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The Birth and Death of a Professional Wrestling Alter-Ego: Takahara Hidekazu's *Gamushara* and the Loss of a Transgressive Identity

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Takahara Hidekazu's (1961–) documentary *Gamushara (Live Recklessly, 2015)* about the *joshi puroresu*, or Japanese women's professional wrestling, star Yasukawa Act (1986–) and her working through of past sexual trauma in the wrestling ring features a very curious but crucial casting note.¹ The film's star, Yasukawa, gets three separate billings in the end credits. She is listed by her birth name Yasukawa Yuka (安川祐香), her stage name which is also Yasukawa Yuka but spelled with different characters (安川結花) and her wrestling alter-ego's name Yasukawa Act (安川悪斗). The credits gesture to the amorphous identity that the film seeks to capture, sensing the fissures and continuities that exist between a mild-mannered woman and her more theatrical, vicious selves. The triple billing for a single individual frames professional wrestling as a potent site for identity formation and fluidity. In his essay on wrestling, Roland Barthes points to a sharp disjuncture between the star in the ring and the performer outside of it. He writes as follows: “wrestling holds the power of transmutation which is common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship.”² In the ring, one can and does transform the self. Other scholars on wrestling like Gregory Stone have found that “the major task of the established professional wrestler is identity work—building and husbanding an identity that can mobilize the appreciations of the audience and maintain them over time.”³ With the



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Gamushara cycle, which includes the feature film *Gamushara* and its sequel *After Gamushara* (2016), produced for the film's home video release, filmmaker Takahara explores this question of transformation and highlights the remarkable distance a performer can come to feel to one's various selves defined by transgressive behavior. Such a developing dissonance could be sensed in two interviews that Marianne Tarcov and I conducted with Takahara and Yasukawa that took place before and after the latter's retirement from the ring. During our first interview, Yasukawa would unconsciously move between the quiet Yuka and the more aggressive Act persona. After her retirement (in our second interview), Tarcov asked the former wrestler "will Act be joining us?" She replied in the negative, because Act only comes out as fan service now.⁴

The catalyzing trauma that propelled Yasukawa's own estrangement with her selves was what the Japanese media labeled the "Ghastly Match," wherein she had her orbital bone shattered in the ring. Takahara followed Yasukawa over the course of a year, tracking her recovery as well as her sudden retirement due to injury. The home video sequel *After Gamushara* offers, I will argue, a unique portrait of a woman holding on to her spectacular, transgressive identity before letting it die.⁵ The cycle shows the birth and death of an identity built upon the receiving and inflicting of violence at the point of healing and asks: what strength is lost within this process? What freedom is gained at the loss of an alter-ego defined by a transgressive femininity? In answering such questions, it frames the potential hold of the audience on a transgressive persona—a metaphorical wrestling match that pits viewer against artist—while revealing the difficulties for a woman working to change and overcome the "script" that governs her in-ring performances and shades her traumas.

This article frames Yasukawa's growing alienation from her selves through close formal analysis of the films, interviews with the filmmaking team and fellow wrestlers, and a theoretical framework that combines studies on recovery from trauma with those detailing the transgressive possibility of wrestling and its structuring dichotomy between the fake and the real. It positions the film against previous representations of *joshi puroresu* in cinema to track the shifting gender politics of the form as it has come to be appreciated by a largely male audience as well as against Takahara's previous self-critical pornographic Pink films. Such comparisons underline how Yasukawa's

feminine transgression exists within a fraught and muddled setting often shaped by a male gaze. To consider the possibilities and limits of Yasukawa's multivalent transgression of both gender and identity norms as well as the operating scripts of professional wrestling and trauma, the article also engages with gender scholar Sharon Marcus's writing on how the rape script might be transcended via the development of a woman's capacity for violence. Through such a critical prism, Takahara's *Gamushara* cycle ultimately emerges as a vital and crucially murky documentary cycle for gender and media scholars concerned with the tensions of identity formation within spaces of spectacle wherein one's performed screams might mask one's real cries for help.

In previous scholarship, Japanese professional wrestling or *puroresu* has been identified as a form capable of particularly transgressive identity work, in terms of both ethnicity and gender performance. During its emergence in the 1950s, a national hero appeared in the wrestling ring—the phenomenally popular Rikidōzan (1924–1963). As detailed by Lee Austin Thompson in his essay, “Professional Wrestling in Japan: Media and Message,” Rikidōzan captivated audiences via his presentation of an invincible Japanese identity. One contemporary observer expressed the force of the power fantasy being fulfilled when describing his first glimpse of Rikidōzan on television. He stated, “on the screen was a [Japanese] man raining karate chops on a huge foreigner. If that didn't astound you, nothing would. It was really an unbelievable sight.”⁶ Through the wrestler's matches, Occupation era (1945–1952) audiences witnessed a defeated Japan re-ascendant.⁷ However, in a fact that was underreported, even hidden during his lifetime, “Rikidōzan was not Japanese.”⁸ Born to Korean parents on the Korean peninsula, the star developed a wrestling persona completely sheared from his past, which permitted his escape from the discrimination facing Korean and Zainichi Korean populations in Japan. For Thompson, Rikidōzan's spectacular mode of passing, a strategy later adopted by other non-ethnically Japanese wrestlers, highlights a crucial and often forgotten fact: “‘Japanese-ness’ is a status that is attributed (or withheld) based on performance.”⁹ Thompson's description of what Rikidōzan unveils about the performativity of cultural identity is made within an essay which reminds readers:

assessing pro wrestling's claims and reasoning for legitimacy confronts us more broadly with the fragility of other activities, sporting and otherwise, that we usually unquestioningly accept as legitimate.

Studying *puroresu* highlights more general legitimizing and reality-making techniques.¹⁰

Professional wrestling thus offers a disruptive site to glimpse the performativity behind seemingly natural modes of identity—to sense the performed that legitimizes and makes up the reality of the authentic.

Joshi puroresu presents a site where the identity transgression going on in the ring is specifically gendered. The ring acts as a space where *kawaii*, or cute women, grapple against opponents who display non-normative or butch gender attributes. Furthermore, these disparate elements sometimes co-exist within individual wrestlers. Meiji Gakuin University sociologist and preeminent *joshi puroresu* scholar Aiba Keiko emphasizes that some wrestlers have the outward appearance of the *kawaii* but refuse to adopt its typically helpless stature in the ring.¹¹ *Gamushara*, with its presentation of the different body types and mannerisms of the wrestlers, offers a useful catalogue of the entire spectrum of *joshi* performance, while also denoting how such performances can contain a sexualized aspect. The film frequently presents Yasukawa's submission hold—which involves splaying open the legs of her more classically feminine opponents over her head—as a villainous move for how it highlights and over-performs the sexual objectification at work within *joshi puroresu*. Her fellow wrestler Kris Wolf gestures toward this reality dictated by a male gaze when emphasizing, in a personal interview, that although the ring offers a space for expansive gender performance “where you can be any type of person,” it is the more classically feminine wrestlers who “sell the most” merchandise.¹² Like Yasukawa's purposely exposing submission hold, Wolf's stress on underlying economic considerations for the female wrestlers begins to expose the limits of transgression in the ring brokered and appraised by a mostly male audience.

