a *hako Tenjin* 箱天神, a box in which a figure of Tenjin (Sugawa no Michizane) could be seen with the scenery around him as the box was rotated.¹³ In further response to Shōza's impressive revolving stage, Jizō also in turn devised a way to elevate the entire stage from below through lifts during a performance of the play *Nara no miyako daibutsu kuyō* 奈良都大仏供養 in 1760. The structure of the stage itself was pulled back and lifted up on a diagonal in the final scene of the play, an impressive feat of engineering at the time and one which successfully challenged Shōza's dominance.¹⁴

Although these tricks of Jizō's were of considerable scale and, by all accounts, well-received by audiences, however, he would never achieve the same level of long-lasting fame that Shōza did as inventor. Part of this may be attributable to Shōza's unique penchant for merging mechanical innovations with those of play-crafting in a way that Jizō's stage lift did not seem to achieve, but another component is likely the issue of print record. Although Jizō would continue to be credited for his invention in some texts through the end of the nineteenth century, Shōza's legacy would be more effectively solidified with the publishing of the biography *Namiki Shōza ichidai banashi* thirteen years after his death, and in illustrated playscripts published around the end of the eighteenth century. Given how few printed theater materials at the time recorded or illustrated the details of developments in stage mechanics, the relative lack of documentation of the details of Jizō's contributions seems to have contributed to the gradual erasure of his legacy, absent a few references in later texts as the originator for certain tricks.

The dynamic rivalries between Namiki Shōza, Takeda Jizō, and Takeda Ōmi IV, and the uniquely enmeshed performance space of Dōtonbori represent a golden age for the playwright-cum-inventor in the history of kabuki. Although the basic components of kabuki's stage machinery had been developed prior to these crucial years, the innovations of the 1750s and 60s introduced new elements to kabuki's dramaturgy and its spectacles; borrowing from the aesthetics of hidden mechanics from *karakuri* shows, these tricks concealed the mechanics of the stage out of sight, ushering in wonder as a crucial component of kabuki's stage spectacle along with these changes. The ubiquity of these tricks at several main theaters in these decades, and the prominent placement of these tricks within the performances are also telling about spectacle's status within theater at the time. Featured predominantly in the concluding acts of the day's performances, these grand mechanics were often given a privileged place within the most climactic scenes.

As Shōza's activities in particular demonstrate, moreover, these spectacles were far from superfluous or gratuitous—they ushered in significant innovations to kabuki's dramaturgy that would have lasting impact on its development going forward. The true genius of Shōza's innovations, as both playwright and erstwhile inventor, was not simply in a creative revolution of mechanics, but rather how these changes could further inspire a revolution in play-crafting and

¹³ For the play *Akiba gongen kaisen banashi* 秋葉權現廻船噺. The trick was also sometimes referred to by the name “*hako Tenjin*” in Kansai. See Kugimachi Kumaji, *Kabuki ōdōgushi*. Tokyo: Seidosha, 2007), 62 and Kawatake Shigetoshi, *Kabuki enshutsu no kenkyū* (Hayakawa Shobō, 1949), 118.

¹⁴ The trick would be performed on at least a couple of other recorded occasions, but it wouldn't be adopted as a regular or longstanding mechanical addition to the stage, unlike Jizō's development of the *gandō-gaeshi*. Its legacy would most be felt in the further innovations it inspired through Takeda Ōmi or Shōza's combination of moving the stage and lifting up structures in its place.

dramaturgy. Shōza's use of the revolving stage to facilitate a new experience of theatrical time was a curious echo of the early connections and lasting conceptual relationship between *karakuri* and timekeeping. As Yulia Frumer and Timon Screech have previously demonstrated, *karakuri* mechanics originated in the development of technologies for clocks and timekeeping,¹⁵ a relationship that seems to have persisted in the application of mechanics in kabuki. In using scene-change mechanics to slow down, speed up, or otherwise complicate the time of theatrical narratives, Shōza's productions explored the full range of the implications of such connections and their possibilities for new spectacular forms not only of staging, but of playwrighting.

Makunashi “Curtain-less” Performances and the Acceleration of Theatrical Time

While Shōza's deployment of the rotating stage as a revolution of theatrical time was a particularly innovative development, it reflects on the fact that scene-change mechanics, such as the revolving stage or lifts, had always been technologies of time by speeding up transitions between scenes. These mechanics of scene changes furthermore coalesced into a new performance style all together by eliminating the need to close the stage curtain in between scenes entirely. Known as “curtainless” (*makunashi* 幕なし) performances, they would become a spectacle in their own right for their speedy execution of scene transitions in view of the audience without closing the main stage curtain. While this may seem simply like a logical extension of the scene change mechanics developed by Shōza, Jizō, Takeda Ōmi, and others, it would in fact lead to a new role for mechanical spectacles within kabuki plays in which they stood more as independent spaces of exhibition than as integral components of the narratives, eventually providing a platform for the unprecedented career of a professional set-designer, Hasegawa Kanbei XI.

The first play to be advertised in a promotional playbill as a curtainless performance seems to be a production of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in Osaka in 1787, though the practice existed in the Kamigata region under the term “*kaeshi*” 返し at least as far back as a performance in 1724.¹⁶ The shift to the terminology of *makunashi* and the prominence of its advertisement in playbills from the late eighteenth century, however, indicates not only how widely used this staging method was, but also marks a transition in their advertising. Nearly three dozen plays from the first half of the nineteenth century were advertised as curtainless productions in their promotional playbills. This prominence suggests that, in addition to the benefit of facilitating speedy transitions, these curtainless productions began to be advertised in playbills as a draw for audiences as their tricks became more elaborate and grander in scale.¹⁷ This transition further

¹⁵ Frumer, *Making Time*, 154-157 especially. Screech, *Lens in the Heart*, 78-80.

¹⁶ Inoue Nobuko, “Kabuki ōdōgu no genzai” *Joshi-Seigakuin Tanki Daigaku kiyō* 31 (Mar., 1999), 54.

¹⁷ The term reached such a level of ubiquity that it became a literary trope used by authors such as Santō Kyōden, Hanzentei Tsubohira, and Tōrai Sanna. In some cases the term seemed to do little more than stand in for the context of the theater in the title of the book (such as in *Ōdōgu shachide makunashi* 大道具鱗幕無 [1794]), but it also took on the valences of revelation or comprehensiveness in *Sekai no makunashi* (1782) or Santō Kyōden's *Chūshingura zense no makunashi* (1794), in which either the customs of society were revealed through the lens of theater or the ties between the past, present, and future lives of characters were exposed and explored.

coincides with a shift in the placement of these tricks in performances—whereas in the mid-seventeenth century such large-scale spectacles were often featured within the climactic final act, curtainless performances generated multiple independent spaces of exhibition for large-scale stage mechanics throughout the day’s performance.

This can be seen, for example, in the history of *Kanadehon chūshingura*’s curtainless performances. Seemingly the play that was most often performed in this style,¹⁸ the scene-change mechanics that were used often changed between productions of *Chūshingura*, both changing locations within the narrative of the play and switching out the large-scale mechanics themselves. In these cases, which trick facilitated any specific scene change was seemingly unimportant to and disconnected from the narrative itself; rather, the tricks themselves stood independently as attractions and entertainments in their own right.

As was the case with early stage mechanics such as the rotating stage, however, *makunashi* productions were not always supplemental to the content of the plays themselves; curtainless staging could enhance or directly contribute to the production as well, as in the case of the 1827 play *Hitoritabi gojūsan tsugi* by playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV. An adaptation of the well-known *Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige* series by Jippensha Ikku, this play featured no fewer than 53 scene changes in a single day’s performance to match the number of stations of the Tōkaidō Highway, using various tricks to facilitate speedy transitions in between the scenes. While not operating in exactly the same way as Shōza’s tricks in terms of opening up some new exploration of the narrative of the play through its staging, Nanboku’s production still used the rapidity of *makunashi* staging to stretch the limits of theatrical time in a slightly different way. The rapid scene changes and quick progression of the play that the stage mechanics facilitated not only effectively recreated the pacing and structure of Ikku’s original text (what Jilly Traganou has called its “technique of fragmentation and discontinuity,”¹⁹ theatrically expressed in the rotating stage’s elision of the travel of the characters between scenes), but it also significantly increased the number of scenes that had ever been staged in a single day’s performance. This rapidity of the play’s pacing and impressive use of the revolving stage and other tricks to facilitate its scene changes were a central part of the play’s advertising at the time.

¹⁸ It may seem surprising that *Chūshingura* incorporated so many spectacular elements given the general seriousness or weightiness of the play’s narrative, but it’s worth noting that its 11th act, the scene of ultimate revenge beginning at Ryōgoku bridge, had long featured comic and spectacular elements.

¹⁹ Jilly Traganou, *The Tōkaidō Road: Travelling and Representation in Edo and Meiji Japan* (London: Routledge, 2011), 112.

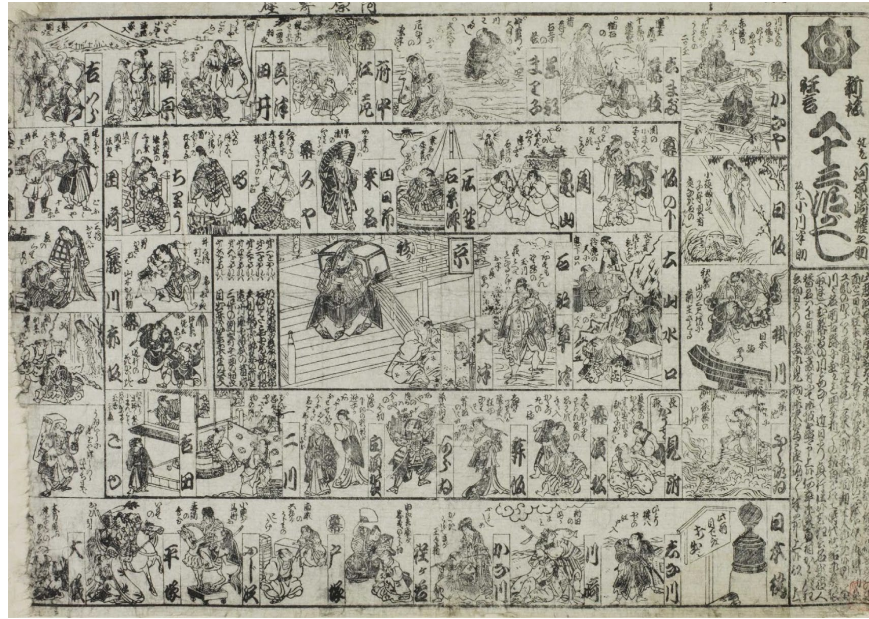


Figure 5: Promotional playbill *Hitoritabi gojūsan tsugi*.
Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

In the print on the left here, for instance, a promotional poster has been inventively arranged in the format of a *sugoroku* game board, allowing viewers, as “players,” to interactively traverse not only the stations of the Tōkaidō, but also the scenes of the play, providing an instant visual sense of the impressive number of distinct scenes in the production.

The expeditious scene changes of *Hitoritabi* share obvious parallels with previous *makunashi* productions, but the content of the play itself and its execution on stage also express a further awareness of the acceleration of contact and the movement of information, culture, and goods across distances by the early nineteenth century. One example of the play’s engagement with these ideas is a scene of rural kabuki performance staged in Namazu in which Edo actors parodied a disastrous performance of *Sugawara denju tenarai kagami* by local residents and fake urban actors. A comic and self-aware reflection on the penetration of urban kabuki culture into spaces outside of urban centers, it also recognized how this circulation of culture had come, so to speak, full circle in the very phenomenon of Edo audiences watching this staged rural performance. The use of large-scale stage machinery to accelerate theatrical time and to elide transitions between the stations on the road that formed the scenes of the play thus enacted on stage this very sense of new proximity.



Figure 6: Illustrated playbill *Hitoritabi gojūsan tsugi*.
Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

This production and its print materials also marked a new emergence into the foreground of a central figure behind the scenes of *makunashi* productions in Edo in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Alongside head playwright Tsuruya Nanboku's name on the back of the illustrated playbill for the production on the right above appears an additional name: "Set craftsman Hasegawa Kanbei." While this may seem like a small addition, this place of privilege in illustrated playbills had always been reserved for the names of playwrights, and Kanbei's inclusion here signals a new level of recognition for his creative contribution as set designer to the production of the play. While professional set designers and craftsman had existed long before his career, it wasn't until Kanbei's activities in the early nineteenth century that any figures other than playwrights had been so publicly credited for a production.

Despite the significance of his inclusion on the printed playbill for the production, Kanbei's fame did not emerge suddenly with the premiere of *Hitoritabi* in 1827. His most famous collaboration with Tsuruya Nanboku, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, had, of course, premiered just two years prior in 1825, for which Kanbei devised a number of tricks for the character Oiwa and the ghostly horrors of the play. Even before the success of the play and Kanbei's tricks featured in it, however, Kanbei's name had begun appearing in the *Kabuki nendaiki* for several curtainless productions of *Kanadehon chushingura* between 1819 and 1825, just months before *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*. In fact, the vast majority of the performances advertised as curtainless productions from 1800 onward in Edo were the work of Kanbei, and it is most often in the context of these performances that Kanbei received public recognition, not only in the form of mention in the *Kabuki nendaiki*, but also with other indicators, such as *nobori* banners with his name emblazoned on them positioned outside the theater for a production in 1819, for instance. It's perhaps not surprising, given how curtainless performances provided these instances of focus on stage mechanics as spectacle, that they were an integral part of Kanbei's rise to fame.

As the figure in charge of the many stage tricks of the production — encompassing not only the scene-change mechanics, but also the elaborate apparition of a supernatural cat and

other spectacles — the inclusion of his name on the printed materials was a perhaps overdue acknowledgment of Kanbei's creative contributions to both this production and preceding ones as well. While many of the large-scale scene change mechanics that Kanbei employed were the same ones that had been developed in the Kansai region by Shōza, Jizō, and Takeda Ōmi in the mid-eighteenth century, the centerpiece of *Hitoritabi*'s stage tricks was a debut of a new form of the rotating stage known as the *ja no me mawashi* 蛇の目廻し or “snake's eye” revolving stage, newly designed by Hasegawa Kanbei XI. Effectively, this form was two independent revolving stages, one nestled inside of another, which allowed for an outer, larger circle of stage to revolve in one direction while a smaller round section in the middle of it moved in another. Fitting to the idea of the play, it allowed for faster and more complicated rotations of sets between scenes as sets and props could be rotated in opposite directions simultaneously. Ultimately, however, Kanbei's grandest contribution to the continuous reinventions of the revolving stage would occur not within the walls of the kabuki theater, but rather in the open-air exhibition space of *misemono* spectacle shows.

Set Designer Hasegawa Kanbei XI

Broadly speaking, stage tricks were typically developed through three channels—by playwrights, by individual actors, and by specialized set designers. In Edo, the role of specialized set designer began quite early with the career of Hasegawa Kanbei I, who joined the Nakamura-za in Edo sometime in the mid-seventeenth century. The son of a shrine carpenter, he eventually came to be in charge of the sets and props of the theater.²⁰ The hereditary name of Hasegawa Kanbei was then passed down through generations of set designers, though historical records are sparse for many of their activities before the turn of the nineteenth century. It would not be until the career of Kanbei XI, however, that set designers would receive wider public recognition and praise from audiences. Some of this can be attributed to Kanbei's relationship with Nanboku and to the existing trends toward *makunashi* staging of large-scale mechanics, and some to Kanbei's own experimentation with producing *misemono* shows. Kanbei's career represented a new phase in the relationship between kabuki and *misemono*, in which not only the mechanics or narratives of kabuki or *misemono* might be taken up in the other, but those involved with kabuki also actively participated in the production of spectacles.

Kanbei XI's is a name that typically appears only tangentially in discussions of nineteenth-century kabuki, usually in reference to his collaborations with playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV for his plays featuring vengeful female ghosts or displays of magic. A famous example of this is Kanbei's close collaboration with Nanboku and the actor Onoe Kikugorō III for the spectacular scenes in *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* or *Ghost Stories at Yotsuya* in which Oiwa's bloody hair falls out after she's poisoned or when two vengeful ghosts played by the same actor appear to be tied to two sides of a door floating down the river to haunt her former husband Iemon. But, as examined above, more than these small, technical tricks, it would be Kanbei's development of large-scale stage mechanics which would most contribute to his redefinition of the position of set designer and to the emergence of a complex reciprocal

²⁰ Itō Kisako and Hasegawa Kanbei XVII, *Ōdōgu Hasegawa Kanbei* (Matsudo, Chiba: Hasegawa Kanbei XVII, 1965), 14-15.

relationship between kabuki and spectacle shows in the 1820s and 30s. This relationship ushered in even larger and more immersive spectacles to kabuki stagecraft which in turn would influence later developments in the Meiji period such as the well-known life-size dioramas of the industrial expositions.

Perhaps no single event is more illustrative of this emergence of the set designer to center stage than Kanbei's *issei ichidai* or "once in a lifetime" performance in 1835. *Issei ichidai* were typically the final performance by an actor (occasionally a playwright), after which they retired from stage activities and these performances featured the roles or plays for which they were best known or had received the most acclaim. Kanbei's was an unprecedented instance of a set designer having a performance advertised as such a commemoration of retirement, an indication of the unusual level of fame – or notoriety – which he had achieved. In addition to a promotional poster featuring a speech about the spectacles for the performance, Hasegawa's name is advertised on another poster, in the text of the illustrated playbills, and even in a series of woodblock prints that were produced for the occasion. No set designer had ever received such recognition or achieved such a level of fame.

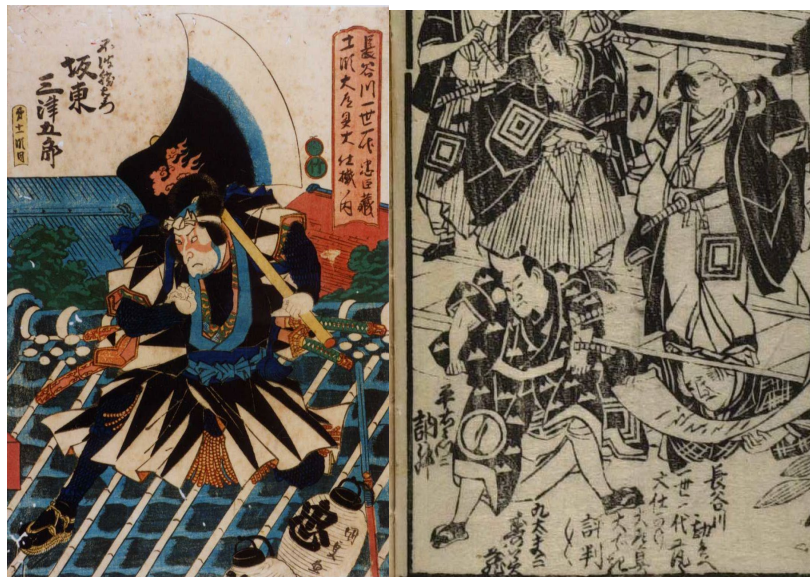


Figure 7: (left) Actor print from tryptic, Bandō Mitsugoro IV in *Kanadehon chūshingura*. The text banner reads "From the stage tricks of Hasegawa Kanbei's retirement performance, *Chūshingura* in 11 acts."

Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

Figure 8: (right) Illustrated playbill for *Kanadehon chūshingura*.

Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

If part of Kanbei's career can be understood as a continuation of elements of kabuki stagecraft going back to the mid-seventeenth century, another aspect of his career was defined by his involvement with *misemono* spectacle shows from the 1820s forward. Indeed, while for Shōza and Jizō, many of their innovations were drawn from the world or aesthetics of the spectacle show, in Kanbei's case it was the reverse: he took developments from kabuki and brought them out of the theater and into the streets. Kanbei produced a number of successful *misemono* spectacle shows beginning with *Shitennōji garan hinagata* performed in Ueno in 1825, which featured a stage lift of a five-story tower from the middle of the audience. Judging from the illustration of the trick on a surviving poster and other descriptions of the spectacle in

contemporary records, it recreated the Shitennō-ji Temple in Osaka, through which audience members could move about. One contemporary account gives a sense of the impressive scale of the spectacle:

A five-story tower of more than 20 feet high was raised up by mechanics from within the middle of the audience and a small structure [the nine-layered finial] was furthermore pushed out from a hole at the top. As the tower, painted in gold, silver, and red, was sticking out partway in view, even those passing by on the street could see it. Distracted by the sight, a large number of men and women, old and young gathered and crowded the street and, in the commotion, a woman of about 50 was knocked over and badly injured.²¹

While the spectacle by all accounts seems to have been well-attended and well-received, it was also criticized at the time as being derivative of a performance at the Takeda theater in Osaka in 1809, which had already featured the lift of a five-storied pagoda in a play of the same title. Reportedly in response to the criticism he had received after his initial *misemono* production in 1825, Kanbei devoted himself to developing a new spectacle show which premiered in Asakusa in 1826, *Sangoku yōfuden*. The featured spectacle of this production was a massive revolving platform that was advertised to be able to spin with up to one thousand people on it at a time, though exactly how many were in fact able to ride it one time is unclear. Unlike the lift of the five-storied pagoda of the year before, this trick was something entirely new and not possible to carry out within the space of a typical theater. The spectacle show ended up being so popular that fights broke out as a result of people crowding and trying to sneak in without paying, and the production was quickly shut down by authorities because of the public disorder.²² Perhaps eager to recover some of the losses that resulted from this early cancellation, Kanbei arranged for the show to be put on in 1828 in Osaka and again in Asakusa in Edo in 1835.²³

As the immersive nature of this first show hints at, Kanbei's grand spectacle shows operated in a very different spacial and experiential environment from that of the theater. Rather than viewing scenes of action from a stationary location, audience members interacted with the show by walking around the structures, sometimes pausing to watch scenes enacted by puppets on established stages. Some of Kanbei's productions, however, would incorporate elements of his kabuki staging, including curtainless techniques, into these spectacles as well. *Kando chūgi suikoden* at the Hachiman Shrine of Fukagawa in 1833, for instance, featured four stages arranged to surround the audience in the center, allowing for the action of the performance (executed by puppets) to transition from one stage to another without pausing while also employing Kanbei's typical repertoire of lifts, flipping sets, and other large machinery to the

²¹ Katō Eibian, *Wagakoromo* in Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei* Vol. 15 (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1976), 472.

²² Asakura Musei, *Misemono kenkyū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2002), 496.

²³ After Kanbei's death in 1841, another craftsman by the name of Hasegawa Kinemon seemingly re-produced Kanbei's *Sangoku yōfuden*, complete with the rotating stage in Asakusa in 1847. This suggests either that, in addition to his son who would become Kanbei XII, Kanbei XI may have also had disciples who would continue to work primarily in *misemono* shows. It's also possible that this figure, and several other craftsman named Hasegawa working in large-scale spectacles in the decade or so following Kanbei's death, were simply borrowing his fame for their own profit, still attesting to the name that Kanbei had made for himself in *misemono* shows.

rhythm of music. The final scene of the performance utilized three stages at once to surround and immerse the audience within the action of the narrative.

As the elaborate tricks of Kanbei's retirement performance in 1835 demonstrate, he experimented with similar tricks to engage the spaces of the audience in his spectacles within the context of the kabuki theater as well. One source, from a collection of comic stories, states that, in addition to the stage trick depicted on the print, which was performed between acts three and four, the final act also featured one in which the *doma* floor seating was pulled to the right and left with the audience still seated and a model of Ryōgoku bridge raised up in its place.

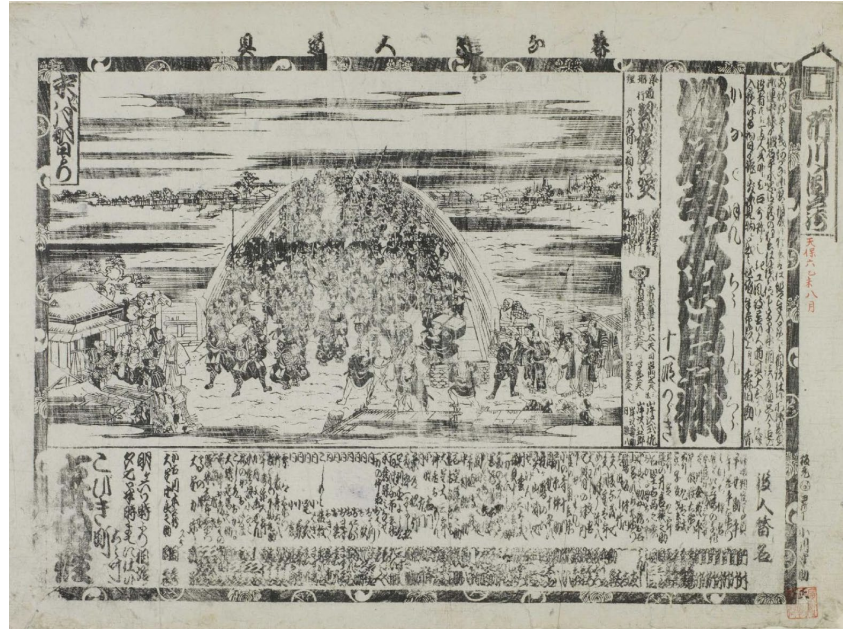


Figure 9: Promotional playbill for *Kanadehon chūshingura*.
Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

This striking visual, of the Ryōgoku bridge appearing with numerous actors already standing on it for the final scene, spilling over from the stage into the space of the audience in front of it, resonates with the scale and impact of Kanbei's *misemono* productions above. Just as Shōza's stage lift in *Keisei ama no hageromo* had ended the performance with a spectacle of scale back in 1753, Kanbei concluded his retirement performance with a dramatic reveal of the bridge and royal retainers, heightening the anticipation for the play's dramatic conclusion.

As with so many of Kanbei's large-scale tricks, this one, too, was not of his own original design. First devised for the puppet theater in 1766 and then imported into kabuki, it involved not only pulling the stage backwards but also moving the area of the *doma* floor seating in front of it to the right and left in order to lift up sets for the next scene, all while the audience remained seated. Known as "splitting apart the *doma*," the trick's history encapsulates the story of the development and trends of so many of kabuki's scene-change mechanics. Originating with a *karakuri* theater playwright, it premiered in the puppet theater before being adapted into kabuki.²⁴ After moving to Edo thereafter, Kanbei performed it on a number of occasions, at

²⁴ Kawatake Shigetoshi, *Kabuki enshutsu no kenkyū* (Hayakawa Shobō, 1949), 118.

times with his own modifications to its structure. It appeared sporadically after Kanbei's death, with its last recorded use occurring in 1866 under the supervision of Hasegawa Kanbei XIII.

While this trick had a long, established history of performance, another performed in 1838, presumably executed by his son who inherited the Kanbei name but likely still with Kanbei XI's collaboration, applied the idea of incorporating audience seating into scene-changes in a new way. This trick incorporated a section of on-stage seating positioned at the back of the stage known as the *rakandai*, which typically faced back out at the rest of the theater.



Figure 10: Playbill for E-iri yomihon taitōki.

Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University. Ro-22-00043-193.

A promotional playbill produced for the performance to advertise the several scene-change mechanics in the production shows the *rakandai* seating being rotated to reveal the setting for a different scene, complete with a waterfall and tree, on the back side of the seating area. The print itself is an interesting composition, with the textual notes labeling each trick written in the language of illustrated playbills, commenting simply on the spectacular tricks here and there but not revealing explicitly what they all are. Despite the fanfare suggested by the production of this promotional print specifically to commemorate the tricks of the performance, this particular trick of rotating the *rakandai* seating only seems to have been performed on this one occasion, suggesting perhaps that such scene-change mechanics fell into decline with the death of Kanbei XI a few years afterward.

There are a couple of elements worth noting about these tricks involving audience seating; first, it's surely no coincidence that tricks such as these involved cheaper areas of a seating rather than more expensive sections, nor that these productions of large-scale scene change mechanics and curtainless performances were produced and executed at the Morita-za and Kawarazaki-za as opposed to more top-tier theaters. This is in contrast to earlier performances of curtainless productions, including similar performances of *Chūshingura*, from the end of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century, which were regularly held at the Ichimura-za or Nakamura-za, theaters with more stable budgets and with better rosters of

actors. This transition suggests both that such stage spectacles had come to be seen as a viable strategy to compensate for the lack of better actors or playwrights to draw audiences, and that spectacle was coming to be targeted at the kind of theater clientele who would purchase the less expensive seating adjacent to the stage. This would also make sense given that these performances of Kanbei coincide with a boom in productions of large-scale mechanical spectacles in the Bunka-Bunsei periods, a trend and clientele that the Morita-za and Kawarazaki-za may have sought to capitalize on. The entrance fees for *misemono* performances were considerably cheaper than theatrical productions, and, while the financial investment needed upfront to produce a new show was immense, they could be extremely lucrative when a show was successful.²⁵ In adopting some of these characteristics of *misemono* shows, the “playing to the cheap seats” of both the Morita-za and Kawarazaki-za was both an effective financial gamble and a reflection of a shift in attitude about the value of spectacle within performance.

Second, as mentioned previously, this involvement of audience spaces in such spectacles wasn’t entirely new to Hasegawa’s designs—Takeda Ōmi, Namiki Shōza, and other playwrights had likewise experimented with moving audience seating for particular large-scale tricks. Kanbei, however, was instrumental in the trick’s establishment in Edo kabuki, and his exhibition of these staging techniques in the spaces of *misemono* shows and his expansion of such tricks within kabuki performances point to a much more bidirectional influence between such open-air exhibition spaces and the theater stage. On the one hand, we can say that Kanbei likely found *misemono* an attractive venue because the relative lack of set structure and parameters allowed for a scale, immersion, and budget for his spectacles that was simply not possible within existing theater structure (both the material architecture of the theater and its institutional and financial structure). Yet, on the other, his innovations in one sphere seem to have enabled and motivated further experimentations in the other, such that we might even see Kanbei’s final exhibition and successful restaging of *Sangoku yōfuden* in Asakusa in 1835 as a companion farewell performance to his spectacular *Chūshingura* performance at the Morita-za of the same year.

While some of Kanbei’s tricks would be inherited by others producing sets and spectacles for either kabuki or *misemono* after his retirement from the stage, the end of his career also marked the conclusion of an era of spectacle in kabuki’s stage history. Kanbei had raised the profile of set designers to unprecedented heights and deepened the relationship between kabuki and *misemono* spectacles in nineteenth-century Edo, but, as the decades after his retirement show, his success in these enterprises was a mix of fortuitous circumstances (the coincidental boom in massive mechanical spectacles, the financial gambles of the Morita-za and Kawarazaki-za, his collaboration with Tsuruya Nanboku IV), and his individual ingenuity and ambition. Change was coming to Edo kabuki, however, both from longstanding trends in theater finances and longstanding government desires for reform, but also from the more unpredictable sources of natural disaster and political change.

Meiji Revolutions – Illuminating Technologies and “Sanitizing” the Theater

²⁵ Kawazoe Yū, *Edo no misemono* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), 38-39.

With the exception of this potential collaboration with his son in 1838, his *issei ichidai* retirement performance in 1835 is the last attested instance in which Kanbei was active before his death some six years later in the fall of 1841. The fall of 1841 was also of incredible significance to kabuki for another reason: in the 10th month of 1841, a fire broke in the Edo's main theater district near Nihonbashi in the center of the city; not only were the two most prominent theaters – the Nakamura-za and the Ichimura-za – destroyed but the fire rapidly engulfed a large area of the city. Fires were not uncommon in Edo's theaters – many illustrations of the theater will show how frequently candles were used for lighting – but this time rather than being rebuilt in their original locations, as they had been so many times before, the theaters were ordered to move to an area north of the Sensōji that would come to be known as Saruwaka-chō, into a walled theater district on the outskirts of Edo. Ostensibly a prevention measure against the periodic fires which had erupted from the theaters and spread to the dense surrounding urban areas, it was in fact part of a broader planned reform of the theaters and their social influence, extending to the private residences and lives of the actors and the depiction of the theater in print. Demarcated and enclosed, the theaters themselves would be contained from the surrounding city for the next three decades until these regulations were lifted early in the early Meiji period.

Although Kanbei did not live to see these upheavals that would mark the theater world in the decades between the early 1840s and the 1870s, the legacies of spectacle in which he participated would continue to shape theater after the Meiji Restoration. Although I have so far focused attention on the role of playwrights and set designers (and the role of actors will receive attention in chapters 3 and 4), there is in fact another group of figures who are equally as central to the narrative of spectacle's history within kabuki, though their involvement is much more difficult to trace in historical record. Theater managers in Edo such as the manager of the Morita-za, Morita Kanya, clearly played a role in the place of spectacle in the theater.²⁶ As I have already suggested above, that Kanbei's retirement performance of 1835 took place at the Morita-za is certainly no mistake. Of Edo's three main theaters, the Morita-za was the most precarious financially and the one to fail most frequently. Not considered with the same regard as the Nakamura-za or Ichimura-za, the Morita-za more often struggled to secure the best actors or productions to entice audiences to the theater. It's likely that the Morita-za adoption of Kanbei's spectacles, especially his curtainless productions and large stage mechanics such as these, was part of a gamble to draw audiences. This wouldn't be surprising if the Morita-za was aiming to draw audiences who may have patronized the cheaper *misemono* shows by adopting elements of such spectacle shows or by featuring Hasegawa Kanbei, who had achieved a degree of fame for his spectacle shows already.

