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Towards a Historical Be(com)ing into Universal Benevolence: *Anastasia* and Geopolitical Reconfigurations in Late Modernity

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Abstract
Focusing on two iterations of the *Anastasia* topos – the 1997 animated musical movie produced and released by Fox Animation Studios and Takarazuka Revue's Japanese theatrical musical live performance from 2020 –, this article analyzes the significance and impact of historical events and their dialectic renegotiation by means of mass entertainment in cross-cultural cross-media perspective. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and archive research, the current analysis attempts a realistic diagnosis of future international developments based on live theatrical representations as well as their crucial reformulations of reality resulted from the empathic exchange between performers and audiences. Moreover, Japan's attempts at reconfiguring geopolitical relations crisscrossing increasingly nationalist discourses in the public sphere during the 2010s are projected on the – likewise increasingly – polarized global narratives juxtaposing individual freedoms, rights, aspirations with collective expectations, pressures, anxieties.

Keywords: animation movie, musical theater, historical impersonations, late-modern hierarchies of values, global anxieties

From Russia to Japan, via the USA

Sometimes, the observation of popular releases and their impact on audiences leads to profound insights into the mechanisms of history – more

particularly, of recent, palpable history – which might possibly deliver understandings of times yet to come. The forthcoming analysis attempts precisely this: drawing on direct experience of two media works focusing on the historical character of Anastasia, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia (1901-1918) and the youngest daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, the last sovereign of Imperial Russia, and his wife, Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna, I quest for answers to interrogations related to the cyclicity of history and its potential predictability.

This article approaches the phenomenon "Anastasia" in cross-cultural perspective, with specific focus on the eponymous American animated musical fantasy drama movie from 1997 and on Takarazuka Revue's Japanese theatrical version from 2020. Produced and directed by Don Bluth and Gary Goldman, the 1997 *Anastasia* was based on Marcelle Maurette's play *Anastasia* from 1952, which drew on the story of Anna Anderson, the best known of the many Anastasia impostors and/or impersonators who emerged after the Russian imperial family were killed in July 1918. *Anastasia* brought Maurette international recognition and was later adapted into the 1956 American period drama movie of the same name directed by Anatole Litvak with a screenplay by Arthur Laurents. Takarazuka Revue's performance drew extensive inspiration from the animated version, while also making use of dramaturgic ideas from the stage musical world-premiered in 2016 in Hartford with music by Stephen Flaherty, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and book by Terrence McNally. It is true that the success of the 1997 *Anastasia* release spawned various adaptations into other media, including a direct-to-video spin-off movie, a computer game, books, toys, etc., but the Takarazuka Revue adaptation was selected for the current analysis due to its far-reaching implications, openly or covertly expressed: on the one hand, it connects with a performance with similar contents – the brutal decline and violent death of the Romanov dynasty – from 2017 titled *Land of the Gods: The Twilight of the Romanovs* 『神々の土地　～ロマノフたちの黄昏～』 *Kamigami no Tochi: Romanofutachi no Tasogare,* scheduled precisely 100 years after the Russian Revolution had started and staged by the same Cosmos Troupe which subsequently performed *Anastasia* and which is subliminally associated in the audiences' perception with progressive visions of future-

oriented shows. On the other hand, Takarazuka Revue's *Anastasia* seems to announce a discrete but profound shift in geopolitical preoccupations, as the *parimono* genre is employed in a nearly dostoyevskian manner and reminiscent of Emile Zola's naturalism rather than of *The Rose of Versailles*' glittering transcendence. As will be shown in the course of the hermeneutic analysis resulting from a decade-long quantitative and qualitative fieldwork (phenomenological experience and empirical inquiries), literature review as well as archive research, the recovery of Anastasia's (the character) identity throughout her journey both inwards and by train westwards is a metaphor for history yet to come, emerging from the redistribution of power relations on the world stage in the global era, with Japan as the lighthouse of the future – or the locomotive, another compelling metaphor on the background of Takarazuka Revue Company's fiscally formal belonging to Hankyû Railways holdings (Kawasaki, *The Utopia Named Takarazuka* 39; Hashimoto 83). Scheduled at a moment in time – November-December 2020 in Takarazuka and January-February 2021 in Tokyo – in which the COVID-19 pandemic was globally still in full rage, and with Japan experimenting a repetition of the (in)famous "closed country" politics (*sakoku*) of the premodern era (Edo period, 1603-1868), locally described as *saisakoku* 再鎖国 or "new closed country," *Anastasia* appears equally as part of an inertia within a marketing strategy which started in late 2016, promoting Japan as the initiator of a new world order. Nonetheless, this marketing strategy will increasingly fade away in 2021, to be finally replaced, in 2022 and 2023, by a focus on individualism, mistrust in governmental capabilities and a fresh representation of history, more intimately connected to internationally recognized narratives.