Previous cinematic representations of *joshi puroresu* featuring working female wrestlers helpfully illustrate its changing gender politics, particularly the increasing presence of the male audience that Wolf invokes and to which the *Gamushara* cycle gestures. Contrasting *The Beauty Pair: Makka na seishun (Red-Hot Youth, 1977)* directed by Naitō Makoto (1936–) with *Ningen kyōki ai to ikari no ringu (A Human Murder Weapon, 1992)* directed by Miike Takashi (1960–) shows how *joshi puroresu* has shifted in perception from a popular vehicle for representations of powerful women for women to a marginal pursuit for mostly males seeking a titillating thrill. Makoto's film stars the Beauty

Pair—Jackie Sato (1957–1999) and Ueda Maki (1959–)—a team of wrestlers who became pop idols and ignited the first *joshi puroresu* boom in Japan back in the 1970s.¹³ The film opens with hundreds of screaming fans waiting to be serenaded; the documentary imagery recalls that of films like the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) directed by Richard Lester (1932–). Once the Beauty Pair appear on the stage, these female fans throw streamers emulating how star wrestlers are traditionally received upon entering the ring and underlining the association of these icons with wrestling. The film goes on to frame the art form as one of female empowerment as it shows the women being inspired by a *joshi* wrestler who easily dispatches a collection of thuggish male harassers. After the boom periods of the seventies and eighties, the audience of *joshi puroresu* shrank considerably and transformed. Miike's low budget direct-to-video release, *Ningen kyōki ai to ikari no ringu*, features popular *joshi* stars from the early nineties performing not for thousands of women but for a dozen leering (and mostly Caucasian) men.¹⁴ One scene shows the film's love interest in the ring, played by the *kawaii* wrestler Kudo Megumi, being beaten, stripped naked, and digitally sodomized by her butch opponent, played by noted villain Combat Toyoda. Miike's film frames female strength in the ring as a route to erotic exposure. The *Gamushara* cycle was produced during today's post-boom period when *joshi puroresu* stars also produce erotic photo books for their fans wherein they seductively pose. *Joshi puroresu* draws mainstream attention not through the empowering pop anthems that defined the Beauty Pair but through incidents like the Ghastly Match, moments of graphic violence that would not be out of place in an exploitation film by Miike. Unlike either Naito or Miike's films, where the camera shifts between audience and performer, Takahara's documentary cycle places its visual emphasis upon the wrestlers operating in this spectacular and sometimes dangerous space while leaving their adoring audiences primarily offscreen. In so doing, it individualizes the wrestlers, particularly Yasukawa, while transforming the male audience into a screaming, peripheral mass.¹⁵

Centering on a wrestler confronted by and confronting her audience, whose complicitous position I will theorize throughout the paper, the *Gamushara* cycle presents Yasukawa's transgression as a multivalent one. She transgresses not only norms of gender and identity but also operating scripts, particularly those that surround both her past sexual trauma of rape and her performance in the ring. In her performance, as a

villain or heel who takes punishment, Yasukawa freely muddies the distinctions between perpetrator and victim. Her dualistic subject-position illustrates why the ring is a particularly powerful venue for women to create a newly resistant, disruptive mode of femininity. In its juxtaposition between different kinds of violence both against and by Yasukawa—be it the performed, the real, or the remembered—the series showcases how a subject becomes molded by and works to mold the scripts of brutality that surround her.

Gender scholar Sharon Marcus provides a productive theoretical frame to appreciate the transgressions in the subject's redefinition of self that this paper will tease out via formal analysis of sequences within the documentaries. Marcus argues that the prevalent rape script promotes, "a gendered grammar of violence [that] predicates men as the subjects of violence and the operators of its tools, and predicates women as the object of violence and the subjects of fear," and she argues that women can challenge the rape script by developing their own "capacities for violence."¹⁶ *Gamushara* presents a subject that has re-scripted the narrative of her rape through the development of her body and an embrace of an often-staged violence. It tracks her moves into a spectacular space marked by what Marcus describes as "subject-subject" violence typically reserved for men, a violence between equal opponents and which ostensibly operates with the logic of "the fair fight." In so doing, the film offers an image of femininity that Marcus argues needs to be produced, one where a woman is the "potential object of fear and agent of violence."¹⁷ Wrestling, however, is a fight that is never fair. As Barthes emphasizes, it is a masquerade that thrives on the breaking of rules, on cheating villains, and the performers in this staged contest of violence are always subjected to a third party—those who watch from the stands.¹⁸ The very ambiguity of wrestling permits Takahara's *Gamushara* cycle to push beyond Marcus's formulations, infusing the process of a woman re-scripting her violent trauma and becoming a subject of violence with its own added and compelling ambiguity.

Director Takahara Hidekazu has long captured and teased out such ambiguities that manifest within spectacular productions and in film documentary. With his film and avant-garde theatre productions, Takahara has shown continual interest in playing with such uncertainties as he explores what he describes as "the backstage of humanity" and hidden selves.¹⁹ The artist's mission statement is perhaps most saliently expressed by the titular heroine in the 2004 Pink film, *Tsumugi* (2004),

who states, “I am comfortable with ambiguity.”²⁰ His 2008 play *Girls Hate Pure*, made with his all-female acting troupe, lovepunk, and which starred Yasukawa, directly questions the assumed veracity of documentaries.²¹ A character reprimands her mother for being too candid on-camera about her sex life and exclaims, “You don’t have to be honest in these things!” *Gamushara* contains surprising formal echoes to his past Pink films creating intertextual allusions that, if seen, provoke a similar skepticism toward the authenticity of the documentary form and an awareness of its staged nature. When Yasukawa rides on a zipline in a playground in *Gamushara*, the shot parallels exactly one where Tsumugi rides a zipline in *Tsumugi*. These linkages thus provoke questions that are central to Takahara’s destabilizing art: where lies the deception in the documentary form? Where sits reality in the spectacle of pornographic Pink film? With *Gamushara*, the question is brought to the spectacle of *puroresu*, a world that he argues is analogous to pornography for how both are spectacles that depend on the body as a mode of expression.²²