The second relevant aspect of the Morita-za's history is that in the period before the relocation of the theaters to Saruwaka-chō, the Morita-za was set apart from the two main theaters that were located in Nihonbashi and was instead located in an area of Edo known as Kobikichō – an area of modern Tokyo that corresponds with Higashi-Ginza near where the

²⁶ While ultimately outside the scope of this chapter, it's worth noting that another famous example of the impact of theater manager is Takeda Izumo taking the position at the Takemoto Theater in 1705. Seemingly to commemorate the fact that Takeda Izumo was joining the theater from the lineage of Takeda's responsible for the mechanical Takeda Theater, Chikamatsu wrote a play for the occasion that included an extended scene of mechanical dolls and tricks. For more on the play, *Yomei tennō shokunin kagami*, and its inclusion of *karakuri* mechanics, see Kojima Toshiko, "Yomei tennō shokunin kagami ni okeru 'karakuri' ni tsuite" *Joshi daigakubun* 22 (Jul, 1967) and Yamada Kazuhito, *Takeda karakuri no kenkyū*, 198.

present-day Kabuki-za stands. After the Meiji Restoration, the Morita-za would be the first theater to relocate from Saruwaka-chō in 1872 when theaters were finally permitted to leave that area. In 1878, the theater would reopen, rebranded as the Shintomi-za, and the opening of this theater is a well-known and extremely important milestone in the westernization of Japan in early Meiji: it ushered in dramatic changes to the construction of the kabuki stage that would reform many of the complexities of the theater space that had been exemplified by Kanbei's spectacles.

The eager adoption of reforms to the theater marked by the opening of the Shintomi-za, far from being imposed by the government, was driven by Morita Kanya, the 22-year-old impresario who had taken over the Morita-za. Long the most financially precarious the three theaters, it was also the most willing to take risks. The close association of Kanbei with this theater in the 1820s and 30s is one example of this, but so too is, decades later, that fact that Morita would pioneer sweeping changes to the stage and audience spaces. The most striking physical change to the structure of the theater was the removal of the thrust stage that had jutted out into the audience in previous theaters.²⁷ The space of the stage was now contained and more divorced from that of the audience, able to be fully concealed from the audience by a stage curtain. Gone, too, was the seating to the side of the stage and behind, the on-stage *rakandai* seating that Kanbei had so actively engaged with lifts, pulleys, or as part of set changes. Where Kanbei's stagings had sought to impress the audience with scale and inclusion within the spectacles themselves, the Shintomi-za contained the impact of both the sets and the primary action of the play to the regulated space of the embedded stage. The space of the audience, too, would be a target of reform—from the hard flooring introduced to the previously dirt *doma* floor seating to the addition of western chairs to the more expensive *sajiki* seats on the sides of the theater.

²⁷ Urushizawa Sonoko, *Meiji kabuki no seiritsu to tenkai* (Tokyo: Keiyūsha, 2003), 21. Urushizawa points out that, in addition to bringing the construction of the stage closer to western models of the proscenium stage, the removal of the thrust stage also increased audience space and thus income, part of Kanya's broader reforms to the financial structure of audience attendance and the income sources of the theater.



Figure 11: Utagawa Hiroshige III. Gas lighting at the opening of the Shintomi-za. (1878). National Theatre (Japan Arts Council).

Beyond these changes to the interior theater space, a print of the reopening of the Shintomi-za in 1878 by Utagawa Hiroshige III commemorates a spectacular addition to the exterior of the theater—an early form of a neon sign made from gas lighting known as *hana gasu* 花瓦斯.²⁸ Curved tubes were illuminated in a vibrant red, rivaling the more conventional red lanterns which line the eaves of the façade, to form the characters for the name of the theater, “Shintomi-za.” Although less remarked upon than other technical or material reforms to theater spaces in Meiji, such radical changes to theater lighting technologies were just as central to this enterprise of reforming both the theater space and its social function.

In addition to the neon gas lighting displayed outside of the theater, the Shintomi-za’s reopening in 1878 introduced a variety of new gas lighting fixtures both outside and inside the theater, including dramatic chandeliers to replace the lanterns that had decorated the space above the stage. To replace the row of candles which had previously lined the front of the stages, gas lights were cleverly concealed out of sight along the ridge of the stage and reflected back on the actors. An article in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* published in advance of the opening of the Shintomi-za explained the “trick” of this new stage lighting: “I’ve heard that they’ve installed a board with a groove in it, in the shape of something like a hallway, at the front of the stage. When it gets dark,

²⁸ Urushizawa has described the public fascination with the sign, which apparently drew crowds to see the illumination after dark in a financial boon for the surrounding tea houses that gawkers would patronize while they were there, according to a report from the *Yomiuri Shinbun* on June 5, 1877. Urushizawa Sonoko, *Meiji kabuki no seiritsu to tenkai*, 32.

light reflects off of some mirrors on the backside of the boards from which the lamps stick out.”²⁹

The lasting significance of this transition from candles to new technologies of lighting for the experience of Meiji kabuki can also be found in Okamoto Kidō’s history of Meiji kabuki, *Beneath an Oil Lamp* (*Ranpu no moto nite* ランプの下にて):

The world I’m about to talk about here is an age without trains or cars. An age when even the use of electric or gas lighting was limited to government offices, banks, companies, factories, stores, and other places where people gathered, and oil lamps had not yet flickered on in the homes of the general public. Accordingly, the matters I’m about to discuss are perhaps best suited to being conducted beneath the faint light of a lamp rather than the brilliance of electric.³⁰

The implication of kabuki’s inclusion in the category of the government offices, banks, and other public facilities to which gas or electric lighting was limited is indicative of its own social transformation. The public spectacle and attention that surrounded the introduction of new technologies of lighting in the theater and the city more generally can also be observed in the number of newspaper articles which announced each new introduction of modified technologies in the different theaters. Kidō’s language furthermore hints at how dramatic this change in lighting technology was for the experience of theater and daily life—the discussion of these things now long past demands a corresponding shift in visual register provided through the shadows and glow of the outdated oil lamp.

Lighting had, of course, always been integral to theatrical performance; especially when performances were held in the evening or even as theaters were rebuilt with roofing, first over the stage only and then over the audience as well in the early eighteenth century, controlling the sources and levels of lighting was a persistent concern of staging. In addition to the candle stands attached to and running along the front of the stage, candles affixed to poles could be held in front of actors by stagehands to illuminate the faces of the actors as they moved about the stage. Shikitei Sanba, in his book on the theater, calls these quite literally, “face candles” (*tsura rōsoku* 面蠟燭): “I have no idea what these are used for. They don’t seem to be any kind of magic [まじない]. They appear to make the face quite hot when the flames are held in front of them, causing grimaces and scowls as one tries to bear it. It’s inscrutable to foreign eyes.”³¹

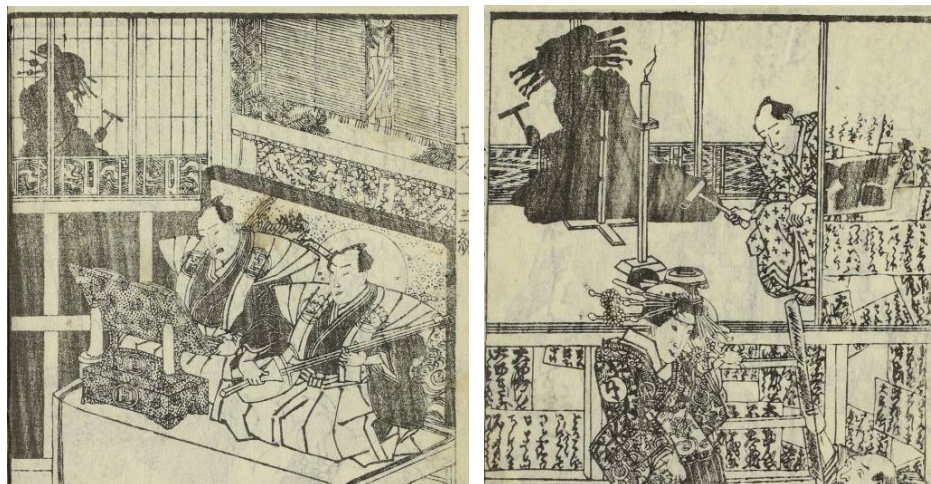
Lighting was also a fundamental component of many stage tricks, controlling what was visible and not, adding an atmosphere of the supernatural or unsettling nighttime, or representing departed spirits as flamed spheres. A perennial favorite was the use of shadow projection, or *kage-e* 影絵. *Kage-e asobi*, or making various shapes appear projected against a sliding screen door, was a popular pastime from the seventeenth century, and eventually made its way into both puppet theater and kabuki, possibly by way of some of the more elaborate versions to appear in

²⁹ Yomiuri Shinbun, “Shintomi-za no shinchiku kimaru – jigyōhi 20 man-en, butai ni ha ranpu de shōmei ni shikake” January 29, 1877.

³⁰ Okamoto Kidō, *Meiji geidan: Ranpu no moto nite* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), 15-16.

³¹ Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui: Kyōwa sannen shohanbon* in *Kabuki no bunken* 3, ed. Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu (Tokyo: Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, 2001), 126-127.

spectacle shows.³² In kabuki, they were furthermore combined with revelation or confusion of true identities, or quick-changes, or dramatic scenes of fighting or violence to enhance their effectiveness and to incorporate them within kabuki's existing dramaturgy.³³ One such scene and a suggestion of how it was done is depicted, for example, in volume 12 of Tanehiko's *Shōhon jitate*, involved casting a silhouette against papered sliding doors.



Figures 12 & 13: Ryūtei Tanehiko, *Shōhon jitate* (1825). Waseda University Library.

As was often the case with such projections, however, the source of the shadow is revealed to hardly be what it seems—Kunisada's subsequent illustration reveals the source to be not an actor but a wood cutout of the character.

In addition to these more spectacular applications, the manipulation of lighting conditions was also of importance in the case of controversial performances after the sun went down. Theaters had repeatedly been banned from holding performances after dark because of how frequently their use of candles started fires that would then conflagrate the dense surrounding urban areas.³⁴ As with many of the regulations on the theaters, however, compliance could be spotty, and enforcement was inconsistent. That was, however, until the fire in the 10th month of 1841, when the theaters would be moved to Saruwaka-chō to, ostensibly, protect the denser areas of the city from the persistent threat of their conflagrations.

The introduction of gas lighting, however, signified a reduction of theaters as a fire risk, and the significance of this change, and how the theaters marketed the rhetoric of gas lighting's association with modernization and progress to benefit their budgets, can be seen in the phenomenon of night performances, highly advertised in the 1860s and 70s. Nighttime performances, once prohibited as a threat to the city, could now be sanctioned and marketed as a

³² Yokoyama Yasuko, *Yōkai tejina no jidai* (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2012), 80, Uchiyama Jun'ichi. *Edo no kōkishin: Bijutsu to kagaku no deai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1996), 130-136.

³³ Matsuzaki Hitoshi, "Kabuki ni okeru kage-e no enshutsu" in Matsuzaki Hitoshi, *Butai no hikari to kage—Kinsei engeki shinkō* (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2004), 19-28.

³⁴ In some cases, the ordinances against performances after dark had to be reissued multiple times, as was the case in 1713 for example. The repeated reissuance of such regulations was typically a sign that compliance was limited, something further confirmed by other historical records reporting performances in the evening in Edo. See Koike Shōtarō. *Kōshō Edo kabuki*. (Tokyo: Miki Shobō, 1997), 279-280 and Yoshida Setsuko, ed., *Edo kabuki hōrei shūsei* (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1997), 118, 120, 132-133.

fresh sensation. The first of such performances, held at the Morita-za in 1878, had the suggestive title of *Butai akaruki chisei no yoshihai* 舞台明治世夜劇, a play on the characters for Meiji and its “peaceful rein” (*chisei*). Simultaneously linking together the illumination of the Meiji period, the safe (and newly sanctioned) nighttime theatrical performance, and the technological marvel of the gas lighting that enabled it, the title was a clever play on trends of the times.³⁵

Specially approved on the basis not only of the fact that the theater structure had been made sturdy and gas lighting used in place of candlelight, but also the new “orderliness” or “tidying up” of the theater space more generally,³⁶ the performance was held in the evening from 5 to 11pm, escaping the heat of the summer months. The performance was heralded in the *Zokuzoku kabuki nendaiki* as the “dawn” of evening performances in Japan, a result of Morita Kan’ya’s trailblazing of the kind of incremental reforms required to build on the strengths identified from French theater as promised in the opening of the Shintomi-za.³⁷ As this quote and the marketing of this performance suggest, this change in theater lighting was also symbolic of another, related, shift—just as theaters no longer needed to be partitioned off from the city because of the risk of conflagration emanating from their use of candles, so too were the dangers of theater as social corruption extinguished by the reforms announced in the speeches at the reopening of the Shintomi-za. Theater would now be an institution for reform, both in the content of its plays and in the newly civilizing space of the theater itself.

Night performances were not the only renewed spectacular application for gas lighting—a play titled *Konoma no hoshi Hakone no shikabue* 木間星箱根鹿笛 by Kawatake Mokuami at the Shintomi-za in 1880, for instance, used gas lighting to facilitate the play’s ghostly apparitions on stage. Notably, the play was a reinterpretation of existing ghost play narratives in which the apparitions were entirely a result of a nervous disorder (*shinkei-byō*) of one of the main characters.³⁸ Again, gas lighting here plays both an ostensibly modernizing and new function—ghosts reinterpreted as nervous apparitions emerge by means of gas lighting rather than the flickering lanterns or candles of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, for instance—while in fact conforming to existing kabuki conventions for lighting spectacles and tropes of the supernatural on stage.³⁹

³⁵ 1878, in which this play would premiere was a critical year for kabuki—Sawamura Tanosuke III, who will be addressed in chapter 4, passed away in July, just a month before the premiere of this play. Several publications of magazines of theater reviews or about kabuki began in the months after (*Gekijō chinpō* in August, *Gekijō shinpō* in November, and *Haiyū hyōbanki*) as well.

³⁶ Naimushō Keihokyoku, *Chōfuken keisatsu enkakushi*. v.1 (Tokyo: Naimushō, 1927), 226.

³⁷ Tamura Shigeyoshi, ed., *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* (Tokyo: Ichimura-za, 1922), 212.

³⁸ For more on ghosts and nervous disorders in Meiji media, see Dan O’Neill “San’yūtei Enchō’s Ghosts and the Aesthetics of Things Unseen” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 14 (Dec., 2002), 1-8, Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 27-29, Yokoyama Yasuko, *Yōkai tejina no jidai* (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2012), 181-185, and Miura Masao, “Shinkeibyō toshite no kaidan—Nihon kingendai kaidan bungaku-shi” *Saitama Gakuen Daigaku kiyō* 7 (Dec., 2007), 268-255.

³⁹ One of the promotional playbills for the performance also includes a map of the train line between Shinbashi, where the theater was located, and Hakone and Mishima, where the action of the play takes place, together with the train fares, running around the outside of the print. The print advertises the opening of the train line by encouraging theatergoers to travel to play’s locations, but it also forms a curious harkening back to the *sugoroku* board print of *Hitoritabi gojūsan tsugi* examined above in providing a sense of new proximity

According to Kamiyama Akira, this transition from candles to gas lighting was also a part of “sanitizing” the space of the theater in a more literal sense as well. In a series of regulations issued in 1878 upon the opening of the Shintomi-za its manager, Morita Kan’ya, stipulated that, alongside moral reforms to the theater and the content of its plays, “in order for the theater to not cause any harm to the health of audiences, everything must be clean and it must be constructed with openings to allow in air and to prevent odors in order to ensure air circulation within the theater.”⁴⁰ As Kamiyama points out, the transition from candles to other forms of lighting was a part of this enterprise—the candles that theaters had used were made of fish or whale oils, both of which give off considerable odors, in addition to those emanating from the large number of people who might be packed into the tight spaces of the *doma* floor seating.⁴¹ A *senryū* poem, for instance, jokes about how pervasive the smell could be: “The smell of the fishy candles makes the building look like a school of fish.”⁴²

In addition to eliminating the considerable smoke and odors from having a large number of candles in the theater space, the new brightness in the theater provided by these lighting technologies projected an image of hygiene and cleanliness in the space, something reflected in illustrations of the newly opened theater.

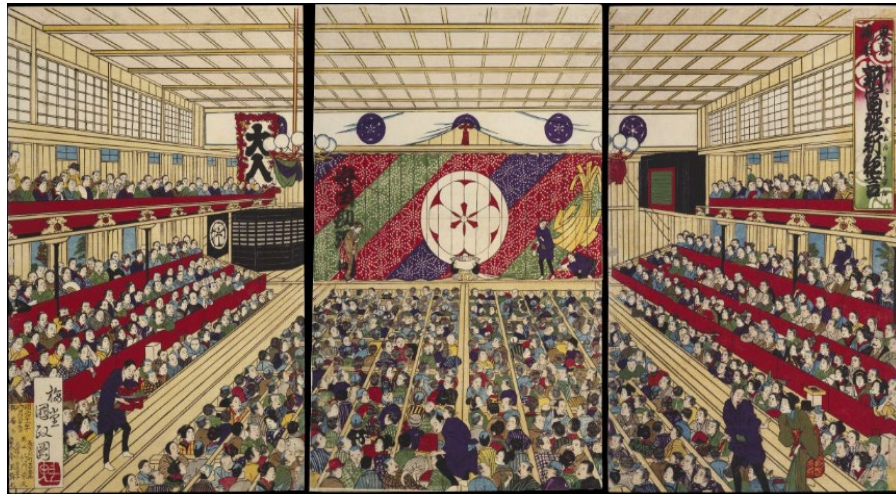


Figure 14: Takeuchi Eikyū (1878). National Theatre (Japan Arts Council)

over distance, now provided by the new train line. *Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University*, ro22-00053-0290.

⁴⁰ Kamiyama Akira, “*Nihon engeki no kindai ni okeru ibunka juyō*” *Meiji Daigaku jinbunkagaku kenkyūjo nenpō* 50 (Mar., 2002), 104. The smell of the candles in the theaters would also become an olfactory note of nostalgia for some audience members, as demonstrated by an article in *Engei gahō* in 1911 titled “I cannot forget the smell of the candles” in which the odor is memorialized not as stuffy or offensive but as especially evocative of a now lost theatrical experience.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 105. It’s important to note that Edo period theaters did have windows for airflow on either side of the theater in addition to typically being open to the air over the space of the audience until complete roofs were installed. These windows allowed in both light and air and could be opened or closed as needed. According to Kawatake Shigetoshi there were even stage directions in some play scripts that directed the windows to be opened or closed for particular scenes, especially for *danmari* scenes which were supposed to occur in the dark. See Kawatake Shigetoshi, *Kabuki-shi no kenkyū: Kinsei kabuki no seikaku wo chūshin to shite* (Tokyo: Tokyo-do, 1943), 537.

⁴² Koike Shōtarō, *Kōshō Edo kabuki*. (Tokyo: Miki Shobō, 1997), 280.

Now that two large chandeliers hang prominently on either side of the stage the space of the stage is no longer cluttered with candle stands in front to illuminate the area. The clean and ordered lines of the expansive ceiling suggest a completeness to the space, with none of the elaborate mechanics or workers to be found in the earlier print. The busy composition to the earlier print and the crowded space of the theater depicted in it are transformed into an orderly and contained audience space and expansive interior (no more images of schools of fish jumping on the water's surface). Even the whiteness of the ceiling and the lightly colored wood gives an air of brightness, cleanliness, and newness to the space.

This sketch of the changes to the Shintomi-za may seem like a familiar – perhaps too familiar – narrative, a story of how which the modernizing impulses of civilization and enlightenment rends kabuki from its past and from its associations with and debts to spectacle. And it is true that there is something to that broad sweep. But I also mean to suggest a different way of thinking about the genealogy of spectacle as it extends into the Meiji period, that the public sensation which surrounded the opening of the Shintomi-za points to another way of thinking about this transition: not as the end of spectacle but as one type of spectacle being exchanged for another, that gas lighting, chandeliers, and sanitized theatrical spaces are themselves a form of spectacle. The very changes to the space of the theater, the conception of the stage, and the experience of the audience became a source of curiosity and marvel and a continued source of fascination for depicting the theater in print.

Chapter 2: Theater as Technology: Illustrating the Stage in Print



Figure 1: Ryūtei Tanehiko, *Shōhon jitate* (1825) Waseda University Library.

There is a striking set of illustrations at the end of volume eight of Ryūtei Tanehiko's *Shōhon jitate* (1815-1831). On the righthand page, a musician sounds a drum in front of panels of stage sets, the heads of the audience in the theater visible in the upper corner behind him. The setting, we understand, is a space just off stage. On the lefthand page is a mirrored image. The style, a reader would notice immediately, is much older, and the darkened paper on which it is presented and the thin and jagged line which cuts it off from the space below both suggest that it is a fragment of an older material. The text below the lefthand image tells us that it is a copy of an illustration from a 1764 text called *Bannō kintokumaru* 萬能金徳丸 which, we are further told, provides the first illustration of the backstage of the theater to appear in a work of fiction. The text claims that the illustration survives as a fragment from a book already lost by Tanehiko's time, a trace of the origins of an already eroding archive of materials about the

theater of which Tanehiko's book of fiction is the sole remaining record.¹

This illustration and its placement within Tanehiko's text is indicative of at least two critical aspects of the fragmentary archive for the history of kabuki's stage technologies. First is the dearth of sources about stage materials and the machinery of the theater, a dearth not just in terms of what survives but also in terms of how little was ever produced to begin with. Often closely guarded secrets, the means through which a theater's tricks were accomplished today often remain in obscurity in the absence of the fortuitous survival of materials such as this. Second is the fact that, as Tanehiko's comment below this illustration indicates, the surviving visual history of the kabuki stage and its properties was written not so much on the pages of directly produced theater documents as in the leaves of printed fiction. This distinction is not insignificant; by situating the depiction of the materials and spectacles of the stage in dialogue with other print genres of knowledge production, such as illustrated encyclopedias or books which reveal the hidden secrets of mechanical spectacles, these works of print shed light on kabuki as a source of spectacle, curiosity, and technological fascination. Presenting particular visions of the theater — all, in one way or another, imaginary — these texts, and especially their illustrations, invited readers into the secretive spaces and perspectives of behind, below, and above the stage.

Theatrical Properties on Stage and in Print

Just as much as the glimpse of the heads of the audience in the image on the right, the stage properties and flat set panels in both illustrations above situate the images within the backstage space of the theater. Stage properties and displays of their artificiality frequently take on this function within Utagawa Kunisada's illustrations throughout the text—recurrent visual reminders of the stage found in the poles with candles to illuminate the actors, the flat backsides of trees or lanterns, or the stands holding up panels of flowers and grasses. A parody of a type of kabuki playscript known as *shōhon* 正本, the prominent illustration of the objects of the stage and their materiality reinforce the texts of Tanehiko's *Shōhon jitate* as theatrical scripts.

¹ The book's existence can be confirmed from a surviving list of works published by Urokogataya but the document only notes the title and the year of its publication, leaving the nature of its contents, and even the correct reading for its title uncertain. It also isn't clear where Tanehiko or Kunisada may have seen the already fragmented book or illustration, or whether the illustration is entirely fictional and simply attributed to the earlier book. For information on the list of Urokogataya publications see Matsubara Tetsuko, "Urokogataya ita-e gedai-kō" *Kinsei bungei* 87 (2008), 29-43.



Figure 2: Ryūtei Tanehiko, *Shōhon jitate* (1825). Waseda University Library.

In this image, for instance, found in volume two, one can discern not only the lines of the boards of the stage but also the stands propping up the decorative small panels in front and the curtain painted with waves to suggest a depth of water. Candles furthermore stick up from behind the curtain to illuminate the painted backdrop of boats and buildings in the distance. While difficult to spot at first, there's even a person, perhaps an actor about to arrive in the scene, concealed in the space between the building and the curtain on the far left portion of the illustration.

The initial inspiration for *Shōhon jitate*, and the direct foundation for several illustrations of its first volume, was a triptych woodblock print by Utagawa Kunisada that showed the backstage areas of the Nakamura-za theater in 1811.² These prints presented a cross-section illustration of the rooms and spaces behind the stage, showing actors and staff engaged in various preparations for the performance or otherwise relaxing, eating, and interacting. Offering to audiences a rare glimpse not only at the normally inaccessible backstage but also at the off-stage appearances of actors in and out of costume, these first prints were successful enough that several others were subsequently produced to show the backstage areas of the rest of the major theaters in Tokyo shortly thereafter. The theme of *Shōhon jitate*'s illustrations was meant to be the theatrical backstage, and Utagawa Kunisada, the artist behind these prints, was brought on board to illustrate *Shōhon jitate* as well. While these prints may have been a critical initial inspiration, however, Kunisada's illustrations expand beyond the direct reproduction of the cross-section or spaces of the dressing rooms to suggest the context of the theater not by the backstage itself but through what Andrew Lawrence Markus has called the "prop-like"³ depiction of the objects of the stage itself. They turn the materiality of the theater space and its properties into a kind of aesthetic of theatricality, much like the text's inclusion of elements such as stage directions and theatrical terminology.

In other words, these illustrations broke with convention by showing not what the stage

² Andrew Lawrence Markus, *The Willow in Autumn: Ryūtei Tanehiko, 1783-1842* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 75.

³ *Ibid.*

objects meant to represent (the water, trees, or flowers within the narrative world of the story) but as they actually looked on stage—ropes, stands, flatness, and all. Although this was a significant innovation for which *Shōhon jitate* has become known, such illustration of stage objects was not pioneered by Tanehiko's text or Kunisada's illustrations. Rather, Kunisada's images were drawing from a visual language for such depiction of stage objects developed in encyclopedic books about the theater published for general readership in the 1790s and early 1800s.

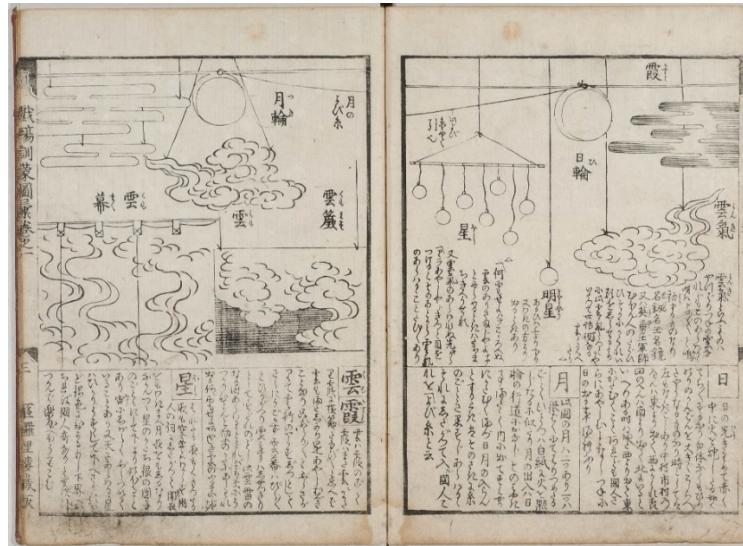


Figure 3: Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui* (1803). Ritsumeikan University Art Research Center.

These pages, for example, from Shikitei Sanba's 1803 *Shibai kinmō zui* 戲場訓蒙図彙 present a series of props for representing different aspects of weather and celestial objects on the stage. The "cloud curtain" on the bottom left is of course quite similar to the curtain used to express the water in *Shōhon jitate*'s illustration above, while many of the other objects are clearly cutouts suspended or pulled across the stage by the ropes or wires visible here. The humor and pleasure of Sanba's text, and of other such encyclopedic texts on the theater, was found in precisely this gap in representation. Until these texts, depictions of stage objects in print had shown the objects they meant to represent; these books, in contrast, facilitated a defamiliarization of how the audience had learned to accept the inconsistencies between stage objects and their referents outside of the theater by making their materiality newly visible by depicting them as encyclopedic specimens.

In total, nearly a dozen such encyclopedic books on the theater published for a general readership survive in published or manuscript form⁴ from both the Edo and Kansai areas in the brief span between 1791 and 1804, not including reprints or reprintings under alternate titles. These books provide a wealth of information about kabuki—its terminology, its customs, and its

⁴ Two manuscripts in this genre survive. One titled *Sanza meikagami* 三座明鏡 is copied in volumes 52 and 53 of Ota Nanpo's *zuihitsu Ichiwa ichigen*. The origin of the work and its authorship have yet to be determined. The other, Mimasuya Nisōji's *Shibai yōshū* 戲場用集 was clearly intended to be published but never was. For more on Mimasuya's text, see Akama Ryō, *Zusetsu Edo no engekisho—kabuki hen* (Tokyo: Yagishoten, 2003), 206.

history—but one of the most curious features shared by all of these works is the considerable number of pages they dedicated to illustrations of stage objects. Pages of lanterns, costumes, wigs and hairstyles, props for representing aspects of weather, birds and animals, various stage settings, trees and plants, and seemingly random collections of stage properties. Exploring the gaps that emerged between theatrical and encyclopedic ways of looking at and presenting objects, these texts became a source of both humor and critique. While reflecting an awareness of theater's artificiality, they also used the polysemic nature of stage properties to call into question existing modes of knowledge production and dissemination as exemplified in two of Japan's early illustrated encyclopedias, *Kinmō zui* 訓蒙図彙 (1666) and *Wakan sansai zue* 和漢三才図会 (1712).

Both the *Kinmō zui* and *Wakan sansai zue* were based on Chinese models of encyclopedias.⁵ One of the tasks in producing a Japanese version of an encyclopedia based on Chinese models was translating the terminology and information of those texts for a Japanese readership, and Nakamura Tekisai's 1666 *Kinmō zui* was significant in introducing illustration to these existing Chinese models of encyclopedias and educational texts as a main means of this translation.⁶ Also an adaptation of Chinese models, the *Wakan sansai zue* was edited by Terajima Ryōan on the model of the Ming encyclopedia *San cai tu hui* and published over the course of three decade. As encyclopedias, *Kinmō zui* and *Wakan sansai zue* aimed to be broadly comprehensive, ordering the natural and human world into sections on astronomy, architecture, geography, culture, animals, plants, and the human body, almost all with accompanying illustrations. *Kinmō zui* inspired dozens of books based on its model or parodying its format (the *Kinmō zui shūsei* alone, for example, includes 30 such entries and is not comprehensive), ranging in topic from the playful *Kōshoku kinmō zui* 好色訓蒙図彙 to more specialized texts. This breadth of reception indicates that, despite being ostensibly produced for the purpose of education of children, *Kinmō zui* clearly enjoyed a much broader readership and influence in terms of age and social class, especially over time.⁷

In both *Kinmō zui* and *Wakan sansai zue*, illustrations emerge as a critical technology for knowledge codification and transmission, but in doing so they also required the development of a new methodology for producing and presenting their subjects as specimens.

⁵ Federico Macron, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

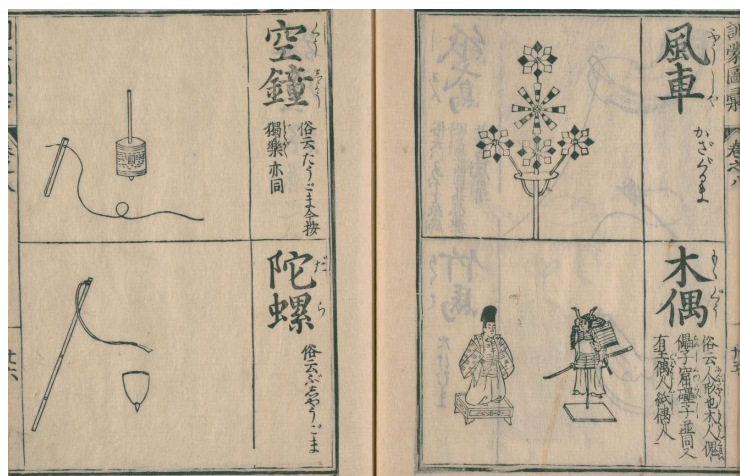


Figure 4: Nakamura Tekisai, *Kinmō zui* (1666). National Diet Library.

