

Gender as Work

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This volume examines how different forms of gender are presented and commodified in contemporary Japan. It focuses on the deliberate work that goes into producing presentations of gender and on how the result of this work becomes an object to be consumed by others. Through ethnographic methods, we enter specific spaces where gender is a carefully choreographed performance to be sold, bought or negotiated. Each chapter is an invitation to join the ethnographers on the specific stages on which they themselves perform gender alongside their interlocutors. Readers of this volume will be taken along as the researcher provides service as bar staff in a Shinjuku gay bar; trains as a cross-dressing escort; waits for customers alongside sex delivery workers; joins a pornography fan community; records the life stories of transgender people; or listens to Kōenji street performers as they deliver both music and gender. Through access to these unique spaces, the edited volume examines gendered performances that are enacted, sustained, denied or disavowed surrounding particular kinds of transactions. It takes an ethnographic close-up look at how intimacy, agency and commodification create gender as a social and economic form in contemporary Japan.

We argue that what the customer pays for – in brothels, gay bars, at fan events, when hiring a cross-dressing escort or simply when throwing down a few hundred yen for a street performer – is a particular performance of gender. Rather than proposing a gender-*at-work* perspective (Ogasawara 1998; Macnaughtan 2020), the assembled chapters make the work of gender itself the focus of analysis. This has two crucial advantages over previously published literature on gender in Japan. Firstly, it allows a move away from sociological survey-style quantitative research that – while very important in order to address questions of gender inequality more broadly – too often simply assumes gender to be a fixed category (Steel 2019; Assmann 2020). Secondly, it also allows for a return to a perhaps older paradigm of gender, which puts performance over performativity (Butler 1990; 1993). In the spaces presented here, as in many everyday life scenarios, gender is the focus of a deliberate performance that involves complex cognitive, social and bodily skills. It is the affective effect of these performances that becomes the object of desire.

These changes happen in the context of a global shift from manufacturing to service-based economies in developed countries. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe it as a shift from material to immaterial forms of labour in post-industrial societies. In their ‘immaterial paradigm’ (2000: 112),¹ post-industrial work takes three forms: informatisation of production through robotics, the advent of symbolic–analytical services such as management and problem-solving, and affective labour, which produces ‘intangible feelings of ease, excitement, or passion’ (ibid.: 293). Analytically, affective labour is differentiated from the older notion of emotional labour by arguing that emotions are mental phenomena, while affect is that which comes before emotion and is both more visceral and less contained. The contagious nature of affect turns affective labour into that which ‘always directly constructs a relationship’ (ibid.: 147), and thus opens the social up to be subsumed into the forces of capitalist production. This understanding is broader than Arlie Hochschild’s earlier definition of emotional labour as ‘the effort to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain an outward appearance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (2012 [1983]: 7), but also less precise and more difficult to apply in concrete situations. An ethnographically meaningful distinction between emotional labour and affective labour is articulated in Elizabeth Wissinger’s work on modelling in the U.S., in which she understands ‘affect as a condition of emergence of emotion, and emotion as the capture, closure, and naming of affect’ (2007: 260).

Emotional work is divided along gendered lines, in that those who perform the bulk of emotional labour are women, poorly paid, or not paid at all (Macdonald and Sirianni 1996). As Hochschild shows through the example of stewardesses, emotional labour is often understood to be feminised and requires the suppression of anger and aggression in the service of being nice and caring. Indulging and pampering male egos while suppressing one’s own irritation is how Anne Allison (1994) describes the main task of working in a hostess club, for example. Several of the chapters that follow challenge the gendered assumptions about who has to undertake the emotional labour required, thus rendering it an important heuristic to compare the different stages on which this happens.²

¹ For a critique of the analytic distinction between the material and the immaterial see Yanagisako 2012.

² Although Hardt and Negri describe the rise of affective labour as a distinctly post-war phenomenon, Nakamura Miri has applied the term to maids in the age of Japan’s opening to the West. Her argument is that the affective labour that maids performed became increasingly demanded from housewives, thus anticipating the rise of the ‘professional housewife’ in the post-war years (2015).

While emotional labour becomes associated with femininity because it requires a deference to hierarchy and often remains unacknowledged, the notion of affective labour allows us to focus on how gender and its production are drawn into the sphere of commodification. Whether as care or sex work, the service industry packages it as immaterial commodity (one that is, however – and this is one of the blind spots in Hardt and Negri’s theorisation – achieved by material means such as cosmetics, clothes, hair products and hormones). Superficially, this seems to respond to the feminist call for wages for feminised work (Federici 1975), but, in one of the many ironies of capitalist production, while gendered presentations become both work (as in individual effort) and labour (as in paid by wages), affective labour remains precarious with little job security and long-term stability. The costs on the other hand remain considerable: distinctions upon which the whole idea of modern work is based, between public and private, between work and leisure and between that which is paid for and that which is given freely are increasingly eroded. Life itself, its capacity for regeneration, reproduction and connection, is drawn into the sphere of production.

While the notion of affective labour provides a powerful critique of late capitalist production and consumption, the ways in which relationality is described as affect circulating among anonymous ‘bodies’ has a disturbingly dehumanising effect. Human subjectivity is often relegated to the status of a mere side effect of affective contagion in such accounts. Against this post-human tendency, Gregory Mitchell proposes the notion of ‘performative labour’. In his ethnography of male sex workers in Brazil and their customers, affective and performative labour are intertwined:

[T]he frame of performative labour shifts focus away from intangible and often invisible affects that trouble the mind-body distinction and exist sometimes on the surface, sometimes below, sometimes ricocheting around the room. Performative labor calls attention to the very visible products of labor: the masculinity that is embodied, commodified, and consumed. (Mitchell 2016: 55)

While affect may be the driving force behind the dynamic of such encounters, the ways in which the promise of intimacy is commodified is better understood as ‘a *commissioned performance* of masculinity, in which economic incentivization structures and guides the contours of idealised gender presentations available in a given culture’s repertoire of masculinity.’ (Mitchell 2016: 38)

The chapters in this volume refer to these concepts to different degrees, but what brings the contributions together is a shared attention to the ways in which gender is created as an intersubjective artefact to be consumed by others. From gender presentation in everyday life to the gender display of male porn stars at female fan events, these performances unfold on a continuum from quotidian gender expression to highly controlled and commodified customer-tailored experiences.

