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HISTORIC PASSIONS

And I Dance With Somebody: Queer History in a Japanese Nightclub

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Halfway up the exit stairs of a Kyoto subway station lies the entrance to a small nightclub called, appropriately enough, Metro. It's been there for several decades, serving a cosmopolitan mix of people drawn from the art schools and universities in the immediate neighbourhood and non-mainstream music scenes from across the wider Kansai region of western Japan. Once a month it also hosts the region's longest-running queer event – a drag-based club night called Diamonds are Forever, which was launched in 1989.

I first went to Diamonds in the autumn of 1998 while studying at a nearby university. I had been learning Japanese for about eight years at that point, starting in my suburban Queensland high school at the high point of Australia's early 1990s turn to Asia, before spending a year as an exchange student at a high school in Kyoto's outer suburbs in 1995. My official reason for being back in Japan was to improve my language skills, but, about to turn twenty-one and with a growing realization of my sexuality, I also knew that it was past time to make real the slow break from the conservative family, church and community I had grown up with.

Julia Kristeva has argued that:

> Tearing oneself away from family, language and country in order to settle down elsewhere is a daring action accompanied by a sexual frenzy: no more prohibition, everything is possible. It matters little whether the crossing of the border is followed by debauchery or, on the contrary, by fearful withdrawal. Exile always involves a shattering of the former body.[1]

This quote appears in an influential, but not uncontroversial, book in queer Japanese Studies. Combining reportage, memoir and critique, *Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism and Japan* (1999) tracked literary scholar John Whittier

Treat's year on sabbatical in Japan in 1986 as a gay man at the height of the AIDS crisis.[2] When I first encountered Treat's book a year or so after my first visit to that Kyoto club, it resonated strongly in its account of the search for what Treat called 'ways out of the dull places that fettered us and ways into the realm of possibility'.[3] In Western Japan in 1998–9 I embraced a newly intense set of embodied experiences – all-night dancing, excessive drinking, fucking, and some first tentative ideas that I could fall in love with men. That this felt as if it could only take place far from home, with all the associated linguistic and cultural confusion, is an experience that has long shaped queer narratives.

> [O]ut of an exuberantly confused act of being emerged not self or other but something our ponderous ontologies do not concede – a flash of bliss, a swirl of helplessness, a tower of omnipotence, a leap of faith, a chance for the sublime, a rush for the clear expanse of a foreign land.[4]

Stories of mobility and exile are familiar tropes across queer history and literature, whether domestic migrations to urban centres or international travel, for escape, or self-discovery, or desire for others.[5] Critiques of these processes as often exclusionary – in their centring of the urban over other modes of sociality, in their privileged modes of mobility or in the neo-colonial exploitation of otherness – are well founded.[6] While acknowledging their potency, I want to focus instead on Treat's evocation of an emergent 'not self or other' that comes in part through the shattering of the past body and a queer leap of faith.

Historic Passions has been a regular *History Workshop Journal* feature since the 1990s as a series of reflections on the origin of historical desire. In one such essay, Alison Light argued that '[p]erhaps the first impulse of a historical imagination is the need to identify, to find siblings and kindred spirits, and this may be profoundly so in children whose sense of self is inchoate and precarious'.[7] This quote might be taken as a narrow valorization of presumably heterosexual, cis-gender childhood as the origin story of many a curious historian. However, Light is careful to make clear that such an inchoate sense of self may be more pronounced for those whose identities have been marginalized. As she continues, '[i]t may also be an urgent impulse for those whose personal past feels disconnected, frail or unacknowledged as part of wider social or cultural history'. Her focus is on class, that great British device to

demarcate access to identity and opportunity. Embeddedness in a family, or another community with a well-narrated past, has also not been so readily available for LGBTQ+ people, and is in fact something many must explicitly reject. Our search for siblings, kindred spirits, and self can take different forms, displaced temporally into our teens, twenties or later, and sometimes geographically into distant cities or foreign lands. Our embrace of history, so often experienced as exclusionary, is often similarly delayed and displaced.