The illustrations in *Kinmō zui* dominate the visual space—each page features two entries with its name and a brief explanatory text to the right. Each entry is isolated in its own box and illustrated in fine detail, but also with the minimal amount of elaboration needed to make the object readily recognizable. Many of the objects are isolated and suspended in blank space, in other words, becoming divorced from their surroundings and highly decontextualized.⁸ While featuring significantly smaller images and adding considerably more textual information and explanation for each entry, *Wakan sansai zue* would largely maintain the same illustrative strategy of decontextualization and minimally recognizable detail for its own illustrations as well.

As a mode of knowledge production and dissemination, this decontextualization of objects in illustration serves an important purpose in these works: it emphasizes the legibility of objects (i.e. their ability to be recognized by the codification of shared visible qualities) which allows them to then be categorized as individual specimens representative of a larger standardized group. While Federico Macron has argued that the illustrations in *Wakan sansai zue* “tended to be simple, small, and marginal to verbal explanations,”⁹ the inclusion of illustrations was of course an important innovation of these encyclopedias, and the centrality of detailed and accurate illustrations of natural objects to the development of natural science and its texts would increase throughout the Edo period. In these early illustrations, however, the goal seems to have been simplification, streamlining the images into recognizable characteristics in order to facilitate apprehension of the names and textual information. Janice Neri has termed this visual strategy “specimen logic” in the context of early modern European texts of the natural sciences, a logic in which nature is turned “into object by decontextualizing select creatures and items—that is, by removing them from their habitats, environments, and settings...Specimen logic produces images that are stubbornly insistent on the materiality of their subject matter.”¹⁰ This concern

⁸ The notable exceptions to this are sections on animals and insects, in which the context (water, land, plants, etc.) served to provide information about where the animal or insect resides and, in some cases, their relative size. For explanation of similar techniques of specimen drawing in early modern Europe see Janice Neri, *The Insect and the Image: Visualizing Nature in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 84.

⁹ Macron, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan*, 231.

¹⁰ Neri, *The Insect and the Image: Visualizing Nature in Early Modern Europe*, xiii.

with representing the materiality of entries further reflects a specific attitude about learning and education in which referents for terminology could be standardized and stabilized, and ultimately transmitted through image text relationships, not just in the case of specimens of the natural world, but even for human beings and their culture and products.



Figure 5: Manya Hikotarō, *Nō no kinmō zui* (1687). National Diet Library.

The first book to apply these techniques for representing objects and ordering knowledge to the materials of the theater concerned not kabuki but noh theater. The *Nō no kinmō zui* 能之訓蒙図彙 by Manya Hikotarō published in 1687, just two decades after *Kinmō zui* itself, already contained many of the elements which would feature in later texts at the end of the eighteenth century. Opening with detailed illustrations of the noh stage, including the dimensions and names for specific components and the locations where various performers would sit, it goes on to devote much of its second volume to illustrations of stage properties. It catalogues the names of and roles for which different masks were used, paired with illustrations of each, as well as costumes and various properties. As with the illustrations of *Kinmō zui*, its objects are depicted in isolation rather than in the context of performance, their detail enough to render them readily recognizable and distinct from one another. While *Nō no kinmō zui* was arguably not ultimately as influential as the much later *Ukan sandai zue* in motivating other similar books about the theater, its illustrations and information would continue to appear in various forms in later books about noh such as *Nō no zushiki* 能之図式 (1715) and a revised edition of its original text in 1760 under the title *Kaisei nō kinmō zui* 改正能訓蒙図彙.¹¹ In some ways, *Nō no kinmō zui* was just one of a large number of books that presented themselves as the “*kinmō zui*” of a particular area of culture or knowledge, and it certainly does not parody the overall format of the *Kinmō zui* or explore the artificiality of stage objects in the same way that later books would. It does indicate, however, an early and longstanding link between encyclopedic illustration and an interest in representing and codifying the objects of the stage in print for more general audiences.

In contrast to *Nō no kinmō zui*’s more straightforward application of an encyclopedic lens onto theater properties, the first encyclopedic book to address kabuki would bring to the fore how comically unsuited stage properties were for the kind of observational scrutiny that had been developed in the depiction of objects in encyclopedias. The preface to 1791’s *Ukan sandai zue* 羽勘三台図絵 written by Hōseidō Kisanji emphasizes the book’s attention to the “illustration of

¹¹ See Asakura Haruhiko, ed., *Kinmō zui shūsei* Vol. 12 (Tokyo: Ōzorasha, 1998), 9.

those things which differ in their shape”¹² from the observable world or the “ghosts with feet and horses with *tabi* socks on their feet,”¹³ in other words, it turns its focus to those elements of stage properties which most distinguished them from everyday objects or customs observable in the world outside the theater. If anything, rather than revealing the hidden secrets or spaces of the theater in print, the illustrations of *Ukan sandai zue* by Katsukawa Shundō I re-expose to view those material aspects of the theater which were already visible to the audience but had not prior to this been depicted in print as such, like triangular-shaped snow or the flatness of prop lanterns. This gap between the narrative space of plays and the world as viewed by the characters and the materiality of the objects visible to audience was what made the strings and poles supporting the birds or clouds suspended in the air suddenly so humorous.¹⁴

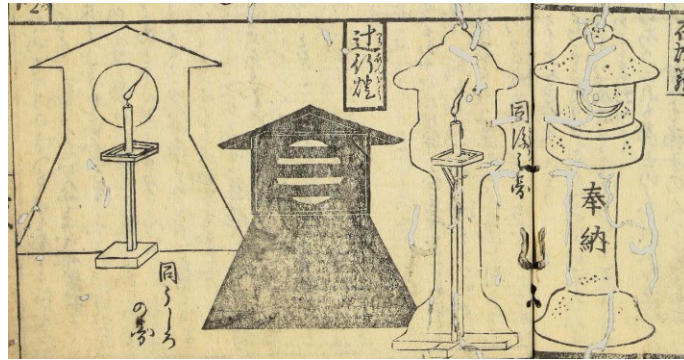


Figure 6: Hōseidō Kisanji, *Ukan sandai zue* (1791) Waseda University Library.

It’s interesting to note how many of the illustrations of stage objects, both in *Ukan sandai zue*, other similar texts, as well as *Shōhon jitate*, focus on the flatness of stage objects. Flat trees, flat lanterns, even the painted boards used for sets in the first illustration mentioned from *Shōhon jitate* seem to emphasize the two-dimensionality of these objects as the clearest example of the duplicitous nature of stage objects. In another sense as well, the dual-sided nature of these objects could stand in for the binary of front and backstage. This binary was a key aspect of the appeal of these books as it expressed a division in access to knowledge, a line these texts themselves were actively blurring. In other words, the view from the audience and the view from the backstage represented not just vantage points on the theater performance itself but also entirely different levels of access to knowledge about the theater. An informed audience member might have a breadth of knowledge of the actors or content of the plays, but only someone connected with the production of the theater would know the secrets behind stage tricks, the textual conventions for playscripts, or the appearance of the properties’ rooms. That is, of course, until the production of texts such as *Ukan sandai zue*. The simplicity of this rhetorical dichotomy, however, does not play out within the actual space of the theater. Far from there being only two vantage points from which to observe the stage, audience members could view the stage from a variety of positions, sometimes even from the back of the stage itself in the case

¹² Hōseidō Kisanji, *Ukan sandai zue* in *Kabuki no bunken 4*, ed. Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu (Tokyo: Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, 1971), 95.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁴ Jonathan Zwicker, “Stage and Spectacle in an Age of Maps: Kabuki and the Cartographic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” in *Publishing the Stage: Print and Performance in Early Modern Japan*, ed. Keller Kimbrough and Satoko Shimazaki, Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Center for Asian Studies, 2011) 150-151.

of *rakandai* 羅漢台 seating. The very act of revealing this knowledge to more general audiences for the first time seems to have generated, or at least increased, a desire to appeal to this binary of front and backstage and the distinct circles of knowledge it represented.

Shikitei Sanba's 1803 *Shibai kinmō zui* would borrow (in some cases wholesale) many of these elements of *Ukan sandai zue*'s text and illustrations, but it would further consider how the polysemy of stage objects that did not engage in this binary also resisted encyclopedic illustration.



Figure 7: Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui* (1803). Ritsumeikan University Art Research Center.

Volume eight, illustrated by Katsukawa Shun'ei, for instance, contains pages of detailed illustrations of stage properties of kabuki, including a *go* game board, a wallet, a water ladle, along with a number of other seemingly random items. Each object is labeled individually, but some also receive brief textual “explanations.” Upon closer inspection, however, the explanatory text for the objects is anything but transparent or informative; indeed, to appreciate their meaning at all the reader has to already possess certain knowledge about the theater and the plays in which these specific objects appear. For instance, the label for the *shuriken* 手裏剣 or throwing knife, reads as follows: “Quickly stopping the throwing knife thrown with an ‘Ai,’ ‘Alms for the pilgrim!’”¹⁵ The props and this line are from the play *Sanmon goson no kiri* 楼門五三桐, in which Ishikawa Goemon, perched high above on the gate of Nanzen-ji throws the knife down toward Mashiba Hisayoshi, disguised as a pilgrim down below. Hisayoshi catches the knife with the water ladle he was carrying and utters the famous line quoted in Sanba's text. The trick is of course that no knife is thrown—the water ladle with an embedded knife is produced by the actor playing Mashiba Hisayoshi, impeccably timed so that he seems to catch it seconds after it's “thrown” from above.¹⁶

¹⁵ Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui: Kyōwa sannen shohanbon* in Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu, ed. *Kabuki no bunken* 3 (Tokyo: Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, 2001), 124.

¹⁶ Today a mechanical version is used in which the knife, hidden initially inside the shaft of the ladle, can be made to suddenly emerge to a 90-degree angle with sufficient speed to convincingly make it appear that the actor catches the knife. For an English translation of the scene, see James R. Brandon and Samuel L. Leiter, ed., *Kabuki plays on Stage Vol. 2: Villainy and Vengeance: 1773-1799* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

Sanba's text of course, provides none of this information. Relying on the satisfaction produced when readers feel "in-the-know" by being able to catch the reference, a broader theme throughout the text, it also points to another way in which the "play" of the text is produced from applying the illustration techniques of encyclopedias to stage objects in a way distinct from *Ukan sandai zue*. These pages of objects demonstrate the inherently contextual nature of stage properties—their significance derives directly from their narrative context within specific scenes or plays. In contrast to the types of objects selected for illustration in *Ukan sandai zue* (copied in turn in *Shibai kinmō zui*), which possess material aspects that distinguished them from their non-theatrical counterparts, most of the objects that Sanba includes here would be largely indistinguishable from their real-world counterparts or entirely meaningless for readers who were not sufficiently familiar with the scenes in which they appeared. The objects of the stage resist the encyclopedic process of being made into specimens because their very meaning is dependent upon their context.

Stage properties, then, represented a different, theatrical, mode of viewing, which necessitated a kind of double vision; keeping in view the materiality of the object while also seeing beyond it to how it was viewed within the narrative world of the play. Encyclopedic modes of looking at objects as specimens sought to stabilize the objects they examined by identifying their most essential material qualities which defined them against other specimens. Theatrical viewing, in contrast, refused such efforts of fixation. Objects of the stage maintained their multiplicity of meaning and contextual significance even when presented anew in printed books. Through the humor that they generate from the gap between encyclopedic illustration and stage properties, *Ukan sandai zue* and *Shibai kinmō zui* also suggest that theater and the nature of its stage properties were a fertile ground from which to question the visual methodologies of illustrated encyclopedias for representing the world. The logic of the decontextualized specimen, of illustration itself as a means of translation, capturing, and disseminating knowledge, broke down when presented with the polysemic and contextual nature of theater objects.

While such analysis would seem to suggest that the playful nature of theatrical representation and stage objects uniquely positions them to critique the stability of representation found in the earlier illustrated encyclopedias, it ultimately points to something quite different: the ludic nature of knowledge found in these illustrated encyclopedias themselves. In these encyclopedias, the logic of the specimen was applied equally to entries expected to be familiar to their readers and to the depiction of foreign persons, objects, and animals, both fictional and actual. *Kinmō zui* and *Wakan sansai zue*'s application of this mode of observation and representation equally to everyday objects familiar to the reader and to those foreign or more inaccessible to a general readership also hints at the performative nature of these techniques.



Figure 8: *Wakan sansai zue* (1712). Waseda University Library.

This image, for example, found in volume fourteen on foreign peoples, shows mythical persons such as those with long legs or long arms. Spectacles of bodily difference and foreignness, they are still produced with the same illustrative techniques as other peoples and the other objects of the text. This strategy gives the impression of comprehensiveness through the inclusion of rarer elements while also inviting a new appreciation of familiar objects such as everyday tools or familiar animals. It performs knowledge by lending credence to its information and illustrations of foreign or rare entries through the recognizability of its depictions of everyday objects. In other words, using the same methods of representation for entries that were fictional or unavailable for direct observation provided the impression that the information was as reliable for those objects close by as those which were literally worlds away.

Yet the inclusion of these imagined peoples or objects within the text also suggests a form of play at work. *Kinmō zui*'s preface, for instance, emphasizes the priority of observational methods in producing the illustrations: "The appearance of each entry [品] is modeled on the customs and local products of this country. They are all drawn and modelled by someone who has observed [目撃する] them. Or they rely on duplications by artists, or craftsman were asked to produce them after inquiring of knowledgeable and expert persons."¹⁷ It isn't precisely clear how seriously readers were meant to take the inclusion of these more fictional objects in light of these claims, but the afterlife of these figures in fiction and spectacle shows suggests that they were very much seen as elements of play, at the very least later on. Hiraga Gennai would base the mythical travel of his protagonist Shidōken to the island of women or people with holes in their stomachs in *Fūryū Shidōken-den* in 1763 on the layout of foreign lands in *Wakan sansai zue*, for instance. And even as late as 1854, the people with long legs and long arms would make another appearance in a spectacle show of life-like carved wood dolls (*ikiningyō*) in Asakusa.¹⁸ While of course significantly postdating *Wakan sansai zue*'s publication in 1712, the persistence of these figures in fiction and spectacle shows suggests playful elements to these illustrated encyclopedias and their presentation of knowledge that would be picked up on in these later

¹⁷ Asakura Haruhiko, ed., *Edo jidai zusetsu hyakka: Kinmō zui no sekai* (Tokyo: Ōzorasha, 2002), 25.

¹⁸ Kawazoe Yū, *Edo no misemono* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), 169-170 and Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu to iu misemono: Abura-e no jidai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2010), 50.

works. In that sense, the encyclopedic books on the theater at the turn of the nineteenth century present not straightforward critiques of these earlier encyclopedias but rather continuations of and expansions of the ludic nature of knowledge and illustration that was already there.

The reappearance of stage objects in Ryūtei Tanehiko's *Shōhon jitate*, and the numerous books that would mimic this aspect of its illustrations, shows that the conventions for depicting stage objects in these encyclopedic books on the theater would persist as a visual shorthand for the theatrical context long after their function as parody seems to have run its course. An extension of the playfulness of Sanba's own appropriation of the illustration techniques of encyclopedias, Tanehiko's book and Kunisada's illustrations similarly used the spaces of the backstage and stage properties to signal a certain kind of duplicity to its readers—just as the properties on stage so visibly deviated from what they were meant to represent, Tanehiko's book, itself a parodic version of kabuki playscripts, operated in a double register. Just as theater audiences possessed a kind of double vision, recognizing the flatness of the stage tree while knowing what it represented, readers of Tanehiko's book must have enjoyed the fissures in its thinly veiled façade as object of the backstage.

Pulling Back the Curtain—Revealing the Mechanics of the Theater

While *Shōjon jitate*'s illustrations attended primarily to stage properties and the gap between what they represented and how they appeared on stage, another book, inspired by it, turned its attention to the hidden spaces and secrets behind a popular stage trick. The illustrated playscript (*eiri nehon* 絵入根本) of Tsuruya Nanboku IV's *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* 於染久松色讀 published in 1831 offered its readers an unusual glimpse into the preparation for and execution of a stage trick known as *hayagawari* 早替り. *Hayagawari* is a trick in which a single actor played multiple roles within a performance and switched between them with shocking speed, usually through the aid of specially designed costumes, wigs, hidden exits, and character doubles. The performance of *hayagawari* was experiencing a significant boom in the early nineteenth century when Nanboku's play first premiered in 1813, fueled by rivalries between actors over the maximum number of roles a single actor could manage to perform in a single play or dance piece.¹⁹

The materiality of stage objects and the stage itself emerge in *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* with a valence not apparent in either *Shōhon jitate* or earlier depictions of stage objects in books on the theater. The illustrations of its first volume anticipate the execution of the *hayagawari* trick with which the last illustration of its final volume will close, introducing the major actors behind it over the course of several images. They depict not only Iwai Hanshirō V 五代目岩井半四郎, playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV 四代目鶴屋南北, and the wig maker

¹⁹ *Hayagawari* also became a metaphor in works of fiction by Shikitei Sanba and others, likening the changeability of human emotion and character to the actor's speedy transition between roles. See Robert Leutner, *Shikitei Sanba and the Comic Tradition in Edo Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1985), 81-82 and Timon Screech, "The Birth of the Anatomical Body" in Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, ed. *Births and Rebirths in Japanese Art*. (Leiden: Hotei Press, 2001), 125.

Tomokurō 友九郎,²⁰ costume workers and carpenters, but also show lead actor Iwai Hanshirō and the other actors inspecting the materials which will facilitate the trick; the costumes and wigs (each specially designed for quick changes), and the hole in the stage and palanquin through which actors and their doubles could switch places.²¹



Figure 9: Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* (1831).
Ritsumeikan University Art Research Center.

As with the illustration of the quick-change itself, these earlier scenes draw attention to the collective effort not just between the actor, playwright, and others in charge of various props and costuming behind the scenes, but also between these people and the objects of performance themselves.

In part, this attention to collaboration, not just between human actors but the stage and its properties as well, was a response to a thorny conundrum for depicting stage spectacles like *hayagawari* in print: how to best reveal in print an on-stage moment so dependent on hiding its mechanisms and means from audience view? How to intelligibly communicate the steps and multiple parts and players behind the trick within a single image, while also keeping in sight how the trick is supposed to appear to the audience? Kunisada's illustrations in *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* accomplish this not only by introducing the major players and objects that enabled the many quick-changes of the play, but also by providing a view of the trick not from

²⁰ In addition to his work in kabuki theaters as a wigmaker, Tomokurō was also active in *misemono* shows and was well-known enough at the time to have appeared in a number of recorded *senryū* poems. See Kawatake Shigetoshi, *Kabuki enshutsu no kenkyū* (Hayakawa Shobō, 1949), 100-101 and Nishihara Ryūu, *Senryū Edo kabuki* (Tokyo: Shun'yōdō, 1925), 182-183.

²¹ The title of this trick is also quite interesting—it's labeled as the "squeezing through the palanquin" or *kago nuke* 駕抜け, but *kago nuke* 籠抜け "squeezing through the basket" was also the name for a type of acrobatic spectacle in which a performer would dive through a basket raised up on a stand that had several candles standing up and lit inside of it. The performer, wearing a straw hat, would jump over the handles in the basket without catching even his hat on fire. An illustration of the trick appears in the *Wakan sansai zue*, and the accompanying text also claims that the trick had been performed since the beginning of the Edo period.

the perspective of the audience, but from the backstage. Looking out at the theater from behind the stage, the illustration gives readers a chance to view the theater from an unusually intimate perspective, one which exposed the materials of the stage to the reader in detail, from the candles illuminating the actors to the backside of a flat wooden tree, covered with scraps of writing.



Figure 10: Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* (1831).
Ritsumeikan University Art Research Center.

The actor Iwai Kumesaburō lies in wait for the moment in which he will swap places with Iwai Hanshirō as the “stand-in” for the character Osome, hidden from the view of the audience by stacks of harvested rice but foregrounded for the reader. As with the illustrations from *Shōhon jitate*, also produced by Kunisada, every aspect of the image plays with the duality of front and behind, the visible and the hidden, the narrative world of the play and the materiality of the stage.

As this book demonstrates, bringing the mechanics and means of stage tricks into view required quite literally new perspectives on the theater and on theater space itself which could incorporate the above, below, and backstage in a single image. While this required reference to how these spectacles appeared to the audience on stage, for the most part these were not attempts to recreate the experience of seeing them in the theater, but rather attempts to explore imagined views of the stage which were only accessible through print. In some cases, such as these illustrations in *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri*, these perspectives were accomplished with views of the theater space and backstage which, while not the most common perspective from which to see the stage, were not entirely unheard of either, since audience members did sit on the stage in some cases. In others, however, and especially in the case of illustrating the many mechanical spectacles of kabuki, this was best accomplished by producing entirely imagined views of the physical space of the theater and stage that involved its cutting away or disarticulation into parts.

This dynamic of hiddenness and revelation in the theater and in print begins not with mechanical spectacles themselves, but with books which revealed the secrets behind magic tricks such as *Shinsen gejutsu* 神仙戯術, a translation of a Chinese book by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (Japanese: Chin Keiju) printed in 1696. Early texts in these genres such as the 1725 *Chinjutsu*

sange bukuro 珍術さんげ袋 or *Tawabure gusa* たはふれ草 (1729) emphasized the performance context of magic or mechanical spectacles while also including multi-step diagrams which allowed readers to both understand how the trick was performed and perhaps to be able to execute it themselves. As Yokoyama Yasuko has pointed out, for those books whose authors we can identify, the vast majority of them were not the performers or creators of these tricks, but rather educated amateurs from other professions who seemed to have authored these books as a second vocation or simply as a pastime out of interest, many of them coming from other fields of knowledge such as the medical profession.²²

Books on automata mechanics began emerging in the Osaka region in the early eighteenth century and, following these earlier examples, emphasized the performance context before providing detailed and often multi-step diagrams which would allow readers to both understand how the trick was performed and perhaps to be able to execute it themselves. The structure of one such book on automata published in 1730, *Karakuri kinmō kagami kusa* 機訓蒙鏡草, for example, reifies the gap between the audience's view of the spectacles and the revelation of their hidden mechanics through separate volumes; the first volume is entirely devoted to how the spectacles themselves were performed. Including these views gave the reader a chance to wonder and ponder at the tricks themselves before being given the backstage secrets for each. These scenes of performance also model responses of wonder and curiosity for the reader by depicting audience members with quotations of them marveling at the spectacle and questioning how it could be possible.

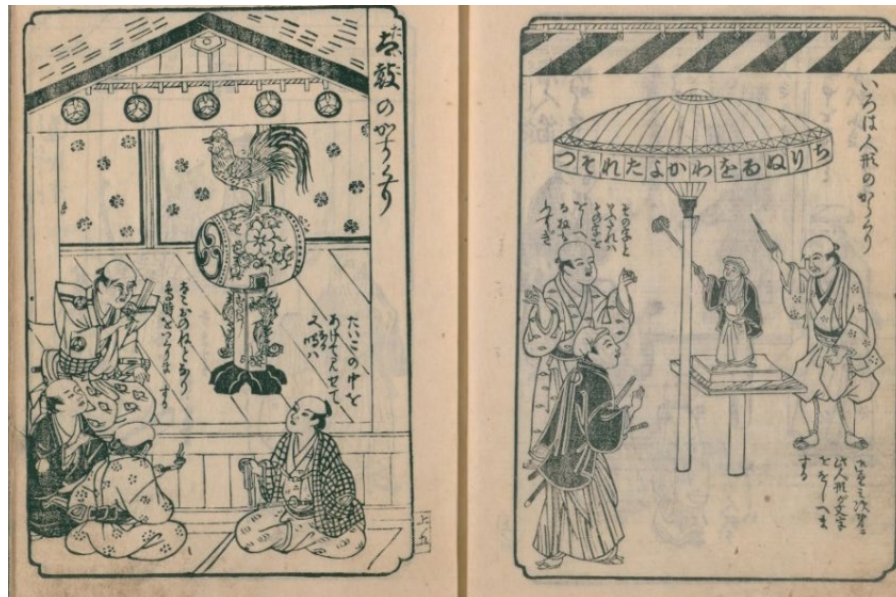


Figure 11: Tagaya Kanchūsen, *Karakuri kinmō kagami kusa* (1730).
Illustrations: Kawaeda Toyonobu. National Diet Library.

For example, this page shows a trick known as the “alphabet (*iroha*) mechanical doll” in which a doll is holding a pole directed at the rim of an umbrella above it on which each letter of the Japanese *kana* alphabet is written in order. The two spectators exclaim excitedly that, just as the operator of the puppet has claimed, “Whatever character I say out loud, the doll then shows me

²² Yokoyama Yasuko, *Yōkai tejina no jidai* (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2012), 71-72.

what the written character is—how strange! (*fushigi*).”²³ Looking at this first illustration of the trick it’s impossible to determine how the doll is being manipulated since the operator appears to be doing nothing other than standing behind the puppet and gesturing at the characters himself with his fan.

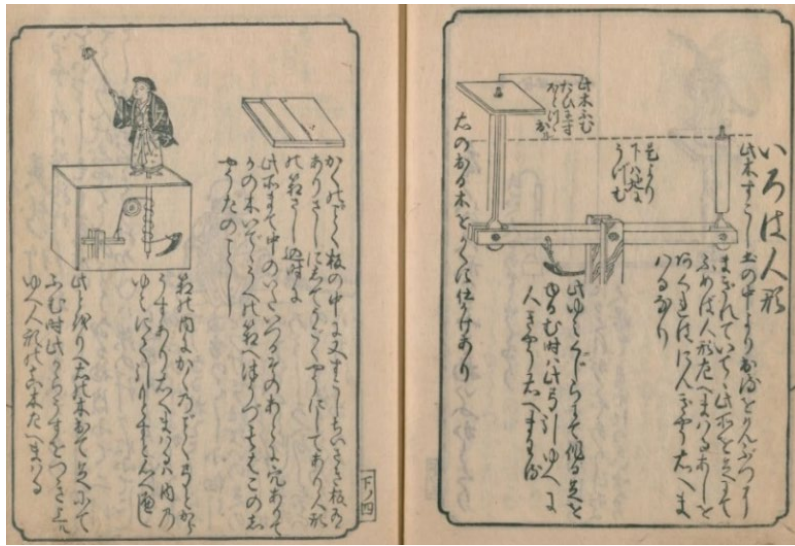


Figure 12: Tagaya Kanchūsen, *Karakuri kinmō kagami kusa* (1730). Illustrations by Kawaeda Toyonobu. National Diet Library.

The next volume makes clear in several diagrams with copious textual notes that not only are there mechanics hidden within the box beneath the doll itself, but also that there is a further seesaw-like apparatus hidden underneath the ground upon which the operator is standing in the earlier illustration. When the operator steps his foot on to a small pin sticking up through the ground the doll is turned to the left, and when his foot is removed, the doll moves to the right. Having thus first established how the trick was performed, the book’s second and third volumes allow the reader to do what the audience could not—to satisfy their curiosity by peaking behind the curtain or inside to the mechanics hidden within boxes or dolls.

The 1796 *Kikō zui* took these techniques of illustration from these earlier books to an even greater level of disarticulation and detail. A preface to the *Kikō zui* by fiction writer and scholar of Dutch studies Morishima Chūryō also suggests that these books could inspire what we might call a “mechanical vision” with which to look at the natural world:

What is required for making machines [奇器] is looking at many things and remembering them, touching many things and learning to use your ingenuity. For example...Takeda Omi saw kids playing with sand and developed an idea for a *karakuri* mechanical trick [機関]. This book too, which is truly on the same level as children playing, may become some help in developing such a spirit of discernment and invention [起見生心],²⁴

²³ Tagadani Kanchusen, “Karakuri kinmō kagami-gusa” Kimura Toshiyuki, ed., *Edo kagaku koten sōsho* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Inawa Shuppan, 1978), 6.

²⁴ For analysis of the meaning and context of this term in the text, see Matsuura Yoshiki, “‘Kiken seishin’ no shutten to imi: ‘Karakuri zui’ no yojijukugo” *Toyota kōgyō kōtō senmon gakkō kenkyū kiyō* 43 (2010), 148-139.

depending on the viewer's ability to grasp it [斟酌].²⁵

The preface references the kinds of stories that often surrounded inventors of spectacles such as Takeda Omi and kabuki playwright Namiki Shōza, in which viewing some action and object in the world could inspire a new invention, such as when Namiki Shōza supposedly developed new mechanics for the revolving stage after seeing the movement of a spinning top. Although these stories were meant to convey the status of genius upon these inventors of mechanics, Chūryō's introduction suggests this book of mechanics itself as a means of learning to look at the world in a new way.²⁶

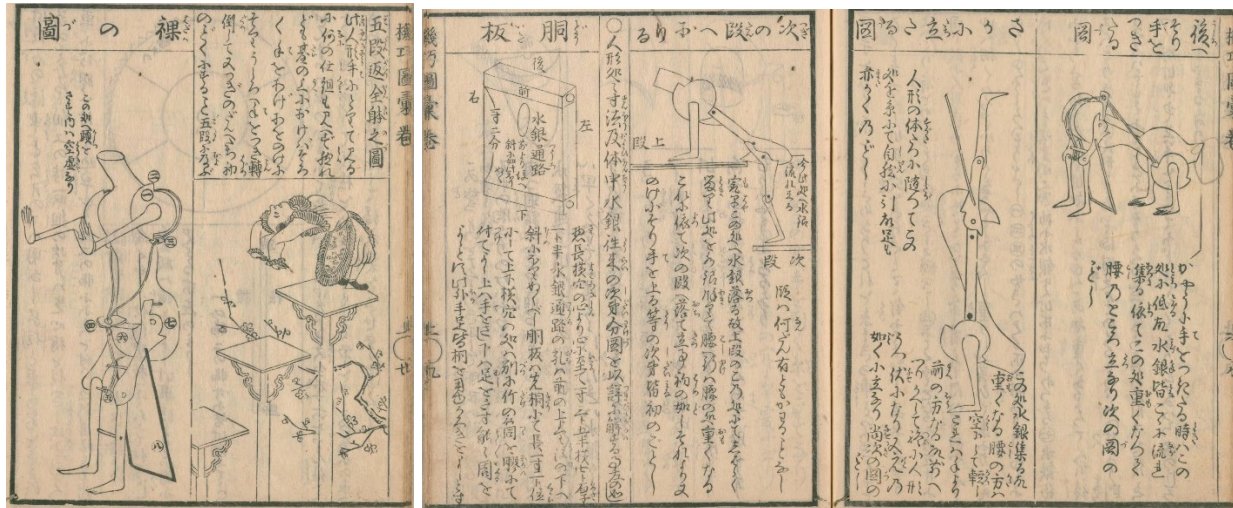


Figure 13: Hosokawa Yorinao, *Kikō zui* (1796) Illustrations: Kawaeda Toyonobu. National Diet Library.

In practical execution, the illustrations of *Kikō zui* appear to be anything but frivolous, as they painstakingly articulate the constituent gears, ropes, pulleys, and other mechanisms in such detail that it approaches the level of a practical manual on how to produce such mechanics in a way that previous books had not. For example, there is an explanation of a doll that does flips as it climbs down a set of platforms that form a staircase. The explanation requires no less than fourteen pages, each containing multiple illustrations which broke the puppet into increasingly smaller parts and pieces. Other sections of the book similarly break down each mechanic into its constituent gears and demonstrate how much taking objects apart and appreciating the relationship between their hidden mechanisms was associated with the acquisition of knowledge. In *Kikō zui* and similar books, the performance context itself begins to fall away from consideration as the focus narrows to articulation and apprehension of the hidden gears, strings, and the mechanic as object. The very disarticulation of these mechanics and the revelation of their intricacy in print became the focus of the experience of wonder and curiosity.

²⁵ Hosokawa Yorinao, “*Kikō zui*” Kimura Toshiyuki, ed., *Edo kagaku koten sōsho* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Inawa Shuppan, 1978), 43.

²⁶ Yulia Frumer stresses that the book had, at its heart, this idea of observation and understanding, much more so than providing information for amateur readers to reproduce the mechanics depicted within it. See Yulia Frumer, *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 158.

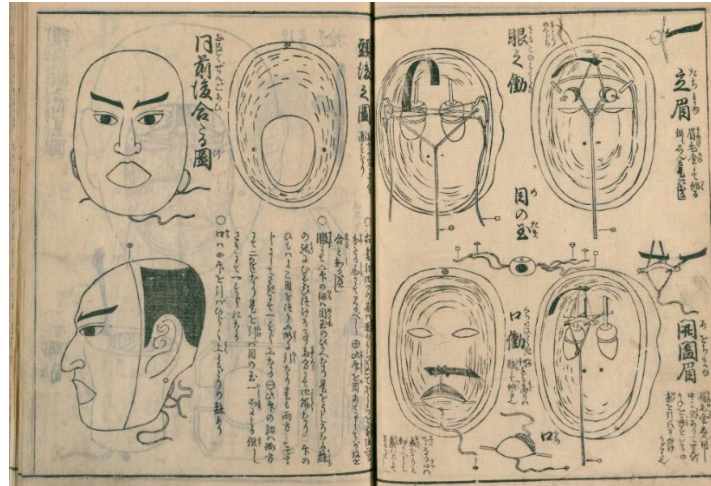


Figure 14: Shōkōsai Hanbei, *Shibai gakuya zue shū* (1802) National Diet Library.