The variety of phenomenological approaches chosen here allow the ethnographer to participate as gendered subjects in the everyday life-worlds of the people and situations they study. Focusing on how gender comes into being in an intersubjective process allows the ‘bracketing’ – the intentional setting aside of assumptions concerning what is real – of both the notion of gender as a psychic reality and the view of gender as a biological fact. This is not to deny the importance of either, but to point out that in everyday life we do not have direct access to neither the interior aspect of gender identity nor to the genitals of persons.³ What we do have access to as participants and observers and what we ourselves make available to others is our own and other’s gender presentation. This volume therefore follows the ethno-methodological convention of talking about gender presentation rather than gender expression. While both terms suggest considerable agency on the part of the person expressing or presenting, ‘expression’ implies a stronger connotation of freedom to outwardly express an inward reality, something that in everyday life is constrained by culturally specific and normative ideas of how ‘gender’ should look.

The way gender is presented in everyday life in Japan – and elsewhere – is strongly inflected by the particular situation one finds oneself in. Gender is never what simply is – it is always something that ought to be in a particular way, thus always something that has to be achieved, that has to be created or modulated according to complex expectations of gendered behaviour that social others hold, be they present or imagined. What is particularly interesting about the chapters collected here is the level of consciousness individuals hold about the requirements of their staged performances. Unlike the gender performances that people (more

³ In contemporary Japan, public baths and saunas are the exceptions, although they are almost always segregated into male and female spaces.

or less) unconsciously undertake as part of their everyday lives, the individuals we meet here are highly aware of and consciously calibrating their performances as work, thus making visible some of the hidden assumptions of gender.

Doing gender: Phenomenology and ethnomethodology

The notion of gender in the social sciences was originally intended to point to the ways in which ‘female’ and ‘male’ were not natural, but socially constructed categories (Ortner 1974; Ortner and Whitehead 1981). Dislodging the natural (= material) underpinnings of gender was crucial to show that other configurations were possible. To do this, primacy had to be given to agency, subjectivity and discourse; hence the initially counter-intuitive formulation of ‘doing gender’ (West 1987). West built her concept on an earlier body of scholarship in ethnomethodology that started with Harold Garfinkel. Arguing from a phenomenological perspective that starts from everyday social reality that is directly available to most members of society, Garfinkel argues that gender is not something given, but something that we attribute to people. His famous study of an intersex person called Agnes defines gender as both the *result* of attributions made through interactions and as *device* that structures future interactions (1967: 116–185; for a feminist critique see Rogers 1992). In their seminal *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, the social psychologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna maintain that ‘[e]veryone must display her or his gender in every interaction. This is the same as saying everyone must pass or everyone must ensure that the “correct” gender attribution is made of them.’ (1978: 126) The term ‘pass’ here refers to being recognised as the gender one is presenting as.⁴ This is made possible by conventional gender markers, which they call ‘cultural genitals’, such as hairdos, gender-specific clothing, voice pitch, speech patterns and bodily comportment. Crucial to the stability of the gender system is the ‘natural attitude’, a set of assumptions about the world that to the holder appear as common sense. ‘There are only two genders’ and ‘gender remains stable over time’ are the most common and basic of these assumptions.

⁴ The term ‘passing’ has been widely used in American literature to describe the experience of someone of mixed racial background who is taken by others to be white or, more rarely, as black or belonging to a First-Nation. See, for example, works by James Weldon Johnson (1912) and Nella Larsen (1929). However, ‘passing’ is also used in the field of gender, but in the context of transgender experiences, the term is problematic as it suggests deliberate deception on the part of the person presenting as male or female.

Once an attribution ('male' or 'female') is made, everyone participating in an interaction is involved in maintaining it, often with considerable cognitive effort: from editing out contradictory information to ignoring what the person themselves is saying. Kessler and McKenna also point out that, from an ethnomethodological perspective, it is the continuous effort to construct and maintain gender as a stable entity that justifies the assumptions made by the 'natural attitude', and not the other way around. This counterintuitive point is supported by historical inquiries into the material culture of gender: the now internationally recognised gendered distinction of blue for boys/pink for girls, for example, is a recent innovation that becomes culturally institutionalised precisely at the juncture at which the assumed 'difference' (read 'inferiority') of women can no longer be held up by biological arguments (Paoletti 2012). In *Delusions of Gender*, Cordelia Fine notes with ironic relish how the colour code that is introduced to maintain the binary gender system is then re-naturalised when biologists try to explain these colour preferences as the result of 'evolutionary processes' (2010: 208).

Note that Kessler and McKenna maintain a strict distinction between gender presentation, gender identity and sexual orientation. Not to do so would mean to regress to the implicit assumptions of the sex/gender system, which Rubin has analysed as a nested system of categories that induce each other: biological sex determines gender determines sexual orientation (1975). Differentiating between these aspects of gender allows for a more fine-grained analysis of gender presentation in Japan that does not necessarily draw in gender identity or sexual orientation. There are, for example, forms of femininity specifically performed for other women, which are different from femininity performed for men, in the same way that there are recognised forms of masculinity that men produce for other men and others that are produced specifically for women to consume/enjoy. Neither of these impinge on the sexual orientation of the producers. Furthermore, different styles of gender presentation are often recognised as social categories of people: the *oyaji-gyaru* or *ossan-joji*, ('geezer girl') for example, is a young girl with the manners and habits of an older man and thus fits right in when out drinking or at karaoke with older work colleagues; *sōshokukei danshi* ('herbivore boys'), on the other hand, present as 'non-threatening' heterosexual men interested not so much in sex as in beauty products and self-expression (Deacon 2013).

Rōrukyabetsu danshi or ‘cabbage roll’ boys,⁵ by contrast, present as herbivores but are actually hidden carnivores. The *joshiryoku danshi* (‘boy with girl power’), epitomised by the figure skater Hanyū Yuzuru, is yet another example in which youthful cuteness as a style of gender expression does not necessarily cast doubts on a person’s gender identity or sexual orientation. These social categories do not, however, emerge from the social field as self-descriptions but are usually created by journalists and gain traction through media exposure. In Japanese discourse, they form a distinct category of their own: half social critique, half marketing language, they provide the means to navigate an increasingly fragmented social landscape.