I recently went back to that Kyoto club for the Diamonds annual pre-New Years Eve party. Starting very late on the night of the 30th December, Diamonds hosts a queer version of Japan's annual New Year singing spectacular – the Kōhaku Utagassen (Red and White Song Battle, affectionately known as 'Kōhaku'). The real Kōhaku is broadcast live by public broadcaster NHK on radio and television for several hours every New Years Eve, as it has been in some form since 1951; New Year's Eve 2019 marked the seventieth iteration.[8] The format is simple. Two teams of popstars, folk *enka* singers and other musical acts, battle for that year's supremacy – the red team is traditionally composed of all women (or acts with women vocalists) and the white team of men. The winner is announced just in time to see in the new year. It is glorious in its campness, and has, perhaps inevitably, attracted a queer following similar in enthusiasm to LGBT+ Eurovision fandom.[9]

The Diamonds show pre-empts the NHK broadcast by less than twenty-four hours, giving queers and their friends a chance to make an early, if often tongue in cheek, claim for the year's cultural highpoints. Acts perform in drag, but not always with strict concern for gender roles. Unlike in the official show, the Diamonds performers do not restrict themselves to living acts, instead drawing from a cultural history of the popular music that shaped postwar Japan. International acts also feature (a rarity in the official Battle), as do celebrities who for some reason made news the previous year, including those who died. When I last attended in December 2018, the line-up included drag versions of the French musical icon Serge Gainsbourg (1928–91), the postwar songstress Misora Hibari (1937–89), and the hugely popular Utada Hikaru (b. 1983), who had just released her seventh album to mark the twentieth anniversary of her smash hit debut *First Love*, Japan's highest selling album of all time. As I laughed and danced and sang along with the crowd until the small hours of the morning of the 31st, I was reminded of the heady confusion of my first visit to Diamonds, twenty years earlier. Newly gay, and newish to Japan, I knew little of the culture and

community I was stepping into, but I sensed that coming out would require an embrace of histories that were not yet mine. As José Esteban Muñoz has noted, '[h]eteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them. All we are allowed to imagine is barely surviving the present'.[10] In that suspended time of a year abroad the present was perhaps enough for me, but seeing a past play out on that stage and dancefloor gave a sense that it might be possible to see myself within history and, in time, imagine a future.

Over the few months I had left of that year in Japan in 1998–9, I soaked up my newfound community. I had a part-time job at a department store in the nearby city of Osaka, which conveniently spat me out of work at 9:30 pm every Saturday night, just in time to walk the ten minutes to the queer bars of Dōyama-chō for a night of drinking and dancing till the first trains began to run early on Sunday morning. I made lifelong friends, who taught me about divas (it was the year in which it was impossible in any gay bar anywhere to escape Cher's *Believe*), dance music (house was in the ascendancy) and local musical cultures. Perhaps typical of gay and queer communities, these lessons focused primarily on pop, camp electronic music and the latest acts. I learned the lyrics to songs by the pop princess and idol Matsuda Seiko (b. 1962) in karaoke booths, where I also practised, if never quite perfected, the plastic vocals and gimmicky dance moves of the deliciously camp duo Pink Lady. And, I owned several sadly now obsolete MiniDiscs by the hipster band Pizzicato Five, the representative act of the then very current *Shibuya-kei* style, a microgenre of J-pop existing at the unique juncture of 1980s Japanese city pop, soul and funk, jazz and wider cultures and musical styles of the 1960s, from Bacharach to Gainsbourg. For a young man whose prior musical exposure was mostly to Christian rock and mainstream top forty radio, these sonic encounters were almost as important as the physical explorations that also marked that year.

Of course I was not the first young gay man to use music and dancing as an escape, or nightclubs as places to seek community. Dancefloors that combined new music and homoeroticism created an 'electric shock' in iconic spaces like New York's Stonewall Inn, well before the famous riot that formed the mythological origin story of modern gay activism and community.[11] That emancipatory potential of the dancefloor for some men existed often in conflict with the exclusions that it created – crafted bodies foregrounded at the expense of effeminacy, intimacy and anyone who was not white and male. Alice Echols describes this as an 'ambivalence occasioned by this brave

new gay world – particularly the exhilaration of brotherly oneness and the elusiveness of sustained emotional connectedness'.[12]

Clubs have for many decades been important, if imperfect, sites for queer community cultivation and engagement with the past. Gregory W. Bredbeck, in an essay about a New York East Village club night in the 1990s, suggests that these spaces allowed 'divergent strains of personal and communal history, of age and youth, and of authenticity and illusion to play themselves out both within and between people'.[13] This community divergence is refracted through the spaces themselves, presenting not something coherent and unified but a community 'inflected by multiple tensions of history and identification'.[14] Bredbeck again points to the tensions present in such spaces, which have rightly been critiqued as male-centred, and often white.[15] Yet there remains something in the history of such sites that is important. Muñoz, in a discussion of the Los Angeles-based artist Kevin McCarty's images of empty punk and queer venues, suggests that these images reflect 'the past – not a nostalgic past but a past that helps us feel a certain structure of feelings, a circuit of queer belonging'.[16] That formation of the circuit of queer belonging, or at least the potential for such a circuit, was also what I began to find on those dancefloors in Osaka and Kyoto.