Such strategies of disarticulation in illustrations would ultimately underpin the representation of theater objects in books on the theater at the turn of the nineteenth century. In Shōkōsai Hanbei's *Gakuya zue shū* published in 1802, for example, Shōkōsai turns to the puppet theater and its properties, providing a wealth of diagrams of the inner workings of its puppets in ways that strikingly resemble images of the human body dissected through illustration techniques. Showing the puppets broken into parts, they reveal the mechanisms and cords which facilitated the movements of puppets' hands and face. Some of the most striking illustrations are those of the interior of the puppets' faces which use cutaway diagrams to show how their eyes and facial expressions were manipulated. Showing four views of the puppet heads from the back of their faces, each illustration shows the pullies and strings by which the eyes, mouths, and eyebrows are moved. Each part (mouth, eyes, eyebrows) is also separately represented to demonstrate where each of the strings is attached.

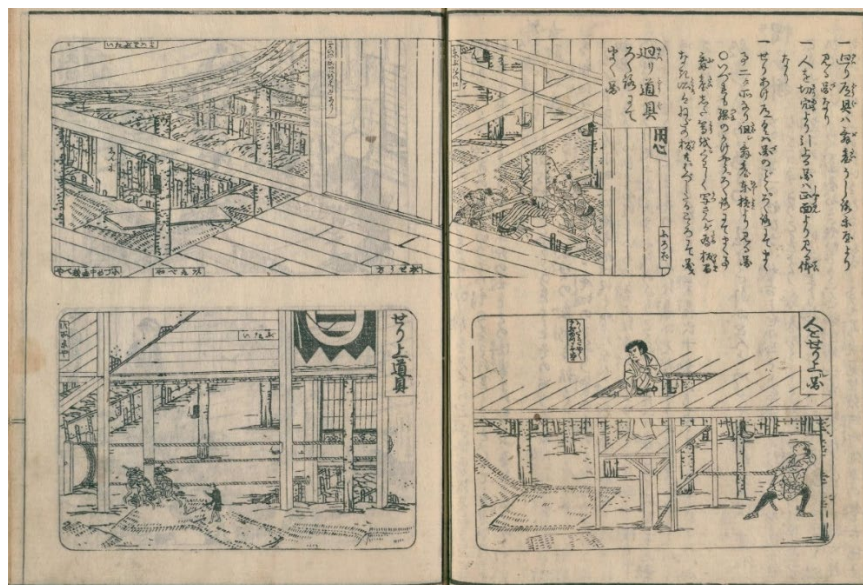


Figure 15: Shōkōsai Hanbei, *Shibai gakuya zue* (1800). National Diet Library.

Ultimately, this logic of disarticulation would be applied not just to smaller properties of the stage, but also the stage and theater itself. Shōkōsai's main illustrations of theater mechanics

depict the stage lift and the revolving stage. Each illustration cuts away sections of the stage floor to reveal the hidden mechanics below while keeping reference to their location on the stage itself. These are of course fictional viewpoints—they do not reflect an actual position from which someone could see both spaces at the same time, but rather are imagined by cutting away portions of the stage floor or providing a complete cross-section of the stage and its below. Even the actor being raised up from below the stage on a lift in one illustration is “cut” in half in the process in order to illustrate the movement over time, suspended half above stage and half below. These unique perspectives reflect the possibilities for print illustration and explanatory diagrams for presenting views of the stage that were not only unavailable to audiences but were in fact not actually viewable in person at all. Just as *Kikō zui*’s illustrations had invited us to marvel at the ingenuity and intricacy of the mechanics, Shōkōsai’s book begins to consider the objects of the theater and the stage itself as technologies in a similar way. These imagined views of the stage from below invited a reappreciation of theater’s own mechanics of wonder.

By the 1803, then, when Shikitei Sanba published the image of the stage mechanics which the 1835 broadsheet uses in its entirety, there was already a long genealogy of images that used cutting away and disarticulation as a key visual strategy of representation. Sanba’s book and its illustrations, however, already begin to parody these dynamics of hiddenness and revelation.

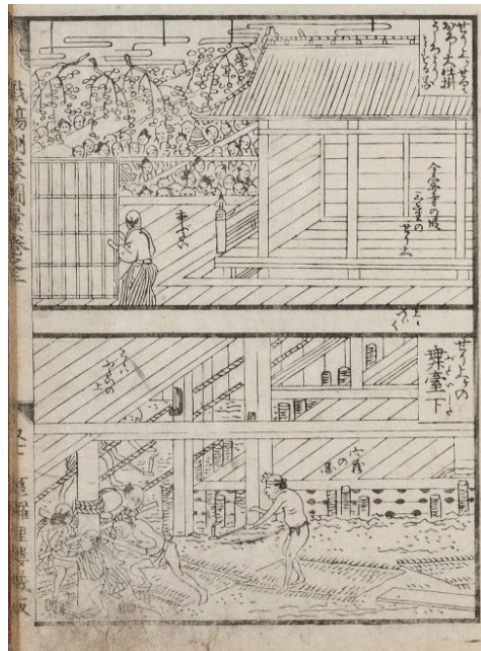


Figure 16: Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui* (1803) Ritsumeikan University Art Research Center.

This illustration by Katsukawa Shun’ei from Sanba’s text, for example, is broken into two sections, one showing the area above the stage and the other the space below it. The top section shows the view from backstage looking out at the audience with the bottom portion of the pavilion of Kinkakuji rising up from below the stage. Underneath this is another illustration which shows the pulleys, ropes, and stagehands who are lifting up the structure from the area below the stage. In order to provide this perspective of the secretive space below the stage, the illustration removes sections of the boards to reveal the mechanics hidden underneath.

Between the two illustrations is a suggestive blank space, however, one which manifests visually another absence one notices when looking at the two illustrations together; while they appear at first to neatly reveal the connections between the action above and below the stage, that which the audience sees and what is hidden from their view, the pulleys and ropes within the image in fact go nowhere and do nothing. In other words, how the movement and mechanics down below materially relate to the emergence of the building above the stage remains entirely opaque.

This is furthermore characteristic of Sanba's treatment of the theater's secrets throughout *Shibai kinmō zui*. In his section on stage machinery, for instance, Shikitei Sanba includes a brief statement about "matters below the stage," claiming, "as it is a closely-guarded secret of the theater, they do not rashly allow in unauthorized persons. The rule is so strict that even this author has no knowledge it."²⁷ This contrasts starkly with an earlier encyclopedic text on the theater, Shōkōsai Hanbei's *Shibai gakuya zue* 劇場楽屋図会, published in Osaka in 1801. In its lengthy entry on the area "below the stage," Shōkōsai provides a wealth of information that Sanba has left out:

The area below the stage is called "hell" [*naraku* ならく]. It's very deep and is lit up with torches in several places...Also, when magicians or ghosts disappear, this is done by having one or two people lower them through a hole set up in the *hanamichi* or the stage when it's signaled that someone has got on [the lift]. It's more or less as shown in the illustration. When a number of people are lifted up together, it's raised up by means of a pulley. For quick-changes, the actors pass through here and, without going up the ladder to the backstage, climb up onto the stage through an opening in the appropriate place and then make their entrance once they've adjusted their makeup and changed their costume there.²⁸

Although Sanba's text was clearly aware of this detailed entry in *Shibai gakuya zue*, as evidenced by other passages it borrows from the earlier text more or less wholesale, Sanba chooses to omit it entirely and rhetorically feign instead a lack of access.²⁹ As with Katsukawa's illustration above, Sanba's book contains many such rhetorical claims of inaccessible or hidden knowledge, both information unavailable to the author and that which he knows but cannot share with readers.

Sanba's *Shibai kinmō zui* was widely influential, both in terms of its textual contents and its illustrations, not only in the case of works of fiction such as *Shōhon jitate*, but even in print materials directly related to the theater. Perhaps the best example of Sanba's book turning up in

²⁷ Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui*, 58.

²⁸ Shōkōsai Hanbei, *Shibai gakuya zue* in Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu, ed. *Kabuki no bunken* 5 (Tokyo: Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, 1973), 22-23.

²⁹ This difference in tone and amount of information is also likely in part a reflection of the fact that *Shibai gakuya zue* was published in Osaka rather than Edo (as most of the other books under discussion were). As outlined in the previous chapter, the development of *karakuri* mechanics and the relationship between kabuki, *karakuri*, and puppet theater was arguably much closer than in Edo at the time, linking the books more closely to those works than the humorous parodies of *Ukan sandai zue* or *Shibai kinmō zui*. Shōkōsai Hanbei was primarily a woodblock print artist, not an author, and this likely influenced the importance given to the detail of the illustrations he provides. In addition to producing a number of actor prints, he developed his own style of *nigao-e* actor likenesses in Osaka and went on to illustrate a number of *e-iri nehon* illustrated playbooks.

the context of theater materials is an unusual promotional print found in the *Misemono* Materials Collection at the National Museum of Japanese History in Chiba. The bottom register of its depiction of the theater, the area showing the mechanics below the stage, is in fact copied wholesale from a depiction of a stage lift from Sanba's *Shibai kinmō zui*.

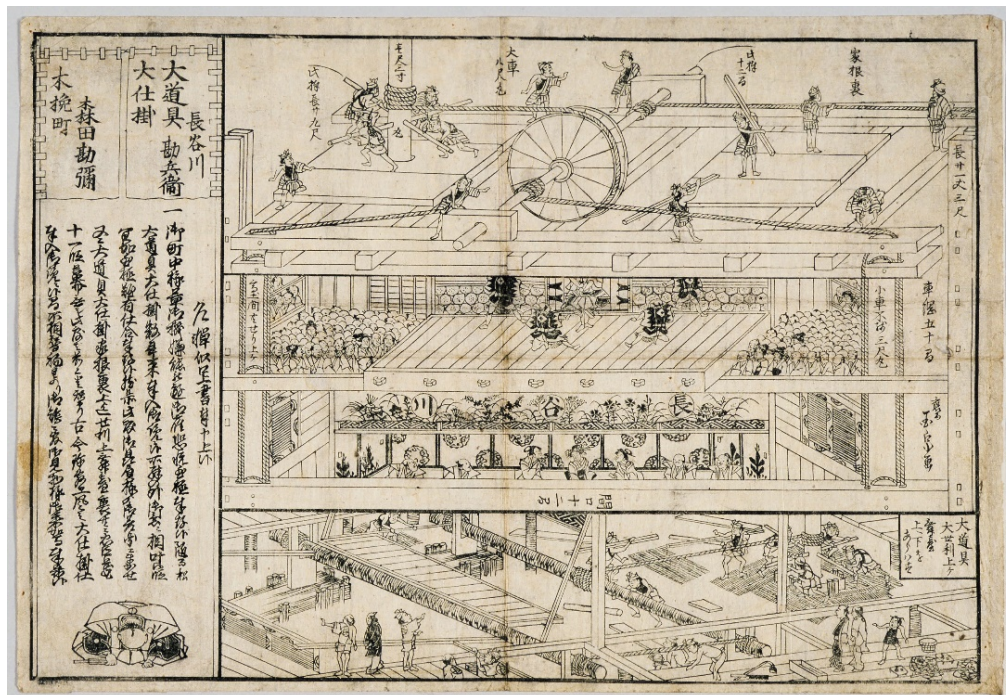


Figure 17: Promotional playbill for a performance of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*.
National Museum of Japanese History, *Misemono* Collection

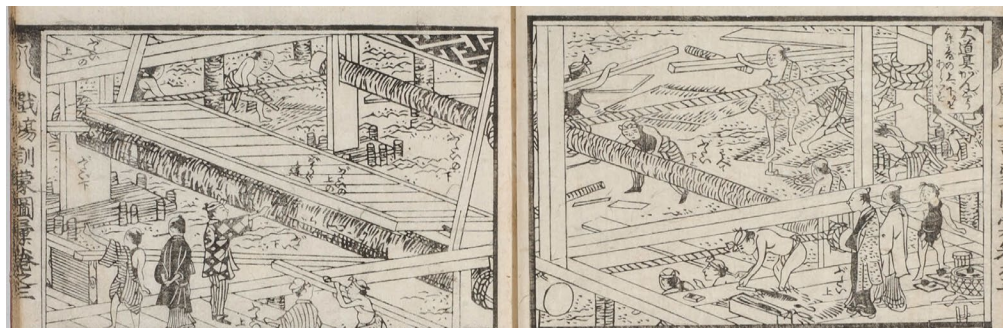


Figure 18: Shikitei Sanba, *Shibai kinmō zui* (1803). Ritsumeikan University Art Research Center.

Although the print is housed in a collection of posters for *misemono* spectacle shows, it in fact depicts a stage trick designed by set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XI for a kabuki performance of the seminal classic *Kanadehon chūshingura* in Edo in 1835. As the text on either side of the print indicates, the trick involved not only lifting up the stage itself but also the audience seating known as the *takadoma* located on either side of the stage as part of a transition between scenes. This print provides its viewers with a near complete cross-section view of the entire theater, from top to bottom, transforming the conception of the theater itself into one large mechanical spectacle; its ropes and gears, but also its staff, actors, and stage properties, are all re-presented as cogs in the machine of the theater. In part this reflects the significance of the career of set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XI and how ubiquitous spectacle had become in the theaters of Edo

from the turn of the nineteenth century. As Kanbei developed or adapted large-scale and more immersive stage spectacles both for kabuki and for *misemono* shows as well, but also as knowledge of the above, below, and backstage circulated in print media, perhaps there was an increasing awareness of only seeing part of a much larger whole of the activity of the theater. Rather than viewing the spectacle generating a desire to understand the secret behind it, this print suggests a reversal of this curiosity had taken place; now, enticed by a striking diagram of the theater's mechanics, perhaps audiences would become curious to see how the trick looked on stage.

Upon closer inspection, however, the print proves to be an obvious trick of a different sort. Despite the detailed comments on sizes, distances, or the explanations of parts noted on the print, all of which would suggest a depth of practical knowledge, the ropes and pulleys which unify the three layers of the illustration do not in fact reflect structural connections in the theater itself; instead, they simply function to link the illustrations together as decorative elements rather than presenting the actual conditions of the stage trick and its execution. This, of course, is the same dynamic we see in Sanba's text, but with one key difference. Where Sanba's text was rehashing long established stage tricks which had also already been revealed in other encyclopedic texts, the print from 1835 reverses the order of hiddenness and revelation built up in these texts. The 1835 print was posted outside of the theater as advertisement a month before the performance. Rather than featuring a trick which audiences would likely have seen on stage before, it is generating anticipation for an entirely new experience of both spectacle and theater space. The curious choice to copy an illustration from Sanba's much earlier text to do so is indicative of the extent to which the visual language of revelation through cutting away the boards of the stage or the walls of the theater had itself become shorthand for the appeal and pleasure of theater's spectacles. The ropes and pulleys that extend downward to this third, citational register thus seem – consciously or not – to foreground the ways in which this document is enmeshed in a genealogy of print that took as its subject making visible to the reader the mechanics of the stage that remained, to the audience member, invisible.

As can be seen from its illustrations reappearing in this promotional print and its influence on the depiction of stage objects in fiction such as Ryutei Tanehiko's *Shōhon jitate* demonstrates, Shikitei Sanba's *Shibai kinmō zui* and other encyclopedic books on the theater at the turn of the nineteenth century had a lasting influence not only on the depiction of the materiality of the theater in print, but on conceptions of the nature of theatrical representation itself. *Shibai kinmō zui* merged together two lineages of printed illustrations of the theater—*Ukan sandai zue*'s playful parody of the illustration of objects as specimens in early illustrated encyclopedias and *Shibai gakuya zue*'s inheritance of techniques for revealing the hidden mechanics of *karakuri*—to construct new ways of looking at and new imagined perspectives on its theater space. Perhaps surprisingly, the appeal of stage tricks did not necessarily languish as their secrets and mechanics were made accessible to audiences through such books. Rather, as print made the hidden areas of the theater—the backstage, the *naraku* below and area above the stage—visible in ways they had never been before, the mechanics themselves began to be a significant enough draw for audiences to become a part of advertising the theater.

As was the case with the illustration from Tanehiko's *Shōhon jitate* being the sole testament to a lost text depicting the backstage of the theater, this print, too, testifies to an otherwise forgotten history. With the exception of one textual source in a book of comic stories

which briefly mentions the trick depicted,³⁰ there are no other extant sources that attest to the existence of this trick or describe how it was done. Despite the considerable investment in changes to the mechanics and structure of the stage and audience spaces, the trick also seems to have never been used again after this performance and, in the absence of the fortuitous survival of this print, would have remained in obscurity. It attests to the cultural moment of Kanbei's retirement, the peak of large-scale mechanics in both kabuki and *misemono*, and to a dynamic relationship between print and the stage.

The print also effectively marks the decline of another longstanding trend: the depiction of the backstage and its mechanics in print. With the notable exception of *Okkyōgen gakuya no honsetsu*, a valuable book that provided diagrams of the secrets behind the most famous tricks of the preceding decades in extraordinary detail, and a few woodblock print series of stage tricks which postdate it, the theatrical illustrated encyclopedia format markedly declined in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Illustration as Nostalgia: Depicting the Stage in Early Meiji

When comprehensive encyclopedic texts reemerged in the early Meiji period, they largely continued trends found in these earlier books of the theater, at times even drawing large sections of their textual information or illustrations about the history of kabuki from these earlier texts. New elements, such as the incorporation of extensive sections on English theater in early published theater histories such as Nagai Toru's 1884 *Kakkoku engeki-shi* 各国演劇史, for example, aimed to situate traditional Japanese theater within an ever-expanding landscape of world performance. Even the appearance of these theater histories, however, which addressed the development of foreign theater as well as domestic, in fact reflected a much longer legacy of situating Japanese theater in a broader international and comparative contexts, extending back to, and far beyond, many encyclopedic theatrical texts around the turn of the nineteenth century.

One significant way in which these texts did diverge from their antecedents, however, was in their relative privileging of textual explanation over the extensive illustrations which had characterized earlier descriptions of the stage and its objects and had given rise to illustration techniques of dissection, cross-section, and decontextualization. Perhaps the starkest contrast can be provided by comparing the role of illustration in the last major encyclopedic book on the theater of late Edo, *Okkyōgen gakuya no honsetsu*, with the sparse illustrations of early Meiji histories of the theater. *Okkyōgen gakuya no honsetsu* is often treated as an outlier in the lineage of encyclopedic books on the theater, in part because of the significant time gap between its production in 1859 and the other works which were published in the 1790s and 1800s, but also because of a marked distinction in the style of how it wrote about and visual depicted the machinery and tricks of the stage. Yet in many ways, *Okkyōgen gakuya no honsetsu* builds on the illustration strategies and techniques of those earlier works, in its inclusion both of numerous

³⁰ The comic story book is *Tōkaidōchū kokkeidan* 東海道中滑稽譚 from 1835 in a section for Odawara. The story briefly describes the various stage tricks of the performance for Kanbei's retirement, a further testament to how significant of an event it was. See Mutō Sadao, ed., *Hanashibon taikei* Vol. 16 (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1979), 50.

stage properties and cutaway depictions of the stage and its mechanics. The technique of displaying the view from the audience in one opening of the pages followed by the view from backstage in another, seen in *Karakuri kinmō kagamigusa*, reappears in the pages of *Gakuya no honsetsu* as it shows the trick of the flowing river in *Imoseyama*, for example. Cutaways return, both in literal form (explaining the tricks behind people appearing to be cut in half during sword fights) and illustrational.

Unlike many of these earlier books, however, in which the text and illustrations were often in more equal relationship with one another, the illustrations of *Okuyōgen gakuya no honsetsu* take over the primary explanatory role, a single illustration filling each set of two pages with smaller additions of text that mostly just elaborate on elements of those illustrations. There are any number of illustrations in the book that one could point to in demonstrating this, but one good example for comparison is a pair of illustrations showing the emergence of the ghost from a lantern, first used for the role of Kasane in 1810.



Figures 19 & 20: Santei Shunba, *Okuyōgen gakuya no honsetsu* (1859).
Tokyo Metropolitan Library.

Spread out across four pages, the illustrations follow the familiar pattern of first presenting the reader with an illustration of how the trick appeared on stage, then flipping the perspective to the backstage to show how the trick was done. The illustrations dominate the space of the pages, with textual explanations of elements of the trick threaded into the remaining white space around and within the images. The text explains that the actor playing the ghost would lay down on the panel and be pushed out of the lantern from behind. As the panel covered the candle below the area would become dark as the ghost emerged, only to appear to reignite as the panel was once again pulled back by the stagehands. This level of detailed illustration and textual explanation of the minute mechanics behind such tricks, far surpassing most other theatrical encyclopedia of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, is one of the reasons that *Okuyōgen gakuya no honsetsu* has received significantly more critical attention and formed the basis for numerous recreations of nineteenth-century stage tricks both in museums and on stage.

Compare this, for example, to *Shibai kenbutsu kokoroe* 芝居見物心得 edited by Akatsuka Kinzaburō and published in 1882. Perhaps the early Meiji text that most closely conformed to the format and content of earlier encyclopedic books on the theater, it contains almost no

illustrations at all, preferring textual explanation instead for everything except costumes, wigs, and a few small depictions of props. Even these few illustrations, however, are not new to this text; the few illustrations of stage costumes and wigs are largely drawn from a manuscript titled *Sanza meikagami* 三座明鏡, copied in volumes 52 and 53 of Ota Nanpo's *zuihitsu Ichiwa ichigen* 一話一言, and the props from Santei Shunba's 1859 *Okyōgen gakuya no honsetsu*. The text reproduces, for instance, the stone lantern trick analyzed above from *Gakuya no honsetsu*, but the detail of the illustration is greatly pared down, preferring to reproduce simplified textual supplements to the streamlined image. The text omits entirely the illustration from *Gakuya no honsetsu* which recreated the appearance of the trick on stage as well.

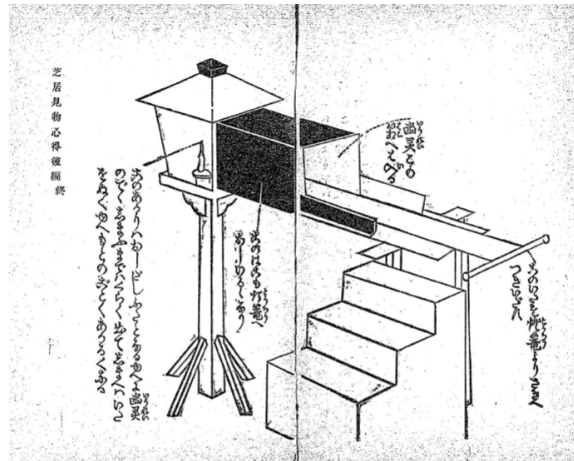


Figure 21: Akatsuka Kinzaburō, ed. *Shibai kenbutsu kokoroe* (1882) National Diet Library.

It's not the case that there were no encyclopedic texts on the theater from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries that prioritized text over illustration as *Kenbutsu kokoroe* seems to—the manuscript of *Sanza meikagami*, from which *Kenbutsu kokoroe* borrowed much of its information, is an example of a much earlier text that also did so—but it is the case that most early-Meiji texts on the theater moved away from the detailed illustrations of their predecessors.

Rather, depictions of the backstage or of stage objects largely became the domain of woodblock prints in the early Meiji period; woodblock series in early to mid-Meiji continued existing visual strategies for representing the stage and its objects, much more so than books on the theater. One set of prints that provides an especially valuable demonstration of the continuations and ruptures of this genre of illustration into the early Meiji period is one of the newly opened Shintomi-za by Kamiyama Seishichi in 1881.



Figure 22: Kamiyama Seishichi (1881). National Theatre (Japan Arts Council).

Taken together, the images attempt to account for both the front and back of the stage in separate prints; the left print shows the backstage areas of the theater where the actors are getting ready for the performance while the right, further split into two registers, shows the inside of the theater with the roof removed in order to merge it with the space outside in front of the theater with its teahouses and adjacent establishments. Prints of the backstage such as this, the same type and format as that which had inspired Taneko's *Shōhon jitate* already in 1815, had continued to be produced periodically in the decades in between.

This set of prints is interesting to consider, too, in contrast to the dissected view of the theater space in the 1835 print for Kanbei's retirement discussed above. This print, too, resects the roof of the stage in order to establish an imagined view of the theatrical space in connection to other areas and activity. The shift in arrangement in this image, however—the inside of the theater is now imagined in direct relationship with the area outside while the backstage is quite literally separated from it into another print entirely—suggests a shift in the relationship established between the front and backstage. Embodying the spacial transition of the Morita-za from to its enclosure within Saruwaka-chō to its reestablishment as the Shintomi-za in the Meiji period, it tracks the accompanying shifts in its audiences and the perception of its social role, discussed in chapter 1.

Another print series that actively sought to reproduce earlier models for illustrating the stage is one from 1897 titled *Ōedo shibai nenjō gyōji* 大江戸芝居年中行事. The series recreates many of the scenes and information from the illustrated encyclopedias from the 1790s and early 1800s, such as the 1803 *Ehon shibai nenjū kagami* 絵本場年中鑑, in rich color and detail in prints by Adachi Ginkō. The prints depict, however, not the contemporary kabuki theaters of the mid Meiji, nor those of the early nineteenth century, which had given rise to the kinds of depictions of the stage examined above, but rather those of Saruwaka-chō. Although the theaters'

time in the enclosure of Saruwaka-chō was comparatively short when considered in the longer history of Edo theaters—spanning only 27 years—over the course of the Meiji period it came to define Edo kabuki for the generation of theatergoers who had experienced it and, additionally, for the generation who had only heard of it but never experienced it themselves. The theater space, spectacles, and the candles of the Edo period theaters had become far enough removed by the mid-Meiji period, when these prints were produced, in other words, to be a source of nostalgia.

The preface to the series makes clear this purposed of the print series: “The great theaters of Edo flourished in the fifty or so years from the end of the Tenpō period [1831-1845] while the theaters were in Saruwaka-chō San-chō, but these prints will prove useful when you feel nostalgic for those times of old, for having never seen the advertising boards outside those theaters.”³¹



Figures 23, 24, & 25: Adachi Ginkō, *Ōedo shibai nenjō gyōji*. (1897). National Diet Library.

Each of the images in the series then takes as its subject an aspect of kabuki performance that had by then become far removed from its current audience. The left image of these three prints almost appears for a moment on first glance to be from the perspective of the backstage. The figure at its focal point in the center, holding the wooden clappers to announce the opening of the performance, is turned away from the viewer toward the other side of the curtain. The audience that surrounds that central space on the bottom and right edges of the print, however, make it clear that this is from the perspective of the audience looking at the thrust stage—an architectural feature eliminated from the major theaters of Tokyo by the time of the print’s production. The middle image depicts a scene known as a *danmari*, silent scenes in which characters appear to be fighting in the dark, despite the theater being lit as usual. Here the scene is further coupled with the use of a stage lift as three performers are lowered below the stage, flames floating dramatically above them. The print on the far right shows a performance of the longstanding staple of the kabuki repertoire, *Dōjōji*, with the candle stands affixed to the stage

³¹ Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu, *Shibai nenjū gyōjishū. Kabuki no bunken 7* (Tokyo: Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai, 1976), 1.

symmetrically framing the center performer while a stagehand holds an extended candle closer to the actor's face. The label above explains the characteristics and purposes of these two types of candles from "the theaters of old."

Just as Tanehiko sought to establish his own work as part of a longer lineage of depictions of the stage in printed fiction by reprinting a fragmented text into his own, these prints testify to the sense of an already foreclosed past. Although defining many of the same terms that Sanba's *Shibai kinmō zui* and other similar books had also addressed, the context for these prints was very different. Sanba and his contemporaries were writing with the expectation that their readers had likely seen these objects in the theater and, indeed, often the humor of the books depends on readers having done so. In contrast, these same terms and their referents were expected to be now largely or completely foreign to the audience of this print series, as its preface indicates. Furthermore, while the illustrations and their accompanying textual content are clearly indebted to the illustrated encyclopedias of the theater from the turn of the nineteenth century, their ostensible subject is in fact the much later Saruwaka-chō theaters of the end of the Edo period. Part of a larger trend of nostalgia for the Edo period to emerge in mid-Meiji, the prints demonstrate not only that theater was a central locus for this longing, but also that the illustration of the stage machinery and props, established in encyclopedic books on the theater and on the pages of fiction in the early modern period, were themselves a means to experience this theatrical past.

This collapsing of nineteenth century kabuki into a single moment of stage practices was, in all likelihood, necessitated by exactly the same problem with which I began this chapter. The visual history of kabuki's spectacles and stagecraft is fragmented and composed from a series of print traces in not produced directly by the theaters or those involved in productions themselves. For the compiler and publisher of this series of woodblock prints, Hasegawa Sumi, and the artist, Adachi Ginkō, these illustrated books on the theater from the turn of the nineteenth century were likely the only available visual documents upon which they could base their nostalgic recreations of the kabuki of just a couple of generations before. Just as Tanehiko borrowed the illustration from some 60 years prior, and as the 1835 print of Kanbei's trick pirated an illustration from Sanba's book of some 30 years before, these Meiji illustrations mined the archives of Edo print to generate their vision of the late-Edo stage—one perhaps more clearly marked as imaginary, but hardly less fictional or nostalgic, than those which had preceded it.

Chapter 3: Alternative Genealogies: Acrobatics and Spectacular Gender Performance

In *Shibai hitsudenshū* the playwright Mimasuya Nisōji records a contentious, if humorous, disagreement between set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XI and actor Onoe Kikugorō III over the use of the trick in which Kikugorō was to emerge on stage through a lantern in 1810, introduced in the previous chapter. Essentially a reimagining of a common acrobatic trick, in which a performer jumped through a long and narrow basket, Kikugorō allegedly protested the difficulty and discomfort of passing through the tiny box concealed behind the lantern. Kanbei allegedly retorted that the difficulty and seeming impossibility of that very act was precisely what made the trick successful: “Anyone can appear out of something large. You have to make them wonder how you emerged out of something so small or it won’t be interesting at all.”¹ In other words, if a trick appeared easy, no one would be impressed. Such clashes between the body of the actor and the material construction of a stage trick, so essential, as Hasegawa points out, to the concept of stage spectacle, not infrequently resulted in injury, power struggle, and, on occasions, actual fistfights on stage between actor and props workers when they occasionally went awry.²

Up until this point, I have focused attention on the larger mechanics of the stage and on the playwrights, sets designers, managers, authors, and illustrators who contributed behind the scenes to their production and circulation. This has, however, left out a last crucial category of figures in the history of stage spectacle in kabuki: the actors. Their involvement in the development process, however, is often harder to track than that of playwrights or set designers—in contrast to these backstage figures who received public recognition and record in print for their inventions, the contributions of actors in the development process behind the curtain were often limited to more rumored accountings and sporadic records in *zuihitsu* or later texts about the theater from the nineteenth century. And yet, not only actors were of course

¹ Mimasuya Nisōji, *Shibai hitsudenshū* in *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6, ed. Geinoshi Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1973), 722. Nisōji emphasizes that the trick was Hasegawa’s idea and that Kikugorō required convincing to undertake it, despite the fact that Kikugorō was publicly praised for coming up with it after the performance was a success.

² A particularly humorous incident happened at the Minato-za in Yokohama in 1877; Bando Tarō was performing a *chūnori* aerial lift as a ghost cat when the lift apparatus came loose, dropping him to the stage. Taro was so enraged that he had a fight on stage with the props handler responsible for the trick. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* playfully titled the story “Bando Taro falls during performance at the Minato-za during a *chūnori* lift/has stage fight with props handler.” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, June 28, 1877. While such stage incidents did not often result in such dramatic fights, reports of injuries and even deaths appear periodically in records of performances and early Meiji newspapers, attesting to how risky stage tricks were to execute.

essential to the execution of spectacular scenes, but they also contributed to the invention of tricks as well, at times so much so that certain tricks became the proprietary information of that actor or his lineage, while others even supplied substantial financial backing for the production of sets and tricks.³

Perhaps even more so than the large-scale stage mechanics of the previous two chapters, the place of spectacular tricks in kabuki acting, largely derived from various forms of acrobatic performance, has typically been more controversial and its reception more ambivalent. This chapter aims to introduce some of the long-lasting ways that acrobatics influenced the development of kabuki acting and, especially, gender performance. Some points of this genealogy are familiar touchstones that have appeared widely in scholarship on early modern kabuki while others have at times been overshadowed by narratives about the development of kabuki acting, such as the legacy of Yoshizawa Ayame's writings on *onnagata* performance. Including these slightly more obscure points and considering how they recontextualize those more familiar, furthermore brings into view a far-reaching genealogy of the spectacular body in the development of kabuki acting and dance. While their meaning and reception within kabuki acting changed considerably over time, spectacular forms of movement, dynamic and shocking scenes of verticality, precarity, and vision, especially as modes for gendered expression, remained a fundamental part of kabuki acting over the course of the early modern period. Linking together the kabuki stage and street acrobats, mechanical puppet shows, and, eventually, circuses both domestic and from abroad, the history of acrobatics and aerial lifts in kabuki was also marked by repeated ambivalence about the place of such spectacles within kabuki's dramaturgy, long before the theater reforms of the Meiji period.