Gender in and as theatre: Masculinity and femininity as *kata*

Each chapter in this volume examines specific spaces where gender is performed and consumed in a highly conscious, often choreographed, manner suggestive of a theatrical stage. The term *kata* (lit. ‘form’) in Japanese is useful in considering feminine or masculine gender presentation as an ongoing, repetitive and deliberate performance. *Kata* are a series of precisely circumscribed movements and postures that form the core of any traditional art, whether spiritual, martial or aesthetic. Through the minute imitation of the teacher, the student’s body is shaped into the appropriate form, ‘so that the individual becomes the form and the form becomes the individual’ (Yano 2003: 26). This is repeated until the skill becomes second nature:

Once committed to muscle memory, skills and techniques become a palpable part of the self. Those who have put in their years of training, those who have tempered their skills to the point where skill is ‘attached to the body’ [*mi ni tsukerareta*], have also become more mature persons in that process. (Kondo 1990: 239)

Dorinne Kondo’s description of the learning processes of master artisans also applies to gender socialisation: ‘*kata* of all kinds codify gender, in effect naturalizing behaviours and making infringements of them improper’ (Bardsley and Miller 2011: 8). Implicit in this

⁵ Cabbage roll is cabbage on the outside, meat on the inside, hence the moniker. The opposite is asparagus rolled in bacon (*Nikumaki asupara*). See Jolivet 2015.

emphasis of imitation and repetition over cognitive understanding is the idea that the visible exterior, the bodily ‘form’, will in turn shape the mind (Yuasa 1990).

The expression of femininity and masculinity as *kata* is most prominent in the long and elaborate theatrical tradition of cross-gender performance that has received much scholarly attention from historians, theatre scholars and anthropologists (Isaka 2015; Stickland 2008; Leiter 2002; Kano 2001; Robertson 1998). Although it is too simplistic to suggest trans-historical continuities between pre-modern theatre and contemporary gender presentation in everyday life, there are four parallels that are worth considering: first, the close alignment of the theatre with sex work; second, an understanding of gender based on conventional signs; third, the independence of gender presentation from ‘nature’, sexual orientation and gender identity; and fourth, a heightened awareness of gender as performance.

Kabuki theatre serves as a case in point. While both ‘boys’ (*wakashu*)⁶ and women performed female roles in early Kabuki, the close connection of this new form of theatre with prostitution soon led to a crackdown by the military administration, which banned female performers from the stage in 1629 (Shively 2002). After that, female roles were taken over entirely by *wakashu* actors whose feminine beauty was appreciated in contrast to the military masculinity of their suitors; unsurprisingly, in 1652 *wakashu* actors were also banned for prostitution. After this, male actors (many of whom had been ‘boy’ actors) took over female roles and perfected the impersonation of women, in which dress, comportment, the use of voice, language and stylised movement conspired to create not an illusion of femininity but an idealised, perfected version of it. Morinaga tries to grasp this by describing it as ‘citationality’ of gender,⁷ ‘[f]or in the light of citationality, neither a pure original (a

⁶ The category of ‘boy’ (*wakashu*) had considerable temporal elasticity in pre-modern Japan. It was usually the *genpuku* ceremony of ‘shaving off the forelocks’ (*kado wo ireru*) that marked the beginning of adulthood. This ceremony could be held anytime from the age of 13 to 17 (Leupp 1997: 125). Before that, boys were eligible to enter a homosocial relationship that may or may not involve sex: ‘The adult male lover [the *nenja*] was supposed to provide social backing, emotional support, and a model of manliness for the boy. In exchange, the boy was expected to be worthy of his lover by being a good student of samurai manhood’ (Schalow 1990: 27). Note that although the fluidity includes gender presentation, sexual orientation and sexual roles according to the power dynamics of the *wakashu/nenja* relationship, it is socially institutionalised and regulated according to life stages. The temporal fluidity of gender should thus not be taken to indicate a greater freedom of choice, although *wakashu* had some leeway in choosing their *nenja*.

⁷ The concept of citationality of gender is based on Butler’s application of Derrida’s idea of citation (1981) to gender. Butler refers to this idea when she argues that gender is not a performance, as there is no subject that exists prior to the performance of gender (1991). She devises the term performativity to indicate that subjects come into being as gendered through acts of repetition that do not have an origin. Each of these acts instantiates and materialises gender.

hypothetical original that cites nothing) nor a rigorously exact imitation (a perfect copy that does not differ from its original in any way)' exists' (2002: 273). She argues that male actors did not replace female actors to become *onnagata*, but that the *onnagata* is a result of making permanent the transient status of the *wakashu*. It was not the goal of the male actor to pass as women,⁸ but to create an enhanced imitation. An able *onnagata* arouses heterosexual desire in the male audience and jealousy and a desire for imitation in women (Morinaga 2002: 269). It was thus bodies considered to be male that participated in the circulation of femininity as citation, so much so that when the early 20th century female Kabuki performer Ichikawa Kume-hachi took on female roles, it was considered high praise when critics claimed she was playing women just as though she were a man (Isaka 2016: 19). Importantly, the historical acting technique was not based on 'completely becoming a character' or presenting a gender illusion, but on a careful layering of the actor's persona with the role being played. The role never obscured the actor completely. Thus, modern-day fans shout the name of the actor during particularly dramatic moments of the play (*ōmukō*), not the name of the character.

What *onnagata* did on stage, thus, was signifying femininity rather than becoming female (Barthes 1970). A performance was not successful because it created a convincing illusion, but because it rendered the performance and the skill involved visible; the audience enjoyed the performance as performance. This is particularly evident in the elaborate play with convention and parody common in the Kabuki repertoire. In *Onna Shibaraku* for example, a play about an evil warlord who has arrested and threatens to execute those who oppose him, the leading role of the tempestuous young man (the *aragoto*) is played by an *onnagata*. After the curtain comes down, the *onnagata* remains upstage and reverts to being a model of dainty femininity, complaining that the sword is so heavy and the male costume so cumbersome. The *frisson* of this moment is entirely based on the fact that the audience knows that this is a man playing a woman playing a man. That is to say, the *onnagata* is practicing a *presentation* of gender, not a representation: 'representation is a form of expression that effaces its mediated nature, which looks immediate and thus realistic. In turn, presentation is a form of expression that openly recognizes its mediated nature' (Morinaga 2002: 265). The question of

⁸ Isaka explicitly speaks of '*onnagata* who pass' (2016: 37) but bases this entirely on a passage from the 1776 treatise *The Words of Ayame*: 'It is hardly possible for an *onnagata* to be considered proficient unless he spends his everyday life as a woman' (quoted in Isaka 2016: 40). While this means that ideally the *onnagata*'s femininity extends beyond the stage, it does not mean that passing as a woman in everyday life was their goal (for a critique see Leiter 2017).

whether a gendered performance is taken at face value or whether it is enjoyed *qua* performance is relevant to several of the chapters collected here.