Staged at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 7 November until 14 December 2020, and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 8. January until 21 February 2021, with Makaze Suzuho as Dimitri and Hoshikaze Madoka as Anastasia/Anya in the lead-roles, Cosmos Troupe's version of Anastasia was based on *Anastasia* The Musical with music by Stephen Flaherty and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens on a book by Terrence McNally, which premiered on Broadway at Broadhurst Theater in April 2017 after its initial world-premiere in 2016 in Hartford, which in turn originated in Bluth's and Goldman's animated musical movie *Anastasia* from 1997. Traditionally

associated with strictly conservative gender politics and socio-economic hierarchies, military-like instruction methods and performance standards which transcend the wildest expectations while pushing the entertainment industry beyond the limitations of technological progress, fans' requirements and technokrats' visions, Takarazuka Revue has been accompanying Japan since the company's foundation in 1914. Simultaneously a faithful mirror of Japanese society and a lucid barometer-like institution for the future, Takarazuka Revue's hallmark is its all-female cast impersonating both male (*otokoyaku*) and female (*musumeyaku*) roles, divided in five performing troupes which bring on the stages of the two major theaters in West-Japan (Takarazuka Grand Theater in the city of Takarazuka) and in East-Japan (Tokyo Takarazuka Theater in the posh district of Ginza in Japan's capital) during ten weekly performances, throughout the entire year, a huge diversity of topics covering all genres and historical-geographical areas. These are embedded in theatrical live performances with Western popular music, laborious choreographies and impressive singing acts, luxurious stage designs, sparkling – and quickly changing – costumes compounded by discrete displays of individual excellence. Moreover, since the 1974 blockbuster *The Rose of Versailles*, Takarazuka Revue has been essentially circumscribing the so-called *shôjo* culture: the framework delineating femininity, feminine identity and feminine corporeality by means of instrumentalizing female teenagers within Japan's rapacious sociocultural system of the entertainment industry, juxtaposing consumerism, sexuality and public discourses on love, marriage, reproduction.

Among the five active troupes – Flower Troupe *hana-gumi*, Moon Troupe *tsuki-gumi* (both founded in 1921), Snow Troupe *yuki-gumi* (founded in 1924), Star Troupe *hoshi-gumi* (1933-1939 and since 1948), and Cosmos Troupe *sora-gumi* (since 1998) –, each of them being linked with specific characteristics which then color the messages of the performances themselves, Cosmos Troupe is associated with a non-conformist allure, breaking prevailing standards in Takarazuka Revue's tradition: founded in 1998, the Cosmos Troupe is the youngest among the five acting ensembles[i] of the Takarazuka Revue Company; in comparison to other troupes, it is regarded as less bound to any sort of image that

Takarazuka Revue – as a socio-economic or political-cultural phenomenon – might have established. The employment of the Cosmos Troupe in *Anastasia* (and in *The Land of Gods* additionally outlined further below) strikes a chord of experimental, explorative exuberance in the audiences' perception. Simultaneously, it suggests Takarazuka Revue's administrators' self-awareness of its fundamental role in conveying to – and therefore, discreetly, inducing in – its (mainly) Japanese (predominantly) female audiences ideas about the future and its fallacies as well as expectations for their roles as mothers and primary educators in building up that very future. Moreover, long-term observation of Takarazuka Revue's business model encouraging "deep fandom" (Jenkins 33) and relying on fans' loyalty as a means to advance its market dominance within the Japanese entertainment industry, renders unexpected insights into the mechanisms of production, consumption, perception, assimilation and reproduction of media phenomena in Japan. Taking into account the fact that the Japanese media industry is extremely vivacious and almost painful in its superficiality with a calculated momentary impact on audiences, Takarazuka Revue's longevity with more than 100 years of uninterrupted activity is a powerful reminder that determination, hard-work, and persistence are worthy assets in the hierarchy of human values – although not always forthrightly advertised as such. Fostered with loving care in the educational process, such values lead to a healthy sense of self which then allows for vulnerability to flourish. In this understanding, vulnerability refers to the ability to display and perform authenticity (more commonly known as "to be one's true self") both towards oneself and towards others, despite Japan's prevalent sociocultural pressures to wear symbolic masks and to play predetermined roles.

As will be shown further below, in the ruthless psychology of Japan's cultural consumption, only two elements could make up for the humiliation of the WWII defeat: the repeated acknowledgement of the failure of the American dream due to a loss of faith, and the intensive reiteration of family as a core-entity of society within the framework of a seemingly progressive wrapping of national ideals (Uchino 54). Takarazuka Revue's Cosmos Troupe would prove a vital mechanism in the process of representing Russia as a new orientation center, possibly replacing France and by all

means the USA. After a detailed examination of the animated movie *Anastasia* and of Takarazuka Revue's eponymous performance, in the *Conclusion*, I expand the comparative analysis towards Russia's global significance, both in light of 2020 and of events ever since.

