

A Third Face:
Defining a New Concept for Identity Creation in Relation to
Communities of Creative Practice

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Abstract:

The concept of the “third place” as popularized by Ray Oldenburg defines a neutral place away from home or work where people can form social bonds, filling an important role in community building. This paper examines a class dedicated to the amateur study of rakugo, a traditional Japanese form of comedic storytelling. While not a specific site like those cited by Oldenburg, could it serve as a “third place?” Through participant observation and interviews, the paper demonstrates that, while meeting many of the criteria of a “third place,” the framework does not hold. The paper argues that this community of amateur performers goes beyond the location-based model and moves more toward a more mobile social space in which members create a new identity tied to this group, warranting a new framework to address the possibility of a “third face.”

Keywords: third place, community, social capital, identity

1. Introduction

Since the introduction of the concept of the third place by Ray Oldenburg in 1999, people have begun use this framework to reexamine social spaces in society. Essentially the third place is a location away from the first place, defined as home, and the second place, defined as work. In this place, people can theoretically find respite from the expectations of the first and second place, gaining comfort from the regulars that occupy this neutral space. Perhaps understandably Oldenburg sited pubs, coffee house and other similar establishments as prime examples of such a “third place.” He saw these sites as serving an important social function in society and the absence of such places to him pointed to a breakdown in that society.

Other researchers have taken this concept and applied it a multitude of sites, looking at the function these sites fill in the community and in individual lives. While several of these studies have looked at the online world, libraries, fast food restaurants, hobby circles, and even a curling club, most research has centered on Western European and North American locations. Furthermore, the possibility that organized classes centered on a creative practice as a potential third place has yet to be explored. Is it possible that such sites, while not as accessible as your local bar, take on the role of a third place? This paper looks to fill that gap in research by examining the *rakugo juku* at Nittere Gakuin in Tokyo.

For a price, the *rakugo juku* class at Nittere Gakuin¹ helps amateur enthusiasts learn the art of *rakugo*, a Japanese traditional style of comedic storytelling in which a person plays multiple characters, signaling the change in character with head movements and other subtle cues. With three-month long terms offered twice a year, the class has formed a loyal following of students with some attending classes for more than five years. To research the questions posed in this paper I enrolled as a student, the first foreigner in the history of the course,² for the April-June 2014 term. I attended all the classes; joined classmates each week at a restaurant they frequented after class; assumed a stage name and successfully performed a *rakugo* story in front of an audience at the class finale recital. While studying *rakugo* I also conducted interviews with students of the course³, the instructor and one of his assistants. Most of the formal interviews were conducted after the course in July and August 2014. In addition, I returned to attend a second term from April to June of 2015. This return to the class helped reconfirm some findings and forced me to reexamine other conclusions.

The picture that emerged of this class was that of a complex social dynamic where individuals with widely differing backgrounds interacted on different levels with common interests but at times differing goals. At first, looked upon as a possible third place, the *rakugo juku* did indeed share several important traits with Oldenburg's framework. However, deeper inspection revealed a much more complex social space that was not simply dependent on location alone. The fact that, while sharing many of the social goals of Oldenburg's third place, this group was focused more on the space they created with identities shared only within this group and the practice of a specific art (*rakugo* in this case) makes a new framework necessary. This new framework, which I call "third face," possesses many of the social aspects of Oldenburg's third place but is not limited by physical space. Instead, participants, through this group, find their third face, an identity separate to the faces they don at home (first place) and work (second place) and is tied to this group and this art form.

The paper will be structured in the following manner. First, a review of recent literature of third place studies will be conducted in an effort to see how the third place framework has been applied to different locations. Attention will also be given to studies of similar learning communities and the role of leisure in this endeavor. The next section will introduce the physical site of the *rakugo juku* in detail, exploring the traits that contribute to making it a possible third place. After addressing the location, the paper will move on to focus on the students who make up the *rakugo*

¹ Despite the recent difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Nittere Gakuin still offers *rakugo* classes to amateur enthusiasts. Their website can be found [here](#).