In her seminal *Acting like a Woman in Modern Japan* (2001), Kano Ayano documents the shift from a paradigm based on the conventional display of gender to the discovery of the body in theatre, a development triggered by the import of naturalistic acting styles from Europe and Russia. The gendered body becomes the new ground from which to build convincing, that is, illusionistic, performances of human behaviour. The goal of the actor in this naturalistic paradigm is ‘to become’ the character; to do this, they have to amplify what is already ‘there’, to use their body in a way similar to everyday life. In other words, ‘nature’ guarantees the verisimilitude of the performance through the implicit new assumption that everyday ways of behaving are inherently ‘natural’, and that the actor needs only to draw on their inner experience. The expressive spectatorship of the Kabuki stage in the Edo period, in which the audience co-creates the performance, is replaced by the appreciation of performance as interior experience: through a psychological ‘suspension of disbelief’, the spectator enters the imaginary world of the play and experiences the emotions portrayed as ‘real’.

The complementary if not synchronous institution to Kabuki theatre is the all-female Takarazuka revue theatre, founded in 1913, which cultivated a similar cult around its stars embodying male roles (*otokoyaku*) (Robertson 1998). While Kabuki male actors created images of perfect femininity for a predominantly male audience the Edo period, ‘Takarasiennes’ create images of dashing masculinity for a predominantly female contemporary fan community:

To create appropriate representations of male and female characters on the Takarazuka stage, performers largely rely upon one or more of three methods – the copying of traditional *kata* that signify masculinity or femininity in a theatrical context, the observation of real people in society, and the exercise of imagination. Like many ‘traditions’, *kata* have been invented, adapted and discarded at various times, and are mainly learned by mimicking the clothing, makeup, voice, gaze, posture, gait, singing/dancing style and mood of seniors in the Revue. Many Takarazuka *kata*, however, have become stylised to the extent that they no longer relate to ‘real’ gender in mainstream society, and have meaning only within the theatre’s fantasy world.’ (Stickland 2004: 187–88)

As in Kabuki, gender is created, in Takarazuka, by the actor's performance and is supported by the audience through rapt attention, by weeping and clapping for their favourite stars: 'The audience is effectively watching two people in one body, and this adds to the potential alternative, "subversive" subtext underlying Takarazuka performances.' (Stickland 2004: 210)

It is important to note, however, that on top of belonging to different periods of Japanese history, male impersonations of femininity and female impersonations of masculinity are not symmetrical in terms of power. Many urban women in the Edo period looked up to the *onnagata* as perfect examples and studied their attitude and comportment, suggesting that it is only in its most artificial form – an artificiality that is never disguised or passed as natural – that femininity fully comes into its own. The opposite cannot be said of the *otokoyaku*. Although 'he' provides female fans with a view of men as gallant and dashing, it is not common for men to study their comportment and stance to enhance their masculinity.

Robertson quotes from a revealing story about a male Takarazuka fan who describes what he finds attractive about the *otokoyaku*: 'Otokoyaku can't quite pass as men. When females wear male trousers their rear end is a dead giveaway.[...] In fact I find it thrilling to try to uncover the female in the man.' (Robertson 1998: 198) On one hand, then, there is the male-assigned performer who provides the perfect template for female behaviour and etiquette; on the other there is a performance that is (sexually) thrilling because it is betrayed by female 'nature'. In other words, within these two long established theatrical worlds, men succeed in being ideal women, while women try but fail at being ideal men. The same argument extends to sexual attraction and, implicitly, sexual orientation: both *onnagata* and *otokoyaku* should⁹ appeal to men as women (Isaka 2016; Robertson 1998), thus recreating a sexual hierarchy undergirded by heterosexual male desire. Despite the possibility of a queer reading of these theatrical practices, mainstream interpretations lead straight back to the most basic tenets of the gender binary that renders women closer to nature and thus requiring close surveillance, while men forge culture out of chaos through acts of artifice.

⁹ The fact that the majority of the Takarazuka fans are women would suggest that same-sex desire plays a part, a point made by Robertson (1998), but denied by Nakamura and Matsuo (2003), who prefer to see fandom as an asexual phenomenon. See Stickland (2004) for a more in-depth discussion.

While we emphasise that the notion of *kata* is useful in order to think about the specific gender presentation discussed in this volume, it is important to note some differences between the Kabuki and Takarazuka stage and the stages as they appear in each chapter. First of all, unlike Kabuki and Takarazuka actors, who perform gender on the theatrical stage at a distance, and with only strictly regulated interactions with their audiences, the cross-dressing escort, the male star at a porn event for female fans, or the street musician, for instance, perform on each of their stages *together with* their consumers. This means that their gender presentation is more situationally calibrated and necessarily includes a degree of spontaneous reactive behaviour not seen on the theatrical stage, where everything is choreographed down to the smallest detail. The various degrees of emotional ties that emerge between the paying customer and the bar staff in a gay bar, the cross-dressing escort or the sex worker, tend to ‘break’ the frame of (theatrical) performance. Takeyama Akiko, in her *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (2016), emphasises the importance of the stage and off-stage aspects of interaction, which also applies to the chapters included in this volume. When the ethnographers and the participants in their fieldwork perform gender as a form of work on their specific stages, the experience becomes personal in a way that it rarely is for an actor on a theatrical stage.

Performance versus performativity

Speaking of gender as performance may suggest a return to a theatrical metaphor of gender as role, with the implication that it can be taken on or off at will. West and Zimmerman (1987) have pointed out this weakness and argued that one’s gender presentation is not only situational but constitutes a master identity that must be maintained across a vast gamut of social contexts. These include the rigid recognition of one’s binary gender by institutions such as schools and hospitals, as well as by the state. Influenced by Foucault’s contention that subjects come into being as a result of particular regimes of discipline and thus power, Butler argues that ‘coherent gender, achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as an *effect* the illusion of a prior and volitional subject’ (1990: 24). In a famous passage from *Bodies that Matter*, she extends her argument: ‘Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the “I” neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.’ (Butler 1993: 7) Distinct from Austin’s notion of performative acts, which require an uttering subject and intention, performativity for Butler is the repetitive iteration of a norm: ‘This repetition is not

performed *by* a subject: this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject' (Butler 1993: 95).

While we agree with Butler that many aspects of gender are inextricably linked to becoming a gendered subject, we oppose a fatalistic reading of her work, which totalises gender as an all-penetrating regime of power on methodological and ethnographic grounds.