Upon *Gamushara*’s release, influential documentarian Hara Kazuo (1945–) wrote a laudatory review of the film for the journal *Kinema Junpō* that helps underline its importance to the contemporary Japanese documentary canon while also drawing attention to some of its core tensions. He noted of Yasukawa, “she performs as a heel, as villain, with all her might, but she is a girl fighting her own cruel destiny, so earnest it’s painfully lovable, noble with pure, true feeling.... It appears that I have fallen in love with this heroine.”²³ Hara, who has made acclaimed documentary studies of both transgressive women and trauma, finds in *Gamushara* a film where performance might exude the pure and true. How Hara admits to having fallen in love with Yasukawa obliquely echoes the seemingly ironic and vexed position that Takahara occupies—as a noted male Pink film director who crafts a nuanced portrait of burgeoning female strength in the face of sexual trauma, even as his camera eye remains both compelled by and accentuates her physicality. His formation in cinema of the body ensures that the *Gamushara* cycle can articulate not only the persona’s physical allure but also the subtle stresses of her injury. For instance, after Yasukawa returns to training following injury in *Gamushara*, the film includes a cut-in on her trembling hand that is no longer able to steady itself. Moreover, Takahara’s earlier pornographic cinema contains an auto-critical dimension about the distorting and perverse dimension of the male gaze that is taken up throughout the *Gamushara* cycle. His Pink films often

push for a reckoning of the ways in which the viewer's pleasures are perverted. This emblematic distancing with his films' female objects of their desire occurs in *Tsumugi* when a sex scene is exposed as an instance of incest only at the point of climax. Echoing Yasukawa's own pulling away from her fans, the *Gamushara* cycle emerges as a portrait of distance, wherein the subject of the camera's fascination pulls further away from its gaze to become ever more indecipherable as her persona seemingly dies. Such a feeling of distance, of lost bearings, is reinforced by the central dichotomy between the fake and the real that exists within wrestling, wherein the trueness of all performance is always up for debate and can never fully be known.

Such a tension inspired Takahara's film with Yasukawa, who was his former acting student. He argues that pro wrestling and documentary film synthesize the fake and the real, and he claims that it is the border between these polarities that attracts him to both forms. During our interview, he cautioned against considering *Gamushara* as an authentic portrayal of the subject noting, "Documentary is always fake. Peering through someone's point of view is always fake."²⁴ For him, the three credits of Yasukawa are designed to emphasize this proposition—to remind us that Yasukawa is always seen through the distorting prism of "my way of looking at her and my sense of distance from her."²⁵ Indeed, the central un-knowability of Yasukawa, her swaying between personas, is again reiterated early on in *Gamushara* by the testimonies of her fellow wrestlers. The first colleague interviewed in the film, Takahashi Nanae, notes, "Every time I see her, I get a different impression," highlighting the core instability in her self-presentation. Takahashi goes on to stress that "a sense of pro wrestling equals a sense of communication." For the wrestler, Yasukawa troubles the communication between wrestlers that is said to be a core feature of the spectacle. Another wrestler Taiyo Natsuki contradicts Takahashi by asserting that Yasukawa "has to be honest to fight so I trust her in the ring." Lacing such pointedly contradictory testimonies with yet another layer of performance, the film stages many of these interviews with the wrestlers in their costumes and in front of the wrestling organization World Wonder Ring Stardom's bright yellow banner. Takahashi even appears to still be sweating from a recent bout in the ring. Such destabilizing visual elements that evoke the theatre of the craft encourage questions: in the world of *puroresu*, can one truly ever be out of character? Inversely, and perhaps more crucially, is one's character any

less true-to-life than one's inherited identity? As Yasukawa was quick to emphasize in one personal interview, "Act is my authentic self. When I hit, when I am fighting, I actually cannot act in the ring."²⁶ The sequence depicting these wrestler testimonies emblemizes the paradox of her claim and the feeling of uncertainty that the cycle cultivates, one sparked by a rocking between the seemingly fake and real worlds of both documentary and that of *puroresu*.

Using the very fraught space of *puroresu* where one can hide oneself, where one can and must build a new persona that inspires trust, Takahara's *Gamushara* cycle stands as a documentary portrait not of intimacy but of distance, in which its star may be beginning to feel the camera's and her colleagues' detachment from her various selves. The Ghastly Match, the unseen fulcrum point between the two films of the *Gamushara* cycle, reiterates these tensions between artifice and authenticity due to its status as an ostensibly real moment of violence in a staged performative universe. Her aggressor, Yoshiko, appears throughout the original film as a figure who encapsulates the breakdown of the fiction. During the aforementioned interview sequence with Act's colleagues, Yoshiko spews to the camera, "I don't believe her. It looks like she is acting all the time.... I detest her. Period." Such testimony could frame the Ghastly Match that preceded the film's release as a traumatizing lesson wherein the consummate professional, Yoshiko, forced the always theatrical Act to experience authentic brutality and thus make her expressed pain believable—to break down Act's act.

Their undepicted in-ring confrontation inspires a consideration of how different kinds of authentic and performed violence are identified in wrestling. In wrestling parlance, a typically staged wrestling match is described as a "work," as in working the audience. A moment of true violence is called a "shoot," deriving perhaps from shooting from the hip. Wrestlers often view shoots as grave breaches of trust that the performers need to place in each other. Kris Wolf, who witnessed the Ghastly Match, claims the ring draws women as it fulfills the contradictory need "to act violently and still wanting to be safe."²⁷ Shoots strip the site of violent spectacle of this overarching security. All distinctions grow muddy when considering the so-called "worked shoot," a moment staged to look like an authentic moment of violence or what media scholar Wilson Koh usefully defines as a "story-line incident that blurs the boundaries between the predetermined lie of 'work' and the legitimate truth of 'shoot.'"²⁸ The shock of the Ghastly Match comes in part for what it

reveals about professional wrestling's relationship to authentic violence as well as the opposing views between performer and spectator, specifically the former's repulsion towards it and the viewers' own pleasure in it.