My searching for those circuits did not take place in what is often imagined as the cultural centre of Japan. The ascendance of the Tokugawa clan in the early seventeenth-century shifted the balance of cultural and political power to the East and the town of Edo, which came to predominance and was later renamed Tokyo, or the Eastern Capital. That move ended a period of many hundreds of years when that centre had been in the Kansai region, to the west, where I was studying in 1998–9. Residents of the Kansai, which encompasses Kyoto and Osaka, as well as the nearby cities of Kobe and Nara and a wider array of less urban prefectures, maintain a sense of cultural difference from the modern capital, as well as proud regional identities of their own.

The ancient capital of Kyoto deploys its more than a thousand years of religious and artistic history and the special place preserved by its emergence from the Second World War relatively unscathed by the aerial bombardment of many of Japan's other cities to market itself as the cultural and historic heart of an 'authentic' Japan. Kyoto's large number of universities, with their many students and scholars, as well as the

city's historic artisan and factory worker populations, means that it has also had a significant organized Left.

The region's major population centre in the nearby bawdy port city of Osaka is renowned for its food cultures and distinctive comedy styles which shape much of Japan's televisual and other comedic cultures. This regional distinctiveness cuts through into other cultural forms, as writers and filmmakers have regularly 'imagined Osaka as a distinctly local order – of space, language, everyday life, gender and more – alternative to the national order'.[17] If Tokyo is the representative city of modern Japan, and Kyoto stands in for ideas of tradition, Osaka can be imagined as the nation's black sheep. A contrarian city whose denizens have refused to accept its marginalization over the last four hundred years, Osaka is popularly associated with the 'excessive, the excluded and the treasonous in a way that refuses…containment' within the nation.[18]

The nearby prefecture of Hyōgo is Japan's seventh most populous, housing the port city of Kobe and the town of Takarazuka famous for its all-women vaudeville show that has been running for over 100 years, marked by categories of female performers sharply delineated into feminine and masculine roles.[19]

Despite the popularity of Takarazuka, queer imaginaries of postwar Japan, like imaginaries of the nation more generally, tend to remain focused on Tokyo, with its major commercial gay hub of Shinjuku Nichōme and the publishing and other modern infrastructure of what was, for many decades, a thriving community.[20] Kansai, though, has its own queer cultures that reflect the wider counter-Tokyo bent of the region. In a 1993 article entitled "Osaka = Japan, Japan ≠ Osaka" and published in the Kansai-based gay zine *Kick Out*, an anonymous author made the case for the distinctiveness of western Japan, and in particular Osaka, for gay communities in the early 1990s.[21] The author writes about an Osaka-ness, an '*aho*' [fool] identity that marks Osaka as the explicit anti-Tokyo and functions like a virus or fungal infection, so contagious that it is quickly adopted by transplants to the city.[22] This, the author argues, is particularly resonant for gay people: 'Carriers of this [Osaka] virus have a "say it up front" positivity. There are no Negative Nancys… [I]n Osaka to be gay for many people is to have some of this *aho* spirit...Being gay and being Osakan is pretty compatible.'[23]

Like many a transplant to the city, this outsider status was something I welcomed, willingly succumbing to the Osaka contagion and adopting the particular linguistic markers that mark the Kansai as distinct. I learned regional slang from campy Osaka gays who taught me a particular *onee kotoba* [language of queens], as well as wider friendship groups who helped me embrace a sense that being different, and sometimes contrary, could be a positive.[24] Before too long, though, it was time to return to Queensland suburbia and the remainder of my degree.

Back at my Brisbane university, I quickly learned that Japan ≠ Osaka. Teachers insisted that my relatively comfortable Osakan fluency was entirely unacceptable in a pedagogical context that took as given that the supposedly 'neutral' sounds of *hyōjungo* (standard dialect) were the only way to demonstrate skilled use of the Japanese language. While my teachers no doubt were trying to correct register as much as dialect, my interest in linguistics quickly waned in favour of a focus on the cultures and histories of those on the periphery. That contrary Kansai spirit, and the newfound freedom sparked by my sexuality, also helped to shift my politics and I become active in the student, queer and anti-capitalist movements that proliferated at the end of the twentieth century.[25] I read voraciously about queer politics, the histories that shaped those struggles and the emancipatory visions of liberation politics; queerness *could* be about more than barely surviving the present.

One key phrase that was popular then, as I am sure it remains, was the apocryphal Emma Goldman line, 'If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution'. This is likely to be something she never said, but the sentiment was not at all at odds with her politics or mine – creating spaces to express joy collectively is as important as spaces for the expression of collective anger.[26] I took this to heart, and for several years in the mid 2000s helped to run warehouse parties that funded a free radical queer newspaper and supported other activist causes in my new home of Melbourne. All of that is a story for another time, though. As I began to read more about queer history both globally and in Japan, I began to also realize that those moments of bliss on that Diamonds dancefloor had emerged from a not dissimilar politics and were indebted to a group of queer activists and artists who had helped craft a critique of Japanese society that drew from and resonated with a politics beyond national borders.