The Romanticization of History: *Anastasia*, the Animated Musical Movie

After being released in 1997 by Fox Animation Studios, the animated musical movie *Anastasia*, produced and directed by Bluth and Gary Goldman and distributed by 20th Century Fox Animation Studios, became in time the most profitable release of the combination, earning over 140 million USD worldwide over a production budget of 53 million USD. On the one hand, the historical background of the 1990s after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the renewed sense of hope in the world instilled by the end of the Cold War, inspired an atmosphere of awe related to cultural products reinvigorating Russia and questioning the subsequent communist era. On the other hand, *Anastasia*'s animation style, its musical score and the manner in which they are combined to reveal another type of a "princess' story" significantly contributed to its initial success and consequent status of a reference animated movie: Anya is not the typical "damsel in distress" marketed by popular Western animation companies, waiting for the marvelous prince to save her from her – self-induced or not – difficult situation, but a strong-willed young lady, determined to figure out her way in life and to find clues to the only thing connecting her to a past she cannot remember: a pendant with the inscription "Together in Paris." The animation movie's plot follows her quest from Sankt Petersburg to France's capital, loosely based on Maurette's (1903-1972) eponymous play from 1952 which had quickly turned into the French playwright's most famous – and lucrative – creation (Becdelièvre 98). Maurette's *Anastasia* was adapted into a movie of the same name in 1956, after having been translated and modified by Guy Bolton (1884-1979): subsequently to its *mise-en-scène* in England by Mary Kerridge (1914-1999) and John Counsell (1905-1987), it was shown on television in 1953, prompting Vivien Leigh to recommend it to her husband Laurence Olivier for a

London production at the St. James's Theater. Despite St. James's Theater's reputation of an unlucky theater, it kickstarted *Anastasia*'s success, as it opened in New York on Broadway at the Lyceum in early 1955, followed by presentations at Falmouth Playhouse in Massachusetts with the Mexican actress Dolores del Río throughout 1956 and continued with a tour of seven other theaters throughout New England (Hall 74-79). 20th Century Fox won the acquiring of the adaptation rights of ca. £20,000 (currently approx. USD 223.000) for the movie in 1956, over Warner and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which resulted in a movie version of *Anastasia*, directed by Litvak (1902-1974) and written by Laurents (1917-2011) with Ingrid Bergman (1915-1982) in the lead-role. The initial play and the live-action movie were inspired by the story of Anna Anderson (1896-1984, real name Franziska Schanzkowska), the best known of the many Anastasia impostors and/or impersonators who emerged after the Imperial family including the last Tsar and Tsarina of Russia, Nicholas II and Alexandra, and their five children Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia and Alexei were killed on 17 July 1918 by Communist revolutionaries in Yekaterienburg, Russia, with the location of the bodies unknown until 2007.

The animation movie expands the historical setting of interwar France from the play and live-action movie to Russia's Sankt Petersburg in the first half, and follows Anya's, Dimitri's and Vlad's journey to Paris in the second half: in Paris, Anya is supposed to encounter the Dowager Empress Maria (Marie) Feodorovna and convince her that she is legitimately the surviving Anastasia, so that Dimitri and Vlad can collect the advertised reward. The animated version includes a series of fantasy elements and deeply inaccurate historical aspects, such as the presence of Grigori Rasputin (1869-1916) who had been a Russian mystic and self-proclaimed holy-man, best-known for having befriended the royal family of Nicholas II, the last emperor of Russia, through whom he gained considerable influence in the later years of the Russian Empire, but appears in the animation release as a sorcerer and former royal advisor exiled for treason, who has sworn to destroy the imperial family and its legacy. In reality, Rasputin was already dead when the Imperial family was assassinated. In addition to this, Bluth created the idea for Bartok, the albino bat, as a comic sidekick for Rasputin, in order to move away from the dark

history of real-life Anastasia and the Romanov dynasty towards a more light-hearted romantic comedy. At the end of the movie, Bartok even falls in love with a lady bat, thus adding to the general sense of the animation release *Anastasia* as being a fantastic story which shares with historical events only superficial data. Furthermore, in creating Anya's/Anastasia's character, Bluth and Goldman took over story elements from George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1913) as well as its most notable adaptations in the eponymous, highly acclaimed movie from 1938 (with Leslie Howard as Professor Henry Higgins and Wendy Hiller as Eliza Doolittle, under the direction of Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, on music by Arthur Honegger), the 1956 musical *My Fair Lady* (with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe) and its critically and commercially extremely successful 1964 adaptation (directed by George Cukor, based on a screenplay by Alan Jay Lerner, with Rex Harrison and Audrey Hepburn in the lead-roles as Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle, respectively), in the process of molding the peasant Anya into a young lady of – ostensibly – noble origins (see Huggett 37).

On the background of the 1990s with its fresh sense of liberation and unlimited possibilities, it is Anya's/Anastasia's character that takes over the narrative development. In previous adaptations of the Anastasia topos, the focus was mainly on three elements: the impostor dimension of the impersonation, the greed of those keen on the reward money, and the resulting conflict between the Dowager's painful investigation and the ruthless cynicism of those exploiting her hopes of reunion with at least one member of the assassinated family. Within the dramaturgic logic of such an approach, the Dowager's disappointed expectations add new layers of suffering to the loss of her beloved family, while highlighting the cruel realities of Imperial Russia with its blatant inequalities and simultaneously reflecting the post-WWII pro-Communism ideologies held by French intellectuals. In Bluth and Goldman's version, the focus moves towards the main character Anya's quest for her past and her family or family history, which is not motivated by greed – as the ending clearly indicates – but by a very natural instinct. Therefore, the animation movie follows Anya's journey: not incidentally, the two major songs *A Journey to the Past* and *Once Upon a December*, since the movie's release having turned into

popular songs in themselves, address precisely her questions, her determination to find the truth and her indistinct memories.