Ichikawa Kodanji IV & Aerial Spectacles of the Nineteenth Century

In Chapters 1 and 2, I examined printed ephemera and playbills, as well as books published about the theater to trace the history of stage mechanics within kabuki, but another wealthy source for examining the development and reception of spectacle in kabuki, and one which provides another perspective on their evaluation over time, is printed actor reviews (*yakusha hyōbanki*). Using these as sources to consider how stage spectacle was received raises many issues relating to their function, format, and representation of broader attitudes, but they do offer valuable glimpses into a multiplicity of perspectives on this history. A review for a performance of the role Fox-Tadanobu in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* in 1848 by kabuki actor Ichikawa Kodanji IV, for instance, provides a dynamic review of the many tricks of diversion,

³ The most famous example of this is Onoe Matsusuke, especially his trick of performing as a revived skeleton, the secret behind which was ultimately exposed in *Ehon shibai nenjū kagami* in 1803. See Mimasuya Nisōji, *Shibai hitsudenshū* in *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, 726 and Shinagawa Takashige, "Shodai Onoe Matsusuke to Edo kabuki" in Torigoe Bunzō, ed., *Kabuki no kyōgen: Gengo hyōgen no tsuikyū* (Tokyo: Yagi Shoten, 2015), 127. Onoe Kikugorō I was also remarkable for contributing financially to the production of sets and materials for his performances as well. See Yokoyama Yasuko, *Yōkai tejina no jidai* (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2012), 81 and Hattori Yukio, *Edo kabukiron* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2003), 237. *Sakusha nenjū gyōji* also states that actors sometimes discussed requests for stage tricks with playwrights, but other times went directly to discuss orders for them with Hasegawa Kanbei XI. Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6, 708-709.

aerial lifts, and acrobatics of the scene:

“While this fight was going on, he followed along the bottom of the stairs, jumped up to the palace up high from down below—he looked like he had no bones...When the irons were placed around his neck, he was lifted up from downstage to upstage and emerged instantly from the platform for the *jōruri* chanters. He then flew across toward the *sajiki* seating on the other side at top speed like the Hi no Maru flag,⁴ then stopping partway, returning back. The skill of his acrobatics [*mi no karui koto*] was a hit, a hit...He should change his name to Hayatake Kodanji. He was just like an acrobat.”⁵

This scene had long tended toward the spectacular, surprising audiences as the fox disappeared and reemerged from unexpected locations on stage, but Kodanji’s rendition of the role enhanced the scene with even more unpredictability. This review of Kodanji’s performance captures in its breathless prose the facility and rapidity with which Kodanji executed the many sequential tricks contained in the final moments of the scene. As is still the case in certain aspects of the scene’s typical staging today, its tricks engage in the pleasure of misdirection, of the fox disappearing into and emerging from unexpected places such as the stairs or the ceiling. In Kodanji’s staging, the fox emerged from a *shamisen* in the chanter’s area, hurtled toward the audience seating on the other side only to stop suddenly partway and reverse course with a horizontal *chūnori* aerial lift. Hayatake, referenced in the final line, is the name of a lineage of acrobats active in the Kansai area since the early Edo period. The most famous of them, Hayatake Torakichi, was already making tours around Japan at the time of Kodanji’s performance and would ultimately gain acclaim in Edo with a grand show of acrobatics in 1853. By mentioning Hayatake, the reviewer seems to evoke and praise the dynamism and physical skill that remains characteristic of the role today.

Was, however, the appellation of “Hayatake Kodanji” actually meant as praise, or was it in fact criticism? Hattori Yukio suggests, for instance, that likening Kodanji to an acrobat and linking him to Hayatake was meant to be critical of Kodanji’s performance, despite the otherwise positive tone of the review.⁶ Nagai Hirō, on the other hand, unequivocally refers to the statement as a “favorable review,” stating that, “the stage tricks of Kodanji, which had already been called close to acrobatics during his years in Osaka, must have amazed the audiences of Edo.”⁷ Within the review itself, the description of Kodanji’s acrobatics and the statements of praise about the performance (“The skill of his acrobatics [*mi no karui koto*] was a hit, a hit.”) are delivered by the “fan” persona, to which the “idle chatter” persona responds with the line, “He should change his name to Hayatake Kodanji. He was just like an acrobat.”

While this format is consistent with the structure of theatrical reviews at the time, both the original internal division and the ambiguity of the review provided by this multivocality, and the disagreement over its interpretation by scholars today, indicate how divisive kabuki’s

⁴ At this period, the Hi no Maru flag was often affixed to boats as the official mark of Japanese maritime vessels, so the image evoked here is likely that of the flag blowing quickly and roughly through the winds of open waters.

⁵ *Yakusha gojūsantsugi* 役者五十三駅路 (1847). I consulted the copy held at the Art Research Center at Ritsumeikan University. Also quoted in Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, 69-70.

⁶ Hattori Yukio, *Edo kabukiron*, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2003), 408.

⁷ Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, (Tokyo: Seibō, 2000), 70.

acrobatic elements can be. Later actors and reviews would also begin to move away from or tone down the acrobatic elements of this scene; Onoe Baikō VI (1870 - 1943), in *Oyama no geidan*, for example, recounts that performing the role with too much effort into the tricks risks the performance “becoming nothing more than spectacle [*keren*] or stopping short at acrobatics,”⁸ further recounting that Iwai Kumesaburō V (1882 - 1945) would perform the role with as little emphasis on acrobatics as possible.⁹ This review of Kodanji’s, however, demonstrates that this ambivalence toward acrobatics had roots already in late Edo kabuki.

In a curious turn of events, Hayatake Torakichi, to whom Kodanji had been so frequently likened and who had so defined the acrobatics of late Edo, died suddenly of an unknown illness in New York in 1868, just two years after Kodanji’s own death in 1866. Hayatake had arrived in the United States the year before, one of a large number of acrobatic and other performing troupes to travel abroad from Japan at the time as part of a global economy of circuses and side shows. Circulating much farther and earlier than theater troupes, circuses were also among the first forms of performance from Europe and the United States to enter Japan, and further linked acrobatics, spectacle, and depictions of foreignness in the public imagination. It did not take long for kabuki to once again borrow from these new trends in acrobatic performance. In 1886, for instance, the kabuki play *Narihibiku Charine no kyokuba* 鳴響茶利音曲馬 premiered in Edo, modelled after the Chiarini Circus, which was actively touring in Japan at the time. The play featured elephants, clowns, acrobatic tricks on horses, as well as Onoe Kikugorō V as the ringmaster and circus’s namesake Chiarini. Kikugorō performed several plays that capitalized on the fad of foreign circuses and spectacles entering Japan, including not only a hot air balloon performer, in which Kikugorō also famously delivered a speech in English on stage, but also a paper puppet that “came to life” as gas was injected into it, eventually rising up into the air.¹⁰

Celebrated as a sign of kabuki’s modernization and a success of Kikugorō’s physical transformations and representations of foreign spectacles on stage,¹¹ these adaptations of circuses in fact re-presented many facets of Japan’s own *misemono* spectacles, remarketed as new phenomena. Although it represented a new page in the history of kabuki’s relationship with acrobatic tricks and development of a spectacular physicality, it also arguably erased this history of *misemono* spectacles in favor of framing circuses as a new spectacle of modernizing Japan. Viewed within this context, these criticisms of Kodanji’s use of stage tricks, on the cusp of a reinterpretation of *misemono* and, especially, acrobatics, in light of this influx of foreign circus acts in the late 1850s and their adaptations on the kabuki stage, signaled an already shifting landscape of spectacle and position for it within kabuki’s dramaturgy.

It’s also perhaps worth noting the timing of Kodanji’s performance of Fox-Tadanobu, not just in the context of Kodanji’s career or this later history of circuses, but in Saruwaka-chō kabuki’s history. Onoe Kikugorō III, who had gained renown for a large number of spectacular tricks and performances, celebrated his retirement from the stage in the 7th month of 1847, just

⁸ Onoe Baikō VI, *Oyama no geidan* (Tokyo: Engeki Shuppansha, 1988), 93.

⁹ This is consistent with other remarks that Baikō makes about roles featuring spectacle or transformation. Concerning *ningyōburi*, for instance, Baikō insists that, while the spectacle of *ningyōburi* is a crucial component, actors should perform the roles as humans, rather than trying to mimic puppet-like movements. Onoe Baikō VI, *Oyama no geidan*, 113.

¹⁰ Yanai Kenji, *Meiji kiwamono kabuki: Sora tobu Godaime Kikugorō* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 2009), 151-152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

eight months prior to Kodanji's performance as Fox-Tadanobu. Kikugorō had not just performed spectacular roles, he had been an active contributor to the creative process behind many of them, very much collaborating and consulting with Hasegawa Kanbei XI and Tsuruya Nanboku about their production and execution. Although likely not a conscious act of inheritance of Kikugorō's mantle of spectacle performance and provided the vast differences in their particular styles and roles, with the coincidence of Kikugorō's retirement and this performance, Kodanji was effectively established as the foremost performer of stage spectacles in Edo for the subsequent decades. Kodanji would even perform in a new version of *Hitoritabi gojūsan tsugi* rewritten by Kawatake Mokuami in 1854, giving him the chance to perform in an updated version of one of the plays for which Kikugorō had been best known.¹² Like Nanboku's previous versions, it featured elaborate stage mechanics and ghostly apparitions, but what had promised to be a successful run was interrupted abruptly by the suicide of Danjūrō VIII on the third day of the performance. When news of his suicide finally reached Edo some ten days later (a testament to how relatively slowly news traveled between Osaka and Edo at the time), the theater world was stunned.¹³ While this news would disrupt and overshadow the performance, the performance itself would have lasting significance as the encounter between Kodanji and future set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XIV, just eight years old at the time. Kanbei was so inspired by the sets and tricks of the performance and by Kodanji's praise for a set piece that young Kanbei had contributed to it, that he reportedly thought of this early success often as he worked as a set designer himself later in life and during his later collaborations with Kodanji.¹⁴ The performance, then, effected a turning over of a new generation, so-to-speak, as the collaboration between Kanbeis XI and XII with Tsuruya Nanboku and Kikugorō transitioned into a new relationship between Kanbei XIV, Mokuami, and Kodanji.

The timing of Kodanji's forays into stage tricks were aptly timed for another reason as well; acrobatic spectacles, which had flourished in the seventeenth century only to stagnate somewhat after that point, were on the cusp of a renaissance.¹⁵ There had been a string of successful acrobatic shows in Edo in the 1840s and, while several of these performers retired within these years as well, the stage was cleared and set for the arrival of Hayatake Torakichi in Edo in 1853. Hayatake, together with another contemporary acrobatic performer from the end of the Edo period, Sakuratsuna Komaju, had already been active and achieved acclaim in Osaka (Nanba Shinchi) in the late 1840s and early 1850s before his arrival in Edo.¹⁶ As demonstrated by his first performance in Edo in 1853, Hayatake's performances borrowed frequently from theatrical settings and plays, especially *Sanbasō* 三番叟, *Shakkyō* 石橋, and *Dōjōjimono* 道成寺物, weaving set acrobatic tricks within these (sometimes quite loose) narrative framings.

¹² *Azuma-kudari gojūsantsugi* 吾嬬下五十三駅. Mokuami added a number of elements and narratives to the play, and, unlike Nanboku's original, which had staged 53 stations as scenes within one day's performance, Mokuami's version was performed over the course of two days, with the first day showing the journey from Kyoto to Kuwana and the second Fujieda to Edo. See Umetada Misa, "Kōkei e no chōsen—*Azuma kudari gojūsantsugi*" *Edo no Mokuami—Zennin o egaku* (Tokyo: Shunpusha, 2020), 112-141.

¹³ Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, 136-137.

¹⁴ Hasegawa Kanbei XIV, "Godaime to ōdōgu" *Engei gahō* (Feb., 1928), 150-151.

¹⁵ This isn't to say that they disappeared entirely in the intervening periods—*karuwaza* were a consistent presence in *misemono* shows throughout the early modern period and continued to incorporate new elements. See Asakura Musei, "Karuwaza" in *Misemono kenkyū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2002), 78-124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

The “fever” for Hayatake’s performance was so intense, so-to-speak, that a rumor emerged that a cold virus that had begun circulating in Edo at about the same time had in fact been brought over from Osaka by a member of Hayatake’s troupe.¹⁷ Asakura Musei even records the existence of a print that shows two figures attempting to tear down Hayatake’s theater while a doctor and medicine sellers try to stop them.¹⁸ It’s difficult not to read this episode as emblematic of anti-theatrical anxieties about waves of fads in performances, helped along by the fact that the terminology to refer to popular social trends was the same as that for the spread of infectious diseases. The *Fujiokaya nikki*, for example, capitalizes on this pun in describing the phenomenon: “Hayatake Torakichi came down from Osaka and, together with the cold, spread like an outbreak and was well-attended” (*dairyūkō ōiri* 大流行大入).¹⁹ Not unlike the comments about Kodanji’s acrobatics in the review above, the advent of Hayatake and other popular acrobatic troupes in Edo in the mid-1850s seems to have been subject to ambivalent reception—well-attended and ostensibly successful, but also treated with suspicion. Indeed, theaters could be sources not only of conflagration or moral corruption, but also of contagion.²⁰

Kodanji was likely very familiar with *misemono* spectacles and their aesthetics from his early touring, where he would have often performed in close proximity to such shows in places such as Nagoya or Ise. 1859 also saw the premier of a play based on the recent fad of acrobatic performances in Edo, in which Kodanji performed as the orator or narrator for a performance of acrobatic tricks.²¹ The illustrated playbill for the performance emphasizes the spectacle of height and verticality that such acrobatics shows were, with the characters and objects bursting out to the margins at the top of the page.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Koike Shōtarō and Suzuki Tōzō., ed., *Fujiokaya nikki* Vol. 7 (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1987), 441.

²⁰ For more on the history of pandemics and infectious diseases in relationship to the theater, see Harada Masumi, “Ekibyō to kinsei engeki—Tōzai kōgyōkai to Ansei go-nen” in *Rosuto in pandemikku: Ushinawareta engeki to aratana hyogen no jihei*, ed. The Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University (Tokyo: Shun’yōdō Shoten, 2021) 168-185 and Gotō Ryūki, “Meiji Taishō no infuruenza to engeki—Okaze to Supein kaze” *ibid.*, 186-192.

²¹ *Chōkochō tsubasa no karuwaza*. 蝶同翼軽業. 2nd month at Ichimura-za.



Figure 1: Illustrated playbill, *Chōkochō tsubasa no karuwaza*.
Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University.

Kodanji had performed *chūnori*, *hayagawari*, and other spectacular tricks for some time before his arrival in Edo, earning a reputation for a proximity to acrobatic techniques early in his career. While not likely because of a direct causal link, the depiction of Kodanji's performances in woodblock prints also bears striking similarities to the composition of woodblock prints produced for acrobatic troupes. Several prints show Kodanji as Fox-Tadanobu, for instance, suspended in the air on alternatively a horizontal rope or pole. In keeping with trends at the time, the prints do not elide the mechanics and structures behind the tricks, making it clear not only that the trick was accomplished through a horizontal *chūnori*, but that this was a central component of the scene's appeal. Rather than elide the apparatus behind the tricks, as had typically been the case in actor prints before this time, they instead emphasize the materiality and artificiality of the apparatus for the lifts in conjunction with the acrobatic contortions of Kodanji's body.



Figure 2: (Left) Ichikawa Kodanji IV as Fox (Kitsune) Tadanobu (1848) Museum of Fine Arts Boston
 Figure 3: (Right) Ichikawa Kodanji IV as the “Night-crawling star” in *Jitsugeitsu seichū ya no oriwake* (1859) Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Famously short-statured, and with far from what was considered “fine” facial features,²² Kodanji was often criticized for being unsuited to both larger-than-life *aragoto* roles and *onnagata* roles. And his experimentations with stage spectacle can be readily understood in this context; in one famous instance, for example, Kodanji used prosthetic legs during a fight scene as Ishikawa Goemon in the play *Sanmon gosan no kiri* in 1851, all unbeknownst to the audience at the time. Kodanji reportedly did this to compensate for his famously smaller physical frame, with the idea that using the prosthetic legs as stilts would give him a large-than-life physicality to match the character of Goemon during a particularly dramatic stage fight. Unable to maneuver properly with them, however, Kodanji injured his leg on the first day of the performance, though he continued to use them for the duration of the performance with his leg bandaged up.²³ The incident was repeated by a number of people in later recollections of Kodanji’s performances, the frequency of its repetition seeming to attest to how effectively the story encapsulated or reinforced narratives about Kodanji as an actor. Emblematic of attitudes about Kodanji’s physical appearance and his use of spectacle as quite literal supplement, it also demonstrated the extent to which Kodanji was willing to risk physical discomfort or injury for the sake of effect.

This would furthermore not be the only occasion on which Kodanji’s acrobatics would fail or result in injury, demonstrating that, while these uses of stage lift machinery may seem far removed from the physical acrobatics of the seventeenth century, they were in fact strenuous and challenging for the actors to execute them. Hasegawa Kanbei XIV, for instance, describes how impressed he was with Kodanji’s performance of Iwafuji given the difficulty of the lift apparatus:

The structure of this *chūnori* was different from how it’s done today; there was a metal pole that ran through the handle of the umbrella, then ran between the thighs so he could

²² Hasegawa Kanbei XIV, for example, repeatedly referred to Kodanji’s gargoyle-like face in his remembrances of Kodanji’s performances. See Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, 288 about recollections of Kodanji’s features.

²³ Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, 89-90.

stand on it with his left foot. This meant that he could only move his right foot. Kodanji, being quite physically skilled, managed to make it look as though he was walking with both legs, his gargoyle-like face becoming that of a beautiful woman, so much so that you wouldn't recognize him. He walked above the *hanamichi* with such charm that the audience all rose to their feet in unison.²⁴

In a further testament to how difficult *chūnori* could be, Hasegawa also recounts at least two occasions that Kodanji's failed during this performance of Iwafuji, once when the apparatus failed because of timing issues, leaving him stranded down below, and another when he fell down to the stage mid-flight. Acrobatic lifts not only required a seemingly effortless collaboration between the actor and the apparatus, but between the entire backstage crew, set designers, and even musicians, to avoid the risk of failure and serious physical injury.

Kodanji's appearance was not the only source of criticism leveled at his performance style, however—his investment in spectacular tricks has frequently been attributed to his modest origins in regional performance. Kodanji did not come from an established acting lineage, nor did he immediately gain a foothold at the center of the Edo kabuki world; his rise to fame was much less linear, winding first through various regional performance venues, then spending formative years in Kansai, before finally staking his claim in Edo. Kodanji furthermore capitalized on his eclectic background, rather than seeking to compensate for it, by incorporating a wide variety of techniques he had encountered along the way, spectacle foremost among them. It wasn't the case Kodanji's spectacle was derided in certain reviews simply for its nature; its associations with regional performance, its mixing of performance styles or association with street performance, and the narrative of its function as compensation for an actor's physical shortcomings that had emerged in conjunction with Kodanji's career.

After Kodanji's death in 1866, rumors circulated, perpetuated by Mokuami's recollections in his later diary, that Kodanji's sudden illness and passing were attributable to the changes that were on the horizon for kabuki. Mokuami's account is particularly dramatic in this regard; a meeting had taken place between city officials and the managers of the Saruwaka-chō theaters, musicians, head actors, and head playwrights to discuss reforms to the content of kabuki plays. Kodanji was unable to attend because of illness, and in his absence the representatives of the theaters had been advised to minimize the sensuousness of plays because of the fact that, "In recent years *sewa-kyōgen* had adhered too much to emotion [人情を穿ち過ぎ] and become too involved with contemporary customs [風俗に拘はる事なれば]."²⁵ These descriptions of the social dangers of *sewamono* struck straight at the heart of Kodanji's style. So stricken was Kodanji by this news that Mokuami reports that Kodanji's face paled and his body trembled on his sickbed as Mokuami informed him that such *sewamono* depicting the emotions of thieves and prostitutes would have to be suppressed in favor of period pieces which would properly encourage virtue and punish vice.²⁶ Mokuami was stunned to hear the next day that Kodanji had

²⁴ Abe Yutaka, "Hasegawa Kanbei jitsuwa" *Engei gahō* (Jun., 1928), 117.

²⁵ Kawatake Shigetoshi, *Kawatake Mokuami*. (Tokyo: Engei Chinsho Kankōkai, 1914), 128-129. For more analysis of the story, its sources (and inaccuracies), see Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, 271-274 and Watanabe Tamotsu, *Mokuami no Meiji isshin*. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2011), 8-13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

suddenly taken a turn for the worse and passed away, which Mokuami attributed to shock from this conversation from the night before.

However much riddled they were with historical inaccuracies and the embellishes of recollection, behind Mokuami's claims about the cause of Kodanji's illness and death lies a truth about shifting trends at the time; namely that the kind of *sewamono* plays, specular acrobatics and dance techniques that had made Kodanji famous would not continue to persist in their current form without significant reinterpretation after his death. Kodanji's passing, on the cusp of the transition into the Meiji period, was reinterpreted in retrospective as a foreclosure, as a failure to be able to adapt to a new cultural position for kabuki. Spectacle certainly did not disappear from the stages of Meiji kabuki, but the reinterpretation of it and the place of acrobatics in kabuki's dramaturgy, was clearly at work already in the mixed reception of Kodanji's incorporation of aerial tricks into his performances in the final decades of the Edo period.

The Spectacular Body in Genroku Kabuki

In 1853, a rehearsal for a production of the new play *Hana no Saga nekomata zōshi* by Segawa Jokō III at the Nakamura-za was suddenly interrupted by an order to cancel the performance, set to start just days later. The Nabeshima clan of the Saga domain objected to the content of the play, which was based on a well-known legend of a cat spirit that had supposedly haunted the Nabeshima clan after its leader had killed the son of the cat's owner over a game of *go* in the mid-seventeenth century.²⁷ The story had already appeared in *jitsuroku* and *kōdan*, but the kabuki production seems to have drawn particular ire from the Nabeshima clan, as well as legal standing judging from the success of the appeal, for its blatant use of "Saga" (albeit with alternate characters) in the title of the play.²⁸

What seems like a dramatic case of a successful censorship claim against a theatrical production over the slander of fictional legend, however, also in fact disrupted a significant event in the history of kabuki. The production would have marked the first performance of a transformation dance piece featuring a cat made famous by Genroku-period *onnagata* Mizuki Tatsunosuke since Tatsunosuke's last performance of it in 1697. Set to revive Tatsunosuke's spectacular dance was Ichikawa Kodanji IV, who had, not dissimilarly from Tatsunosuke, by this point established himself as a central performer in Edo kabuki with a reputation for his spectacular performances that often incorporated acrobatic elements.

²⁷ See Hayakawa Yumi, "Nabeshima neko sōdō no hensen—Jitsuroku, kōdan to *Hana saga nekomata zōshi*" *Nagoya Daigaku kokugo kokubungaku* 86 (Jul., 2000), 1-16.

²⁸ That the title of the play had been significant grounds for the success of the objection by the Nabeshima clan is supported by the fact that the play was performed in 1864 under the title *Hyakumyōden dasuna no somewake* 百猫伝手綱染分. Nagai Hirō, *Yodai Ichikawa Kodanji*, 120. In the Meiji period the play also came to be frequently performed under its original title by Bandō Tarō in Edo and as a traveling act around Japan, presumably because the changed political climate meant that the risk of retribution was now minimal. Atsumi Seitarō, ed., *Nihon gikyoku zenshū* Vol. 44 (Tokyo: Shun'yōdō Shoten, 1933), 416. This volume also reproduces the script of the play in full.

Whether or not Kodanji realized it at the time, and whether or not it was these very similarities that had in part motivated his performance of Tatsunosuke's "cat dance," Kodanji's career paralleled Tatsunosuke's in at least a few striking ways; both were based in Kansai originally but had also made names for themselves with performances in Edo. Both were repeatedly demeaned for their looks, particularly for having unattractive facial features; Mizuki Tatsunosuke was famously maligned for physical appearance, particularly in contrast to Yoshizawa Ayame. He was consistently called "*bukiryō*" 不器量 or "plain" in actor reviews, while Kodanji was frequently said to have a "face like a gargoyle" by Hasegawa Kanbei XIV and repeatedly criticized for his short physical stature by others.²⁹ The relationship often posited between Ayame's appealing features and his more subdued style of *onnagata* and that between Tatsunosuke's relative unattractiveness and his focus on more dynamic or spectacular dances, demonstrates how longstanding these attitudes about spectacle as supplement or compensation had been before Kodanji faced similar criticisms.

Yet both actors gained reputations as exceptionally beautiful and skilled dancers despite, or perhaps in part because of, these perceived physical shortcomings. Both made a name for themselves with spectacular performances that incorporated acrobatics, though they also arguably turned toward new interpretations of dance and drama later in their careers—Tatsunosuke toward more subdued *shosagoto* dance pieces and Kodanji toward *sewamono* plays. Regardless of whether Kodanji had any or all of these similarities in mind at the time of the anticipated performance, the failure of Kodanji's revival of Tatsunosuke's dance piece to take place as scheduled was widely lamented.³⁰

While some contemporary audience members may have eagerly anticipated Kodanji's revival of Tatsunosuke's most famous performance in 1853, however, such a revival would hardly garner similar interest today. Mizuki Tatsunosuke's name and reputation as one of the foremost *onnagata* performers of the Genroku period has been greatly overshadowed by other famous actors from the time period. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when Tatsunosuke's reputation, and, indeed, that of a number of other prominent *onnagata* who were known for acrobatic elements in their performances around the same time, began to languish vis-à-vis the status of actors such as Yoshizawa Ayame I, but there are glimpses of this important generational and stylistic shift occurring in *onnagata* performance already in a moment from 1698 recorded in the *Kabuki nenpyō*. *Onnagata* Yoshizawa Ayame I is performing in the play *Keisei Asamagatake* at the Hayakumo-za in Kyoto, after which Ihara Toshiro remarks that "Audiences had packed into the Mandayu-za exclusively, hearing that Mizuki Tatsunosuke had come down from Edo [and was performing there], but the popularity of *Asamagatake* built following its premier, and it ended up running for more than a hundred days."³¹ This gravitation of audiences, voting with

²⁹ Tsuchiya Keiichirō, *Genroku haiyūden* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), 41.

³⁰ The *Zoku kabuki nendaiki* laments the cancellation of the performance for that reason: "Since the dance piece featuring a transformation into a cat hasn't been performed since Mizuki Tatsunosuke, the performance being cancelled is too bad, too bad." Ishizuka Hōkaishi, ed., *Zoku kabuki nendaiki* (Tokyo: Hiroya Kokusho Kankōkai, 1925), 644.

³¹ Ihara Toshiro, Kawatake Shigetoshi and Yoshida Teruji, ed., *Kabuki nenpyō* Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 214. The *Kabuki yakusha taizen* states that the performance went on for 120 days total, thanks to excellent performances by Nakamura Shichisaburo, Yoshizawa Ayame, and others. Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6, 71-72. Further demonstrating how complicated this landscape of

their feet, so-to-speak, from Tatsunosuke's performance to Ayame's is a particularly stark illustration of a more gradual transition taking place. *Onnagata* Tatsunosuke, who had made a name for himself as a performer of spectacular acrobatic tricks and transformation dance pieces, would inexplicably retire just six years later at the age of 32. Ayame, already hailed as one of the top *onnagata* by the time of this performance, would only see his reputation increase in the remaining decades of his long career. While they had once been ranked alongside one another as foremost *onnagata* of the Genroku period, their styles and approaches to *onnagata* performance, and the subsequent trajectory of their legacies, could hardly have been more different.

If there is one text about Edo period kabuki that has come, particularly in English-language scholarship, to stand representative of kabuki's *onnagata* more than any other, it has surely been Yoshizawa Ayame's *Ayamegusa*. Early practitioners of a more acrobatic or spectacular form of *onnagata* performance in the Genroku period are names much less frequently invoked in articulating the history of *onnagata*—Mizuki Tatsunosuke, Hayakawa Hatsuse, and Arashi Kiyosaburō I, among many others. Highly praised *onnagata* at the time, their legacy, and the type of spectacular performances for which they were best known, have often been overshadowed by Ayame and the lineage of *onnagata* performance that he and his writings have come to represent. This association, between the rise of Ayame, his writings on *onnagata*, and the overshadowing of spectacle at this crucial stage of kabuki's development, has further suited a recurring narrative of performance styles shedding their spectacular elements as they mature into theatrical traditions.

While there have been many correctives issued to this narrative in recent years, either questioning how straightforwardly we can interpret Ayame's claims, or considering the performance of masculinity alongside the *onnagata* or *onnagata* performances by women,³² Ayame's statements about the correlation between the *onnagata*'s comportment of gender on stage and in public have long shaped our understanding of *onnagata* and the nature of kabuki's gender performance. Yet, as Ayame's rivalry with Mizuki Tatsunosuke indicates, his career developed within a much more complicated landscape of gender performance that included a very different kind of physicality, one which emphasized the physical virtuosity of the actor's body. Far from being confined to seventeenth-century kabuki, this spectacular acrobatic physicality developed during the Genroku period in the seventeenth century—involving highwire stunts, daring leaps from heights, and mechanics for lifting actors into the air—continued to influence new expressions of *onnagata* physicality and expression well into the Meiji period.

To return again to the depiction of the performance landscape of the Shijō riverbed on the folding screen with which I began chapter 1, *misemono* shows in the earliest decades of the Edo period already encompassed the basic categories of spectacles which would remain characteristic of their performances throughout the subsequent centuries: acrobatics, the exhibition of rare animals, and spectacles of mechanics.

gender performance could be, *Keisei Asamagatake* did actually feature a spectacular scene of a female ghost appearing from the flames, though this was not the role that Ayame performed in the play.

³² Galia Petkova, "Onna Mono: The 'Female Presence' on the Stage of All-Male Traditional Japanese Theatre" *Asian Theatre Journal* Vol. 32 (2) (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 387-415. Maki Isaka, *A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2016). Satoko Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition: From the Worlds of the Samurai to the Vengeful Female Ghost* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), to suggest just a few.



Figure 4: Close ups of an acrobatic performance (left) and animal show (right) from the Amusements at the Dry Riverbed, Shijō. Kanbun era (1661-73). Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

While each of these would influence kabuki plays or techniques at different points in its history, the most influential at this early stage of contact was the highly developed acrobatic techniques of early *misemono*. The prevailing strain of acrobatics at the time was known as *kumomai* 蜘蛛舞, in reference to the performers balancing on single or doubled ropes in the manner of spiders. The history of *kumomai* and related acrobatic performance arts goes back as far as the Nara period (710-794), but, before their prolonged encounter with kabuki, they also mixed with and picked up influence from a variety of other acrobatic and performance forms both domestic and foreign.³³ *Kumomai* was recorded to be performed alongside of kabuki dances from as early as the 1580s and appears in records as interludes within both puppet theater and kabuki periodically throughout the seventeenth century.³⁴ These tricks included not only highwire performances, but also feats of jumping through hoops and long tube-shaped baskets, walking across bamboo, and doing handstands or tricks on ladders.