Diamonds was started by the artist and activist Furuhashi Teiji, also known by his drag persona Glorias. Furuhashi had lived in New York in the mid 1980s, falling into the East Village's burgeoning drag and gay scene centred on the Pyramid Club, where

influential drag acts like Lypsinka, Tabboo!, Lady Bunny and RuPaul appeared.[27] Furuhashi performed with a friend as the Kookie Kabuki Sisters, playing with the crowd's stereotypes of Japan by deploying ikebana, sushi and tea ceremony in a 'very kitschy, Takarazuka style', drawing on the vaudeville styling of the all-female troupe familiar to Furuhashi from back home in the Kansai.[28] On his return to Japan, Furuhashi began Diamonds with DJ Lala (Yamanaka Tōru) and the grand dame of Osaka's queer scene, the drag artist and chanson singer Simone Fukayaki, both of whom remain central figures in Diamonds today.

Furuhashi's influence extended beyond the drag scene, through his involvement in the radical performance art collective Dumb Type, which challenged social norms around gender, sexuality and identity.[29] Dumb Type created an 'intermedium between theatre, dance, visual arts and social experiment, informed by contemporary theoretical debates in the arts and humanities and marked by a cultural activist politics'.[30]

Perhaps the best-known of their works was the performance piece *S/N* which was developed throughout 1993 and premiered at the Adelaide Festival in South Australia the following year. S/N opened with Furuhashi provocatively declaring his homosexuality and his HIV+ status: 'I think that all of you will have heard of gay people or AIDS patients in the past, but I cannot imagine that you have ever seen with your own two eyes a gay AIDS patient…so I thought I should tell you these things about myself at the beginning'.[31] For critic Ōtori Hidenaga, S/N represented a direct challenge to the norms of Japanese theatre, turning 'theatrical space into a political vehicle'. Dumb Type stopped performing in 2002, until a relaunch saw them prepare to stage their first work in almost twenty years in Kyoto in the spring of 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted plans.

That same year S/N premiered – 1994 – saw the Tenth World AIDS Conference in Yokohama, the first held outside Europe or North America. It took place during a profoundly depressing time in the response to the AIDS crisis when prospects for effective treatment seemed bleak. Members and associates of Dumb Type, including Furuhashi, insisted instead on the possibility of living through the crisis, hanging red banners and hosting a party to reflect this insistence and the mechanism through which they understood that life could continue to be realised – collective acts of dancing and love. The AIDS acronym was stripped of its association with illness, stigma and death to become And I Dance with Somebody, accompanied by the

slogans LOVE POSITIVE in English and a repetitive mantra in Japanese that imagined a dissolution of binary divisions, whether HIV+/-, man/woman or citizen/foreigner: 'I have a dream that my status disappears. I have a dream that my sex disappears. I have a dream that my nationality disappears.'[32]

Despite this highly visible intervention, the organization then tasked with running the conferences, the International AIDS Society, later described the 10,000 person strong 10th Conference in the following way:

> The organizers work hard to avoid friction between the conservative Japanese society and the western activists. The hope is to leave a permanent impression in the attitudes, legislation and policies of the host country.[33]

This rendering conveys an all too common hierarchy in discussions of Japan. At core conservative, Japan must learn something from some amorphous 'West', which naturally has all the answers. Transnational movements of ideas are never that simple or hierarchical, of course. Yokohama was not simply a story of an 'enlightened' West confronting a 'conservative' Japan. It also featured Japanese artists and activists joining with those from elsewhere to remind scientists and policymakers that HIV positive people continued to live their lives through the crisis.

Writing in the same year as that Yokohama conference, Furuhashi recalled his time in New York and his friendship with the drag queen and performance artist, Ethyl Eichelberger, who had also been a prominent figure around the Pyramid Club. In a short essay accompanying the touring show of Paul Rudnick's *Jeffrey*, one of many AIDS-related theatre works that were popular in mid-1990s Japan, Furuhashi describes in ways similar to Kristeva and Treat a shattering and reconstruction of his body that occurred through the crossing of borders, in this instance not just of nation but also of gender through the medium of drag.[34] He was guided, like so many of the East Village queens, by Eichelberger acting as mentor or in her terms 'Queen Mother', a role she loved 'because I'm trying to better the world for drag performers'.[35] Furuhashi's memories of Eichelberger shaped his future actions, along with the embodied transformation he was also about to experience.