Methodologically speaking, her hypotheses concerning gendered subjectivities are metaphysical rather than empirical. This does not render them invalid, but removes them from the everyday and fantasy arenas of gender that we are interested in. Like the 'natural attitude', the 'performativity of gender' thesis can be bracketed in order to see how power is ascribed and claimed, denied and reinforced in everyday interaction. The emphasis on gender as something that we 'do' returns some agency to individual and collective actors, but does not in any way imply that actors are free to choose their own ways of performing gender. The work of gender is achieved as a collective intersubjective construction by many actors and is thoroughly infused with expectations, norms and powers of definition not necessarily held by the individual. A performance can fail to achieve an appropriate form of gender in the eyes of others. While a failed performance on stage will only throw doubt on your ability and identity as an actor, however, the stakes of performing gender appropriately in everyday life are much higher: failing to do so is likely to lead to ostracism, if not violence. In other words, the fact that gender is intersubjectively constructed in interaction does not mean that it does not have real consequences, or that the performance can be changed at a whim. Quite the opposite seems to be the case: the more social actors are aware of the artifice of gender, the more strictly they must perform it. That being said, gender as a binary category of person ('male'/'female') is not always the overarching principle that distributes power along gendered lines. In this we follow Barrie Thorne's account of gender in the schoolyard in *Gender play* (1993), which through careful observation and analysis shows how the ability of the category 'boy' or 'girl' to structure interactions between children is switched on and off depending on the frames of action and play (chasing versus co-operative group work for example). In such a situational rather than a totalising reading, gender moves in and out of focus as a relevant social fact. In that sense, we are closer to Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004) than to her *Bodies that Matter* (1993):

If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical.

On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my 'own' gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author. (Butler 2004:1)

The second objection is grounded in ethnographic reality. Rather than to take our cue from philosophical assumptions that are impossible to verify, the analyses assembled here take their cue from the experiences of those who consciously 'do' gender as part of their everyday lives. The ways in which some aspects of gender are negotiated in Japan allows some glimpses into conceptions that do not necessarily align either with the 'natural attitude', nor with the idea of performativity in which the subject comes into being in necessarily gendered forms. Rather, expressions such as '*onna wo suteta*' ('I gave up being a woman') and '*onna ja nai jibun ni nareru*' ('I can become myself without being a woman') – see Mochigi 2019 – suggest that there is a gap between subjectivity and gender presentation, an awareness of the work that goes into passing as a gendered being, but also an awareness of the emancipatory possibilities that this entails.

Sincerity and authenticity commodified

Thinking of gender in everyday life as a kind of performance points towards both the artificiality of gender and the sanctioning of the performance by a given audience. By not relying on a notion of 'nature' to guarantee the 'reality' of gender, we can ask a series of questions that would make no sense if we took gender to be a biological fact: If there is a correct form of performing gender, what happens when gender is performed incorrectly? Is there such a thing as 'gender failure' (Coyote and Spoon 2014)? What are the parameters of sincerity for a gendered performance? Is it sincere because it instantiates a match between an external performance and an inner reality of gender? How do we account for the situational aspects of gendered performances? Furthermore, what happens if one ceases to assume that gender is stable over time and considers the temporal horizon of gender? Given the evanescence of human intention and emotion, the more exigent question to ask, then, is not whether something is natural, authentic or sincere, but how long one can keep it that way.

This is what Goffman means when he argues that there is no gender identity, ‘only a schedule for the portrayal of gender’ (1979: 8).

As most chapters in this volume dealing with commodified experiences show, it is precisely the time limitation of the performance that is the condition of its sincerity. This may sound doubly paradoxical because of two implicit Eurocentric assumptions: a) that a person who is truly sincere does not have to put on a performance – ‘one cannot at the same time both be sincere and seem so’ as André Gide said (1930: 142); and b) that commodities and authenticity are incompatible, something we still tend to assume as academics trained in a Western Marxist tradition. Such mutual exclusionism renders us blind to ‘the subtle ways in which people actually match their monetary transfers to their various social relations, including intimate ties.’ Payments as such do not determine a relationship’s quality, ‘but the relationship defined the appropriateness of one sort of payment or another’ whether it is made as a reward, as compensation, as an entitlement or as gift (Zelizer 2000: 818). Even when intimacy is commodified, it does not follow automatically that it is therefore ‘insincere’. Prasad has argued that the gift is more likely to ‘draw forth the ritualized pretence of sentiment’, which usually camouflages strategic machinations on the part of the giver. The commodity form, on the other hand, ‘offers freedom from the necessity of *appearing* selfless, generous, grateful, or otherwise sentimental and can therefore be construed as free from hypocrisy’ (Prasad 1999: 185).

Contrary to the modern ‘pure relationship’ that is entered for its own sake and contains within itself the means of its consummation (Giddens 1992: 58), then, Elizabeth Bernstein convincingly argues that commodified exchanges of sexual services are not necessarily ‘inauthentic’. In *Temporarily Yours*, her ethnographic work on sex workers in North America, Sweden and the Netherlands, she introduces the concept of ‘bounded authenticity’:

In contrast to the quick, impersonal ‘sexual release’ associated with the street-level sex trade, much of the new variety of sexual labour resides in the provision of what I call ‘bounded authenticity’ – the sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection. [M]iddle-class sex workers’ efforts to manufacture authenticity resided in the descriptions of trying to simulate – or even produce – genuine desire, pleasure, and erotic interest for their clients. Where in some cases this involved mere ‘surface acting’ [...] it could also involve the emotional and physical labour of

manufacturing authentic (if fleeting) libidinal and emotional ties with clients, endowing them with a sense of desirability, esteem, or even love. (Bernstein 2007: 103–4)

For this to work as escape, fantasy and recreation, however, it is crucial to establish a clear sequestration of experience. The cut that stops the relationship between the worker and the client from contaminating everyday life is the monetary transaction, as the San Francisco-based sex worker and writer Carol Queen has argued: ‘We create sexual situations with very clear boundaries, for ourselves and for our clients. In fact, one of the things that people are paying us for is clear boundaries [...] Same thing with seeing a psychotherapist; there you are paying someone to tell your secrets to, someone you can trust will not judge you and who at least won’t interrupt you in the middle and start telling you their secrets. Instead, you are getting focused attention.’ (Quoted in Chapkis 1997: 77)

Thus, the client can enjoy the performance as performance, without worrying about ongoing commitments, relationships of duty and obligation and, furthermore, without the burden of having to be grateful for what one has received. That is not to say that clients have no obligations at all; as many of the chapters show, clients are also expected to act in certain ways and rules are often in place to ensure that consumers stick to their part. In that sense, experiences of ‘bounded authenticity’ are ‘cost-efficient and well-suited to the structure of the modern corporation: temporary, detachable, and flexible’ (Bernstein 2007: 175). It is not surprising, then, that sex work, which has been less stigmatised in Japan than in the West, is seen as an expedient means to earn significant amounts of money by many women who do not want to subject themselves to the drudgery of an ‘office lady’ existence (Koch 2020). But as Bernstein points out, ‘those who participate most fully in the emotionally contained economy of recreational sex and bounded authenticity are also those whose psychic lives are most fully penetrated by the cultural logic of late capitalism’ (2007: 176).