Lingering on the Ghastly Match's reception in the Japanese media proves useful for understanding these conflicting expectations between performer and audience. The incident was characterized as a grotesque perversion of *puroresu* by some, including the most popular male star, Tanahashi Hiroshi. He criticized the popular magazine *Puroresu Weekly* for putting a bloody Yasukawa on its cover. In his printed "A Very Special Talk" with the magazine editors the week after which Yasukawa was the cover story, Tanahashi labeled the real violence as antithetical to the art form and derided its celebration in the magazine.²⁹ Responding to the magazine's defense that the Ghastly Match exemplifies wrestling's inherently violent spectacle, Tanahashi dubbed the editors as hypocrites for not putting the photos of a more mutilated Yasukawa on their cover. Tanahashi falls in line with Yasukawa herself who admits in *After Gamushara* that the Ghastly Match is not "true" *puroresu*. For these performers, true or shoot violence perverts the form. For the spectators, emblemized by the *Puroresu Weekly* editors, such a shoot is worth celebrating as the essence of the *puroresu*. The *Gamushara* cycle comes to increasingly highlight a central antagonism between wrestler and her audience, between the former's desire to perform and the latter's desire for blood. Thompson suggests the allure of the real in wrestling when describing its fans as either naive "believers" who trust, to some degree, that they watch true competition, or canny "sophisticates" who understand that they watch a staged spectacle. Assessing the pleasures of the sophisticate, Thompson asserts that "he may watch for those brief moments when he believes he sees a display of real emotion, or the real application of a normally showy move."³⁰ Thompson reveals that some fans hope and remain drawn to the shoot moments, to "the real application" of a move, where a truly destructive violence may occur in the ring. These witnesses thus have an appetite which wears on the body and the psyche of the victim of the Ghastly Match who sacrifices all for the show.

While the *Gamushara* cycle foregrounds corrosive aspects of the sport, in keeping with its signature vacillations, the films also remind viewers the spectacular tools it offers Yasukawa to create an ideal self that exists outside of a narrow-gendered frame, one capable of healing

from past sexual trauma. The film situates the birth of the Act persona against the masculine power fantasies of Yasukawa's childhood, the rape she suffered as a teenager along with the suicide attempts and acts of self-harm that the experience provoked. Early on, *Gamushara* juxtaposes Yasukawa's debut in the ring with a photo montage of her childhood. Against images of Yasukawa as a child climbing trees and wielding swords, the subject speaks of her "tomboy" side and her dream to be a samurai where she might take part in mythic battles of good versus evil. After being told by her friends and family her dream was an impossible one, Yasukawa quit *kendō*. To suggest the disappointment of this realization, the film places her words of disillusionment over a photo of her unsheathing a *seppuku* blade, as though Yasukawa came to kill a part of herself upon realizing that she could not emulate the masculine ideals of pop icons (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Yuka with a *seppuku* knife. *Gamushara* (Takahara, 2015).

Following this montage of images from her past, the film cuts to a sequence entitled "Wannabe Samurai" where the wrestler takes on the position of a masculine aggressor, guzzling sake and spitting in the face of opponent and referee alike. She yells and growls as she contorts and humiliates her opponent. The film jumps from the stasis of the photo montage of childhood to the relentless motion of Yasukawa in the ring. In voice-over, she describes her acceptance in the role of a comical heel

or villain. Later on, before winning her first championship, Yasukawa arrives to the ring dressed in full samurai regalia. No longer does she wield a *seppuku* knife; instead she swings a *katana*, signaling that her childhood dream of becoming and being accepted as a samurai has become reality (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Yasukawa with a *katana*. *Gamushara* (Takahara, 2015).

For our purposes, the shift in her weapon—from self-destroying to self-empowering—presages the eventual death and resurrection of Yasukawa Act that I argue is a core theme of the cycle.

Yasukawa's visible transformation into the samurai Act in these in-ring sequences exemplifies previous scholarship about the transgressive possibility of *puroresu* for women in terms of their gender performance. To emphasize the liberating force of wrestling, the film presents another montage of photos depicting the hyper feminine space Yasukawa existed within as a gravure model before her professional wrestling career took off. At this earlier point in her career, she adopts a femininity constituted by a lace negligee and submissive, come-hither posturing. While Yasukawa's voice-over emphasizes that acting offered a route to her salvation after the traumas of her childhood, the film's deployment of a narrow visual frame for many of the on-screen photos denote that her persona as a gravure model may have been similarly constricted. *Puroresu*, by contrast, offers entirely new performative possibilities.

Itani Satoko argues that the wrestling ring exploits the “discursive fissure between the sexist and normative discourse of ‘women’ and ‘devoted female athletes,’” so as to give its performers a “third gender space” wherein “diverse and resistant gender practices (i. e., masculine embodiment and/or gender expression, player of a masculine sport, etc.) are made possible.”³¹ Itani cites and builds upon the writings of Aiba Keiko who notes that the pro wrestler’s body “demands transgression” for how it can synthesize opposing gender modes.³² Aiba writes, “the body of women wrestlers who allow the traits of the ideal *female* body and those of the *male* body to coexist in themselves effectively destabilizes, and thus transforms, the dichotomous sex gender system.”³³ Act’s costume, seen throughout the cycle, offers an a-symmetric fusion of masculine and feminine tropes. One leg of her leather pants is tailored to reveal her bare thigh. Her leather top contains eyelets on the sides to expose the skin of her flank. Beyond sexualizing the woman, the exposed skin on costumes also draws attentions to the bruises and the welts caused by competition. What could be read as elements of costuming that emphasize femininity can also serve to frame the performers’ strength and ability to persevere in the face of punishment. As Act, Yasukawa can occupy the position of a masculine “agent of violence,” to use Marcus’s phrasing.

Gamushara suggests that the price a woman pays for such liberation, for the right to transgress and act violently, is the health of her body. Scenes of combat in the ring sometimes contain captions that reveal the “real life” injuries that she receives within worked sequences of fighting. Before a key example of this presentational style, Yasukawa tells the camera, “I wanted to do this [match] as I am without hiding or pretending.” As she speaks, the film cuts to two very brief shots of Act’s large banner hanging in the arena which includes the phrase “An Actress Soul.” Such editing appears to undercut the veracity of her comments about openness by reminding the viewer of the subject’s occluding nature—she may always operate with the soul of a consummate performer. At the same time, the presence of an allegedly authentic or shoot injury in the wrestling match to follow encourages us to read the juxtaposition between Yasukawa and the signage in a different metaphoric light: as a signal for how a Yuka who seeks not to pretend may be similarly interrupted by the force of Act. Could Yuka’s appearance in the ring be as marginalized as her earnest testimony is by the image of the Act banner? The proceeding long back-and-forth battle

between Yasukawa and her mentor, Aikawa Yuzuki, contains a seemingly innocuous moment where the star receives a kick to the face before she falls on her back with her usual theatrical flair. The film then cuts to a mid-shot, framing Yasukawa alone and prone as a ring rope cuts across the frame. Disrupting the shot with the ring rope amplifies the disrupting presence of the caption, “This match seriously damaged her neck” (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Marking real injury within the spectacle. *Gamushara* (Takahara, 2015).