> Ethyl Eichelberger died never telling her friends about having AIDS. On my next trip to New York I went along to Sheridan Square, in front of the playhouse [in the

heart of the gay village, opposite the famous Stonewall Inn]. As in the scene in the play, lined up outside the theatre were rows of flowers. I lingered there for a while, until a cute man invited me to join him at a club. I wavered until I could suddenly hear Ethyl's voice in my ear, 'Oh girl, forget about me and run on ahead'.[36]

A couple of years after Eichelberger's death Furuhashi confronted his own diagnosis in a letter to friends sent in October 1992, and titled 'Furuhashi Teiji's New Life – Life with Virus: Celebrating the announcement of my HIV diagnosis'.[37] This celebration led to a greater awareness of his body and the wider social context in which he operated, which in turn prompted the political turn evident in Dumb Type's S/N and the actions at the Yokohama conference.

So, what concretely do I need to tidy up [before I go]? Beyond the question of what happens to my body, there are mountains of social and economic problems to confront. Up until now, the environments I've lived in have been somewhat unusual and I have been able to be ignorant of Japan's social structures, but now I see that there are so many issues.

[…]

This is not the end of me, but the beginning of a new me. Now if I close my eyes, I can hear the sounds of my blood pumping through my veins. Through that sound I had not noticed before, I am already awakened to a new life.[38]

Furuhashi's diagnosis also affected other key figures in the scene around Diamonds and Dumb Type, most notably BuBu de la Madeleine, who continues to appear in Diamonds Kōhaku performances. Bubu has been a central figure in radical social movements around sex and sexuality, particularly Japan's sex-worker rights movement. When Furuhashi initially fell ill, the recently divorced Bubu took over his primary care, all while attempting to continue the collaborative art practice of the wider collective. Bubu recalls this in an introduction to a recent volume on sex-work studies edited by the sex-worker organization Sex Work and Sexual Health (SWASH). In this essay, a character she calls T features prominently.[39]

For T, who was living with HIV, that new work [S/N] had a special meaning: he only had limited time left. And with that imperative of T's care and the new work,

> there was a need for me to remain healthy and economically independent, so I needed to cover living expenses in as minimum a time as possible...in terms of the number of working hours and relative freedom of choice, I thought there was no choice other than sex work.[40]

For Bubu, the decision to work in the sex industry made sense initially as an economic strategy both to survive as a divorced woman in a misogynist Japan, and to support her friend with the care he needed. Like Furuhashi, the AIDS crisis and its increased opportunity to talk across borders also began to shift Bubu's politics, which started from her core belief that sex work was work.[41] In Yokohama, she connected with a wider array of sex-worker politics around autonomy and self-direction by sex workers, and notions of empowerment. Ultimately, Bubu recalls that that engagement with transnational form of sex-worker organizing built on her own politics, and shaped much of the Japanese debates around sex work over the following years.

Bubu also used her sex work in her art, including in one infamous scene in S/N which Furuhashi described as follows.

> There's also one controversial scene in which Bubu – who appears as a prostitute – she actually is one – pulls two dozen flags out of her vagina. It's like a magic show, but it's real. It's very funny and beautiful: a few people even told me it was so beautiful it made them cry.
>
> Bubu came up with the idea, saying 'The least I can do is make you laugh'. … It's an extreme interpretation of sex, but somehow it expressed my feelings after losing many close friends to AIDS and experiencing the futile struggle with science and bureaucracy. It's like screaming into a black hole.[42]

It is only in very recent years that these interlocking worlds that encompassed Dumb Type, Diamonds are Forever and more, have come to be more widely recognized within Japan. This recognition culminated in a major research project, oral-history gathering process and then an exhibition and series of public events at the prominent Tokyo contemporary art gallery Mori Art Museum in 2018–19, followed by a publication of archival documents and critical commentary in 2019.[43] These processes have been important in placing this moment and these scenes as significant in the history of Japanese art and activism. Perhaps understandably for a major

contemporary art gallery though, the focus is on the producers and creators of these spaces, events and actions, rather than the emotional and embodied charge for participants. Neither the activist reflecting on how HIV/AIDS shaped their politics or the newly queer kid shuffling nervously on the dancefloor is very evident. From my perspective, something is lost in a narrow focus on creation – collective politics is rarely experienced in such a simple hierarchy. A scene is created, sure, and that act of creation is fundamentally important, but what is created is also experienced by participants, who may or may not be known to the creators themselves and who make those spaces their own through their acts of resistance, or their dance moves.