Moving into the Genroku period, however, what were initially independent spectacles of acrobatics within performances came to be incorporated within the narratives of the plays themselves, and, along with this transition, these displays of acrobatics developed into scenes of gendered revenge stories, ghostly apparitions, or non-human transformations into animals or dolls. By far the most prevalent association was between acrobatics and *onryōgoto* 怨霊事, or stories of vengeful, typically female, ghosts or spirits. Even a cursory survey of illustrations in early kabuki print materials reveals just how ubiquitous such scenes and narratives were; female ghosts appearing out of fires, walking on high ropes, doing handstands atop folding screens or fences, being suspended from above the stage. So pervasive were these acrobatics among these plays that Gunji Masakatsu has stated that one can essentially read any reference to an *onryōgoto* plot as a reference to acrobatics as well.³⁵ Although there are exceptions in which these roles

³³ Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki: Yōshiki to denshō* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2005), 126-127.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁵ Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki: Yōshiki to denshō*, 145.

were performed by male-role actors,³⁶ they were primarily performed by *wakashū onnagata* or *onnagata*. This was in part because the actors for these roles were said to have lighter frames which allowed them to better execute the delicate balance required for the tricks, but also perhaps in part because acrobatics were considered closer to *shosagoto* dance, something more associated with *onnagata*.³⁷

The relationship between these narratives of vengeful spirits and acrobatics has most often been interpreted in terms of a binary between the everyday and the extraordinary, a conclusion that follows from the fact that the characters depicted through acrobatics are most often ghosts, spirits, deities, or animals. Concerning why these acrobatic techniques emerged alongside narratives of jealousy or revenge in the first place, Hattori Yukio has suggested that it's because they presented an extraordinary style of performance and staging (日常ならざる演技と演出) that was essential to manifesting the likewise extra-ordinary vengeful spirits on stage.³⁸ Using the example of inverted ghosts doing handstands on stage, Hattori analyzes how this involved a literal turning the world on its head, both to visually manifest the boundary between the jealous woman during life and her haunting spirit after death, and to mark the departure from “everydayness” (*nichijō*) enacted by the appearance of ghosts and spirits on stage. Stated another way, since acrobatics sought to cultivate and display feats of skill, strength, and flexibility beyond the capabilities of “ordinary” bodies, this mode of performance was best suited to expressing the supernatural or extra-ordinary.³⁹

Notably, this is a marked inversion of discourses of “everydayness” which have propagated around the *onnagata* as presented in the writings of Yoshizawa Ayame or Segawa Kikunojō I. In contrast to Ayame's writings, which emphasized an alignment between the *onnagata*'s actions on stage and in public and stressed the successful production of an observed “femaleness,” the spectacular physicality of *onryōgoto* acrobatics employed the physical strength and virtuosity of the actor's body to express the extra-ordinary state of these female characters on stage. Given the broader context of Ayame's early career in the more spectacular landscape of *onryōgoto* and acrobatics in *onnagata* performance, however, we can begin to see how Ayame's articulation of the *onnagata* may have developed its emphasis on the everydayness of gender performance precisely in opposition to the extraordinary presentation of female characters in these other plays. For, of course, what constitutes the everyday versus the unusual or

³⁶ Kawai Masumi makes this point in a roundtable discussion in “Shintai geinō to Saikaku/ukiyō zōshi no jidai—Kabuki, ningyō jōruri, misemono, shōgei no shiten kara” in *Saikaku to ukiyō zōshi* Vol. 5 (June, 2011), 48, as does Satoko Shimazaki in *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, 183.

³⁷ Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki: Yōshiki to denshō*, 144. This is not to say that performers of male roles were not involved in early acrobatics, nor that acrobatics did not impact the development of such performance. In the case of male roles, however, acrobatics developed more along the lines of staged fights (though, of course, female characters also participate in stage fights as well), or *chūnori* aerial lifts.

³⁸ Hattori Yukio, *Sakasama no yūrei: “Shi” no Edo bunkaron* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2005), 78-79.

³⁹ How straightforwardly the introduction of *onryōgoto* necessitated the incorporation of acrobatics is debatable, however. As if to capture the confusion in his prose, Kondō Tamao, for instance, states that “One would immediately draw the conclusion that *onryōgoto* surely required movements which differed from those of the everyday” (72) for its expression, only to take back the claim on the next page: “Just now I have stated that acrobatics were incorporated in order to express the extraordinary movements as *onryō*, but it would be more accurate to state that *onryōgoto* was incorporated in order to demonstrate the acrobatics that were the particular skills of *onnagata*.” Kondō Tamao, “Shintai no hyōgen” in *Kabuki noshintairon* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), 73.

extraordinary is also constantly in contention, often on the very stages of the theaters themselves, much more so than such arguments or divisions might initially suggest.

Yet it was not the case that all instances of acrobatics in Genroku kabuki were tied to instances of the extraordinary or supernatural; while we might read cases of *onryōgoto* as a marker for acrobatics, it was not the case acrobatics necessarily meant that a play involved vengeful ghosts. These plays in particular point to other uses of acrobatics that focused on verticality, risk, and aerial perspectives. Early acrobatic performances such as *kumomai* took place in the open air, allowing for more expansive and elevated configurations of ropes for the performance space, and, even once more fixed structures began to be used for acrobatic shows, they were specially constructed to be much taller than they were wide to allow for height, making them visually stand out among other *misemono* structures. With the initial move into kabuki's comparatively more constrictive theater structure these acrobatics had to be modified to function in a more horizontal performance space, at times favoring handstands, walking along the tops of fences or sliding doors instead of elevated wires. Gradually, though, the vertical nature of acrobatics necessitated a similar verticalizing of the stage space through the development of large stage props and sets, such as multistoried buildings and scalable fences. Inoue Nobuko has gone so far as to suggest that the first developments of multi-storied structures on the stage were in fact driven by the needs of an influx of acrobatic performers into kabuki in the mid-seventeenth century, rather than changing attitudes favoring more detailed depiction of the narrative worlds of the plays.⁴⁰ Once developed, this "spectacular staging of double levels" inspired a variety of other innovative uses in scenes, from creative and complex fight scenes on multiple levels to eavesdropping and quick-change scenes.⁴¹

Even if this relationship between early acrobatics and the development of multiple levels of staging may not have been quite so straightforwardly related through cause and effect, however—the relationship between the development of sets, stage tricks, and dramaturgy was often circular—it's worth considering what this new verticality meant for the stage. In contrast to the hand standing of *onryōgoto* plays that Hattori examines, in which actors often, though not always, remained on the ground, most early acrobatic skills were in fact aerial spectacles of height. Elevation of course increased risk, or at the very least the perception of it, an essential component of the appeal of any kind of physical stunt or acrobatic, but one which found new significance in a subset of acrobatic performances that featured characters leaping from elevated positions, often using an umbrella as an "aid" to their decent. While Gunji Masakatsu has suggested that the prevalence of umbrellas (*karakasa* specifically) in scenes featuring vengeful spirits or ghosts is due to the connection between such figures and rain,⁴² the configuration of a character leaping with an umbrella just as likely derives from legends about jumping from the

⁴⁰ Inoue Nobuko, "Kabuki ōdōgu no genzai" *Joshi-Seigakuin Tanki Daigaku kiyō* vol. 31 (Mar., 1999), 55. The motivations behind the early development of stage sets and props in kabuki has long been the subject of debate—Hattori Yukio and others have posited that it was simply influence from puppet theater as kabuki drew from its narrative elements as well in the 1660s and early 1670s. See Hattori Yukio, *Edo kabukiron*, 230.

⁴¹ Inoue Nobuko, "Namiki Shōza izen no Kamigata ōdōgu to sono butai" *Kabuki: Kenkyū to hihyō* 10 (1992), 117-120.

⁴² Umbrellas also had significant religious meaning and had been used in *dengaku* long before they began to appear in kabuki. Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki Yōshiki to denshō*, 146-148, and Gunji Masakatsu, *Fūryū no ikonogurafī* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1987), 209. See also Hattori Yukio, ed., *Kabuki o tsukuru* (Tokyo: Seidōsha, 1999), 258-259.

stage of Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto, which had been rebuilt in 1633.⁴³

Religiously, these leaps were calculations of risk and belief—one would make a request to Kannon and then jump off of the Kiyomizu stage as a test of faith. A number of plays from the Genroku period and subsequent decades incorporated such scenes, either direct adaptations of the leap from Kiyomizu (The earliest of which seems to be *Nippon yomekagami* 日本嫁鑑 in 1702), or simply scenes involving the spectacle of characters jumping from upper levels down to the main stage.⁴⁴ The gendering of these leaps on stage is particularly striking and such scenes, this early play included, typically featured female characters jumping off of the stage in a love suicide attempt or as a symbol of their determination, often clutching an open umbrella as though to ease their descent. Such scenes were also, however, spectacles of perspective in other sense. The stage of Kiyomizu was a famous cherry blossom viewing location, where large crowds would gather for its commanding aerial view of the blossoms on the hillside below. Thematically, these blossoms and gazing down at them from the stage became tied with these leaps of faith or resignation by predominantly female figures.

While much later examples, this linkage between aerial lifts and distance viewing would become much more literal in several plays at the end of the Edo period and early Meiji, most famously *Kagamiyama gonichi no Iwafuji* 加賀見山再岩藤 and *Fūsen nori uwasa no takadono* 風船乗評判高閣, both by Kawatake Mokuami.⁴⁵ The most famous scene featuring a lift with an umbrella to still be performed today is *Kagamiyama gonichi no Iwafuji*, in which Iwafuji, having returned as a vengeful ghost, wreaks terror and revenge. As Iwafuji is lifted in the air, holding her umbrella aloft, she exclaims about the incredible view of the cherry blossoms in full bloom from her elevated position: “Neither dispersing nor falling, the blossoms are at their peak flower—what a truly moving aerial view.”⁴⁶ Likening Iwafuji’s manifestation as a ghost to the seeming impermanence of the fixed cherry blossoms, unbuffered by the wind (in contrast to their function in other scenes in the play to foreshadow the death of other characters), Iwafuji’s aerial suspension and commanding view are a meaningful reversal of scenes of young women jumping off the stage at Kiyomizu. Suspended in the air, Iwafuji refuses to succumb to her fate (i.e. refuses to remain discarded bones) and instead returns to seek her revenge, very much in the manner of early *onryōgoto* narratives. A later performance by Onoe Kikugorō V in 1895 made even more explicit the grand view that Iwafuji commanded, only suggested at in the earlier

⁴³ This followed a short-lived version based of it at the Kaneiji Temple in Ueno in Edo. See Timon Screech and Murayama Kazuhiro, trans., *Edo no shikō kūkan* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1999), 253.

⁴⁴ See Inoue Nobuko, “Namiki Shōza izen no Kamigata ōdōgu to sono butai,” 119-120 for a partial list of some examples.

⁴⁵ One earlier famous example of a connection between distance viewing and the *seri-age* lift, in which often multi-level structures were raised up from below, can be found in *Kinmon goson no kiri*. An illustrated playscript of it, *Yakusha hama no masago*, for instance, contains an illustration of Goemon gazing into the distance from atop the Sanmon gate at Nanzenji. A copy from 1842 is held at the National Diet Library. Timon Screech has also highlighted how perspectival viewing functions as bravado in the play *Sukeroku* in *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan: The Lens within the Heart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 104-105.

⁴⁶ In modern staging, this scene is typically done by moving Iwafuji back and forth across the stage while elevated in a sideways lift, though Mokuami’s version has Kodanji emerge from the *suppon* and then alternate between being lifted up and lowered down as though floating on the wind. See Kawatake Mokuami and Kawatake Shigetoshi, ed. *Mokuami zenshū* Vol. 21 (Tokyo: Shun’yōdō, 1926), 411.

version by a stage curtain painted with blossoms and other decorations, by adding in a rich distance painting for the backdrop of the sky, hills, and cherry trees in the distance.



Figure 5: Triptych of Onoe Kikugoro V as Iwafuji in *Kagamiyama gonichi no Iwafuji*. Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

This elaboration of the background may have been influenced by another play of Mokuami's that had featured Kikugorō in an aerial suspension of a radically different context. Inspired by a hot air balloon act by Englishman Percival Spencer (1864 - 1913) performed in Yokohama and Ueno in 1890, Mokuami's *Fūsen nori uwasa no takadono* saw Kikugorō suspended by a hot air balloon above the stage against a background not only of the sky, but of the buildings of Ueno and Asakusa. It also utilized a perspectival trick of kabuki sets by suspending a miniature version of Kikugorō against a backdrop of the sky to suggest the height and distance that he had flown to.⁴⁷



⁴⁷ This technique is also known as *tomi* 遠見. The most famous example that is still frequently performed today is in *Ichinotani futaba gunki*, in which child actors riding miniature horse puppets are used to suggest that the characters are moving further away in the distance. See Watanabe Tamotsu, *Kabuki: Kajōnaru kigo no mori* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1989), 194.

Figure 6: Triptych of the play *Fūsen nori uwasa no takadono* (1891)
Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

This innovative staging combined newer fads of panorama spectacles and observation towers (visible on the painted backdrop of Ueno and Asakusa in the scene), a fascination with the western technology of hot air balloons, with longstanding related techniques of perspective and vision in kabuki dramaturgy, such as aerial lifts and *tōmi* distance painting and props.⁴⁸

Although the type of distance background painting that is sometimes used in conjunction with such tricks today—known as *tōmi* 遠見—would not become commonly used in kabuki scenery until much later,⁴⁹ the earlier scenes of leaping, flying, or climbing to elevated positions over the stage in the Genroku period already suggested and invited audiences to imagine such aerial perspectives long before they were made more literally visible in the visual techniques of set design in late Edo and early Meiji. This legacy of imagining not just aerial perspectives, but also flight and the social meanings of precarity and suspension, spurred innovations to the construction and use of the stage, its properties, and theater space itself, all drawn from kabuki's early encounters with acrobatic entertainments. Genroku period *onnagata* acrobatics, while most often associated with tales of gendered revenge and the supernatural, were far from uniform or univocal in this sense. Elevation could manifest faith or precarity, flight could express defiance. Although the prevalence of such acrobatic *onnagata* plays would decline in the following decades, these associations and elements of spectacular physicalities and elevated positions continued to reappear in *onnagata* performance long after the curtain had closed on the early period of development.

Despite the many similarities in the trajectories of their careers, the context in which Kodanji performed at the end of the Edo period differed substantially from Tatsunosuke's, with significant ramifications for how his spectacular performances were received. It would be difficult to overstate the contribution of Ichikawa Kodanji IV to the place that acrobatic stage spectacles continue to hold within kabuki. His career, as mentioned above, bridged an important gap between the career of Onoe Kikugorō III, famous for the spectacles of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* or *Hitoritabi gojūsan tsugi*, and that of Onoe Kikugoro V, whose experimentations with adaptations of circuses, hot-air balloons, and foreign settings and characters in plays enlivened early Meiji kabuki. Kodanji's legacy and reputation, however, have arguably been more controversial, particularly in relation to his use of stage spectacle and acrobatics. Understanding how and why Kodanji's reputation developed in this particular way, and how the historical context of his career contributed to it, demonstrate precisely the differences, as well as surprising continuities, between the careers of Tatsunosuke and Kodanji. It also sheds light on the

⁴⁸ Yanai Kenji, *Meiji kiwamono kabuki: Sora tobu Godaime Kikugorō*, 163-164. For more on the history of perspectival painting or panoramas in the Edo period and their connections with art in the Meiji period, see Kinoshita Naoyuki, "Panorama" *Bijutsu to iu misemono*, 183-223, Timon Screech, "Tobiori to hikō" *Edo no shikō kūkan*, 251-300, and Uchiyama Jun'ichi, "Tokei to no deai" *Edo no kōkishin*, 48-87.

⁴⁹ See Watanabe Tamotsu, "Tōmi: Sōzōryoku no jihei" in *Kabuki: Kajōnaru kigo no mori* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1989), 191-197 and Hattori Yukio, *Kabuki no kīwādo* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 218-221. The painter and scholar of Dutch Studies Shiba Kōkan (1747-1818) is recorded as the originator of using oil painting for kabuki backgrounds, likely in the late eighteenth century in *Danshū hyakuwa* 團州百話 by Ichikawa Danjūrō IX. See also Kawatake Shigetoshi, *Kabuki enshutsu no kenkyū* (Hayakawa Shobō, 1949), 123. Kawatake states that there are no other sources for Danjūrō's claims, and, given how much later Danjūrō was writing, it's been so far impossible to corroborate his claims about the specific origins of this narrative.

ambivalent reception of stage spectacle in the final decades of the Edo period, and on the perhaps surprising reasons for the mixed attitudes about the role of spectacle in kabuki dramaturgy that had less to do with spectacle itself, than with its associations with street acrobatics or provincial styles of performance.

Puppet-mimicry and Metatheatrical Transformations

The ubiquity of *onryōgoto* or acrobatic tricks in the Genroku period and the decade or so after and instances of praise for such actors or skills in evaluation booklets should not necessarily be mistaken for confirmation of their universal acceptance or recognition as an enviable skill for any actor. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, actors were being praised widely in the pages of actor evaluation booklets for their skills,⁵⁰ but such attitudes were not necessarily universal, even within the pages of actor evaluations themselves. Satoko Shimazaki, for example, has pointed to a positive review of one of Sakakiyama Koshirō I's performances of a character possessed by a vengeful female spirit who walked on his hands atop of a folding screen in 1706, but an earlier review for Koshirō from 1686 criticizes him for “only ever doing the kind of vulgar things one would expect of a street magician [辻放下].”⁵¹ Kawai Masumi indicates that that the attitude expressed in this review suggests a broader sense that the types of acrobatics with which Koshirō had made a name for himself may have been viewed as unfitting a higher-ranking actor, going so far as to say that it was only after Koshirō abandoned these kinds of performance styles that his rank finally went up.⁵² That there were conflicting opinions about acrobatics within kabuki is not surprising, but what is significant is that detractors tend to focus on policing the divisions between kabuki and acrobatics or spectacles. This reflects not only a negative opinion about street arts, but also a concern for the development of a “purer” kabuki style of performance distinct from these other genres, even if only in the case of its top actors.

Perhaps in part because of this division of opinions concerning them, the acrobatic *onnagata* performances that had flourished in the Genroku period began to decline in frequency the years following, but they certainly did not disappear entirely in the subsequent decades. Arashi Wakano II, for example, performed a version of “acrobatic *Dōjōji*” (*karuwaza no dōjōji*) to much acclaim as late as 1758, walking across a cloth draped from the top of the *hafu* gabled roof over the stage to second floor audience seating before descending to transform into a snake atop the bell.⁵³ Both a dynamic use of the performance space of the theater—balancing from the

⁵⁰ Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki: Yōshiki to denshō*, 137.

⁵¹ *Naniwa tachigiki mukashibanashi* 難波立聞昔語. I consulted the copy held at Waseda University Library.

⁵² Roundtable discussion “Shintai geinō to Saikaku/ukiyō zōshi no jidai—Kabuki, ningyō jōruri, misemono, shōgei no shiten kara” in *Saikaku to ukiyō zōshi* 5 (Jun., 2011), 48.

⁵³ According to the *Shinsen kokon yakusha taizen*, Wakano had originated as an acrobat in Osaka before transitioning into kabuki and performing as an *onnagata*. While many earlier performers had made similar transitions from acrobatics into *onnagata* performance pre-Genroku, by Wakano's time this had become a much more exceptional transition to make (hence it being worthy of note). Wakano was praised as an accomplished dancer and he successfully drew audiences with his use of the cloth to walk between the roof over the stage to the *sajiki* seating in the audience in this play and several others. See *Shinsen kokon yakusha taizen* in *Kabuki sōsho* Vol. 1, ed. Kinkōdō Henshūbu (Tokyo: Kinkōdō, 1910), 126-127 and Watanabe

roof structure over the heads of the audience—and a clear derivation from very early traditions of *kumomai* tightrope tricks in kabuki, Wakano had performed similar acrobatic tricks in a number of plays well into the mid-eighteenth century. This style of performing *Dōjōji* using acrobatics or suspending the actor to have him descend onto the bell, had also been a prominent strain of its performance in the Genroku period, and several early versions existed that used *chūnori* lifts (such as Sakakiyama Koshirō III's *Sanze dōjōji* in 1701), not to mention that many of the actors who had performed *Dōjōji* in the Genroku period—Tatsunosuke, Arashi Kiyosaburō, etc.—were specialists in acrobatics.⁵⁴

Dōjōji was not the only ceremonial play or dance piece that has its origins in these earlier acrobatic tales of female vengeance and *onryōgoto* roles of the Genroku period. *Kabuki koto hajime*, for instance, records Hayakawa Hatsuse as the originator of a “an acrobatic dance of *shishi* at the Osaka Matsumoto Nazaemon-za” in the Genroku period, though Mizuki Tatsunosuke reportedly performed a version of the play as well.⁵⁵ This is, of course, a reference to a category of known as *shakkyōmono* 石橋物, a crucial ceremonial piece in kabuki that had originated in *noh*, though it was also widely adopted in other performance traditions, from puppet theater to *misemono* shows. The content of the story obviously lends itself to acrobatic display; tracing back to a story of a *shishi* cub thrown from a cliff by its father as a test of strength, providing not only narrative context for performers to be suspended from heights, but a conceptual linkage between the daring stunts of the actor and those of the mythical *shishi*.

Although the spectacular origins of these plays remained an important aspect of their history and arguably left indelible marks on their narratives and staging, however, these versions slowly gave way to less acrobatic styles over the eighteenth century. Decades after Hatsuse's spectacular *Shakkyō* or Koshirō's *Sanze dōjōji*, Segawa Kikunojō I debuted new versions of the plays in 1734 and 1731 respectively, both of which were highly influential on later developments of the plays. And although Wakano had frequently performed his acrobatic *Dōjōji* to acclaim in the mid-eighteenth century, this genealogy of the play effectively ended with his career.⁵⁶

Although the acrobatic aspects of these plays would be minimized over time in their later versions in kabuki, both plays continued to appear frequently in *karakuri* or acrobatic shows well into the final decades of the Edo period. These iterations capitalized on the acrobatic elements and potential of the narratives as performed in early kabuki by increasing the height or difficulty of the tricks involving the elevated bridge of *Shakkyō* or the raised bell from *Dōjōji*. As Kawazoe Yū has pointed out, while kabuki may have incorporated acrobatics into its narratives, acrobatic shows were moving in the opposite direction over the course of the Edo period, adopting narratives from kabuki and *noh* to the point that their appeal was no longer simply as displays of physical virtuosity, but rather as “acrobatic theater.”⁵⁷ In a sense, these spectacles of acrobatic theater inherited and took over the more acrobatic versions of these plays as they were falling out of favor in kabuki, completing a circle of influence from acrobatic street performance to the kabuki stage and back again. This very proximity and sharing of narratives and staging may in

Tamotsu, *Musume dōjōji* (Tokyo: Shinshindō, 1992), 153-155.

⁵⁴ See Watanabe Tamotsu, *Musume dōjōji*, 144-145.

⁵⁵ Geinoshi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Nihon shomin bunka shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 6 (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1973), 127.

⁵⁶ Watanabe Tamotsu, *Musume dōjōji*, 161.

⁵⁷ Kawazoe Yū, *Edo no misemono*, 145. Also Ono Takeo *Misemono fūzoku zushi* (Tokyo: Tenbōsha, 1977), 228.

part explain the anxiety about distinctions between kabuki and these other performing traditions that emerged in the form of actor reviews critical of spectacular elements such as those mentioned above.

Spectacles of vengeful ghosts and the spectacular tricks and performance techniques that manifest them on stage did not remain subdued in kabuki for long, however; reinterpreted in the early to mid-nineteenth century, they were once again brought to life by actors Onoe Matsusuke I, Onoe Kikugorō III, playwright Tsuruya Nanboku IV, and set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XI. Using dramatic quick-changes and new technologies for shocking and horrifying audiences with these ghostly apparitions, these plays were emblematic of a historical moment of societal and economic change for both the theaters themselves and the public more broadly.

These revivals were not the only form of spectacular physicality to emerge in the Bunka-Bunsei period; while Matsusuke and Kikugorō were defining a new form of ghostly horror in Edo kabuki, Nakamura Utaemon III, together with his greatest rival, Bandō Mitsugorō III, dominated Kansai kabuki in the early nineteenth century with spectacular aerial tricks, quick-changes, and a new mode of physicality known as *ningyōburi* 人形振り or “puppet-mimicry”. *Ningyōburi* is a mode of performance in which an actor, typically supported by other actors in the role of “puppeteers,” physically enacts a role in the manner of a puppet.⁵⁸ Although the actual puppets of Japanese puppet theater are in fact very smooth and natural in their movements, kabuki’s *ningyōburi* is often more of an exaggeration of puppet-likeness as the actor moves his arms and legs more stiffly and less naturally. Today the style is most associated with the psychological state of female characters, trapped between intense emotions such as love or a desire for revenge, and familial and social forces that prevent them from acting in accordance with these desires.⁵⁹ These tensions are visually manifested through the precise movements of the actor and the relationship between the actor and the “puppeteers” on stage. The story of how this performance mode, which was popularized by the comic performances of male characters by actors such as Utaemon and Mitsugorō in the early eighteenth century, came to be a predominantly *onnagata* physicality, points to the development of another lineage of spectacular gender performance that moved away from tales of female specters or overt acrobatics while maintaining a virtuosic display of spectacular physicality.

⁵⁸ The style is not exclusive to kabuki – for information about a lineage of *ningyōburi* dance within *Kyō-buyō* as well, see Okada Mariko, *Kyōmai Inoue-ryū no tanjō* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2013), 379-383.

⁵⁹ Maki Isaka, *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2016), 104. Isaka also elaborates on how divided opinions were on *ningyōburi* in the early twentieth century, with many preeminent *onnagata* reinterpreting or avoiding it altogether. See especially 105-107. See also Sawai Manami, “‘*Ningyōburi*’ *ronkō*” (Ph.D Diss., Osaka University, 1999) for more detailed analysis of the style’s later controversies and reception.



Figure 7: (Left) Close-up of Kodanji's dramatic leap from the top of the yagura as Oshichi on the promotional playbill. The depiction of the yagura extends from the top to the bottom of the print's illustration, further emphasizing the verticality of the scene. Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

Figure 8: (Right) Actors Ichikawa Kodanji IV as Yaoya Oshichi (T), Onoe Kikugorō IV as the Servant (Gejo) Osugi, and Kawarazaki Gonjūrō I as Dozaemon Denkichi (B). Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

In his performance of the character of Oshichi in Edo in 1856, Ichikawa Kodanji IV made a dramatic final leap from the *yagura* tower back to the stage at the close of the play, depicted dynamically on promotional playbills and woodblock prints for the performance. Loosely based on an actual event, the story of Oshichi appeared in numerous works of fiction and theater throughout the Edo period and well into the Meiji period. While there is a great deal of variation in the narrative throughout its repeated reinterpretations, Oshichi's transgressive act of sounding the warning drum in order to signal her lover not to commit suicide, an act for which she was famously sentenced to be burned alive, resonated with the public long after her death in 1683. Part of the spectacle of the scene had always been its verticality—the slow and determined progress that Oshichi makes up the *yagura* tower to strike the drum, a precarity enhanced in Kodanji's performance by the addition of deep snow falling all around her. Kodanji's ultimate leap back down to the stage not only emphasized Oshichi's resolution to give up her life, it also harkened back to the verticality of the acrobatic tricks of *onnagata* of the Genroku period and the narratives of intense female emotion that they had brought to life on stage.

These elements—the blinding snow and dramatic leap—were not the only spectacular additions to the scene for Kodanji's performance, however; a much more influential inclusion was that of *ningyōburi*. Seeming to be moved about the stage and manipulated by the surrounding puppeteers, the actor is lifted into the air as he dances to the chanter's narration of Oshichi's plight, a metatheatrical transformation of actor into puppet. Born out of a complex mixing of theatrical genres and the close relationship between kabuki and puppet theater, the general effect of this performance style has historically broken down into two major strains; the first, the comic depiction of male characters in which the exaggerated movements of the actor contribute to the humor of the scene, and the second, scenes featuring a climactic moment of

emotional intensity for female characters.

The actor most often credited for the style's development, Nakamura Utaemon III, had begun his career at a young age performing in a style known as *kubifuri* 首振り, in which chanters delivered the characters' lines while the child performers acted the scenes out.⁶⁰ *Kubifuri* was performed in many contexts, appearing in puppet theater and spectacle shows such as the Takeda Shibai in Osaka, in which child actors were sometimes used interchangeably with puppets to stage its spectacles. It was through this early experience that Utaemon reportedly built relationships with puppeteers of *bunraku* that he would benefit from in establishing *ningyōburi* as a regular performance style in his later years.

While Utaemon was not the originator of the style—there are examples already from the late eighteenth century and sporadic references to actors imitating puppets as characters as early as the Genroku period—he was the actor who most established it as a performance mode. Most of Utaemon's performances, however, were of male characters, to which the stilted puppet-like movements of *ningyōburi* added a comic effect. One example, which is still often performed this way today, is the role of Iwanaga in *Dan no ura kabuto gunki*. As the courtesan Akoya is interrogated to give up the location of her lover, Kagekiyo, one of the two men conducting the interrogation, Iwanaga, moves as though he is a doll come to life; his static movements and more extreme outbursts, verbally antagonizing Akoya and egging on his fellow interrogator Shigetada, are meant to provide a foil to the more refined Shigetada, who expresses greater sympathy for her plight. Iwanaga's comedy adds levity to the scene, which is otherwise an extended pretense for the *onnagata* performing the role of Akoya to demonstrate virtuosity and musical versatility in three separate instruments: the *shamisen*, *koto*, and *kōkyū*.

Even the earliest example of a play to be recurrently performed in a *ningyōburi* style that we would recognize today, *Hidakagawa iriai zakura* 日高川入相花王, stages a contrast between this *ningyōburi* as comic depiction of male characters and as expression of a climactic moment of emotional intensity for female characters. The play centers around Kiyohime, who has fallen in love with Prince Sakuragi, disguised as a priest named Anchin, only to discover that he has in fact fled with Odamaki, to whom he is his betrothed. She loses herself to her feelings of attachment and jealousy and attempts to follow Anchin and Odamaki across a river to kill them. Having been refused passage on a boat to get across, her body transforms into a snake as she swims across the river to get her revenge. A central theme and the climactic conclusion of the play is a transformation brought about by an intensity of emotion, in this case *rinki* (jealousy). The seemingly insurmountable barrier of the river becomes a point of no return for Kiyohime. The transformation she must undergo to cross it, and the deed which its crossing will bring her closer to, mean that there will be no going back or stopping the momentum that is building.

As Kiyohime begs passage across, the play transitions into *ningyōburi*, with both Kiyohime and the boatsman performed as though they are puppets. This transformation on the part of the actor into puppet-like movements anticipates the final physical transformation of Kiyohime at the close of the scene. The use of puppet-like movements and, particularly, the different approaches to *ningyōburi* style represented in Kiyohime and the boatsman intensify the tensions between them, as the emotional outpouring of Kiyohime is met with the more

⁶⁰ Sawai Manami, “‘Ningyōburi’ ronkō,” 6.

exaggerated and comic movements of the boatsman.

The thematic similarities between early acrobatic performances in plays about vengeful spirits and *Hidakagawa* are obvious—a woman, wronged by her lover or society undergoes a transformation in order to exact revenge, a transformation signaled or mirrored by a change in physicality on the part of the actor, in the same way that acrobatics had functioned previously. This connection is reinforced by the relationship between *Hidakagawa* and *Dōjōji*, which was a mainstay of *onryōgoto* performances around the turn of the eighteenth century. While *ningyōburi* may not at first appear to conform to particular expectations for stage spectacle to which earlier acrobatics more neatly do, the two in fact derive, at least in part, from a shared lineage. While highwire acts or handstand tricks markedly declined in the mid-eighteenth century, their aesthetics and associations reemerged toward the end of the century in the form of dance pieces featuring physical feats of the actors, such as *hayagawari* quick-changes and *ningyōburi*.

A major difference, of course, is that this transformation into puppetry takes place not within the world of the narrative, as does Kiyohime's later mutation into a giant snake, but instead exclusively on stage. In almost all cases in which puppet-like movements are used, the character does not become a puppet narratively within the story. *Ningyōburi* is not necessarily thematic or metaphoric either, meaning that the material characteristics of a puppet were not necessarily evoked to express the emotional situation of the character but rather added intensity to a climactic scene, manifesting the emotion of the scene through a transition in performance mode. This understanding begins to offer a hint to why the style broke down into substantially different interpretations in the case of male versus female roles. Just as the adoption of acrobatics into kabuki developed into somewhat distinct lineages as acrobatics for *onnagata* roles took on valences of supernatural transformation, jealousy, and revenge, *ningyōburi*, too, became another form of non-human transformation to externally manifest an intensity of emotion on the part of female protagonists.

Kodanji's performance of Oshichi in *ningyōburi* only further emphasized it as a spectacular metatheatrical technique for expressing a female character's struggle against social forces, influencing the style's development in Edo kabuki toward a predominantly *onnagata* performance mode. Although *ningyōburi* had a long history of performance in Kansai (due in large part to the career of Nakamura Utaemon III and his students), the establishment of the style into Edo has often attributed to Kodanji. Precisely why Kodanji chose to perform the role of Oshichi in 1856,⁶¹ certainly not a role for which he was naturally suited, has remained a matter of debate, but it has been suggested that he got the idea from an earlier performance he witnessed during his years touring in Nagoya and Ise.⁶² At the time, there does seem to have been considerable skepticism about Kodanji's capability to perform the role and rumors circulated that he was only performing the climactic scene of Oshichi's climb up the *yagura* because he wasn't confident enough to compete against more established *onnagata*.

Understood in this context, the emphasis on *ningyōburi* and acrobatic leaps has been

⁶¹ *Shōchikubai yuki no akebono* 松竹梅雪曙. Kawatake Mokuami. 11th month, 1856. Ichimura-za.