² While I was the first foreigner of this *rakugo* course there are many examples of foreigners who have taken to performing *rakugo* as professionals and amateurs, most famously Henry Black during the Meiji period and more recently the Canadian Katsura Sunshine. More recently, a Swedish *rakugoka* in Japan, going by the stage name of Sanyūtei Kōseinen, has reached the second highest rank of *futatsume* as a professional.

³ Those that agreed to be interviewed understood that the interviews and their findings would possibly be used in a research paper.

juku, a mix of regulars and newcomers with a varied background. The paper will then address how the class functions as well as how students interact with each other and their teacher. This section will also address how the group extends beyond the classroom but only if a student chooses to take part. Finally, in the discussion section I tackle the reasons why I feel this place should be looked upon as a kind of third place and why that framework alone cannot be used to accurately analyze what this class means to the students that take part in it. I go into detail on what makes a third place and why certain situations do not fit that framework as well. In the conclusion, I summarize why this site retains many of the core qualities of a third place while being something different, something more that warrants further consideration and study.

2. Literature Review

Can a class centered on an artistic discipline like *rakugo* be included as a third place? Is it something more than a third place or something completely different? Before examining these questions, a deeper look at what a third place is, and the studies attributed to it are necessary. With the release of Ray Oldenburg's, *The Great Good Place* in 1999, the concept of "third place" has been utilized in a variety of studies in an effort to better define the parameters and role of "third place" in the lives of those who share them. Defined by Oldenburg as a site that is neither home (the first place) nor work (the second place), the third place is an easily accessible neutral site where one could take a break from the outside world, engage in conversation with a variety of people or just quietly keep to oneself (Oldenburg 24-32). Oldenburg saw these places, usually taverns or coffee houses, as a home away from home and a vital part of a healthy community. Oldenburg laments the fragmentation of life in the United States due to a lack of third places as a result of suburban sprawl, with people living far away from the town center in housing areas only accessible by car (3-4). This is also echoed in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2006) where the author documents the breakdown of building relationships through group activities (like bowling), which leads to a lack of social capital for the individuals.

Oldenburg was not the first to make the connection between spread-out city layouts and a more disjointed community. Victor Gruen, the father of the modern shopping mall in the U.S., immigrated from Vienna, Austria with its abundance of outdoor cafes and public places for socialization. He too saw a need for the kind of social spaces that were commonplace in his home country and tried to incorporate them into his shopping mall designs (1965). Oldenburg's concept of third place also has much in common with Jürgen Habermas' notion of the "public sphere." Well before Oldenburg, Habermas envisioned a "sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed" (1989). Still, Oldenburg's classification and clarification of what is and what makes up a third place spurred numerous studies looking at how far this concept could be applied to a variety of settings.

However, before looking at how the concept of third place has been used it is necessary to give an overview of the requirements that Oldenburg felt were needed in this place. A third place must be “on neutral ground” allowing people to come and go freely while not requiring any one person to be host (Oldenburg 22). This should be a place that, while not being home for any one person, feels like a home away from home. This third place would also be a “leveler” (23). This would require the third place to be inclusive, accessible to the general public and not have any restrictive membership requirements. “A place that is a leveler also permits the individual to know workmates in a different and fuller aspect than is possible in the workplace” (24). This status as a leveler would also include members surrendering their outward worldly status, whether it is a businessman or janitor (25).

Another requirement of a third place is that the main goal must be conversation. In referencing the value of this social interplay Oldenburg again refers to the high rate of socializing in pubs or cafés in England and France while lamenting the lack of such sites in the United States, hence the perceived breakdown in social ties (27). While drinking and eating takes place in these locations the true goal of the regulars that frequent these places is that of entertaining conversation. To quote Oldenburg, “The game is conversation, and the third place is its home court” (31).