A wider shot of the wrestler follows which again positions her alone in the frame, producing a sensation of isolation that suggests her injury cannot be shared with her opponent or the audience that watches. The exact instant of authentic hurt to Yasukawa’s neck always remains illegible to the film viewer, lost within the bombast of the fighting. The ambiguously phrased captions disturb because they reveal the difficulties in empathizing with a performer whose persona has been transmuted by the Spectacle which depends on the creation of semblances of pain. We begin to realize not only what is gained but also lost within the discursive fissure of *puroresu* , where new transgressive identities emerge concurrently with a potential loss of expression. Such a point is more fully articulated in *After Gamushara* where Yasukawa can no longer physically heal from her pains.

Indeed, the shift in Yasukawa away from the ring and its empowering energies is made apparent in the divergent opening

sequences between the main documentary and its home video sequel. *Gamushara* begins with a cacophony—the screams of Yasukawa receiving punishment across a series of matches. The first two shots show the wrestler rising upwards from the canvas, as if to meet the violence head on. Set at almost a sadistic pitch, the sequence removes the theatricality from the presentation to hint at the very real consequences of the ostensibly staged brutality. It ends not with screams of horror but with roars of approval as the crowd cheers Act's name. The spectators love Act because of how she absorbs such a barrage of blows. Reflecting on the scene in our interview, Yasukawa found, "I get punched, and I stand back up, and I get punched some more—that is my style of *puroresu*."³⁴ The scene acts as an oblique demonstration of a wrestling technique known as *ukemi*, or what Aiba defines as "the receiving of one's opponent's moves."³⁵ Aiba stresses that "wrestling is different from combat sports such as judo and boxing in that a wrestler has to be able to receive the full brunt of her opponent's attack," using their technique to safely absorb the onslaught before launching their own offensive maneuvers.³⁶ In a study of the training process designed to teach newcomers *ukemi* and toughen them up, Aiba mentions one wrestler whose body had been transformed. The wrestler had grown inured to the wear-and-tear of in-ring performance so that she "really believes' that human bodies are amazing."³⁷ The resilience on display in the opening of *Gamushara* works to show the strength and the resolve of the performer. It also attests to a spectacle built around the awe-inspiring and amazing withstanding of bodily pain.

Contrasting the screams and blurs of motion presented in *Gamushara*, its sequel opens in a space of quiet and stillness in the days following the Ghastly Match. Yasukawa lies motionless in a hospital bed with her eyes closed and bandages wrapped over her recently operated face. In extreme close-up, Yasukawa whispers to the camera, "Itai desu ne," softly expressing her anguish. The film suggests a further rupture in the performer's subject position via a key prop visible in the wider shots of Yasukawa on her bed—a pro wrestling magazine (Fig. 4).

Such a prop also recalls the scene in *Gamushara* wherein Yasukawa shows off her vantage point on family fights during her childhood, precariously perched at the top of her home's staircase, high above the action. Through these elements, it now seems the hero of the ring may be regressing to the detached position of the spectating fan.



Fig. 4. In bed with a *puroresu* magazine. *After Gamushara* (Takahara, 2016).

The sense of a pulling back to her formerly passive position becomes undercut, though, when Yuka takes on the voice of Act within her medically induced haze, a transition that shows just how linked the two personalities remain. At this point, Yasukawa rests within a liminal space between her personas. After telling the camera in a subdued tone of her hopes of a return, she switches to her more forceful in-ring voice to announce, “I’m a woman who overcomes all obstacles. Don’t think I’ve lost heart. Just wait and see, I’ll come back to the ring, you’ll see.” She punctuates her speech with her catchphrase “Ijō!” (That’s all!). Taking on the manner of Act, Yasukawa speaks with a new-found speed and fluidity, giggling at the energy emerging from her own self-valorizing words. The transgressive identity springing out of her hospital bed allows for an articulation of the former resilience she outwardly appears to have lost and for a break from the bonds of her present corporeal condition. Emboldened, Yasukawa proceeds to take two teddy bears and reenact a match-up on her lap. A visitor mimics the referee in the ring by asking one of the plush competitors, “[Do you] give up?” Shaking the bear intertwined in another’s arms, Yasukawa replies, “No! No!” (Fig. 5).

The brief shot compels in part because of how Yasukawa co-opts cuteness to securely enact brutality, a third gender space in miniature, as well as for how she controls both parties in the imagined violent exchange—both the aggressor and aggrieved fall into her hands.



Fig. 5. “Give up? No!” *After Gamushara*.

How an enlivening vivacity breaks into the hospital bedroom by way of her invocation of Act, disrupting a stable line between perpetrator and victim, gestures toward the power of *joshi puroresu* performance to heal its practitioners of their own trauma. *Gamushara* focuses on this aspect as wrestling permits Yasukawa to move forward from and perhaps find a language to reconceptualize the trauma of rape and her ensuing suicide attempts. She returns to her hometown and the site of her sexual assault, a playground. The scene of remembrance is marked by sharp tonal juxtapositions as the subject speaks fondly of the joys of the zipline, after she has identified the site of her rape, and even proceeds to happily ride the contraption again. The scene’s juxtaposition of physical joy against the subject’s monotonous retelling of the rape—her eyes are cast away from the camera that she typically looks straight into—at once work to frame the deadening impact of the incident as well as hint toward transcendent possibility of physicality. Her testimony is marked by traumatic blank spots and ellipses when she works to reconstruct the event. Discussing the assault itself, she evokes the language of *puroresu* noting, “They pulled my hair, like a pro wrestling match.” Wrestling gives her a framework in which to assess the trauma of her rape and her own victimized status. At the same time, hair pulling is illegal in professional wrestling, the tactics of a villain that Yasukawa gleefully employs in the ring. Such discursive fusion, the melding of her words and her actions in the ring, suggest a dual subject position as both

remembered victim and imagined victimizer. Reinforcing this effect, the scene where Yuka remembers her assault is then followed by those of Act in the ring, who takes on a perpetrating perspective and a violent command.