⁶² Sawai Manami suggests that performing Oshichi in *ningyōburi* was an original innovation of Kodanji's, but, as Aoki Shigeru has indicated, Nakayama Nanshi II had already performed the role that way on several occasions prior and Kodanji likely took inspiration from his performances. Sawai Manami, "'Ningyōburi' ronkō," 26 and Aoki Shigeru, *Wakaki Kodanji: Bakumatsu o irodotta meiyū no shugyō jidai* (Tokyo: Daisan Shokan, 1980), 177

interpreted as another way of compensating for Kodanji's lack of prowess in female roles. Set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XIV, for instance, later recalled his shock and fascination as he watched Kodanji's transformation into Oshichi in the performance in 1856: "The public made fun of the fact that Kodanji, with a face like a gargoyle, was going to perform the role of sixteen- or seventeen-year-old Oshichi, but, when the curtain finally opened, somehow—somehow—it was a truly impressive Oshichi...I was shocked...No matter how you looked at it, the appearance of Kodanji performing the feat of *ningyōburi* in the heavily falling snow was just like a woodblock print."⁶³

Such reception of Kodanji's performance of Oshichi in *ningyōburi* certainly reinforced a narrative of spectacle as supplement or compensation for a lack of natural physical appearance as an actor. Kodanji, who did not primarily perform as an *onnagata*, was perceived to lack both the experienced skill and natural aptitude for such a role. Turning to more spectacular physicalities—such as *ningyōburi* and the dramatic leap at the scene's close—were part of a strategy by Kodanji to distract from these perceived shortcomings. There is, however, another way to look at Kodanji's Oshichi as an impactful reinterpretation of spectacle, rather than a strategic decision in light of these attitudes about his body and acting. In contrast to scenes such as that of *Hidakagawa*, where the transformation of the actor into *ningyōburi* is linked to one on the part of the character as well, Oshichi's narrative used *ningyōburi* not to denote physical transformation or supernatural intervention but instead to exclusively to mark an internal struggle within the character. As explained above in the case of Kiyohime, this emotional or internal strife was always a component of these instances of transformation, but Kodanji's Oshichi reinterpreted it into an exclusively metatheatrical technique (rather than one internal to the narrative), in which the spectacle of the virtuosic puppet-like movements became an expression of emotional intensity. Kanbei's recollection further suggests that the transformation of the scene was interpreted no longer as that of the character exclusively, but rather one of Kodanji as actor. The script for Kodanji's performance in 1856 does not explicitly describe the use of *ningyōburi* in the scene in its stage directions, though it includes a speech given at the theater before the scene begins that announces that what follows will be performed in that style and naming the puppeteers and accompaniment, reinforcing it as a metatheatrical performance mode.⁶⁴ The "transformation" taking place in the scene is no longer tied to a physical one on the part of character; like the leap that Oshichi takes at the end of the play, it signals her struggle and ultimate resolve. Furthermore, as Kanbei's recollection above suggests, it was a transformation not of the character, but of Kodanji himself.

In this sense, Kodanji's reinterpretation of *ningyōburi* through the role of Oshichi was very much in keeping with his style, which favored the depiction of contemporary trends and appeals to and explorations of the internal emotions of characters. Although he did not continue to perform *ningyōburi* regularly, Kodanji's innovations to the style deeply influenced its development in Edo kabuki. Both tying it to early acrobatic expressions of female character's resolve through its final leap and moving it toward a metatheatrical transformation rather than a literal one in the world of the play, Kodanji's Oshichi marked an important gendering of *ningyōburi* that has remained a central aspect of its performance today. The restrained, precise, and exaggeratedly stilted movements of *ningyōburi* were a far cry from the dynamic flips, jumps,

⁶³ Abe Yutaka, "Hasegawa Kanbei jitsuwa" *Engei gahō* (Mar., 1928), 120.

⁶⁴ Atsumi Seitaro, ed., *Nihon gikyoku zenshū*. Vol. 36 (Tokyo: Shun'yōdō Shoten, 1932), 403.

and highwire acts of Genroku acrobatics, and their origins derived not from acrobatic shows but from a mixed space of puppet theater, mechanical shows, and kabuki actors, yet their development into a specifically *onnagata* spectacular physical movement and display of virtuosity demonstrate how much they shared with these earlier performances. Eschewing the extraordinary or supernatural, Kodanji's reinterpretation specifically brought *ningyōburi* closer to a mundane theatrical expression of emotional intensity. *Ningyōburi* and its development presents just one example of the many strains of influence that continued to extend from kabuki's early relationship to acrobatics and the scenes of gendered spectacle that they inspired. While this relationship would be reevaluated and questioned over time, as Kodanji's career or Kikugorō V's adaptations of circuses indicate, encounters between acrobatics and kabuki acting continued to be fruitful, if controversial, spaces for innovation and development of new modes of physicality for the kabuki stage long after Tatsunosuke's sudden retirement, Ayame's rise to fame, or even Kodanji's death in 1866.

Chapter 4: The “Curious” Case of Sawamura Tanosuke III

When the kabuki actor Sawamura Tanosuke III underwent surgery in 1867 to amputate his right leg due to a serious gangrene infection, the news caused a sensation. Illustrations of the surgery, carried out in Yokohama by the American doctor James Curtis Hepburn, circulated in broadsides and woodblock prints. Adding to the public spectacle surrounding Tanosuke’s medical treatments was an artificial leg imported to Japan from the United States, the first modern prosthetic to be used within Japan. Audiences flocked to the theater for a chance to catch a glimpse of the leg during one of Tanosuke’s early performances after his return to the stage in 1868. What is at one level a story of fascination and curiosity about western medicine and modern technologies of prosthesis, however, becomes more complicated when considering the story of another artificial leg made for Tanosuke, this one by a carver famous for his life-like wooden dolls (*ikiningyō*), Matsumoto Kisaburō. Kisaburō’s dolls were an integral part of the culture of *misemono* (spectacle shows) in the late Edo period, offering lifelike representations of figures of the imagination or the supernatural, and facilitating embodied encounters with the foreign, the strange, the frightening, and the sensual. In these two prosthetic extensions of the body of the actor, we see the intersection of two modes of imagining and performing the body, one ostensibly marked as foreign and modern, the other as increasingly behind the times. The stage itself would provide a space, and the conventions of the theater a vehicle, for the performance of disability through which these two discourses would be negotiated before the viewing public.

Even as Tanosuke’s performances embodied the tension between these two discourses, however, there was another venue in which the public came to examine his body as a site for seeing this spectacle of modernity: the printed page. Both Tanosuke’s career on stage and the public discourse concerning his disability were dramatically shaped by the emergence of sensational media in the 1860s and 70s. As the spectacle of the body—in exhibition or on stage—became a focal point of policing and censorship, the pages of early illustrated newspapers and newspaper-inspired fiction provided new spaces for the sensationalizing of bodies that would not only shape how Tanosuke’s legacy has continued to be understood, but also the development of news media and fiction in Meiji Japan.

Medical Spectacles and Prosthetic Technologies



Figure 19: Illustrated playbill *Yosete mitsu renjō kidan*.
Waseda University's Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum.

This illustrated playbill for a performance of the play *Yosete mitsu renjō kidan* 群見成恋情紀談 in 1870 shows Sawamura Tanosuke III as Yaegaki-hime standing alone on a stone bridge accompanied by the stock phrase “in this scene there is a stage trick of unusual design.” The “stage trick” referred to in the playbill was a kind of *chūnori*, in which an actor is lifted up above the stage with wires or ropes. Tanosuke had by this time already undergone two extensive amputation surgeries to treat gangrene infections in each of his legs, and the “trick” being advertised is that he moved about the stage seemingly without any form of conventional prosthetic support. While historians have often focused attention on Tanosuke’s use of artificial limbs, his innovations of using existing theatrical stage tricks and mechanics such as these as assistive technologies in his early years back on the stage critically reimagined prosthetics as generative integrations between actor and technology rather than medicalized somatic replacements.

Born the son of actor Sawamura Sōjūrō V and younger brother of actor Suketakaya Takasuke IV (Sawamura Tosshō II), Sawamura Tanosuke III distinguished himself from a young age with his ambition and skill, reaching the status of lead *onnagata* at the Morita-za at the unprecedentedly young age of 16 in 1860. Known for his physical beauty and style, he inspired trends in clothing, hair, and other fashions, a testament to the height of his public profile. He was a frequent collaborator with the playwright Kawatake Mokuami, who most famously wrote the role of Kirare (“Scarface”) Otomi in the play *Museumegonomi ukina no yokogushi* 処女翫浮名横櫛 specifically for Tanosuke in 1864.¹ The play centers around the encounter between Yosaburō and Otomi, who is the mistress of a gang leader. When their tryst is discovered Otomi is punished by the gang leader Genzaemon and left with distinctive scars on her face. Years later Yosaburō and Otomi encounter each other again and Otomi, committed to helping Yosaburō get the large sum of money that he needs to restore his family’s standing, extorts the money from Genzaemon and, in a bloody climax of the play, kills one of his henchman in order to acquire the

¹ The play had been scheduled to be performed under the title *Wakaba no ume ukina no yokogushi* in the 4th month of 1864 but a fire broke out at the Morita-za at the end of the second day of its performance, spreading rapidly through the surrounding areas. When the theater was rebuilt in the 7th month the performance was resumed under the revised title *Museumegonomi ukina no yokogushi*. See Watanabe Tamotsu, *Mokuami no Meiji isshin* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2011), 183.

needed amount.² The role of Otome is an *akuba* 悪婆 (“evil woman”) role type, one that had been in vogue from the early nineteenth century and characterized women who engaged in various nefarious or scandalous acts. Closely related to the *dokufu* 毒婦 (“poison woman”) narratives that would proliferate in early Meiji fiction,³ Tanosuke’s association with these types of roles in general, and that of Otomi in particular, would later impact Okamoto Kisen’s decision to write a *dokufu*-style narrative about Tanosuke himself after his death.

Another type of scene for which Tanosuke was known in these early years and which would influence later narratives of his illness and disability was one known as a *semeba* 責め場, in which a protagonist is put under either physical, verbal, or psychological abuse to extract information or force them to renounce loyalty. The scene in which Otomi is attacked after her relationship with Yosaburō is discovered is one example, but Tanosuke would perform these scenes in a number of plays over the course of his career. Such scenes were meant to draw pity and rouse emotion in the audience as the heroine maintains loyalty or bravery despite her considerable suffering and displays of the body in pain, and Tanosuke’s particular aptitude for these scenes and their rousing of emotion and sympathy among the audience made them some of his most famous roles. Ultimately, Tanosuke’s close association with these *semeba* scenes forged a link between them and Tanosuke’s disability, as attested to by the most prominent theory of the origin of Tanosuke’s injuries. This narrative claims that the initial cause of Tanosuke’s gangrene infection in his right leg was a fall on stage while performing a *semeba* scene in the play *Ichiban nori meiki no sashimono* 魁駒松梅桜曙微 (*Benizara kakezara* 紅皿欠皿) in 1865. Often called a Japanese Cinderella story, the play was Mokuami’s adaptation of an 1815 *yomihon* by Takizawa Bakin known as *Beibei kyōdan* 皿皿郷談 and featured the story of Kaede-hime who is abused by her step-mother. In one scene of abuse in particular, Tanosuke, as the heroine of the play, was tied up and hung from a tree, but during an early performance he fell to the stage when the rope holding him snapped, injuring his foot on a nail on the stage.⁴ There is no mention of a fall or

² The play is in fact a gender-swapped version of an existing play known as *Kirare Yosa* (Yowa Nasake Ukina no Yokogushi 与話情浮名横櫛) which had originally premiered a decade prior at the Nakamura-za in 1853.

While the basic setup for the narrative at the beginning is more or less the same, in the earlier version it’s Yosaburō who is caught and physically attacked for their relationship. In this version they are also happily reunited later in the play and, once Otomi’s continued loyalty is made clear to Yosaburō, the play is resolved without the violence of Mokuami’s later version.

³ While *dokufu* has a much longer history in kabuki as a distinct role type, the two terms were becoming more and more interchangeable in the early Meiji period as sensational stories of such women were making their way from the pages of newspapers to the stage and fiction.

⁴ Hanayanagi Shōtarō, “Yukigeta” in *Nihon no Geidan 5: Shinpa, Shingokugeki, Kigeki* (Tokyo: Kyūgei Shuppan, 1979), 57. This seems to be the earliest extant reference to the onstage fall being the cause of Tanosuke’s gangrene infection. Hanayanagi did not know Tanosuke personally and based most of his information on his own examination of other records and the testimony of an elderly *onnagata* that had known Tanosuke, and the source of this information appears to be the latter. The *Kabuki nenpyō* does record an account that Tanosuke’s foot began to cause him pain during this performance, but nothing about the specific story of a fall during the torture scene resulting in an injury from a nail on the stage and no other contemporary accounts confirm the story. It is additionally unlikely that the source of Tanosuke’s multiple infections was a single injury as gangrene is typically localized to the wound site and then spreads to tissue in the vicinity of that area. This would make it most likely that Tanosuke was experiencing a chronic illness affecting his circulation (diabetes, for instance), though it’s impossible to be sure based on existing sources.

injury during the performance in the records of the *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki*, nor any other indication that this was the cause of Tanosuke's initial injuries in most early accounts of Tanosuke's life, but Tanosuke's apparent absence from the stage that month and the next does suggest that he was experiencing significant pain, potentially exacerbated or caused by an injury. The close association made between these *semeba* scenes and the origin of Tanosuke's illness in later accounts, however, attested to by this narrative of Tanosuke's injury, indicates both how crucial these types of scenes were to Tanosuke's career and also how frequently the roles which Tanosuke played on stage ultimately shaped narratives of his life and disability offstage in sometimes unexpected ways.

By the 5th month of 1867 the pain in Tanosuke's right leg had become so intense that he had to cancel scheduled appearances on stage, and by the 9th month his infection had progressed to such an extent that the decision was made for him to travel to Yokohama to have it amputated above the knee by American doctor James Curtis Hepburn. It would be only three months later that Tanosuke would first return to the stage after his surgery and recovery, performing in Yokohama at the Shimoda-za in the 12th month of 1867 as a "thank you" performance dedicated to Dr. Hepburn. Although this seems to have been intended as an isolated performance, it drew sufficient crowds to the theater that Tanosuke was furthermore requested to return to the main stage of Tokyo just months later in early 1868. In addition to the crowds packing the theaters, there was considerable demand among the public for information about Tanosuke's surgery, an early indication of the sensation and fascination surrounding Tanosuke's body that would continue in the years to come. News of Tanosuke's surgery circulated in *kawaraban* news sheets⁵ and was reported in early newspapers such as *Moshiogusa* もしほ草 (*Yokohama shinpō moshiogusa* 横浜新報もしほ草).⁶ Central to these narratives was the spectacle of western medicine, as can be seen especially clearly in an unusual woodblock print attributed to Utagawa Hiroshige III entitled "treatment for a foot ailment by a French doctor." The content of the print has been identified variously as a depiction of Hepburn (misidentified as French) treating Tanosuke's foot or Tanosuke being fitted for his imported prosthetic leg. The print's dating to 1866, the year before Tanosuke underwent surgery, however, makes this attribution incorrect. It's possible that the print was produced in reference to other treatments that Tanosuke had sought out prior to seeking treatment from Hepburn, which would be reasonable given the print's dating in relationship to the timeline of Tanosuke's illness, but, in either case, it demonstrates some elements shared by many of the sources that spread news of Tanosuke's surgery and recovery.

⁵ One extant example can be found in *Kaizō* 12 no. 1. (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1930), 146.

⁶ Osatake Takeki, ed. *Bakumatsu Meiji shinbun zenshu* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Taiseidō, 1935), 258



Figure 2: (Left) Print by Utagawa Hiroshige III (1866) Yokohama Archives of History.

Figure 3: (Right) Okamoto Kisen and Toyohara Chikanobu, *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* (1880). Waseda University Library.

The print visually emphasizes the contrast between Tanosuke and his appearance and that of the French doctor through the brightly colored and rather outlandish costuming of checkered pants, green coat, and striped knit hat that the bearded doctor is wearing as he reaches out toward Tanosuke's extended foot. Tanosuke is seated in front of the doctor on a large western chair in his usual *onnagata* attire with a deep blue kimono with floral pattern. Another example of similar dynamics, albeit from much later, is the illustration of the surgery found in Okamoto Kisen's *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi*. Kisen's text and Toyohara Chikanobu's corresponding illustration depict Tanosuke's first amputation surgery to his right leg by Hepburn and another colleague. Spread across two pages, the right half shows the two doctors preparing for the surgery, the floor and table covered with medical instruments and bottles. The space of the room is filled with foreign furnishings, standing in clear contrast to those from the illustrations of domestic scenes which preceded it in the text, displaying an elaborate table, glass windows with curtains, and a large standing bed upon which Tanosuke is laying. While arguably more subdued in its depiction of the doctors and the context than the earlier woodblock print, Chikanobu's illustration shares with it a similar investment in calling attention to the foreign context of the surgery space and exposing Tanosuke's body to view in the moments of medical treatment. Depicting Tanosuke either seated or reclined with his kimono pulled back to reveal his legs to the doctors in each image, such illustrations also exhibited Tanosuke's body to the gaze of viewers and readers.

Return to the Stage—Theatrical Prosthetics

This mode of viewing, which sought glimpses of the site of Tanosuke's surgery or, later, his prosthetics, would translate into the theatrical context as well as Tanosuke returned to the stage. Tanosuke's early performances were by all accounts exceedingly well attended, so much so that he had the distinction of performing at all three major stages within the same month in 1868—the Ichimura-za, the Nakamura-za, and the Morita-za.⁷ While Tanosuke did not often use conventional prosthetic devices for his performances, on the occasions that he did it elicited considerable fascination among audiences. Okamoto Kisen, for example, claims that the Morita-za was exceptionally packed for Tanosuke's performance as Sankatsu in the 7th month of 1869 because so many had come to catch a glimpse of the imported prosthetic leg that Tanosuke was using at the time.⁸ This artificial leg, imported from the United States at the time of Tanosuke's surgery, not only contributed to the spectacle of western medicine that surrounded Tanosuke in these years, but also represented an important shift in conceptions of assistive technologies at the time. The introduction of such prosthetics shifted the focus of assistive technology from adaptive forms that focused on aiding mobility to those which sought to recreate and replace materially an absent portion of a “whole” body.

In addition to this imported prosthetic, however, Tanosuke also reportedly commissioned one made of wood from the famous carver of *ikiningyō* 生人形 “living dolls” Matsumoto Kisaburō 松本喜三郎 to use until the other arrived from abroad.⁹ Although ultimately Tanosuke did not use the prosthetic leg that Kisaburō had designed for him, Kisaburō's involvement suggests a certain understanding of prosthetics based on the relationship between *ikiningyō* and anatomical models of the human body at the time. *Ikinigyo* were a kind of *misemono* show that experienced a significant boom at the end of the Edo period into the early Meiji period that featured highly detailed and true-to-life wooden dolls which were often used to depict dramatic scenes of kabuki plays, legends, or erotic bathing episodes. *Ikinigyo* were an important space in which conceptions of the body were performed, especially through depictions of somatic difference, the exposed and sensual body, or the body in pain. In part because the appeal of *ikiningyō* was in their detailed representation of the life-like human body, they relied heavily on the exposure of its skin, in scenes of muscles and sinew in tension, and bringing to life exaggerated expressions and forms. Many of the most successful *ikiningyō* displays had, accordingly, taken for their subject erotic scenes of women undressed, or in the act of falling

⁷ Tamura Shigeyoshi ed., *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* (Tokyo: Ichimura-za, 1922), 108-109.

⁸ Suda Chisato and Iwata Hideyuki, ed. *Meiji gessaku shū*, 556. The *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* doesn't mention Tanosuke using a prosthetic leg for this performance though it does comment that his portrayal of the role of Sankatsu was well-received (96). The *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* does record another time that Tanosuke used a prosthetic leg for the 1870 performance of *Oni azamidate some katabira* at the Morita-za: “Tanosuke gave a speech commemorating his recovery of health for his role as Miyagino while wearing a prosthetic leg and his fans and audience members were so moved to see him appearing to sit freely on his own that they cried.” (105) *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* records many instances of such emotional responses among audiences.

⁹ The original sources for information about Tanosuke's commissioning of the prosthetic from Kisaburō and the subsequent exchange between them about its lack of practicality and its cost (Kisaburō is said to have refused to accept payment for it when it became clear that it would not be possible for Tanosuke to use it as a prosthetic) remain murky and hard to determine. The information appears in a number of later accounts and with enough specific detail, some shared by some only appearing in one source or another, that there seems to be some basis for it at the very least. The presence of a design sketch for a prosthetic leg among Kisaburō's anatomical designs also lends credence to the information.

with their kimono billowing around them, or the gaunt figure of a hag, naked from the waist up, dragging one of her protesting victims by the hair.¹⁰

One example of how the spectacle of the body in *ikiningyō* shows could function to construct or reinforce norms is an exhibition by Kisaburō in 1854 in Osaka and 1855 in Asakusa that featured the residents of various fictional foreign islands that had been depicted in encyclopedias such as the *Wakan sansai zue*, including the “island of those with long legs” or the “island of those with holes in their stomachs.”



Figure 4: Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Ikiningyō* at Asakusa Okuyama (1857). National Diet Library.

This longstanding equation of foreignness with somatic difference emerged with a new vitality as the figures were exhibited in a way that provided an embodied encounter for audience members.¹¹ The ethnographic function of such *ikiningyō* exhibitions is further reinforced by their curious afterlives—despite the considerable time and cost required to produce the dolls for display, they often became worn down and lost their value on the domestic market when the popularity of their show had run out. They found new worth and purchasers on the burgeoning international market streets of Yokohama, however, with many eventually making their way into

¹⁰ Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu to iu misemono: Abura chaya no jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993), 83 and 88.

¹¹ The dynamics of observation and spectatorship were further complicated by the inclusion of two other figures to the tableau in another print series to depict the show—two geisha were also included who were shown looking on at the spectacle of the foreign figures between them and the audience. There are a couple ways to understand their inclusion; first is as a proxy or model for the reactions that audience members were meant to have to such a strange and unusual encounter. Another, however, may harken back to a reversal of roles in which Japanese figures are exhibited for display in *misemono* shows as foreign themselves. This reversal of the dynamics that turns the dynamics and gaze of *misemono* on Japanese persons provided both a fantasy of viewing Japaneseness itself as unfamiliar and strange but also emphasized the role that *misemono* themselves played in defining what was foreign and what was familiar. One example of such a narrative is in Hiraga Gennai's *Shidōkenden* in which its protagonist, having visited many of the islands featured in this *ikiningyō* show, finds himself put in a *misemono* show in a foreign land. See Kawazoe Yu, *Edo no misemono* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), 170.

museum displays in the United States and Europe. In contexts such as the Art Institute of Detroit or the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem,¹² these carvings became art objects or displays of Japanese life for international audiences, appearing alongside suits of armor, hats, tools, or pottery.

As Kinoshita Naoyuki has pointed out and as this ethnographic function of *ikiningyō* suggests, *ikiningyō* were undergoing a shift in tone, subject matter, and purpose in the late 1860s and early 1870s, transitioning from more grotesque, erotic, or supernatural subject matter to material more in step with the ideals of the new Meiji government for education and art.¹³ *Ikinigyo* began to be put to significantly different purposes, developing into store mannequins, but also into anatomical models for medical education or international exhibitions. That a wood carver as skilled in human likeness as Kisaburō would be commissioned to produce an artificial leg for Tanosuke is telling of developments in the relationship between medicine and *ikiningyō* spectacles in the latter nineteenth century; just some four years after he had made this prosthetic leg for Tanosuke the medical school at Tokyo Imperial University would commission Kisaburō to produce a series of anatomical models for educating medical students in anatomy in 1872.¹⁴ Kisaburō also went on to produce a model skeleton in addition to a carved wooden flower for exhibition as part of the 1873 Vienna World's Fair, establishing a connection between *ikiningyō* and anatomical models that would continue over the coming years as a model of dissection would be exhibited in Osaka in 1875, a cutaway model of a pregnant woman with a model of a 10-month old fetus visible inside her stomach in Asakusa in 1879, and numerous additional anatomical models appeared in further exhibitions and world's fairs.¹⁵

Although these examples postdate Kisaburō's production of Tanosuke's prosthetic, they indicate a deepening connection between these spectacles of true-to-life carved wooden figures and medical and anatomical representations that reinforced norms about the human body. These norms also of course influenced definitions of somatic difference and disability in a way that was also reflected in Kisaburō's production of a prosthetic leg. Although the anatomical models that Kisaburō produced for Tokyo Imperial University were lost in a fire after being relocated to the city of Matsumoto, a series of sketches Kisaburō produced in preparation for making them shows the detailed anatomical illustrations that he drew to prepare for their execution. An illustration of a prosthetic leg, complete with the straps to affix it to the upper leg, is included among the diagrams produced for this project, though these illustrations are presumably those done in

¹² The Morse Collection at the Peabody Essex Museum contained several *ikiningyō* of common life, such as farmers, a farmer's wife with a baby, but also an armored warrior, donated by Edward Sylvester Morse, a marine biologist who took a side ethnographic interest in Japanese culture during his visits to Japan in the late 1870s. The Detroit Institute of Art was long home to a dramatic piece called "The Giant Wrestlers" by Kamehachi, which depicted a sumo bout between Taima no Kehaya and Nomi no Sukune from the *Nihon shoki*. Originally produced for the National Industrial Exhibition of 1890, it failed to be completed in time and was instead displayed near Sensōji before being sold to an American businessman in Yokohama, who subsequently donated it to the museum. It has since been purchased and repatriated to the Contemporary Art Museum Kumamoto, in Kamehachi's hometown. See Kobayashi Jun'ichi, *Umi o watatta ikiningyō: Perī izen igo no Nichi-Bei kōryū* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1999).

¹³ Kinoshita Naoyuki, *Bijutsu to iu misemono: Abura-e chaya no jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993), 74.

¹⁴ Kinoshita, *Bijutsu to iu misemono*, 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

preparation for creating Tanosuke's prosthetic.¹⁶ Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Kisaburō's specialty as a carver of static life-size dolls, although the artificial leg was reported to be quite beautiful, it was not practically functional for balance and movement and Tanosuke ultimately never used it. Even with some fabric insert or other cushion, the hardness of the wood and issues of balance would likely have been uncomfortable enough to be prohibitive. This privileging of aesthetics over practical function in the decision to commission a prosthetic leg from a carver of *ikiningyō* is telling about the conception of prosthetics emerging at the time, reinforcing an attitude of physical difference as absence or lack that could be replaced with visually approximate anatomical models, at times sacrificing mobility gain for appearance.

As Tanosuke returned to the main stages of Tokyo in 1868, however, he collaborated with playwright Kawatake Mokuami and set designer Hasegawa Kanbei XIV to create a variety of modifications in staging, innovative stage tricks, and other forms of "prosthetics" to respond to public expectations for his body. Some of these modifications were simple adjustments to staging, such as rewriting a scene so that Tanosuke could remain seated for the majority of it (including one in which he participated in a stage fight while sitting on a horse throughout), but others relied on the dynamics and effects of stage spectacle as assistive technologies in ways that called into question some of the assumptions of somatic norms demonstrated in his early artificial legs. Tanosuke's spectacular performance of Yaegaki-hime from 1870 demonstrates how such stage tricks, both existing forms and newly designed mechanics, could use kabuki theatrical conventions to shape discourses about Tanosuke's body and disability. The scene in which Tanosuke plays the role of Yaegaki-hime from the play *Honchō nijūshikō*, in which Tanosuke, as mentioned briefly in the example above, shows Yaegaki-hime being aided but also possessed by foxes whom she has asked to help guide her safely across a lake to warn her lover Katsuyori of her father's plan to have him ambushed. For Tanosuke's performance of the scene, he was lifted and moved from above the stage by means of the *chūnori* lift, supporting Tanosuke from above the stage with ropes in ways that intentionally played with audience expectations that Tanosuke would not be able to stand unsupported on stage. While the scene was not conventionally performed by means of such lifts, there was in fact an earlier precedent for using a *chūnori* lift for the Yaegaki-hime role as well; Ichikawa Kodanji IV had combined the use of a lift with *ningyōburi* puppet-mimicry performance to create a more spectacular version of the role in his performance at the Nakamura-za theater in the 3rd month of 1850. In this case, the use of *chūnori* was part of demonstrating Yaegaki-hime's supernatural possession by the foxes as her movements become more foxlike and she is surrounded by supernatural fire. The *chūnori* lift within the scene for Tanosuke's performance, then, was used assist Tanosuke's movements on stage but did so in a way that was consistent with the context of the scene itself and in line with previous deployments of the same technology.

For the scene preceding this one, however, Kanbei had employed an entirely new stage trick specially designed for Tanosuke. Hasegawa had constructed a kind of metal vest that would support Tanosuke around his chest and waist beneath his costume, and which could in turn be held up via a metal pole from below. Hasegawa then made small openings in the stage floor through which the pole could be inserted or moved from below.¹⁷ Kanbei claims that his inspiration for the trick came from seeing mannequins in western clothing stores and that the vest

¹⁶ *Ikinigyō to Matsumoto Kisaburō* (Kumamoto: Ikinigyō to Matsumoto Kisaburō Ten Jikkō Iinkai, 2004), 164.

¹⁷ Hasegawa Kanbei, "Omoidasu Saruwaka-chō – 7" in *Engi Gahō* (Oct., 1928), 122-123.

with the supporting pole was modeled on the construction of these figures. The end effect would be for Tanosuke to move about the stage, to stand or sit, without any support visible to the audience. The timing of the movements, however, was extremely tricky because those supporting Tanosuke from below the stage could not see the action above and if the movement were out of sync it would ruin the effect. This concern led Kanbei to suggest having stagehands to support Tanosuke during the scene, something that had been done in other performances, but Kanbei reports that Tanosuke flatly rejected their addition because they would ruin the effect of the stage trick.¹⁸

This comment by Tanosuke is valuable as one of the only reported statements we have concerning his approach to these later performances, but it also points to an important dynamic of these spectacles and their function as assistive technologies. Even this new trick for Tanosuke was essentially an inverted kind of *chūnori*, though having the pole emerge from below the stage and presumably hidden behind Tanosuke's body was even more successful than a *chūnori* in hiding the mechanics which enabled the trick. While, on the one hand, the stage trick relied on audience knowledge about Tanosuke's amputations and expectations for his body, it also shifted the focus from one of medical fascination—which had surrounded his surgery and his first prosthetic legs—to one which fit into existing modes of kabuki performance and stage spectacle. Tanosuke's statement to Kanbei after this performance recalls that during the trick the audience shouted not his name, but "Hasegawa," in recognition of the ingenuity of the trick's architect.¹⁹ As Tanosuke's statement indicates, for this performance to be successful it needed to surprise audiences with Tanosuke's seemingly unaided movement about the stage, turning the trick not just into an assistive technology, but one which would be seamlessly integrated and virtually undetectable to the viewing audience, turning his mobility into a kind of spectacle itself.

This trick, however, had already been employed by Tanosuke in at least one instance before the 1870 performance of *Yaegaki-hime*, Tanosuke's performance of Kiyohime in the play *Koishiki no ji Hidaka no akebono* 恋紀の路日高曙 in 1869, a new version of the play *Hidakagawa iriai zakura* 日高川入相花王, rewritten on this occasion for Tanosuke by Kawatake Mokuami. In this version of Mokuami's, the ultimate physical transformation of Kiyohime into a snake as she crosses the river is prefaced by an earlier moment of solitary recognition. When Kiyohime looks into a mirror, a symbol for vanity, but also by extension one for evaluating and correcting one's behavior, she sees herself already transformed into a snake, though this change is not yet visible to the audience or to the other characters. Though her father pleads with her to accept that her relationship with Anchin will never be, having seen her own transformation she knows it is too late.²⁰ Multiple characters have tried to pull her back, but (as the audience, familiar with the story, already knows she will) she ultimately makes her way to the river.