To foster this conversation-centered neutral atmosphere accessibility and accommodation are important factors. According to Oldenburg third places that offer the “best and fullest service” are those that are accessible “at almost any time of the day or evening with assurance that acquaintances will be there” (32). This would certainly explain why Oldenburg sees taverns, pubs, coffeehouses, and other businesses that keep long hours as ideal third places. In these accessible sites there also have to be regulars. These regulars help give the location its character and guarantee that on your next visit to this site there will be someone you know to talk to (34). At the fictional bar *Cheers*, popular 1980s television comedy, Norm, Cliff, Frasier and other regulars knew when they dropped by that there would always be someone who, like the theme song, always knew their name.

A third place must also maintain a low profile (36). In other words, Oldenburg envisions a third place as someplace plain and in outward appearance mostly unremarkable. Oldenburg also maintains that a third place is not made for the purpose of being a place to build a friendship, it is just repurposed as such by the regulars that frequent it (36). He continues by noting that the plainness plays into discouraging pretentiousness and therefore encouraging an environment that is a leveler (37).

The final two requirements of a third place are a playful mood and a feeling of a home away from home. The playful mood is set and maintained by the witty conversation and the gentle ribbing of regulars. “Here joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation. This is the magical element that warms the insider and reminds the outsider that he or she is not part of the magic circle, even though seated but a few feet away” (38). The concept of a home away from home for Oldenburg is contingent on several points. At such a site regulars would find warmth

from the support, mutual concern and friendlessness while also finding themselves “regenerated or restored” by their visits (41). At times, regulars would be able to let their hair down more and reveal details to others that they may not feel capable of sharing in their actual home (ibid). Oldenburg finally notes while these third places may not serve as a substitute for home to some they may be more of a home than their true home which may lack the personal connections that he saw as necessary for a healthy life (40).

So how has Oldenburg’s concept of third space been used to look at how people interact with space and establish their own third places to meet their needs? There has been a surprising wide array of sites looked at as possible third places in the years since *The Great Good Place* (99). Of course, one of the most natural places inspected was that of the pub. In one study, Perry Share’s research on pubs in contemporary Irish society not only looked at the historical and contemporary function of the pub in Irish society, pointing out their economic and social function, but also examined gender inequality in usage of these businesses (2003, 5). Despite the perception (and probable reality) of the pub as a masculine world limiting its function as a third place as a “leveler” Share gives ample evidence that the pub, in many cases, does indeed qualify as a third place according to Oldenburg’s requirements.

Other researchers have explored the kind of coffee houses mentioned by Oldenburg in the form of the employee/ customer relationship dynamic in the United States (Rosenbaum, Ward, Walker and Ostrom, 2007) as well as the coffee house culture in Japan (White 2012). Yet others have found great examples of third places in local fast-food restaurants in Hawaii (Cheang 2002). Cheang’s study of older residents congregating for breakfast daily at a local fast-food restaurant was particularly fitting as an inspection of a third place while looking at this site with a focus on play in the form of friendly conversation (305). Still, such a location is within the traditional definition of third place.

In addition to restaurants, bars, and coffee houses other scholars have taken a look at how other sites can function as third places for people, providing them with a much-needed home away from home. One of the more popular recent trends in looking at and for third places is the study of virtual third places located online in discussion boards, web sites or online video games. The conclusion of whether or not these online spaces can be considered a third place under Oldenburg’s guidelines is mixed. While many studies noted several similar traits such as neutrality, being a leveler, and having a low profile they also saw the limitations to the link. Steinkuehler and Williams (2006), when studying online gaming platforms, noted that while these massive online games did lend themselves to a third place the function as such begins to “wane as the community begins more to bonding rather than bridging social capital” (903). Scott Wright, while examining political talk in non-political online spaces notes several differences (as well as similarities) with Oldenburg’s narrative but nevertheless acknowledges the importance of the concept (2012).

