II.

Transcultural Topographies: Transgressing the Body as Gendered and Cultural Space
In *nihon buyō* (Japanese classical dance) each dance is gendered as either *otokogata* (male form) or *onnagata* (female form), identified primarily by the movement of the dancer’s body in space. The gender of the dancer and that of the dance are not necessarily the same, a dynamic that is an inherent aesthetic of *nihon buyō*. There are further layers of gender signification in the costuming determined by the gender of the dance and dancer. Gender signifiers in *nihon buyō* are complete artistic constructs played out on both male and female bodies and are never meant to completely obscure the gender of the dancer, for the audience’s knowledge of the layers underneath heighten their appreciation. This article looks at the signifiers that define a dance as male or female, and discusses how these are played out on the bodies of both male and female performers, creating a liminal space where gender layering is played with and enjoyed.

Body. Space. The Body in Space. How an individual moves is a signifier of identity: of one’s body’s culture, personal history, age, emotional state and gender. Many of these signs are socially constructed – consciously or unconsciously learned movement patterns and codes that can be read ‘correctly’ by other members of one’s society. In the heightened theatrical context of *nihon buyō* (Japanese classical dance) these signifiers are completely codified and stylised and have become set *kata* or forms. Any knowledgeable audience member watching a *nihon buyō* performance receives a great deal of information about story, context and character from the simplest of movements. These movements of the body in space in *nihon buyō* also create different layers of gender signification.

The audience and performers are always aware of three distinct but connected layers of gender signification in *nihon buyō*: the gender of the dancer’s body, the movements of that body in space which signify the gender of the dance, and the decoration of that body with costumes, make-up and wigs which is determined by a combination of the first two layers. In this article I will describe how these layers work on the body in space and argue that this layering of gender in *nihon buyō* is part of its aesthetic, with the interplay of real and stylised gender signifiers creating a liminal space where the lines between male and female are played with and interwoven.