In classical journeys of initiation, the male hero sets off on a pathway of self-discovery during which he must overcome hardships and gradually learn to achieve results therefore metamorphosing slowly but with certainty from an innocent young man with no knowledge of the world whatsoever into a full-fledged grown-up: self-secure, self-sufficient, and responsible, able to actively contribute to the community he belongs to (Bauman 97). The various rites of passage he encounters are meant to strengthen him physically, mentally, emotionally, and to give him a univocal understanding of who he truly, unabashedly, is.

On the contrary, Anya's journey leads her to the past: bereft of any memories or sense of who she might be apart from the years spent in the orphanage, Anya does not remember anything. It is suggested that her amnesia is part of the human complex emotional-mental construction to protect the individual from extremely traumatic events which might jeopardize his/her survival by inducing despair and its related ills such as the inability to act, to protect oneself, to move forward, to look for shelter and essential necessities. From such a perspective, Anya's resolute but slightly carefree attitude is both encouraging and motivating: eventually, it is irrelevant whether she does find the answers to the quest or whether she is the missing Anastasia or not; what matters is that she starts to grasp the potentialities of her inner self and that she can work towards manifesting them in real life (see Eagleton 22-41). Up to the climax in which she defeats Rasputin, she had been repeatedly in situations in which she had either to be "given signs" – as when she had to decide which way to go, to the left to the fishermen's village where the orphanage headmistress had found her a job in a can factory, and Pooka, the pet-turned-stray dog miraculously shows her to head, instead, to the right, to Sankt Petersburg – or to be rescued – as when Dimitri catches her from the fatal fall into tempestuous waters under Rasputin's evil mind-control. As it turns out, Anya's journey was not so much about her past as it was about finding her own self and her own inner potential. The decision to elope with Dimitri, as romantic as it might sound, appears in the dramaturgic logic of the animation movie as a liberation and empowerment statement for girls and women all over the

world: it does not matter if one is born into royalty or not, as history can strike at any time and take away literally everything – what really matters is staying alive and true to one's deep sense of self.

Throughout her development, secondary characters serve several roles: Dimitri, as a boy and as a young man doing his best to make ends meet in the Communist era, saves her life twice and shows her, repeatedly, which direction to follow. Anything but a stellar protagonist, he, too, evolves from a petty thug into a mature man, able to make grounded decisions which would allow him, in the long run, to keep on living with self-respect and in dignity. Interestingly, it is through his encounter with Anya and their subsequent interactions that he manages to glimpse inner positive qualities such as kindness, compassion, generosity, which will guide him in his own developmental trajectory. Likewise, Rasputin is the absolute antagonist, ridiculous in his groundless hatred towards the imperial family, revealing, at the same time, the deep-seated contradictions in Imperial Russia and in the interwar Communist Soviet society, religious entanglements included (see Fuller 131). The Dowager and Vlad are both symbols of two eras: the past with its glittering remainders perpetuating itself dimly and condemned to extinction in the new world based on the values of equality and freedom while allowing everyone to live a life of equanimity among others, and the future sprouting from that very past without either glamourizing or demonizing it. Fierce pragmatism is the new code-phrase, as well as clarity of goals and priorities. There are moments when the past and the future seem to collide – like the encounter at the Palais Garnier and Dimitri's consequent kidnapping of the Dowager to force her to meet Anya –, but the future is always posed to win, as Anya's final decision proves.

Lastly, the Russian Revolution is depicted rather neutrally, which might be connected with the rising leftist tendencies in the 1990s North-American cinema, animation included, and the French origins of the *Anastasia* topos: paradigm shifts are necessary and inevitable, but they do not need to be brutal. Obviously, for regular Russian citizens, the Bolshevik Revolution has not brought significant changes in their everyday life. Nevertheless, a return to the previous era is both unthinkable and undesirable. Therefore, everyone tries to come by and make the best out of

the given situation: similar to the French Revolution, largely regarded as the inception point of modernity and as its ideological foundation with the ideals of "freedom, equality, brotherhood," the Russian Revolution did not deliver what it had promised, being followed instead by decades of senseless atrocities and chaos. The French *joie de vivre* praised in the song *Paris Holds the Key to Your Heart* towards the climax of the animated movie is a welcome contrast to the rather gloomy *A Rumor in St. Petersburg* from the beginning of the movie, but at the same time contains subtle indicators of the superficiality encompassed in apparent luxury as mindless consumerism and civic indifference (see Yamanashi 54; Žižek 163). Products of popular culture are supposed to be contrarian and promote alternative values to prevailing historical trends and tendencies: one might argue that *Anastasia*'s major contribution to mainstream media rests in its depiction of female identity as a self-quest for self-understanding, self-development and self-expansion, and not its questioning of historical events, particularly given its factual inaccuracy. Among the numerous princesses and female characters in the annals of animation releases, Anya stands out spectacularly as a liberated empowered lady, able to pursue her own pathway in life and to inspire others to do the same.