Perhaps Charles Soukup most critically examines the perceived links between the online world and the concept of third place (2006). Soukup not only analyzes the “inaccurate and potentially dangerous” (432) use of third place in reference to computer-mediated communication but also points out that the basis for traditional third places also need to be examined fuller (430). Soukup also pointed out that countless barriers exist preventing everyone from truly being able to participate in a computer-based community (428). Still, even with several reservations, Soukup did note that the identity concealment available to those who take part in such communities did help foster a “comparable jocular, energetic and spirited conversational tone or mood” that fit as a third place (425). “By masking their identity or using alternative personae, people feel less inhibited and online conversations are often highly spirited and lively” (ibid). This kind of “masking” and identity creation is an important trait of some third places and something that will be discussed later in this paper in reference to the rakugo class.

A further examining of different third places include looks at libraries (Harris 2007) and their evolving roles in peoples lives, places of support for cancer patients (Glover, Parry 2008), curling clubs in Canada (Mair, 2009) and even sewing communities of women called collectively by the term Stitch ‘n Bitch (Minahan, Cox 2007). The Stitch n’ Bitch communities, despite their colorful name, may have the most in common with the rakugo classes examined in this paper. Although much of this study is devoted to the feminism and a response through knitting to societal inequality the movement and the groups getting together to form knitting communities where social capital is also a goal has some similarities to the rakugo class, another potential third place centered on a creative practice.

Besides those that directly address third place theory there are several studies that could help complete the picture when looking at a rakugo class such as this. Katrina Moore’s look at women involved in amateur Noh, while not dependent on a certain location, connects the practice of this art to a new connection of self on the part of the participants (2014). Noting that knowledge, respectability, and responsibility, accumulated through life helps to form an everyday identity she also added that, “through leisure activities, however, practitioners can detach from this everyday identity. With the peeling away of identity that occurs, practitioners gain an opportunity to expand the concept of who they are and who they can become. (6)” Other studies like Millie Creighton’s inspection of a weaving course in Nagano also connects the learning of an art with the creation or affirmation of identity, in this case, the Japanese identity (1998, 191). The theme of identity and learning of an art comes up again in Kaeko Chiba’s study of Japanese women and the practice of the tea ceremony (2011). Again, while not focusing on third place (some locations do come into play, but they do not fill the described role of third place) her study does expose how a creative practice, in this case the tea ceremony, can provide a separate identity outside of everyday life that practitioners can go back to whenever they see fit. Providing a means to improve their life on several levels, their mask as a tea ceremony practitioner “gives them inner strength” and can

become their *ikigai* or *raison d'être* (172). These practices (Noh, tea ceremony, rakugo) point to a discovery of self through finding an outlet and community to share this activity with.

This section gave a brief overview of the concept and requirements of a third place. In addition, it looked at how the framework of third place has been applied to an expanding variety of sites in an attempt to broaden the possible meaning of this important social space. Attention was also given to studies that while not noted as third places hold similar value to their participants as the topic of this paper, the rakugo *juku* for amateurs. While seemingly unrelated both third places and learning communities such as these serve as a social environment where people can create an identity separate from that of home or the workplace. In the next section the actual physical site of the *rakugo juku* will be examined to see how it may function as a third place for the enthusiastic rakugo students that frequent it.

3. A Third Place of Learning?

In *The Great Good Place* Oldenburg describes with great fondness examples of third places, a refuge from the stresses of home and work life for those who darken their doorsteps. And while an escape from the outside rat race was noted by Oldenburg as one of the main benefits of a third place, he also warned against emphasizing the external conditions of these sites and instead keep in mind the more important experiences and relationships that he saw as most paramount (1999, 21). With that in mind the next section will first take a look at the physical site of the Nittere rakugo *juku* examining how this site makes or weakens the case to consider this a third place.