Takeyama provides an excellent example of this in her ethnography of host clubs in Tokyo (2016), where entrepreneurial male hosts turn themselves into commodities to entertain the romantic fantasies of female clients. She notes that the desire at the heart of the transaction tends to spill over the temporal boundaries:

While the host club stage is physically bounded, the actors' exchanges extend well beyond the club and potentially transact in shared imaginary futures. Thus, the value of exchange stretches out over time and space. As a result, the relationship between reality and fantasy, commodity and gift, and profit-seeking capitalism and life-enhancing humanism becomes opaque and ambiguous in the quest for [a] hopeful future. (Takeyama 2016: 68)

In this case, the commodity form is split open by the desire to extend relationships in time and space, or rather to sustain a more ambiguous social space within which truth and reality are partly suspended: '[T]he clients I interviewed told me that they felt good about themselves, even though they knew their hosts' flattery and romantic gestures were merely a performance. In seduction, as is sometimes also the case in ethnography, it is not so much the truth that matters as the fantasy, the sensible experience, and the dream.' (ibid.: 19)

This point is further supported by Kumada Yōko's ethnography of a 'delivery health service' in Tokyo that specialises in light SM. Anonymity is the most crucial element that gives both clients and sex workers a certain degree of freedom from shame, but also the potential to 'reinvent' themselves, or, as Kumada writes, to separate or connect aspects of the self (2017: 196-201). Anonymity also relieves both clients and sex workers from the imperative of a coherent self, an important precondition for sexual fantasy play, especially when the client wants to try something he thinks of as 'uncharacteristic' of himself. Her interlocutors, on the other hand, revealed different aspects of their selves in a strategic manner. Aya, who is a single mother, for example, carefully judged whether to reveal this fact to her customers. When clients spoke of their own children she often did, and this created a sense of solidarity and warmth. Other clients, she sensed, were put off by this 'smell of real life'. Thus, the fantasy space remained contained or not depending on the concrete interactions and relationships of trust that emerged from them.

Following these cues, the present volume asks how this cultural logic of late capitalism shapes new social forms and new subjectivities surrounding gendered performances in different frameworks. Here the advantages of ethnography are clearly displayed. Rather than assuming what the appropriate relationship between privacy, intimacy and sexuality should be and then formulating a critique of the commodification of intimacy based on these

assumptions, the contributions look at the lived experience of the providers and consumers of these experiences and assess each case as to the fulfilments and constraints it offers. They militate against the tendency to view commodification as something categorically negative, but interpret it as a nascent social form that allows for new ways of being and feeling. Following Maruta Kōji's ethnography on 'assisted dating' (2001), they ask: Who is selling what to whom? What is exchanged in these transactions? How does the exchange give form to fantasies, subjectivities and ways of being in the world? Instead of reducing complex realities to a facile critique of neoliberalism, the ethnographic portraits assembled here look in more details at the trade-offs that people make between freedom, marketization, hierarchies and self-commodification. What emerges, then, is not just a more nuanced interpretation of social experience for those enmeshed in it, but also new ways to define established concepts, such as alienation, freedom and agency. Yes, one may not have the freedom to change an expected and standardised performance to fit one's needs, but one has the freedom not to mean it and still be paid for the work. Part of the reason why commodification is understood to be alienating is because we tend to assume that work necessarily draws in the whole person, an assumption that in turn is based on a mythology of the self as undivided, whole entity. If we took a more relational view of the self, we might find that a different kind of freedom can be found in the 'insincere' performance, a freedom that resides in the gap between external performance and inner feeling, a freedom from the imperative to be an authentic, sincere and coherent person at all times. Conversely, an initially stylised gesture can become filled with genuine emotion and a sincere gesture can become mannered and stylised over time.

Authenticity, the Japanese self and the limits of gender

It is crucial for a critical anthropology to take different ways of doing gender not just as local variations of a universal theme but as an invitation to rethink our own assumptions concerning the stability and inevitability of gender. Even in its most current iteration, popular Euro-American discourses on gender are still based on a 'depth ontology of the person' (Miller 2009: 16), and they start with the assumption of a core personality that must be expressed in order to lead a meaningful life. The imperative to be an 'authentic self' pitches the individual against society and, at the same time, disregards the social nature of the imperative. Not to be true to oneself implies 'living a lie' towards others. From popular television programmes such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* to the vast and dangerous

landscape of self-help literature, we are interpellated from all directions to ‘be ourselves’ and ‘to live our own truths’ independent of the opinions of society; to submit to the imperative of authenticity more slavishly; to prostrate ourselves in front of the altar of the one true self.

In contrast, the Japanese social experience has a greater appreciation of the fact that to be oneself, one needs others. There is a heightened awareness of gender as not a natural given, but as something to be performed, something the individual must learn, perfect and manipulate in appropriate ways for a given situation (Hansen 2016). The Japanese examples brought together here allow glimpses of a different way of conceiving the links between freedom of expression and gendered performances. Persons are interpellated to gendered performances, but there is a sense shared by those interpellating as well as those interpellated that what is required is a performance *qua* performance, not an instantiation of nature. What emerges, then, is a gap between the gendered performance, which has to be correct and committed, but not necessarily sincere, and the psychic reality of gender, which is authentic, but whose expression cannot be forced. In the depth ontology of the person, freedom is understood as the freedom to express what one already is against social constraints (Nietzsche’s dictum ‘become what you are’), while in a more interdependent cosmology the imperative to self-expression can itself appear as a form of coercion. Freedom can be found in the awareness of the performance as performance, that is, in the gap or the disconnect between the outward performance and the inner truth.