The deep emotional narrative of the play, enhanced by Mokuami's revisions, were paired with scenes of spectacle involving Tanosuke's body and his movements on stage. The playwright Takeshiba Kisui recounts his amazement at how effective the trick using the pole and vest was during his performance of Kiyohime: "Tanosuke's Kiyohime was so well done and I was shocked when Tanosuke, having only one leg, came running out on the *hanamachi*...the stage

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Yoshimura Shinchi (Kawatake Mokuami), *Koishiki no ji Hidaka akebono, Koharunagi okitsu shiranami, Futarizuma bairiyū shinbun* (Tokyo: Yoshimura Ito, 1889).

fight was choreographed so well that we were in amazement at the way that he went to exit the stage—one would have no idea that he was doing it on one leg.”²¹

In this play, however, the trick was combined with *ningyōburi*, a spectacular style of puppet mimicry discussed in chapter 3. As *ningyōburi* generally involved other actors performing as “puppeteers” who appeared to support or manipulate the central actor as “puppet,” this performance style would provide physical support for Tanosuke from other actors or stagehands in a way that still conformed to kabuki convention. Takeshiba indicates that this was part of the reason for Tanosuke performing the role in *ningyōburi* style even though performing it in that style was not yet an established convention in Edo at the time—neither the stagehands nor the pole trick alone was enough to support Tanosuke through the scene at the time.²² This makes Tanosuke’s refusal to use stagehands for the Yaegaki-hime role appear as more of a deliberate choice to emphasize the stage trick and its potential to amaze audiences, especially given that the role of Yaegaki-hime also had precedent for being performed in *ningyōburi* style by that time. *Ningyōburi* also functioned differently from Tanosuke’s use of stage tricks in a significant way—whereas stage tricks redirected attention away from Tanosuke’s body to the mechanics which were functioning as prosthetics, *ningyōburi* more directly referenced and, ultimately, exposed Tanosuke’s body in ways that would only intensify in print media about his performances.

Kanbei recalls Tanosuke’s enthusiasm to use the same techniques for future roles given how well-received these spectacles had been by audiences, but, as Kanbei states, Tanosuke’s subsequent illnesses and recurrent pain made it difficult for him to continue to perform such strenuous tricks. After a series of absences from the stage and recoveries from additional surgeries to both of his hands, Tanosuke ultimately retired from the main theaters of Tokyo with a performance of the play *Kokusen’ya Sugata no utsushi-e* 国姓爺姿写真鏡 at the Murayama-za in 1872. After a brief opening of his own theater in 1873, the Sawamura-za, which closed just two years later in 1875, Tanosuke ventured on a tour of the Osaka-Kyoto theaters followed an additional tour in more rural areas.

It would be within these later performances in Osaka that Tanosuke returned to the *ningyōburi* performance of Kiyohime in 1875, though in this case it would not be combined with other stage mechanics or spectacle. Although Tanosuke performed the role of Kiyohime only once during the early portion of his extended tour in the Kansai area from the fall of 1875 to the spring of 1877, it came to define these later performances even more than other roles that he had performed more consistently. Whereas Tanosuke’s previous uses of spectacle and stage technology had relied on concealing the materials means of support in order to shock or surprise audiences, this performance focused solely on *ningyōburi* as prosthetic. Five actors performed the part of puppeteers and stagehands to facilitate Tanosuke’s movements across the stage, rather than the customary two or three actors. This time Tanosuke did not use a pole from below the stage for additional support, likely in part because of the cost and this would have required in modifications to the stage floor, but also as part of a more general move away from the spectacular performances he had engaged in years before in Tokyo and, likely as well, the

²¹ Takeshiba Kisui, “*Mukashi-banashi*” *Engei gahō* (Feb. & Mar., 1920), 132.

²² Tanosuke and his brother Tosshō, who went on to perform the role several times after this performance of Tanosuke’s, are in fact typically credited with establishing the convention of *ningyōburi* for Kiyohime, one which continues even through modern performances of the piece.

considerable physical demand that they placed on his body. Whereas Takeshiba had previously marveled at the contrast between the collective effort hidden below the stage which supported Tanosuke's seemingly effortless performances above it,²³ on this occasion this cooperation and support was made visually explicit to the audience through the presence of the other actors as "puppeteers". A powerful example of the many forms of collaboration with which Tanosuke had continued to perform, from his partnership with Mokuami and Hasegawa Kanbei to the other actors and stagehands, by doing away with the kinds of spectacles he had used before it also foregrounded Tanosuke's body in ways that would be picked up on in print media in persistent statements of puppet-likeness and discourses of curiosity.

Newspapers and Sensationalized Prosthetics in Print

One difficulty of assessing the staging and public reception of this performance of Kiyohime in 1875, however, is the almost total absence of theater reviews, records of performances, or newspaper articles to record the event. This dearth of written records, not just for this performance in 1875, but for Tanosuke's career as a whole, and an accompanying dramatic shift in print media that was occurring roughly contemporary to his surgery and return to the stage, were crucial factors in how public discourse concerning Tanosuke's disability developed. On the one hand was the gradual decline in regularity of published actor reviews or *yakusha hyōbanki* which would cease all together in 1866 and only resume regularly production with the *Haiyū hyōbanki* 俳優評判記 in 1878, the year of Tanosuke's death.²⁴ Theater reviews would eventually be taken over by newspaper columns and by the new genre of serial magazines dedicated to the theater such as *Kabuki shinpō* 歌舞伎新報 in 1879, *Kabuki* 歌舞伎 in 1900, and *Engei gahō* 演芸画報 in 1907. Had Tanosuke's performances taken place a decade or so earlier we would have published reviews, just a few years later and serial magazines and new printed review materials would have recorded their details and reception. What emerges in their absence are reports in news articles and illustrated newspapers, and a semi-fictional account of Tanosuke's life penned by Okamoto Kisen shortly after Tanosuke's death. This transition in media is key to appreciating, in a narrow sense, how this single performance of *ningyōburi* came to so prominently represent his later performances, but in a broader sense as well how the aesthetics of *misemono* and spectacles of the body found a new home in the late nineteenth century—newspapers and sensational fiction.

One such source, and one of the only materials contemporary to the performance of Kiyohime to address it, is a print from the illustrated newspaper series *Nishiki-e hyakuji shinbun* 錦絵百事新聞. Early Meiji illustrated newspapers such as this one frequently featured sensational stories of scandal, violence, and notoriety and, while it wasn't unheard of for them to include stories about actors, this particular report of Tanosuke's stage performances stands out. The

²³ Takeshiba Kisui, "Mukashi-banashi" *Engei gahō* (Feb. & Mar., 1920), 132.

²⁴ Theater reviews would continue during this span of time in the form of single-sheet woodblock prints, but they were not as regular, did not follow the same format, and did not contain as much information as theater reviews had previously. See Kurahashi Masae, "Edo-ban ichimae-zuri yakusha hyōbanki: Edo ni okeru 'yakusha hyōbanki' no ninshiki o fukumete" *Kinsei bungei* 77 (2003), 15-30.

article prioritizes the illustration of the *ningyōburi* performance of Kiyohime over other roles for which Tanosuke was better known and which he performed much more often on this tour and it focuses attention on Tanosuke's body through the language and imagery the print evokes in its final statements.



Figure 5: Hasegawa Sadanobu (1875). University of Tokyo's Meiji shinbun zasshi bunkō. *Nishikie hyaku jinbun* #3.

Noting that Tanosuke was not the first kabuki actor to continue performing despite a disability, nor the first to be so successful in rousing the emotion and acclaim of audiences, the print identifies a blind actor from the eighteenth century, Tanimura Tatehachi, who “deeply moved audiences with his performances as the blind character Kagekiyo in the play *Musume Kagekiyo Yashima nikki* [娘景清八島日記].” It goes on to give the more recent example of Jitsugawa Gakujūrō II who, after going blind, continued to perform romantic roles to great acclaim until his death in 1866 (around the same time that Tanosuke was becoming ill for the first time). “And now the beauty and emotion of Sawamura Tanosuke performing the role of Urazato with his disabled body [五体不具にして] is of unprecedented curious appeal [古今稀代の奇量] and he is a skilled performer who far excels those other two in packing the theaters....Audiences are waiting eagerly with their hands and feet raised for what will surely be his curious [奇成る] performance of O-hyaku and Kiyohime.”²⁵ The implication of the text and image is that Tanosuke's particular popularity was a combination of the “curious appeal” exemplified in the use of prosthetic stage spectacle, and the ability to “deeply move audiences” emotionally by performing roles which referenced his disabled body such as *semeba* scenes. It is his virtuosic performance of both of these modes that made him, for the article's author, exceptional in a newly created “lineage” of actors with disabilities.

The text's application of terms such as *ki* 奇 (“curious” or “strange”) to Tanosuke's

²⁵ Urazato from *Akegarasu* was another role which Tanosuke would perform repeatedly during his tour of the Kansai area which climaxed with an emotional scene in which the heroine is subjected to physical abuse to try to get her to renounce her lover.

appearance and performances is evocative of an important history of their application to non-normative bodies, especially in the context of early-modern *misemono* spectacle shows. Namase Katsumi identifies this language in the context of *misemono* shows as the aesthetic of “*shinki* 新奇 (new curiosities),” which relied on audience fascination, and which was driven by larger shifts in a privileging of the new and wonderous in the nineteenth century.²⁶ As with similar types of spectacles featuring those visible disabilities or physical differences in other countries, they relied on the spectacle of difference to repeatedly reinforce the normal. In some cases they were simply about exhibition, exposing divergent bodies to an audience’s gaze, while in others this was combined with displays of various physical skills.

While the exhibition of disabled or deviant bodies remains closely associated with the now languishing *misemono goya* 見世物小屋 culture of modern Japan, Kawazoe Yū has pointed out that they in fact comprised only a small percentage of *misemono* shows earlier in the nineteenth century and that they actually began to increase in number only at the end of the Edo period into Meiji.²⁷ Such *misemono* shows were of course not the only context within which visible disability and its meanings in early modern Japan were defined and negotiated, but the appellation of physical difference as “curious” or “strange,” reinforced within the context of *misemono* shows functions within the illustrated newspaper to sensationalize Tanosuke and these performances. The exhibition of those with physical disabilities had only been banned three years before this performance in 1872, part of more broadly instituted reforms aimed at disability around that time, though such shows would continue to appear for years after being officially declared unlawful.²⁸ Conceptions of disabilities more broadly were also in flux, with newer western medicalized discourses informed by new conceptions of health, ability, and disability interacting with existing autochthonous understandings of disabilities and the body. While terms such as “curious” or “strange” of course had broader applications and associations as well, the frequency with which they were invoked in descriptions of Tanosuke, his body, and his performances, points to significant ways in which public performance space could still be deeply ambivalent for those with visible disabilities. Comments such as Hasegawa Kanbei’s that audiences who came to see Tanosuke’s performance of Yaegaki-hime were “fascinated by [珍がる] the sight of Tanosuke standing despite having no legs,”²⁹ also suggest that this response of curiosity and fascination was far from an invention of the language of such newspapers, even though this illustrated newspaper may be an especially clear example of such rhetoric.

As John Jervis has articulated in his theorization of sensationalism in the context of early newspapers and novels during the nineteenth century, sensationalism in such media was deeply concerned with the body and its exposure: “Sensationalism turns the body inside out, displays the defenseless body as surface, dismembered, bloody, with the vicarious pleasure that can be taken in this spectacle of the abject body.”³⁰ An examination of early Meiji illustrated newspapers in Japan shows that very similar tendencies were at work in both their text and

²⁶ Namase Katsumi, *Nihon no shōgaisha no rekishi: Kinsei-hen* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1999), 76-78.

²⁷ Kawazoe Yū, *Edo no misemono* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), 131.

²⁸ Yoshikawa Miki, *Misemono no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1970), 293 and Asakura Musei, *Misemono kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shibunkaku, 1977), 336.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁰ John Jervis, *Sensational Subjects: The Dramatization of Experience in the Modern World* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 29.

images. Christine Marran has demonstrated similar “sensationalizing gestures” related to the body of Takahashi Oden, a “poison woman” whose story would appear widely in newspapers, on stage, and in works of fiction, including a semi-fictional biography by Okamoto Kisen in 1879 (*Tōkyō Kibun: Sono na mo Takahashi dokufu no Oden* 東京奇聞：其名も高橋毒婦の小伝).³¹ Few places was this treatment of Oden more apparent than in reporting on her autopsy after her execution for murder, in which the causes of her licentious and deviant behavior were sought in her body as it was exposed to view on the autopsy table. While Oden’s autopsy is not illustrated in Kisen’s account, it is in another: Kanagaki Robun’s *Takahashi Oden yasha monogatari* 高橋小伝夜叉譚, also published in 1879.³² The illustration shows the body of Oden lying on a table in the process of autopsy surrounded by several men, two of whom, presumably physicians, watch the process while seated on chairs on either side. Such scenes demonstrate the extent to which medicine itself was spectacle at the time and how the quite literal exposure of the body that medical spaces (both surgery and autopsy) facilitated were a critical component of the sensationalizing of figures such as Oden, other “poison women,” and, indeed, Tanosuke as well. Filled with episodes of violence, blood, and scandal, illustrated newspapers provided glimpses into some of the most intense and dramatic moments of news events, rumor, or strange occurrences. In this sense, they overlapped heavily in material, tone, and, indeed, aesthetics with *ikiningyō* exhibitions, relishing not only scenes of the extremes of the body injured or grotesque, but the curiosity of depictions of foreign peoples and customs. This proliferation of images of the abject body and the body in pain in illustrated newspapers as well indicates that, even as such extreme depictions of violence and the body were beginning to be policed within the context of *misemono* such as *ikiningyō*, such somatic spectacles were reemerging within the pages of printed newspapers and related fiction genres.

Additionally, just as the medical community of the early Meiji period sought explanation for Oden’s deviant behavior in her body for the purposes of broader medical and scientific knowledge, the fiction of Kisen, Robun, and others performed their own kind of narrative autopsy, seeking to satisfy reader curiosity by accounting for her actions through biography. Okamoto Kisen’s 1880 *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi*, a semi-fictional biography of Tanosuke ultimately performs a similar function in accounting for Tanosuke’s personal life, performances on stage, and the progression of his illness. *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* is a culmination of public discourses and representations of Tanosuke’s life and his body that had been circulating in the decade since his first illness. Merging narratives from popular rumor, newspaper articles, Tanosuke’s performances on stage, and other materials such as this illustrated newspaper, Okamoto Kisen’s text would provide by far the most sensationalized treatment of Tanosuke to appear in print. Kisen’s *Akebono sōshi* also draws heavily from the style and language of newspaper reporting and the form of sensational biographies of “*dokufu*” which were popular in the 1870s.³³ Such narratives frequently embellished on facts, claiming the authority of truth while feigning to expose some scandal or shocking revelation. By juxtaposing the surgical theater with the performance stage and borrowing elements from the story of Kiyohime and Anchin, Kisen weaves together a dramatic story of Tanosuke’s life filled

³¹ Christine Marran, *Poison Woman: Figuring Female Transgression in Modern Japanese Culture*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 2.

³² Marran, *Poison Woman*, 15-17.

³³ *Ibid.*, and Jim Reichert, *In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-Male Sexuality in Meiji Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 43-44.

with romances, betrayals, and tragedy. Consistent with Kisen's general techniques of semi-fictionality, the text itself is mostly a list of Tanosuke's performances or details of events reported elsewhere, such as in newspaper stories or performance records such as the *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki*, with periodic embellishments or exaggerations for sensational effect.

The language of this newspaper print would also find its way into Okamoto Kisen's *Akebono sōshi*, the most obvious example of which how a forward to the fifth volume by Yoshikawa Shuntō, a sometimes collaborator of Kisen's, borrowed from the text of the newspaper print almost wholesale: "When that brave Jitsukawa Enzaburō [Gakujurō] of Naniwa performed on stage blind it was praised as something that had never been before, but seeing Tanosuke perform again and again with such wonderful skill despite his exceptional disability, it seems insufficient to simply call it wondrous [奇]." ³⁴ The selection of Tanosuke's Kiyohime performance to be one of only two on-stage performance moments to be depicted in the book as a whole also suggests that the illustrated newspaper print influenced the text of the work itself as well.



Figure 6: Okamoto Kisen and Toyohara Chikanobu, Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi (1880). Waseda University Library.

In addition to the direct evocation of the language of the curious in the illustrated newspaper print in Yoshikawa's introduction to the volume, however, Kisen's text describing the Kiyohime performance adds several key embellishments. Kisen treats this performance as Tanosuke's last before his death, even though Tanosuke would in fact continue to tour for two more years after this performance. The accompanying illustration by Toyohara Chikanobu, spread across two pages, also shows Tanosuke surrounded by five other actors and stagehands as he is lifted into the air, his *obi* sash and hair further manipulated behind him by poles. The textual description which accompanies the illustration further emphasizes the drama and spectacle of the moment:

Whenever Tanosuke appeared on stage after losing his hands and feet he was supported

³⁴ Suda Chisato and Iwata Hideyuki, ed. *Meiji gessaku shū*, 534. It also seems highly likely that the prominence given to Tanosuke's performance of Kiyohime as one of only two on-stage moments to be depicted in the book is because of the scene's circulation in this earlier print.

by his students Kanjirō and Ichikawa Misuji more or less in the manner of puppeteers,³⁵ but for this occasion Sōjūrō, Kuzō, Kakitsu, Fukusuke, and Ebijūrō received instruction from a puppeteer famous in that region and, dressed as puppeteers, they lifted Tanosuke's body in the air and used hands and feet made of wood. He was more suitable to be called a "living doll" (*ikiningyō*) than the real thing and the scene was extremely well-received.³⁶

Kisen's narrative doubles the transformation of the scene, overlaying Kiyohime's with Tanosuke's own transformation into, as Kisen puts it, a "living doll." This invocation of *ikiningyō* is possibly a reference to Kisaburō's early production of a prosthetic leg for Tanosuke, but it may also again reflect a sensationalizing reference to the role that *ikiningyō* had come to play in the medical definition and representation of the human body by this time. Kisen also adds the idea that the actual arms and legs from *bunraku* puppets were used as prosthetics for the scene, a claim that seems to have no other source beyond Kisen's book. Within this context, this addition further emphasizes and exaggerates the relationship between the materiality of puppets and Tanosuke's body, but it also presents a kind of hyperbolic version of Kisaburō's prosthetic that seems to point back to earlier spectacles surrounding Tanosuke's body and his use of prosthetic legs. Taking both the concept of prosthetics and *ningyōburi* to their logical extremes, Kisen's text here borders on the satirical, seeming to call attention to the extremity of the public fascination with Tanosuke's early prosthetics even while exploiting the very same material for his own sensational work.

Tanosuke's Final Speech and Exposing the Dynamics of Sensationalism

In contrast to this sensationalized account of Tanosuke's final Kiyohime performance in *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* there are instances within the text and, especially, the illustrations, that indicate a greater awareness of the dynamics of sensationalism and the public space of the theater. The best example of this is the depiction of an emotional stage speech that Tanosuke gave at the opening of the Sawamura-za in 1873 and subsequently at every theater he visited during his Osaka-Kyoto tour. After Tanosuke's repeated failing health and subsequent amputations had caused him to frequently miss performances and ultimately retire from the main theaters of Tokyo, a wealthy patron had provided the financial backing for the opening of the Sawamura-za with Tanosuke as its main star in 1873. The stakes for this performance and for the speech Tanosuke gave to commemorate the opening of the Sawamura-za were extremely high for Tanosuke and for the theater. After a string of financial hardships, the opening of the theater offered Tanosuke a chance at financial stability and the speech marks a significant departure in the tone of Tanosuke's performances.

As you all know, I became disabled [*fujiyū na mi* 不自由な身] as a result of a serious illness...since I have been staying inside on account of physical limitations, I sometimes become envious of those who are able-bodied. Forgetting myself while

³⁵ This is referencing the way that his students moved him about the stage dressed as stagehands even when not performing *ningyōburi* scenes.

³⁶ Suda Chisato and Iwata Hideyuki, ed. *Meiji gessaku shū*, 565.

I sleep, I dream of myself standing on stage with my body whole. Almost as soon as I exclaim how happy I feel, I awake again, and in the anguish of that moment, I wonder what reason there might be that I should have become disabled. I must have uttered such regrets and cried many times. But where there is suffering there is also joy...having received permission to open this theater, this body that had become useless in society once again became able to be in public and appear on stage like this. The tears I am crying now are not tears of sadness, but those of joy.³⁷

This was not the first stage speech that Tanosuke had given in which he referenced his disability, but this was by far the most extensive, most emotional, and the most impactful of his career. The *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* describes the entire audience of the theater unable to keep from weeping during this emotional moment in the day's performance: "Using the letter he gave a an intimate speech about his illness and there was no one in the audience who did not wring their sleeves and display their sympathy, and the whole theater wept."³⁸ The impact of the speech also lasted far beyond this initial performance of it in 1873; as Tanosuke continued to perform the same speech at each theater he visited during his final tour in Osaka in 1875 and 1876 it became sufficiently well-known to simply be advertised in prints as his "speech on a boat" (*fune no kōjō* 船の口上). The number of different prints depicting this particular scene of the speech, which outnumber those printed to commemorate, for example, his retirement from the Tokyo stages just over a year prior, also confirm the importance of this moment in Tanosuke's later career.

The speech itself was set within a play specially written for the occasion titled *Yoizamashi fukeyo suzukaze* 酔醒吹涼風 in which Tanosuke played the geisha Otama. While the characters are riding on a boat within this play, they discover a letter box floating on the Sumida River and inside the box is a letter on which Tanosuke's speech is written. A section of the script from the Osaka performance of the speech quoted in a later source has Tanosuke's older brother Tosshō and adopted son Hyakunosuke stretching out the letter before Tanosuke as Tosshō remarks that the letter is from Kawatake Mokuami and contains that speech that the playwright had written for Tanosuke to read.³⁹ Once Tanosuke finished his speech the scene changed as the actors returned to character, with the *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* recording that after the tension was broken with a joke in the next scene, "after that there were many humorous elements and the somber spirit of the previous scene was exchanged for light and sunny acting. Tanosuke was so energetic that one would never know that he was suffering because of his illness."⁴⁰ Not only does this transition from speech to play, from somber to sunny acting mirror the shift in tone within the speech itself from intense emotional confession toward more conventional expressions of gratitude to fans and audiences in such speeches, it also potentially reframes the preceding speech itself as performance in ways that would be emphasized in other elements of the performance as well.

The emphasis on the authorship of the speech was another way that the emotional intensity and confessional mode of the speech itself was marked as scripted or performed. Although framing a stage speech within a play, or even having a speech be written on a letter

³⁷ Print accessed from the National Theatre (Japan Arts Council). Image ID 13050.

³⁸ Tamura Nariyoshi, ed., *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki* (Tokyo: Ichimura-za, 1922), 145.

³⁹ Maruki Sado (Hato Toyokichi), *Fūgawari na hitobito* (Tokyo: Shoroku Shoin, 1931), 324.

⁴⁰ Tamura Nariyoshi, ed., *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki*, 145.

that a character finds, was not an uncommon way to incorporate such a speech into a performance, the material letter of Tanosuke's speech also became so prominent in written accounts and visual representations of the speech as to suggest a great significance to this specific form of communication within the speech. One diptych print by Utagawa Kunimasa IV, for example, not only included the entire text of the speech running along the top of the print, but also formatted it as the material letter scroll, as though the viewer is being given the chance to see the letter just as it was provided to Tanosuke to read. Below this running text Tosshō and Hyakunosuke hold a smaller version of the letter before Tanosuke, further linking the material letter printed above to the moment of Tanosuke's performance. Illustrations of the speech in other woodblock prints and in playbills for the performance itself similarly give prominence to the letter, usually indicated by a letter box shown floating in the river, generating suspense and expectation about the moment of the speech to come by foregrounding the letter as prop in waiting.



Figure 7: Utagawa Kunimasa IV (1873). National Theatre (Japan Arts Council).

These indications of scripted performance within the scene did not, however, seem to diminish the emotional response of the audience, as the *Zoku zoku kabuki nendaiki*'s account indicates. As suggested by the fact that there are multiple other examples in such records of Tanosuke's performances in which audiences responded to Tanosuke's regular performances with such public expressions of weeping, whatever the framing of the speech itself, audiences were prepared to respond to Tanosuke's performances with emotional outpouring. Especially as Tanosuke's illness progressed and he began to miss more scheduled performances in the year or so before his retirement, initial responses of fascination to the medical spectacle surrounding Tanosuke's body apparently gave way to a spectacle more emotional in nature, for which the speech itself provided a context and space to experience. The scene had impact and was positively received as an emotional spectacle in which Tanosuke provided a narrative of his disability in a way that allowed audiences to respond in an expected manner, but the framing of the scene also hints at a more complicated moment in which these audience expectations quite literally became the script from which he read. In this way the letter indicated both intimacy (as a letter addressed to the audience) but also distance and performance, facilitating the dynamics of

mediated sympathy which turn moments of sensation into sensationalism with public aspect.

One final representation of this staged speech in the illustrations of *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* by Toyohara Chikanobu calls attention to these dynamics of spectacle and sensationalism and in the public fascination surrounding Tanosuke's body in an even more critical way. The speech is illustrated immediately following one depicting Tanosuke's second amputation surgery, forging connection between medical and stage spectacles by the visual transition from one two-page illustration spread to the other. In essence, the text moves from the "operating theater" of Tanosuke's surgery (filled with its own "props" and figures) to the Sawamura-za theater packed with spectators on opening night. Recreating many of the tropes of the medical spectacle—emphasis on the foreignness of the doctors, the exposure of Tanosuke's injuries and body to view—the transition between the two images suggests a critical linkage between the physical exposure and pain of the operating theater and the emotional exposure of Tanosuke's speech.

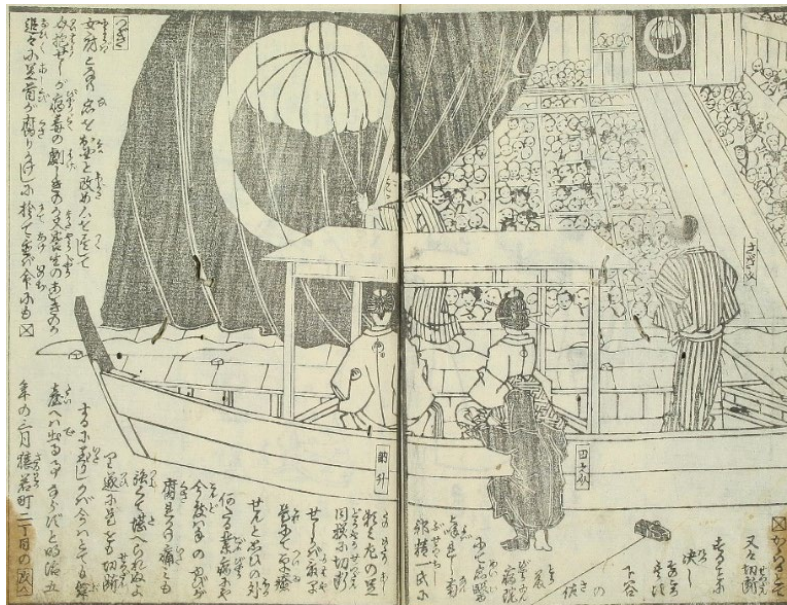


Figure 8: Okamoto Kisen and Toyohara Chikanobu, *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* (1880).
Waseda University Library.

The illustration of the speech flips the perspective of the scene to gaze out at the audience from the back of the stage, a crucial reversal of the perspective of the scene typically provided in other visual depictions of it in woodblock prints and playbills. The anticipation and expectations of the packed audience appears in the illustration's suspension of the moments preceding the speech itself; the curtain is still only halfway pulled back to reveal the audience to the actors on stage, and the box containing the letter of his speech rests suggestively on the stage, visible to the reader but not yet to the audience. So well-known was this moment by this time that the letter and its role in the scene need only be visually suggested by the letter box waiting to be floated down the river by the stagehand who is poised behind Tanosuke as the scene opens. In addition to the sense of anticipation built by the reveal of the curtain and the promise of the letter box, the spectacle of the moment is emphasized by the crowd of tiny heads showing the audience packed impossibly tight to the very corners of the theater. The content of the speech itself is not actually described until several pages later, and the text appearing directly below the image instead

details the progression of Tanosuke's illness, suggestively layering the book's description of his illness and surgeries with Tanosuke's own narration of his experience from the stage and further linking them together conceptually. What the illustration offers to our view and consideration is ultimately not Tanosuke's speech itself, but rather the public spectacle which surrounded it and Tanosuke's illness, body, and narrative more broadly, both in the space of the theater and in print.

While the illustration invites consideration of how the dynamics of spectacle played out in the theatrical context in particular, this does not mean that the role of print media in general, and fiction such as Kisen's *Akebono sōshi* itself, escape the same criticism. One implication of the visual juxtaposition between the medical and emotional spectacles in these illustrations of Kisen's novel is an additional connection between the stage speech and this "behind the scenes" view of Tanosuke's personal life and emotional experience which the book claims to provide. The book as a whole, like many of Tanosuke's performances, plays with what its readers are expected to know already about the sensationalized nature of Tanosuke's personal life. The text shows that the desire for explanation of the narrative of Tanosuke's disability continued after Tanosuke's death and the centrality of the emotional spectacle—linked here closely with the medical spectacle surrounding his surgeries—continued to be an important part of the way Tanosuke's life has been rewritten in fiction and on stage since. In some contexts, sensationalism and its blending of truth and fiction in early Meiji illustrated newspapers and fiction such as Kisen's provided avenues for the subversion of officially sanctioned values and media forms, but the treatment of Tanosuke's body and narrative within print also points to how the exposure and exploitation of non-normative and abject bodies was also a fundamental part of this sensationalism. This sensationalizing and the language through which it was often accomplished, with its echoes of early-modern spectacle shows, furthermore points to the role that performance and theatrical space played in the development of spectacle and sensationalism. *Misemono* spectacles which most attended to the human body and its representations—especially those exhibiting non-normative bodies and spectacles of lifelike carved wooden dolls known as *ikiningyō*—would be among the first subjected to government censorship or reform in early Meiji as branches of knowledge previously the territory of spectacle shows were gradually taken over by institutions such as the museum, the zoo, and the anatomy classroom. Within the context of this increasing concern over the role of spectacle in knowledge dissemination and entertainment, the sensation surrounding Tanosuke's disability and performances reveals both intense fascination with and anxiety concerning prosthetic technologies and the intersection of the human and the artificial played out in the public space of the theater and the pages of new print media in Meiji Japan. The way in which the language of puppets and *ikiningyō* would become metaphors for Tanosuke's body and disability in print media demonstrates the ways in which public spaces, be they the stage or the page, could be complicit in the sensation of disability in Meiji Japan.

Conclusion

The way that Tanosuke's performances deployed stage spectacle and how his performances were ultimately received and represented in print demonstrate how spectacle could at once present opportunities for challenging the public's expectations while also lending itself to

the reproduction of other narratives and tropes of exhibition, strangeness, and curiosities. On the one hand, stage spectacle as prosthetic seems at times to have successfully shifted the audience's focus from the medicalization of Tanosuke's surgery and disability to an appreciation for the ingenuity of the stage tricks themselves. On the other, a new media landscape of newspapers and fiction inspired by them sensationalized Tanosuke's body by drawing on existing discourses of the strange and curious developed in *misemono* shows that had long participated in defining the normative against the visibly disabled body. Print media, especially illustrated newspapers and fiction such as Kisen's *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi*, enabled a sensationalizing of his body and narrative because of its ability to make the intimate public, providing close and immediate access to Tanosuke's life and experiences while in fact generating a shared and public experience of imagined empathy. As the illustration of Tanosuke's speech in *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono sōshi* demonstrates, however, this potential for the theater stage to become a space for public spectacle, exhibition, and sensationalism itself for someone with physical difference did not always remain unmarked, even within the fiction itself.

Okamoto Kisen's blending of truth and fiction in his biography of Tanosuke is emblematic of a larger challenge in writing about Tanosuke's life and performances. Perhaps as a result of the fact that Tanosuke did not leave behind any writing or statements about himself or his experience beyond his staged speeches, there seems to be no end to the hearsay, rumor, factual errors and exaggerations that have stepped in to fill that void, first in newspaper articles and remembrances in theater magazines, and later in the many brief statements about Tanosuke in histories of medicine, prosthetics, or theater in Japan. A kind of narrative prosthetic in their own right, these stories, like Kisen's novel itself, seem to respond to an impulse for autopsy, for an accounting and an explanation for Tanosuke's disability and a space for the public to respond. Writing about Tanosuke and his life necessarily involves sifting through, comparing, and evaluating the many accounts of his later years and attempts to discern fact from fiction, but Tanosuke's speech as performance also points to the value of appreciating and considering the spectacle itself rather than trying to see beyond it. In this context, Tanosuke's speech, and the letter's suggestion of its own scripted nature, is a potent reminder of the limited lexicon of cultural "scripts" available for those living with the identity of disability in Meiji Japan. Tanosuke's 1873 speech was but one of many such narratives constructed—some self-fashioned, others not—about Tanosuke's body and his disability during his later years. These narratives allow us to situate his career at the intersection of older conceptions of the body with long histories in Japanese performance practice and theory and newer discourses informed by modern conceptions of health, ability, and disability. In this sense, Tanosuke's career provides a understanding how the body became newly problematic in the years surrounding the Meiji restoration and how, because of its very public nature, kabuki itself became a vehicle for exploring these changes for the viewing public.

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