The equivalences drawn in these scenes between her trauma and her performance in the world of wrestling reinforces how the latter might serve as a site of redefinition and working through. Marcus finds that the rape script needs to be linguistically conceived as “subject to change” and that its “narrative element... leaves room and makes time for revision.”³⁸ Yasukawa’s changing of the script of her trauma through the logic of wrestling, occupying different parts within a rapist-raped binary, reveals a subject who does not take on the immutable identity of the “raped” that Marcus finds the dominant discourse around the act proposes. Marcus’s framing of the need to redefine rape and a subject’s relationship to it speaks more broadly to established conceptions of traumatic healing. In her study *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman speaks at length to how trauma can be resolved via reenactment. Healing can only occur, she says, when survivors create a new mental schema to approach the traumatic event.³⁹ Reenactment can be a healthy and productive mechanism if those suffering the effects of trauma can “integrate reliving experiences into their lives in a contained, even socially useful, manner.”⁴⁰ Through a contrast between Act’s performed aggression on-screen and Yuka’s testimony on *puroresu*’s transformative possibility in the soundtrack, the film suggests a repurposing of the harassing behavior she experienced into potentially therapeutic entertainment.⁴¹ In the ring, she can adopt the manner of abusive masculinity, as when she pours sake over Yoshiko’s face while shouting, “Wanna get drunk, baby?” Over this footage of a match with Yoshiko that took place prior to the Ghastly Match, Yasukawa states, “It’s exactly what I’ve dreamed of—being a fighter.... I can do anything. I can be true to myself and feel alive. That’s pro-wrestling.” Wrestling permits Yasukawa, *Gamushara* thus suggests, to create a new mental schema on her past trauma via spectacular reenactment, and to revivify and redefine herself as a fighter outside of the terms of her also acknowledged victimhood.

Although the persona allows for healing, the home video sequel frames a growing disillusionment within Yasukawa as she comes to confront how wrestling may stifle her full expression, a point only obliquely suggested in *Gamushara*. After her return match following her

talk with the press, she breaks down in front of the camera, offering the paradoxical formulation, “I don’t want to cry, I can’t cry, I’m not crying,” as tears spill down her face. Her sadness cannot be expressed in a space where one is expected to triumphantly arise from her blows. Such repression may surprise given the role that enactments of despair traditionally play within wrestling as well as Yasukawa’s own anguished in-ring performances that are presented throughout the cycle. As Barthes writes, “The gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat which, far from disguising, he emphasizes and holds like a pause in music, corresponds to the mask of antiquity meant to signify the tragic mode of the spectacle. In wrestling, as on the stage in antiquity, one is not ashamed of one’s suffering, one knows how to cry, one has a liking for tears.”⁴² The film illustrates here that tears can only fall when in service of the spectacle. The spectacle may thus push its practitioners to misrepresent and hide aspects of themselves. Yasukawa’s contradictory account of her tears indicates the limits of a transgressive identity in the ring, since as Stone noted, a pro wrestler’s identity is built for the enduring “appreciations of the audience.”

The audience figures centrally to both the cycle and the wrestler’s own view of her profession. As previously detailed, the audience can be heard in *Gamushara* chanting her name at the beginning of the film, cheering for her and for her punishment. Over the title card, *Gamushara*, only their chants of the name “Act” can be heard while the film’s subject is unseen. The cheers of the crowd thus underpin the documentary. When asked if she was conscious of Takahara’s camera during our interview, Yasukawa admitted that even when she was not conscious of it, she remained always conscious of her audience in the ring.⁴³ The audience’s privileged status in wrestling is succinctly expressed by Koh when he writes:

Professional wrestling is a performance-spectacle that caters directly to audiences. Each punch and body slam essayed in the ring—and the reaction of the unfortunate wrestler on the receiving end of them—is aimed at eliciting an affective response from these audiences. Audiences, thus, are in a relatively powerful subject position.⁴⁴

The opening of *Gamushara* frames their powerful subject position—each punch that the “unfortunate wrestler” Act receives is aimed at eliciting their ovation. Media scholar Annette Hill, although generally arguing that professional wrestling represents an equitable spectacular co-production between the promoters, the audience, and the wrestlers, also

hits at the a-symmetries in power that exists between the latter two groups. She writes:

The passion work of wrestlers and audience members is literally inscribed in the bodies of wrestlers who experience multiple injuries and the bodies of audiences who have screamed so much that their throats are hoarse.⁴⁵

The performer can expect bodily injury as a hazard of the work while the enthusiastic fan (at worst) can expect some mild discomfort. Over the course of the cycle, the audience becomes ever-more visible as Yasukawa becomes ever-more injured, a parallel that implies how the audience's passions inscribe themselves upon and eventually desiccate Yasukawa's body. *After Gamushara* renders the audiences in a more visually domineering fashion. The camera often sits within the crowd, making the audience members in the foreground loom large over the ring and the performers upon it. While they throw red streamers in the ring that coordinate with the color of Yasukawa's costume during her retirement match, one of the eager male fans takes up the center of the frame, thereby shrouding Act in his silhouette (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Yasukawa falls under the fans' shadow. *After Gamushara*.

The fans' shadows thus falls over the form of the film and the performer they so eagerly cheer, leaving the latter in a marginalized position where

her transgressions may require sanction from the spectating power brokers who watch and judge her act.

In keeping with such de-centering of Yasukawa, *After Gamushara* visually implies that the ring may be turning into a place of repression rather than freedom for the performer during what would be her final matches. As she awaits the announcement of her name to enter the arena, she stands in front of her teammates, the villainous troupe known as Ōedo Tai (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. The monumental stillness of Act. *After Gamushara*.

A break from the film's very loose shooting style occurs here to frame a highly composed image where Act looms monumentally large in the foreground, dwarfing her teammates, so that she takes on a larger-than-life dimension. While the inspirational *Gamushara* theme music from the film plays in the off-screen arena, the wrestler stands motionless, keeping her emotions in check. In the background of the shot, her teammate Kris Wolf weeps, thereby accentuating the taciturn reserve of her leader. Act, up to this point in the cycle, has been a figure of constant movement and effusive emotion. Now, upon her return following the Ghastly Match, captured through a rare image of visual stasis, the film implies that this energy has begun to attenuate. Indeed, when she gives a retirement farewell late in the sequel, her exuberant passion seems entirely dissipated. Inverting the earlier scene in her hospital bed where the strong voice of Act emerged from the frail body of Yuka, here the more

quiet and subdued voice of Yuka emerges from the figure of Act clad in gaudy samurai dress.

Barthes's writing on pro wrestling helps express the shock of this shift that the film frames in the subject's wrestling performances following her traumatic injury. In his essay, Barthes frames wrestling as a hyper-visible spectacle where one's interiority becomes legibly rendered in a physical form. He stresses the allure of performance and the disinterest in the revelation of a genuine self when arguing, "what the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself."⁴⁶ Yasukawa, in her final wrestling performances, pushes against these demands for legibility by taking on a new inscrutable stillness. She thus grapples with the constraints of an artform that may only want an image of *a* passion and not a view onto *her* own passion. Act begins to be a persona that can no longer offer Yasukawa a psychological service but instead comes to only serve her fans compelled by this facet of her identity.