Here the issues of gender and presentation of the self meet with a rich literature on the ‘relational self’ in Japan, which is usually contrasted with American notions of personhood (Kondo 1990; Rosenberger 1992; Sugiyama 2004; Ozawa-de Silva 2008). Wim Lunsing succinctly summarises these findings:

Japanese, indeed, seem to be relatively sophisticated in dealing with varying presentations of themselves in a variety of contexts and do not allow themselves to be led astray by the idea that they have to present unchangeable selves regardless of contexts. Their inner selves appear rather to be stronger precisely because they feel less of a need for confirmation by others, unlike for instance Americans who tend to present themselves all the time as if they were unchangeable and essential to the personhood, adhering to some identity or other. It seems to suggest that they are

insecure about what they are and therefore seek confirmation from others continually.
(Lunsing 2001: 331–32)

While we think of gender as relational, as embedded in social relationships and hierarchies, we also think of it as situational, that is, as being shaped by co-presence, even if the present others are not part of a social relationship or not human themselves. De-centring the human subject as that which ‘has’ gender, we understand the work of gender not only as presentation and attribution, but also, in the words of Jane Ward, as ‘the act of giving gender to others’, which consists in ‘witnessing, nurturing, validating, fulfilling, authenticating, special knowing, and secret-keeping’ (2010: 240). Ward describes this act as in itself gendered along a division of labour between male-identifying subjects whose masculinity is co-created by those identifying as female, but she also stresses that gender is always co-constructed and that everyone requires and gives gender labour. This emphasis on the collaborative nature of gender allows for a more dynamic understanding that does not shy away from conflict, power differentials and historical and cultural specificities.

Finally, we have to address the question of the limits of gender, as a social fact on one hand and as a theoretical concept on the other. Insofar as we understand gender as an intersubjective construct that involves many different agencies – ‘a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint’ – gender carries only as far as the communities of practice implicated in its co-construction reach. This counterintuitive insight is particularly important for queer constructions of gender. Constructions of gender are precarious to the degree that they cannot invoke support from the ‘natural attitude’. This creates a gender hierarchy that privileges those who feel that their gender identity and their gender presentation match, or, in other words, those whose gender appears as ‘natural’. Everybody else has to put in extra work to justify and legitimise their presentations of gender, extra work that accumulates in turn around racialised and gendered categories (Bailey 2013).

Conceptually, too, there are limits to the understandings that can be wrought from an intersubjective construction of gender. What can be said about the psychic realities of gender from this perspective is limited, for example. Nonetheless it allows us to ask ‘heretical’ questions that point both to the limitations of construction and to what remains beyond construction. To what degree can gender presentation be separated from one’s gender

identity, and at what cost? Is gender detachable from personhood? And do we cease to be gendered when left to our own devices?

Fieldwork and embodiment

The chapters in *The Work of Gender: Service, Performance and Fantasy in Contemporary Japan* are written by junior scholars and are based on long-term fieldwork in Japan, mostly as part of their doctoral research. Each chapter looks at a particular situation in which work, gender, and commodification intersect; each then provides an analysis in terms of power, agency and fantasy. What all the chapters have in common is an unwavering commitment to ethnographic research. The insights presented here are the results of visceral encounters in the field that go beyond just interviews and observation. It may be a commonplace in anthropology by now to argue that the fieldworker's main instrument is their body, but we are still some way from letting the embodied nature of fieldwork register in our writing. All ethnography is necessarily affective, but affective ethnography, understood by Takeyama as 'the method and writing derived, in part, from affective modes of knowing' (2016: 20) is still a challenge to the imperatives of empirical objectivity. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach offers both a close examination of concrete bodily experience and an insight into how this positions the researcher as a gendered participant in a particular social field (Desjarlais 2003). Whether it is waiting for hours in the biting cold of Tokyo winters for an audience to gather for a street music performance, being groped and slapped in a gay bar, being drawn into the fan community at a porn event aimed at women – or, on the contrary, becoming the object of adoration of customers – or being misgendered on a regular basis in the field or in academia, the knowledge presented here is only made possible by rendering oneself open and vulnerable to encounters in the field. As readers, it behoves us to acknowledge the personal cost at which this knowledge is made available to us.

Another aspect of ethnographic research that is often suppressed is the role that failures play in the creation and shaping of knowledge. In an age in which funding bodies want to know about expected results preferably before the project starts, the open-ended nature of fieldwork constitutes a considerable risk. Failure is not an option, or at least it is anathema to success in academia – or so the common perception goes. But as every ethnographer worth their salt knows, ethnography is just a long series of unfortunate events: failure to gain access, failure to gain the trust of gatekeepers, failure to be accepted as fieldworker/participant/friend,

failure to perform according to taken-for-granted standards in the field, failure to understand what is at stake until it is too late; the list goes on. Despite this seemingly pessimistic view, we believe that failure is an essential part of fieldwork in the ethnomethodological sense: it is the failure of the ethnographer that creates a situation that forces participants to make explicit what happened and how things went wrong. It is the foreign body – ‘foreign’ in the broadest sense, as that which does not ‘naturally’ belong to a particular scenario – that becomes the instrument that reveals how ‘normality’ is constructed. It is also the foreign body that becomes the target for ‘normalisation’: being physically corrected or shouted at, being excluded from proceedings, being shunned or joked about or rendered the material of countless anecdotes.

Guide to the chapters

In the opening chapter, *Serving Gender* by Marcello Francioni, it is service itself that becomes gendered, behind the counter of a gay bar in Tokyo’s gay district. Although it is assumed that both customers and bar workers are sexually interested in men, the dynamics of service unfold around a masculinity/femininity binary. Ideal service at Eclipse, the bar that Francioni worked at for almost a year, means allowing the customers to experience their masculinity by presenting a feminine, and therefore obedient, demeanour. The *miseko* would strategically adopt linguistic gender presentations that would render them more feminine (using the personal pronoun *atashi* instead of *boku* or *ore*). The ‘proper’ gender presentation of staff would even be policed by the customers. In terms of space, too, gay bars create a homely atmosphere in which the master is the mama and the *miseko* act as surrogate daughters who are there to indulge the customer’s every whim. The third element of the situational feminine gender of the gay bar experience is the sexually explicit banter, which often revolves around the real or imagined sex lives of the bar staff, who are presumed to be ‘bottoms’. There are, however, important exceptions to this rule: Francioni documents how *miseko* who present a more butch masculinity get treated quite differently. Their gender presentation is less policed, but in line with gendered stereotypes they are assumed to be ‘tops’, bad listeners, and thus less in tune with other’s desires.

Gay bar life as described by Francioni is less about liberation, or about shifting norms of gender, than it is about keeping up the power differential between customers, who after all pay for the service provided, and the service workers, who are expected to provide the

emotional work to create a nurturing environment. The customer returns because of an increasing familiarity with the bar's personnel and style and the hope of recreating and increasing the indulgence he was granted previously.