In a recent article in this journal, Matt Cook drew on Ann Cvetkovich's idea of an 'archive of feeling' to suggest that 'emotions are never "only" personal but are woven into attempts to voice, prompt and persuade in a multitude of places and social practices, from the domestic to the operations of the state'.[44] Drag acts and club spaces such as Diamonds provide one such space to construct the past and present of queer communities through what happens on the stage and the dancefloor. The scholar of drag Katie Horowitz has suggested something similar, arguing that 'what we typically think of as staged performances, like drag shows, produce effects just as real (and as really political) as apparently unstaged performances – political rallies, legal interventions, and organized protests, to name a few'.[45] Queer marginalization from and active rejection of heteronormativity and its institutions have also led us to claim 'nightlife and trash as spaces for social justice'.[46]

I never met Furuhashi, as he died a few years before my first Diamonds visit. That missed moment became all the more poignant a bit over a decade later with my own seroconversion, thankfully now in a time of antiretroviral treatments that made diagnosis both survivable and manageable, but perhaps less urgently transformative. I do sometimes wonder what Furuhashi would have made of this post-antiretroviral world. I like to think that his newly awakened life would have continued as a critical voice of dissent, confrontation and fun. Certainly his friends at Diamonds have carried on where he left off.

That 1993 article from the Osaka zine *Kick Out* concluded with the following, somewhat tongue-in-cheek call:

> As the world surrounding us gays rapidly changes, perhaps we should take a leaf out of Osaka people's worldview as a way to not lose our own place amongst all

> that dynamism. Perhaps we can also relax, doing one *aho* thing with our friends, as we sincerely grapple with various obstacles as a community.[47]

And that really gets to the heart of what queer spaces can be, whether in western Japan, or not. A retreat from the heteronormative world outside. A place to grow into cultures and histories marginalized from that world. That flash of bliss that gives a sense of a future beyond those dull places that fettered us. And a damn fun night of dancing, as a political act in and of itself.

* * *

This article was mostly drafted in late 2019, but is being finalized from coronavirus-induced lockdown. Words like 'social isolation' have been normalized and enforced, as have modes of living that are alien to many queer people as forms of sociality that we have often explicitly rejected. The secure family home cocooned from the dangerous world outside has not been real for many of us.

Before that all began, however, the drag artist Oozing Gloop reflected on the purpose of drag as a revolutionary act:

> To activate the energetic potential for change that is all around us. That's why we love drag queens, when we see them change themselves we see a way to change the world for the better, and it gives us hope and makes us happy. Like taking drugs. The problem is that this is too much of a flashbulb moment and leaves us, and the queens, burnt out, used up and no good. Affective modes of community-building, spreading love, care and affection and championing global political change in the personal, immediate area.[48]

Turning those flashbulb moments into affective modes of community-building is a good summary of what happened in those queer scenes in the Kansai in the 1990s, and in the imagination of a little queer kid from suburban Australia. They also seem, from my Manchester lockdown, more important than ever. As Gregory Bredbeck wrote, 'Like disco itself, identity and community are processes, things that cannot simply *be*, but that must be constantly *done*'.[49]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

This piece has been drafted over many years and is shaped as much by dancing buddies and lovers, nightclubs, and other queer contexts, as the colleagues who helpfully commented on drafts. Thanks in particular to Masa, who scooped me up from many an Osaka gutter, and Masaki, who have remained friends for more than twenty years; and those who commented on drafts, including Jamie Coates, Jennifer Coates, Kate Davison, NH, Vera Mackie and Lukasz Szulc. Translations from Japanese are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Japanese names appear in their normal order in Japanese, family name first.

1 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, transl. Leon S. Roudiez*,* New York, 1991, p. 30.

2 John Whittier Treat, *Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism, and Japan*, New York and Oxford, 1999. Treat's work has not been without its critics, including Katsuhiko Suganuma, in *Contact Moments: the Politics of Intercultural Desire in Japanese Male-Queer Cultures*, Hong Kong, 2012.

3 Treat, *Great Mirrors Shattered*, p. 14.

4 Treat, *Great Mirrors Shattered*, p. 47.

5 See for example, John d'Emilio, 'Capitalism and Gay Identity', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David Halperin, London and New York, 1993, pp. 467–76; Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, Oxford and New York, 1991, p. 250.

6 Critical writings on LGBTQ+ processes of mobility, travel and tourism are now extensive. See for example, Jasbir K. Puar, 'Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, and Globalization', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8: 1/2, 2002, pp. 101–37; Aren Z. Aizura, *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*, Durham NC, 2018.

7 Alison Light, 'The Word Made Flesh', *History Workshop Journal* 46, 1998, pp. 177–86.

8 For more on Kōhaku, see the work of Shelley Brunt, for instance Brunt, '"The Infinite Power of Song": Uniting Japan at the 60th Annual Kōhaku Song Contest', in

Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music, ed. Toru Mitsui, London, 2014, pp. 37–51. Brunt prefers to translate the event's title as the Red and White Song Contest.