After Gamushara shows how she may cope with her loss through a closing sequence tracking her post-retirement acting career. We see a montage of the various and varied roles she takes on stage and screen suggesting that she is undergoing a regeneration. However, these changes place her away from the camera and, by extension, her viewers. One sequence follows her on the set of a period television program wherein Yasukawa plays a plainly dressed peasant (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. A voyeuristic view of Yasukawa. *After Gamushara*.

Wide angle shots of Yasukawa being filmed by the television crew are taken from a far-away and voyeuristic vantage point as the film's documentary camera is positioned behind the bushes. Ambient noise of the surrounding forest muffles the sound of her voice in the film's soundtrack. She appears to become a part of and no longer the center of her environment. The scene posits that, with her move away from Act, Yasukawa risks relinquishing something of her spectacular power—her screams may no longer sound so strongly. The scene contains a few moments when the former wrestler stumbles over lines or accidentally hits the other camera with pebbles. Her awkwardness here is a far cry from how she formally commanded the documentary camera's attention in the earlier *Gamushara*, where it would move downwards when she crumpled down in agony, entirely held in her thrall. To lose Act, the film suggests, may mean losing some control.⁴⁷

Outside the ring, the actress, still in her period costume, goes on to suggest the realm of possibilities available to her, "I was a peasant this time. Next time, I'll play a ninja, and if I am lucky, I hope to become a samurai!" She seeks new routes to find the transgressive identity that she once fully embodied in the ring. The film cuts between her optimistic testimony to the surreal image of Yasukawa watching the testimony on a computer monitor—the documentary subject gazes upon her projected self (Fig. 9).⁴⁸



Fig. 9. One Yasukawa encounters another. *After Gamushara*.

There is a momentary silence as her eyes shift rapidly between the monitor and the documentary camera. She then remarks, "Yes. So that's,

uh... so that's it." Not knowing how to end, she then says her wrestling persona's catchphrase, "Ijō!" before burying her head in her arms with embarrassment. The catchphrase now carries with it a newfound uncertainty, a point reaffirmed when she finally looks up laughing and asks, "was that wrong?" She no longer seems sure how to perform the self that was Act. *After Gamushara* thus captures an identity in flux. It remains that multivalence of subjectivities that makes the documentary cycle so crucial to understand the possibilities and costs of forming an identity defined by a transgressive femininity.

Just as we think Act has been laid to rest, however, *After Gamushara* ends with a final note of ambiguity—the end credits echo the main documentary by featuring Yasukawa's three names. The documentary forces us to consider if and how Act may yet live in a resurrected form beyond the ring. Yasukawa noted in our interview regarding the Ghastly Match that one of its shocks was her inability to express her suffering. She had to maintain the performance of Act which left her trapped, waiting desperately for someone else to throw in the towel.⁴⁹ Act represented a mask that she could not take off—plastered on by the audience expectation and the strictures of wrestling where, to use Aiba's words, "men and women are supposed to perform in spite of injury."⁵⁰ By reminding viewers again of her three personas at its end, *After Gamushara* allows for the possibility that the persona may still exist. The credits encourage a reflection on an earlier scene where the subject places her head in a cardboard cut-out of a male samurai, a figure who dons similar accoutrement as Act (Fig. 10).⁵¹



Fig. 10. Marking the boundaries between one's personas? *After Gamushara*.

Here, however, she steps out of the cut-out's frame, establishing a clear border between her multiple selves. Seen through this light, her quote about Act-as-fan service becomes not a signal of the death of her persona but a mark of her newfound autonomy wherein she may escape the deadening aspects of her Act persona and instead reconfigure her as a tool. Act becomes, like the rape script that Yasukawa has taken hold of and shaped, "always subject to change." Yasukawa's shirt in the scene with the samurai cardboard cutout states, "No man knows when he shall die although he knows he must die." It encapsulates a core thread of the *Gamushara* cycle, concerned with the possibility of bringing wrestling's power of transmutation outside the ring. The death of such a transgressive persona offers a way in which it can rise again in a more liberated form, one free perhaps from a spectacle where cries for help can never be allowed to break the façade of one's character.

NOTES

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- ¹ *Gamushara*, directed by Takahara Hidekazu, Perfs. Yasukawa Yuka and Yasukawa Yuka and Yasukawa Act (Maxam Inc., 2015), Digital Copy. All stills courtesy of Maxam Inc. and Takahara Hidekazu.
- ² Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling." *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 15–25, 23.
- ³ Lee Austin Thompson, "Professional Wrestling in Japan—Media and Message," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 21.1 (March 1986): 65–81, 77.

- ⁴ Yasukawa Yuka and Takahara Hidekazu, personal interview co-conducted with Marianne Tarcov, August 1, 2016.
- ⁵ *After Gamushara*, directed by Takahara Hidekazu, Perfs. Yasukawa Yuka and Yasukawa Yuka and Yasukawa Act (Maxam Inc., 2016), Digital Copy. Translations of the film by Adrian Thieret. All stills courtesy of Maxam Inc. and Takahara Hidekazu.
- ⁶ Thompson (1986), 74.
- ⁷ For most of Japan, the Allied Occupation lasted from 1945–1952. However, the Ryūkyū islands, which includes Okinawa, remained under Allied Occupation until 1972.
- ⁸ Thompson 1986, 75.
- ⁹ Lee Austin Thompson, “The Body Politic in the International Arena: Professional Wrestling in Japan,” in *This Sporting Life Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan*, eds. William W. Kelly and Atsuo Sugimoto (New Haven, Conn.: Yale U Press, 2007), 107–124, 118.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ¹¹ Aiba Keiko, “The Impact of Women’s Pro Wrestling Performances on the Transformation of Gender.” in *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, eds. B. Chow, C. Warden, and E. Laine (Oxford, U.K.: Routledge, 2016), 85–94, 91.
- ¹² Kris Wolf, personal interview co-conducted with Marianne Tarcov, September 8, 2015.
- ¹³ *The Beauty Pair: Makka na seishun (Red-Hot Youth)*, directed by Naitō Makoto, Perfs. Jackie Sato and Maki Ueda (Tōei Company, 1977), digital copy.
- ¹⁴ *Ningen kyōki ai to ikari no ringu (A Human Murder Weapon)*, directed by Miike Takashi, Perfs. Megumi Kudo and Combat Toyoda (Maxam Inc., 1992), digital copy.
- ¹⁵ A brief discussion of *joshi puroresu* in film would not be complete without mention of the documentary *Gaea Girls* by Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams (2000). Centered around the rigors of training, the film valuably chronicles the physical transformations when women train to enter the ring. Scenes featuring thin trainees doing squats next to their muscle-bound teachers illustrate how the body develops into ring shape. The documentary, however, does not share *Gamushara*’s interest in probing the lines between the fake and the real, the toll of injury, nor in any sustained discussion in the creation of a professional wrestling persona. It is only in glancing moments that *Gaea Girls* speaks to themes that *Gamushara* more fully takes up and