Gambling with Power: *Anastasia*, Takarazuka Revue's Live Performance

In the economy of the current analysis, three dimensions in Takarazuka Revue's representation of the *Anastasia*'s narrative stand out: the shifting importance of Russia as the background for live performances, the employment of *parimono* (Paris-centered performances since 1927's *Mon Paris* in Takarazuka Revue's nomenclature), and the position of the Cosmos Troupe in staging *Anastasia*.

In 2017, 100 years after the Bolshevik Revolution put an end to the centuries-old Russian Empire and changed the history of the world, the performance *The Land of Gods: The Twilight of the Romanovs* (at Takarazuka Grand Theatre from 18 August until 25 September 2017, and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre from 13 October until 19 November 2017) with Asaka Manato and Reimi Urara in the lead-roles, displayed in

nostalgic tones of remembrance and pain the tableau of a wintery Russian aristocracy, entangled in its own twisted sense of importance and unable to sense the upcoming upheavals. Cosmos Troupe delivered touching reverberations of times long past, but lacking the atemporal tension from earlier performances based on Leo Tolstoy's monumental novel *War and Peace* from 1869 (Star Troupe, 1988-1989, a subtle pretext to explore Napoleon Bonaparte's life and work) or his complex novel *Anna Karenina* from 1878 (Snow Troupe, 2001, Star Troupe, 2008, Moon Troupe, 2019, which, like *Gone with the Wind*, allowed Takarazuka Revue's administrators to orchestrate once again modern visions on masculinity based on the main female character's flaws and lack of existential direction and by focusing on Count Alexei Kirillovich Vronsky (Alyosha) who turns into the main character. In contrast, *The Land of Gods* investigates a symbolical return to the sacredness of rural life which could transcend history's violence and past suffering in the light of a new beginning (see P. Anderson 95; Stickland 142). Like Marie Antoinette, the Austrian queen of France who was guillotined due to her inability to see the reality metamorphosing in front of her own eyes and who is one of the most celebrated and mourned characters in the popular culture of Japanese media, the Romanovs are seen as ill-fated figures swallowed by the waves of history, inevitably intertwined with the dramatic shifts triggered by mechanisms of popularity, and completely cut-off from their intrinsic significance.

In *The Land of Gods*, both the obvious display of the social fact – revolution – and the unstoppable progression of the individual in the spotlight on the most powerful stage of a traditionally collectivist society – or at least, a society discursively constructed as "collectivist" – bring forth the vision of a world in which personal excellence conceived as a combination of integrity, empathy and vulnerability, on the one hand, and hard-work, persistence and humility, on the other hand, becomes the new standard in the main male character's constitution: Dmitri Pavlovich Romanov, a fictional cousin to Nicolas II and a young imperial guardsman, who synthesizes in his persona "authenticity" so deeply admired in the representatives of the divinely appointed aristocracy and upper-class. Yet, the violence of revolution and its dualism reveal the impossibility of following classical rules of behavior and internal validation as well as the

increasing ambivalence of traditionally transmitted ideals: there is comfort in the centuries-old Japanese code of unconditional obedience to rules, or in following strong leaders without asking for re-assurance, but modernity with its challenges and uncertainties dissolves the warm, soft protective layer offered by hierarchical structures and requires instead initiative and a sense of discernment (Hooks 51; Hori 73; Kimmel 91). The Romanovs' strikingly artificial appearance represents highly contradictory alternatives to the on-going project of re-inventing social roles and modeling them according to patterns established once again in accordance with historical requirements: in their fluid, non-controversial figures, with their weak, convoluted personalities and inability to provide material support, moral orientation to those around them or mental toughness in times of turmoil, the predominantly female Japanese audiences recognize traditional patterns of relating and identifying, both in their function as mothers and primary educators, and in their yearnings for a world of emotional outbursts and explosive passions.

Three years later, in late 2020, *Anastasia* breaks with the tradition of hesitant performance strategy and public display of educational conformity by eviscerating the *parimono* subgenre with naturalist insertions *à* la Zola and reframing it in Dostoevsky-like dimensions. The *parimono* genre refers in Takarazuka Revue's nomenclature to performances centered on Paris as the inception space of ideological modernity due to the French Revolution of 1789, and celebrated as such since 1927's *Mon Paris*, Japan's first performance patterned upon Western, specifically French, models while proclaiming, at the same time, Japan's supremacy and world leadership, with repeated reiterations ever since in ca. 30% of performances. The memorable *The Rose of Versailles* (『ベルサイユのばら』 *Berusaiyu no bara*) from 1974 and its numerous restagings in diverse settings throughout the decades play a crucial role in Takarazuka Revue's – and to a certain degree, in Japan's – success at representing itself domestically as the real center of the globally designed future.[ii]