The different perspectives of consumers and staff described by Francioni are also recognisable in several of the following chapters. In the chapter by Marta Fanasca, this is taken a step further: by training as a cross-dressing escort, Fanasca both became the object of her inquiry and the object of desire of those who booked dates with her. She describes in minute detail the process that she underwent to transform into a 'guy', from the haircut to the accoutrements such as binders to change her body shape, to masculine forms of language use and the creation of a masculine alter ego that corresponded to the fantasies of the customers. This included forms of embodiment such as the use of a lower voice register and following a strict diet and exercise regime. Her descriptions of what happens during a 'date' shed a fascinating light on the construction of gender as a complex transaction: Fanasca quickly realised that her masculine gender presentation served as a foil for the clients' femininity and that both parties ended up deeply involved in re-creating romantic ideas of binary gender.

Unlike the hosts described by Takeyama (2016), cross-dressing escorts are forbidden to engage in sexual relationships with clients; the issue of drawing boundaries thus looms large. This requires delicate negotiations, during which the escort conspires to keep the fantasy of a future, more intimate, encounter alive in the mind of the client, so much so that the client becomes a regular customer and creates a steady stream of income for the escort. Here the temporal horizon of the transaction comes into sharp focus: the exchange of money may delimit the boundaries of the paid intimacy, but the fantasy and desire created extend beyond the commodified frame, with consequences that are again distributed unevenly in terms of power and dependency. The money flows to the successful purveyors of masculinity, while the clients sometimes end up with considerable debt. While male clients of hostess clubs can still put such entertainment on to corporate accounts (Allison 1994), female consumers bear the brunt of the financial burden and often find themselves in precarious situations as a result.

Even when it comes to the 'real thing' in terms of sex work, commodified experiences of intimacy have clearly demarcated boundaries, as Nicola Phillips argues in her chapter on the women who work for *Deadball*, a sex delivery service specialising in *busu* women (often a coded expression in Japan for chubby or middle-aged). With unprecedented access to the

‘backstage’ where the women on duty waited for customers, she informally interviewed 12 women in their 40s and 50s as to their motives and the nature of the service they provide. The women working for *Deadball* cultivate a deliberately amateurish image that suggests that the experience of intimacy they provide is more authentic than a more ‘clinical’ encounter with a professional sex worker. The authenticity of the connection is further supported by the fact that negotiations over the precise nature of the act (anything short of vaginal intercourse) are done by the back office on behalf of the workers, thus outside the frame of ‘bound authenticity’. What customers expect and what they pay for is not a polished and thus perhaps intimidating performance, but an experience of connection and closeness through relatability. Interestingly, the felt authenticity of the encounter is not diminished by the fact that clients pay the women directly.

While at *Deadball* it is the women who are providing the service, in the fan communities that emerge around pornography aimed at women, youthful men become the object of the female gaze, as Maiko Kodaka shows in her chapter. The titillating spectatorship of the fans initially suggests that gender roles in this case are reversed, that male bodies and a kind of masculinity specifically performed for women become the object of female desire. Shared desire for the *eromen* creates a community of fans in which they can open up about their own perceived shortcomings and openly discuss sexual desires and experiences. But Kodaka also shows how the fandom creates a safe space in which fans who may lack self-esteem can experience the thrill of being flattered and feeling feminine, thus recreating a disempowering notion of gender. What the *eromen* are paid for, then, are acts of ‘giving gender’ to the fans, who often interpret these acts as personal attention. Like Fanasca, Kodaka observes that the ‘bounded authenticity’ created by the fantasy space creates emotional attachments that tend to extend beyond the boundaries of the commodified experience and leads some of the fans to incur considerable debt in the process of repeating it.

Performances of a different kind are the subject of Robert Simpkins’ contribution on gendered spaces of street music on the streets of Kōenji, West Tokyo. While at first glance the street musician’s ethos seems to be defined by a search for authentic artistic expression, a closer analysis shows that in order to be successful one has to calibrate one’s performance in ways that conform to police surveillance, neighbourhood noise awareness and public expectations. But street performance is not just a question of how to occupy a space, it is also a question of how to co-create the space in which to enjoy music in the first place, that is, the

skill of turning random passers-by into an audience. While male performers often display a carefully cultivated carelessness, female street musicians are more stringently ‘policed’ by the public male gaze in ways that renders them more vulnerable. They thus negotiate the spaces of performance and interactions with the public in ways that solicit a non-threatening experience by taking into account the business of a station exit, the number of people on the street and their proximity to the police.

The final contribution, by Lyman Gamberton, takes us back to the original question of the work of gender in an everyday context. His project investigates how transgender individuals negotiate their everyday lives and future gender trajectories in light of the draconian gender reassignment law that enforces a conservative and stereotypical understanding of the gender binary and the gender/sex system. Starting from an auto-ethnographic account of how he managed his own gender presentation as a white trans man in a Japanese context, Gamberton describes the experiences of gendering and misgendering that his informants encounter in everyday life. He illustrates the many ways in which the gender binary haunts every attempt to free oneself from it, even in the most progressive of contexts. For example, it is often assumed in the trans community that trans men are interested in women, thus recreating a heteronormative idea of transitioning. These strictly binary parameters of transitioning are ultimately dictated by the state and transcend the everyday life of trans people. In this system, to refuse full medical transitioning is akin to renouncing one’s claim to transgender identity. This is also where the ethnomethodological approach with its focus on everyday acts of doing gender reaches its limits: when it comes to structural inequalities, the micro-focus alone will not suffice.

As traditional notions of gender are interrogated and gender inequality is challenged, anthropology has shown that gender varies widely in different contexts. Conversely, links between gender and a biological understanding of sex are currently reinvigorated by the nascent neuroscience of gender. Gender thus remains a moving target and that is why its constructions and performances provide a rich and important field of analysis for the anthropology of Japan and beyond. The ethnographic work assembled here shows – for better or for worse – that ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ remain salient ideals around which people create life and fantasy worlds. And although many of these fantasy worlds are accessible through monetary transactions, the source of their value remains social: it is to be found in the desires of others. This renders them profoundly human, despite the argument that all

forms of commodification are essentially alienating. There is misery to be found in authentic human relations and a great deal of joy in the artificial paradises of commodified experience. It is our hope that this collection will inspire more research into the complex and fascinating thing we call the (gendered) human condition. The work of gender is never done.

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