Essay

An Oscar for Wakamaru: Robots, Gender, and Performance

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Summary
Beginning with an introduction to the robot Wakamaru, followed by the origins and current definitions of the word “robot,” this essay interrogates the differences between sex and gender in humans and humanoids, with a focus on Japanese robots. I compare the gender technologies employed in the all-male Kabuki theatre, which emerged in the early 1600s, and in the all-female Takarazuka Revue, founded in 1913, and elucidate their influence on the attribution and “performance” of robot gender. I argue that human actors and humanoid robots alike simultaneously call attention to the mutable artifice of gendered identities and recuperate the binary construction of gender, reinforcing in the process heteronormative conventions of being in the world.

Keywords: robots, androids, gender, cross-dressing, theatre, Japan

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* I would like to thank Cosima Wagner, Freie Universität Berlin, and Susanne Brucksch, German Institute of Japanese Studies (DIJ), Tokyo, for inviting me to contribute to their timely special issue on STS (science, technology, and society) in Japan. This special issue of ASIEN demonstrates the importance of Japan as a site for exploring new vectors of technology and intersections of the humanities and sciences, and for generating new methodologies and theoretical approaches in STS studies. Collectively, the contributors decenter the mostly Eurocentric focus of STS. Parts of this article are included in a chapter on robot gender in my forthcoming book, Robo sapiens japonicus: Robots, Eugenics, and Posthuman Aesthetics (University of California Press). My research on this topic was supported by a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2011–2012), an Abe Fellowship (Social Science Research Council, 2010–2012), and a Faculty Research Grant, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan (2012, 2015).