In *Anastasia*, a huge parable on the protective power of amnesia and the benefits resulting from not always remembering the past – at least, not too accurately –, the main male character Dimitri (without family name), a man of questionable morality, turns to the right path in contact with genuine

aristocracy which transcends poverty and betrayal. The female main character's absence of a clearly outlined past hinders her emergence as a full-fledged citizen; simultaneously, it allows for an infinity of potential futures to take shape, initially blurry, on the horizon of historical manifestations, counterpointing Anya's silhouette and her shy waltz among the many shadows haunting the derelict imperial palace and its symbolical ramifications in interwar France. Takarazuka Revue's *Anastasia* reiterates prewar *Mon Paris*' imperialist ethos and its overtly paternalist message from 1927, embedded within a thick emotional fabric of *otokoyaku*'s cool reticence and *musumeyaku*'s cute submission, which reverse the cliché of the disempowered human being into a hero of longing and, paradoxically, belonging (see Iwahori 12; Takaoka 54). As in *The Land of Gods*, generosity and spiritual enlightenment underscore, according to the axiological ideal promoted by Takarazuka Revue, the re-evaluation of humanity from a competitive undertaking towards a playful togetherness. The desire to situate Japan in its symbolic representation by Takarazuka Revue Company as a credible successor to the world's last two great empires, the Russian Empire before it became the Soviet Union and the United States of America, transpires from deep within and inoculates itself into audiences' subconscious. Beneath this stylistic cacophony, ideological inconsistency and aesthetic contradictions, Takarazuka Revue as a historical phenomenon arises as a romantic world – and above all, a world full of longing for romantics, with the *takarasienne* as a "Lichtgestalt," an athletic, slender "angel of light" profiled on the background of a rigorous, disciplined lifestyle as the pathway to individual fulfillment and national supremacy.

Moreover, in tune with *Mon Paris*' initial plot of a train trip from Takarazuka to Paris in 1927, passing through various cities in several Asian and European countries, *Anastasia*'s train excursion starting in Moscow is a direct reference to Hankyû Railways Holdings, to which Takarazuka Revue belongs as an economic sub-entity. At the same time, the train trip appears as a symbolic appropriation of the "other" and a powerful mechanism to materialize the self in relation to that mysterious "other" (see Kawasaki, *Takarazuka: The Spectacle* 112-123; Robertson 106). The staggering success of *Mon Paris* and the longstanding performance strategy it launched might be explained by the increasing awareness of the regular

citizen of inclusion within a greater whole, in which consumption and excess are intensified by the foreign flavor of unknown places and people. More importantly, *Mon Paris* has continuously provided nostalgic undertones and ideological orientation since its world-premiere, despite never being re-staged after Japan's surrender in August 1945. In *Anastasia*, it is not the French Revolution of 1789 which disturbs history, but the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which satisfies the irresistible urge of human beings to witness dramatic shifts in the outer world in order to submit to radical changes within – a drive deeply, radically outrooted by systematic education in Japan (Watanabe, *The Japanese Culture* 119). The empathic participation in the live representation, as performer or spectator, mediates the feeling of connectedness in this parallel world to modern Japanese ordinary life, infused with Western influences, dominated by consumerism, excess and the illusion of luxury through surplus. By overwhelmingly orchestrating these very parameters – Western-like appearance of the actresses, consumption-driving marketing strategies, excess-, luxury- and surplus-celebrating performance practices –, Takarazuka Revue shows an uncanny ability to foresee history's development, and to represent it *avant-la-lettre* on its shiny stage. The problem remains, of course, the fact that the world at large is a far less shiny stage – and far less favorable to the Japanese view of reality than Takarazuka Revue would gladly want to make its audiences believe.

In the long run, *Anastasia*'s disruption of the *parimono* subgenre might prove a slightly modified return to the ideal of Takarazuka Revue's founder Kobayashi Ichizô (1873–1957) of it being a theater for the average people and representing them, their dreams and their yearnings. Combined with the preference for the Cosmos Troupe as the carrier of Takarazuka Revue's most progressive contents, the theatrical medium "Takarazuka Revue" turns once again into an instrument of reflecting, promoting, propagating, implementing, and thus providing alternative role-models and existential paradigms to audiences within the neo-liberal undercurrents crisscrossing Japan's public discourse in mid- and late 2010s – (in)famous for its increasingly conservative tendencies (Leheny 129; see B. Anderson 45; see Allison 119).[iii] *Anastasia* additionally reinforces the subliminal premises for the *wakon wasai* ("Japanese spirit/roots, Japanese technology/

knowledge") strategy, with friendship (*yûai*) and kindness (*yasashisa*) as core parameters of a new paradigm of humanity, and transcending the (Western) modernity – which had been emulated by Meiji technocrats into the *wakon yôsai* ("Japanese spirit/roots, Western technology/knowledge") slogan. Unlike the (Western) modernity project, based on efficiency and competitiveness and prioritizing economic growth and technological progress over political stability and social cohesion, the Japanese solution brings into the foreground cooperation and compassion as sociocultural parameters, compounded by integrity and harmony as tools to attain and keep peace, both within nations and, more importantly, between nations.