which are central concerns in this article. At one point during Longinotto and Williams' documentary, a trainee is injured while sparring yet pretends to be unhurt before tapping out to her partner's submission hold. The trainer screams, "Why did you hide your pain and give up? The audience won't get it." She appears completely unmoved by the actual suffering in front of her. Her admonishment gestures to the way in which pain must be amplified and made legible in the ring for the audience. Over the course of the *Gamushara* cycle, the process comes to oppress Yasukawa during and after the Ghastly Match where she appears to engage with an audience who does not or chooses not to "get" her underlying pain. Later, in *Gaea Girls*, trainees are told, "Look in the mirror every day. Think about your image every day." By offering a view of the multitude of selves that Yasukawa presents and constructs, Takahara's films bring the wrestler's image fully into view and articulates the way in which it becomes distorted by the various mirrors that she encounters, be it those found in the wrestling ring, her own memory, or within the documentary camera. For a further look at the shaping of a female body for the ring that starkly differs in tone and in content from *Gamushara*'s own study of a woman's transformation, see *Gaea Girls*, directed by Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2000), digital copy.

¹⁶ Sharon Marcus, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 385–403, 392, 397.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 400.

¹⁸ Barthes, 22–23.

¹⁹ Yasukawa and Takahara, 2016.

²⁰ *Tsumugi*, directed by Takahara Hidekazu, Perf. Sora Aoi (Pink Eiga, 2009), DVD. Takahara has worked extensively within the long-established Pink film genre. Abé Mark Nornes defines Pink film as "the soft-core, independent cinema of Japan" (Nornes 3). Such formally experimental pornographic films are always low budget and shot on 35mm film as they are meant to be projected in cinemas. For a further contextualizing of this vibrant film form, see Nornes' introduction in the digital anthology *The Pink Book: The Japanese Eroticism and its Contexts*, ed. Abé Mark Nornes (N.P.: A Kinema Club Book, 2014), 1–16.

²¹ *Girls Hate Pure*, directed by Takahara Hidekazu, Perf. Yasukawa Yuka (lovepunk, 2008), digital copy.

²² Yasukawa and Takahara, 2015.

²³ Kazuo Hara. "Gamushara Review," *Kinema junpō*, excerpt from the *Gamushara* Facebook Page, April 5, 2015. Translation by Marianne Tarcov.

²⁴ Yasukawa and Takahara, 2015

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Wolf 2015.

²⁸ Wilson Koh, “‘It’s What’s Best for Business’—‘Worked Shoots’ and the Commodified Authentic in Postmillennial Professional Wrestling,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34.5 (2017): 459–479, 461.

²⁹ *Shūkan puroresu*, no. 1782 (March 18, 2015), 7–12.

³⁰ Thompson 2007, 112.

³¹ Itani Satoko, “Japanese Female and ‘Trans’ Athletes: Negotiating Subjectivity and Media Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and Nation,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto (2015), 267.

³² Aiba Keiko, personal interview co-conducted with Marianne Tarcov, August 31, 2015.

³³ Aiba Keiko, “The Impact of Women’s Pro Wrestling Performances on the Transformation of Gender,” in *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, eds. B. Chow, C. Warden, and E. Laine (Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 2016), 89.

³⁴ Yasukawa and Takahara, 2015.

³⁵ Aiba Keiko. “Japanese Women Professional Wrestlers and Body Image” in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity Are Making a Difference*, ed. Fujimura Kumiko (Fanselow, New York: The Feminist Press, 2011), 268–283, 272.

³⁶ Ibid., 273.

³⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 273.

³⁸ Marcus 1992, 391.

³⁹ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40

⁴¹ *Joshi* wrestler Kris Wolf offers compelling insights into how the very nature of pro wrestling performance productively counters societally ingrained responses to suffering. She states that when training to be a wrestler, she needed to “learn how to show the audience that I am in pain, even though my natural urge is to smile through it” (Wolf, 2015). Her formulation suggests how the art form can be therapeutic because it teaches one to express emotions that would otherwise be stifled. The *Gamushara* cycle reveals the possibilities for and boundaries of the expression of one’s pain in the ring.

- ⁴² Barthes, 16.
- ⁴³ Yasukawa and Takahara, 2015.
- ⁴⁴ Koh, 460.
- ⁴⁵ Annette Hill, “Spectacle of Excess: The Passion Work of Professional Wrestlers, Fans and Anti-Fans,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18.2 (2015): 174–189, 178.
- ⁴⁶ Barthes, 18.
- ⁴⁷ Following her retirement in *After Gamushara*, we again see Yasukawa confronted by professional wrestling in a scene from the director’s 2016 lovepunk play. The biggest laugh of the night occurs when one of the costars charges towards Yasukawa’s naive character and claims she is doing pro wrestling. With an incredulous look, Yasukawa replies, “Really? Pro wrestling is dangerous!” The playacting highlights how Yasukawa’s relationship with the artform has also changed. The spectacle now is made to seem a kind of ridiculous joke for the performer, a sequence of slapstick that is especially surprising due to Yasukawa’s claims made in *Gamushara* that she needs to always be in the ring.
- ⁴⁸ The mirrored staging is something of a signature in Takahara’s films as it is also used in the “Making of” for his Pink film *Tsumugi*, attesting to an abiding interest in having his subjects encounter their projected selves.
- ⁴⁹ Yasukawa and Takahara, 2016.
- ⁵⁰ Aiba, 2015.
- ⁵¹ The Japanese flag that the samurai cut-out holds lends the image of Yasukawa a nationalistic dimension, recalling *puroresu* star Rikidōzan’s transgressions of Japanese-ness. Both these wrestlers prove potentially troubling because of how they show easily the way one can step in and out of socially-defined frames of identity—whether it be that of a strong and inherently Japanese masculinity or a transgressive femininity sanctioned by the audiences of *puroresu*.