9 Catherine Baker, '"The 'Gay Olympics"? The Eurovision Song Contest and the Politics of LGBT/European belonging', *European Journal of International Relations* 23: 1, 2016, pp. 97–121. While the Kōhaku broadcast does not create a direct national contest, it nevertheless facilitates forms of Japanese nationalism. By curating an annual musical review and in facilitating opportunities for audience singalongs with the performers on stage 'articulates the image of unity for the nation.' Brunt, "The Infinite Power of Song", p. 49.

10 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity*, New York, 2009, p. 112.

11 Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, New York, 2010, p. 45. See also Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: a History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970–1979*, Durham, NC and London, 2003; Tim Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor*, *1980–1983*, Durham NC and London, 2016. Critiques of this Stonewall narrative as US-centric, and exclusionary of other histories of struggles, are now commonplace. The use of New York examples in this essay, however, is not simply about the predominance of New York in much of the scholarly writing on gay/queer histories, but is important to this particular story.

12 Echols, *Hot Stuff*, p. 155.

13 Gregory W. Bredbeck, 'Troping the Light Fantastic: Representing Disco Then and Now', *GLQ* 3: 1, pp. 71–107, 79–80.

14 Bredbeck, 'Troping', p. 81.

15 For example Katie Horowitz, 'The Trouble with "Queerness": Drag and the Making of Two Cultures', *Signs* 38: 2, 2013, pp. 303–26, where she points to segregated drag cultures in her field site of Cleveland.

16 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 111.

17 Michael Cronin, *Osaka Modern: the City in the Japanese Imaginary*, Cambridge MA, 2017, p. 3.

18 Cronin, *Osaka Modern*, p. 9.

19 For more on Takarazuka, see Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998; Naomi

Miyamoto, 'The Takarazuka Revue: Its Star System and Fans' Support', in *Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Toru Mitsui, London, 2014, pp. 23–36.

20 See for example Mark McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities*, Richmond, 2000; or more recently Thomas Baudinette, 'The Spatialisation of Desire in a Japanese Gay District through Signage', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16: 3, 2017, pp. 500–27; Baudinette, 'Ethnosexual Frontiers in Queer Tokyo: the Production of Racialised Desire in Japan', *Japan Forum* 28: 4, 2016, pp. 465–85.

21 Anonymous, 'Osaka = Japan, Japan ≠ Osaka', *Kick Out* 8, December 1993, p. 13.

22 'Aho' literally means fool or idiot and can be an aggressive or insulting term in most of Japan. However, its usage is different in Osaka – not exactly a term of an endearment but certainly a more intimate and light term, often used with friends.

23 Anonymous, 'Osaka = Japan, Japan ≠ Osaka'.

24 For useful discussions of queer language in Japan, see Claire Maree, *Onee kotoba ron* [On the language of queens], Tokyo, 2003; Claire Maree, *queerqueen: Linguistic Excess in Japanese Media*, Oxford, 2020.

25 I discuss some aspects of this period in Mark Pendleton, 'Looking Back to Look Forward: the Past in Australian Queer Anti-capitalism, 1999–2002', *Melbourne Historical Journal* 35, 2007, pp. 51–71.

26 Alix Kates Shulman, 'Dances with Feminists', *Women's Review of Books* IX: 3, December 1991.

27 This scene has also recently become more recognized, at least among art professionals, curators and enthusiasts: significant exhibitions at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2017–18 and the Hayward Gallery in 2018 are two recent examples. Community oriented historical projects also played a significant role here, primarily through the long-running slide-show performances 'The Drag Explosion', curated and presented by Linda Simpson, (see: http://www.thedragexplosion.com/) and the YouTube channel 5ninthavenueproject, which collects the work of videographer Nelson Sullivan (https://www.youtube.com/user/5ninthavenueproject/videos). See also Tim Lawrence, *Life and Death on the New York Dance Floor: 1980–1983*, Durham NC and London, 2016, pp. 257–70.

28 There appear to be different versions of the group's name, with Furuhashi himself using Kookie Kabuki Sisters in an interview with Bridget Cooper, that was reprinted in 2011 at https://kyotojournal.org/culture-arts/furuhashi-teiji-dumb-type/, while the *New York Times* reported instead a group called Kooky Kabuki, which appeared at the 1987 Wigstock: *NYT*, 4 Sept. 1987, p. C8.

29 The collective has been discussed extensively in the theatre/performance art literature. See for example *The Dumb Type Reader*, ed. Peter Eckersall, Edward Scheer and Fujii Shintarō, Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen, 2017; Dorina Neave, 'Meditations on Space and Time: the Performance Art of Japan's Dumb Type', *Art Journal* 60: 1, 2001, pp. 84–95; Cynthia Gendrich and Woodrow Hood, 'Noise and Nudity: Kyoto's Dumb Type', *Theatre Forum* 18, 2001, pp. 3–10.