While it has been repeatedly argued that Takarazuka Revue – a huge institution within the highly corporatist entertainment industry in Japan – represents a typical phenomenon of cultural-intellectual hybridization which has been occurring since 1868 and dovetails with the prevailing social-political agenda by buttressing aesthetic-ideological patterns officially endorsed by the Japanese establishment, *Anastasia* displays once again Takarazuka Revue's public self-advertisement policy as a "world of love" (*ai no sekai*), in which "friendship, hard-work and (individual) excellence" (Ueda 34) serve the greater ideal of a dynamic community based on compassion, respect and trust among its members – the supreme goals of any enlightened society in the late-modern era, with "self-love" at its core as initially postulated by Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving* (1956): a concatenation of self-acceptance, self-compassion and self-respect, compounded by courage and integrity – as well as kindness. Kobayashi rejected specific structures of the Japanese traditional theatre, such as music, which he considered unsuitable for powerful military marches or impressive chorus, and, consequently, adopted Western (popular) music, even in Asian or Japanese plots, where popular melodic clichés were mixed with Western sounds. His goals to create a theatre "for the people" and to offer them models of discipline and hard-work, on the one hand, and to support the imperialist levelling efforts, on the other hand, were summed-up as follows: "entertainment (*kairaku*), education (*kyôyô*) and assimilation (*dôka*) of the audiences can be attained through manners (*girei*), social interactions (*shako*) and friendship (*shinwa*)" (Takaoka 194; Watanabe, *Takarazuka Revue's Metamorphosis* 39). It is within this complex framework

that Takarazuka Revue's performative educational practices and their powerful impact outside of the entertainment industry are to be observed.

The reality of the audiences and of their interaction with Takarazuka Revue's administrators and actresses is, in fact, the reality of a manually crafted metaphorical work subtly but effectively (inter)woven in *Anastasia*'s dramaturgic architecture, which, if left unchecked, might symbolically trigger the collapse of what society currently views as "reality". When controlled, it is indeed a romantic, friendly metaphorical work softly melting fantasy and substantiality into one. Juxtaposed over this message of political acceptance and economic nurturance, there is the far-reaching idea of a "world of love," incessantly promoted by Takarazuka Revue in its public advertisements of corporate policy. While it is a perfectly valid ideal to live by, its practical affirmation makes place for abusive interpretation, with very limited freedom of movement and coming dangerously close to wartime rhetorics (Uchino 75-78). It is true that theatrical performance allows for freedom of expression and exploration of potential worlds. It also delves into new ways of re-semantization of familiar circumstances. The Japanese version of stage representation as provided by Takarazuka Revue, though, raises more questions than it seeks to answer, not least due to its unilateral view of history and historical circumstances. More than being a stable entity for the "silent majority" to follow, Takarazuka Revue's proposal for a future society suggests rather a shadowy adaptation to the expectations and pressures of that very "silent majority" whom the *takarasienne* was once supposed – or chosen – to lead. Only the future can show whether this vision of individual excellence and universalism, which has been the foundation of Western creativity, innovation and progress, can offer valid solutions for Japan, Asia and the world at large-as well.

Conclusion: From Russia, with Love

The *Anastasia* topos is a charged one: on the one hand, it echoes deep collective memories of blatant social inequalities, limitless luxury in contrast with bottomless poverty, and the historically materialized necessity to erase them; on the other hand, it delivers undeniable proofs of the

meaningless brutality of masses led into destruction and bloodshed without substantial changes resulting in the aftermath – in fact, recent history shows that quite the opposite tends to happen after the demise of strong leaders, as autocratic and despotic as they might have been. Additionally, its popularity connects to the main site of development in the initial iterations – interwar Paris – as the intellectual-cultural center of the civilized world, having emerged and flourished from the chaos of another history-changing event: the French Revolution. In critically observing the animated version and the live theatrical performance of *Anastasia*, two dimensions stand out: firstly, the feminine presence gaining contours and individuality against the background of the revolution(s), serving as a soft reminder that change does not have to be violent but can, in fact, occur in tones of peaceful conflict, both necessary and healthy; secondly, the shifting world order from a West-dominated one towards a pluri-centric one which would allow for parallel systems to coexist, perhaps even harmoniously, rather than relentlessly fight each other.

Both in Bluth and Goldman's version and in Takarazuka Revue's version, Anya's journey is not about socioeconomic gain: it is about understanding her own self. In the animated movie, this personal journey reflects the preoccupations of the time, with feminism becoming increasingly intellectually relevant, questioning the male-regulated discourses of individual development and registering female life trajectories as equally important in the definition, perception, processing, appropriation and reiteration of role-models. In the live theatrical version, despite the focus on Dimitri due to topstar-*otokoyaku*'s absolute position in Takarazuka Revue's dramaturgic logic, it is still Anya commanding the performance's significance, a huge and unique modification from the company's more-than-centennial policy. As unexpected as this may seem, it is indicative of the increasingly powerful awareness that female instances do indeed play crucial roles in the society, not only as mothers and primary educators but more so as active citizens and reliable, responsible members (see Fuller and Goffey 29-33; Greene 2018). The role of the Cosmos Troupe in this configuration emphasizes the revolutionary stance: progressive and staging more often than not performances with contrarian messages to the Japanese status quo, the Cosmos Troupe serves in 2020's *Anastasia*'s

import to Japan as a mediator between the millennial tradition and the creativity of times yet to come within the unstoppable flux of history.

Although potentially more imperative, the second dimension draws upon the first one: it is the gradual realization that upheaval does not have to be violent but can borrow smoothness from the femininity of transitions, organically unfolding as step-by-step processes and therefore allowing for events to unravel towards final goals which might transcend initially envisioned outcomes. The ending, in which Anya-turned-Anastasia chooses to elope with Dimitri instead of enjoying the privileges of her socioeconomic position, is, I would argue, the crucial secret beneath *Anastasia*'s enduring popularity despite the conventionality of the animated medium: life is a flow of events and there is always something which our limited consciousnesses cannot grasp. Releasing control and moving forward open-mindedly allows for the limitless potentialities of the world and of history to manifest themselves naturally, without our often violent intervention. This is in line with the vision of a more feminine, pluri-centric or rhizome-like existence, into which the emerging global order seems to constitute itself: if we do not want a repetition of history as it cyclically reveals itself since times immemorial (Dalio 2021), we need to allow a feminization of history to enter the universal circuit, as a complementary structure to the one familiar so far and largely promoted as unique and uniquely possible, stemming from the multi-millennial experience of the human race. As in Takarazuka Revue's version of *Anastasia*, it is not a replacement, but a peaceful harmonization of two essential architectures within the same conglomerate: in the same manner topstar-*otokoyaku* constructively cooperates with topstar-*musumeyaku* in building up a coherent narrative of mutual acceptance, respect and understanding, without any attempts at overpowering each other, the world could start to move towards a multi-dimensionality of co-existent systems, instead of fiercely competing and continuously fighting each other. It is, one might argue, the Japanese vision of the future, the way it was projected before the pandemic struck in early 2020, a prominent remainder of Takarazuka Revue's scheduling its performances 12 to 18 months in advance. Things have changed tremendously ever since, but the lessons of the past remain the same with the clear message, despite ideological deviations, that unless

we learn and shift the paradigm towards universal benevolence, peaceful harmonization and creative permission for the organic manifestation of events, humanity is doomed.

Notes:

[i] Flower Troupe was formed in 1921 and is largely perceived as the most treasured of the five ensembles, with larger budgets and more lavish stage and costume designs as well as more powerful and impactful performances. Similarly, Moon Troupe was created in 1921, and was the one to push forward the performance strategy when it staged the world premieres of *Mon Paris* (1927), *The Rose of Versailles* (1974) and *Gone with the Wind* (1977), with meticulous attention to group performances (and in particular to powerful expression in chorus singing) and numerous adaptations from Western dramas. Snow Troupe, inaugurated in 1924, simultaneously with the opening of the first Takarazuka Grand Theatre, is considered the upholder of traditional dance and opera for the whole company and carries the reputation of being the vanguard of classical Japanese drama; on this backdrop, the fact that it premiered in Japan in 1996 the Vienna-original musical *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love and Death* from 1992 has symbolical underpinnings, with 'appropriation' and 'Japanisation' being among the main preoccupations. Lastly, Star Troupe was grounded in 1933, in the same year as the original Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre was inaugurated, but was banned from performing between 1939 and 1946; it is said that, like Flower Troupe, Star Troupe delivers strong, charismatic *otokoyaku* performers (such as Wataru Kozuki 2003-2006 and Reon Yuzuki 2009-2015) in performances with memorable messages.

[ii] The *parimono* subgenre initiated by *Mon Paris* in 1927 and shortly followed by *Parisette* (*Parizetto*) from 1930 and *Rose Paris* (*Rôzu Pari*) from 1931, includes all those performances with plots located in Paris (circa one third of all Takarazuka Revue performances), of which approximately half relate in one manner or another to the French Revolution of 1789. The most powerful example is the performance *The Rose of Versailles*: based on the hugely popular manga running originally from 1972–1973 by Ikeda Riyoko who drew inspiration from Stefan Zweig's biography *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman* (*Marie Antoinette: Bildnis eines mittleren Charakters*) from 1932, Takarazuka Revue's version of *The Rose of Versailles* by Ueda Shinji with the central plot located in Paris before, during and after the French Revolution of 1789 had its world premiere in 1974 and has been ever-since re-staged countless times, by all Takarazuka Revue's troupes and with various narrative lines around that major historical event.

[iii] 2014 and 2017 have been turning-point years for Takarazuka Revue due to its centennial celebration, and its 90th celebration of *Mon Paris*, respectively.

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