30 Peter Eckersall and Edward Scheer, 'Introduction', *The Dumb Type Reader*, ed. Eckersall, Scheer and Shintarō, p. 11.

31 Ōtori Hidenaga, 'The Historical Position of Dumb Type in Japanese Theatre: the Birth and the End of the Politics of New Media Dramaturgy', in *The Dumb Type Reader*, ed. Eckersall, Scheer and Shintarō, pp. 50–1.

32 *MAM Research 006: Chronicle Kyoto 1990s – Diamonds are Forever, Art-Scape, And I Dance With Somebody*, ed. Tsubaki Reiko, Nakajima Mimi, Takeuchi Momo, Ishitani Hiro and Fukai Atsushi, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2019.

33 From the International AIDS Society's list of conferences (each given two-sentences in the present tense). See August 1994, Yokohama: X International AIDS Conference (AIDS 1994) Theme: The Global Challenge of AIDS: Together for the Future, on p. 3 in https://www.iasociety.org/Web/WebContent/File/30_Years_of_AIDS_A_History_of_HIV_and_IAS.pdf.

34 Furuhashi Teiji, 'Eseru Eikurubaagaa no koto' [On Ethyl Eichelberger], in *memorandum teiji furuhashi*, ed. Dumb Type, Tokyo, 2013, pp. 26–8.

35 Lawrence, *Life and Death*, p. 258.

36 Furuhashi, 'Eseru', p. 28.

37 Furuhashi Teiji, 'Furuhashi Teiji no atarashii jinsei – LIFE WITH VIRUS: HIV kansen happyō o iwatte' [Furuhashi Teiji's New Life – LIFE WITH VIRUS: Celebrating the announcement of my HIV diagnosis] in *memorandum teiji furuhashi*, ed. Dumb Type, Tokyo, 2013, pp. 36–43.

38 Furuhashi, ‘Furuhashi Teiji no atarashii jinsei’, pp. 41–3.

39 Bubu de la Madeleine, ‘Sekkusu waaku to iu kotoba o kakutokusuru made: 1990 nendai tōjisha katsudō no sukecchi [Before we acquired the word ‘sex work’: a sketch of our own 1990s activism],’ in *Sekkusu waaku sutadiizu: tōjisha shiten de kangaeru sei to rōdō [Sex Work Studies: Thinking about sex and labour from the viewpoint of those concerned]*, ed. Sex Work and Sexual Health [SWASH], Tokyo, 2018, pp. 9–28. The Japanese language term *tōjisha* appears here in both Bubu’s chapter title and that of the book. Literally meaning ‘those directly concerned’ it is a term that has come to be deployed in a range of Japanese social movements since the 1980s to reflect a sense that affected people should be in control of the movements that relate to their lives. Mark McLelland and Katsuhiko Suganuma have described the term in the following way: ‘Originally a legal term referring to the “parties concerned” in litigation, tōjisha is now widely used among minority and civil rights groups to insist on their right to self-representation and self-determination.’ See McLelland and Suganuma, ‘Sexual minorities and human rights in Japan: an historical perspective’, *International Journal of Human Rights* 13: 2–3, 2009, pp. 329–43, p. 336.

40 Bubu, ‘Sekkusu waaku’, p. 13.

41 Bubu, ‘Sekkusu waaku’, p. 19.

42 Furuhashi Teiji, ‘artist Furuhashi Teiji, interviewed by Carol Lufty, September 1995’, in *memorandum teiji furuhashi*, ed. Dumb Type, Tokyo, 2014, pp. 106–35, p. 117. Bubu has continued to make work around her experiences of sex work, including in the 2006 exhibition ‘Baijo nikki: okyaku to isshoni toru poruno’ [Whore’s diary: A porno I shot with a client]: http://www.otafinearts.com/ja/exhibitions/2006/post_65/

43 *MAM Research 006*, ed. Tsubaki, Nakajima, Takeuchi, Ishitani and Fukai,

44 Matt Cook, ‘Archives of Feeling: the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987’, *History Workshop Journal* 83, 2017, pp. 51–78; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Durham N.C. and London, 2007.

45 Horowitz, ‘The Trouble with “Queerness”.

46 Andrès Jaques, ‘Grindr Archiurbanism’, *Log* 41, Fall 2017, pp. 75–84, 79.

47 Anonymous, ‘Osaka = Japan, Japan ≠ Osaka’.

48 Martha Margetsen, ‘An Interview with Oozing Gloop’, *Louche* 1, 2019, pp. 30–3, 33.

49 Bredbeck, ‘Troping the Light Fantastic’, p. 100.