3.1. Going Underground: The Physical Space of the *Rakugo Juku*

Rakugo Juku classes take place in a classroom in Nittere Gakuin, a school located in Kōjimachi in the basement of the building that houses NTV, a major television station in Japan. Nittere Gakuin is dedicated to teaching acting, announcing, scenario writing and other television-related skills. The small school's presence is announced by a bright glass front with two glass doors, with a television set up outside showing the NTV broadcast. To the left of the school is a basement entrance to NTV, manned by a private security guard looking for the proper credentials. Inside Nittere Gakuin there is a seating area with white plastic chairs and tables on the left, next to a wall covered with posters of TV and movie productions. On the right, behind a long counter covered with information flyers, stuffed characters and other promotional materials, there are several rows of desks with employees hard at work. The wall next to the counter and the walls down the hall are covered with pictures of actors next to paper red flowers followed by the announcement that they had landed a role in a TV show or movie. Other papers have the names and/or pictures young announcers who have also recently found work with TV networks. Somewhat out of place among the course for acting, announcing and other skills that translate directly (hopefully) into a job in television this school offers a course that teaches its students the art of *rakugo*, a traditional form of comedic storytelling where one person, while sitting down in a kimono, acts out several

characters aided by only a fan (*sensu*) and handkerchief (*tenugui*). The facility in general is clean and relatively new looking with white walls and doors that have a small circular porthole-like window allowing those in the hallway to see what is in progress inside.

As a site of learning and of socialization the classroom and the school itself, while clean, is unremarkable in its design. Compared to the usual sites for learning *rakugo*, a traditional comedic art with a history dating back to the 1600s by some accounts (Brau *Rakugo*, 61), this venue is quite antiseptic and lacking in character. The plainness of the school is shared with many of the third places sited by Oldenburg (1999, 37). In fact, it could be argued that the school, while being a functioning professional development site, by virtue of its location and physical size that it does fill one requirement of a third place with a low profile. As a school where *rakugo* is but one of many courses offered, and is certainly not the main revenue generator, this low profile (of the class) is somewhat understandable.

3.2. School and Course History and the Issue of Accessibility

One of the key requirements of a third place as defined by Oldenburg is its accessibility (1999, 32). This section will give an overview of the history of this school and the *rakugo* course while looking at just how accessible this potential third place is. It is not easy to find the *rakugo* course on the Nittere Gakuin website. Under the category of “culture courses” one has to click on the category for the name and link of the course to become visible (*rakugo* appears just below the chorus course and just above a speed-reading course). Perhaps alluding to the pecking order at the school above the link for the *rakugo* course are links to announcer school, talent⁴ school, a scenario writer course, variety program writer course, and a link to various coursing in speaking. The school itself was originally founded in 1976 for the purpose of training those amateur singers who were aspiring for a music career, often as part of music television shows on the network at the time (Nittere). The school later expanded to offer courses for writers of variety shows and other television related fields eventually adding an announcer-training program under the instruction of experienced NTV announcers (*ibid*). Despite the higher profile courses at the school and perhaps because of the relatively small size of the school the staff maintain a friendly and welcoming relationship with the *rakugo* course students with many on a first name basis. Overall, while unconventional as a site for studying a traditional art such as *rakugo*, Nittere Gakuin provides a supportive and easily approachable space for learning.

The Kōjimachi *Rakugo Juku* course was established in 2008. First-time students pay 47,520-yen (approximately \$465) to enroll; this includes a 10,000-yen (\$95) entrance fee. Students who re-enroll in the course for a second term pay 36,720 yen (\$360). The term consists of twelve classes, culminating in a final student performance, which takes place in a small theater in downtown Tokyo. Add to that the cost for a kimono (needed for the final performance) and the price, while

⁴ The term “*talento*” is often used on Japanese television and can most easily be translated into meaning a television personality.

not out of the ordinary range for a working person, may be prohibitive to many. The fact that a fee is needed to gain admission to this space may alone be reason enough to disqualify it as a third place. This fee, reasonable as it may be, sets up a barrier for those who want to share this potential third place. Of course, it could also be argued that many of the sites that Oldenburg see as examples of third places, bars, coffee houses, cafés, also require the purchase of food or drink and may have dress codes that one must abide by for one to be able to gain entrance to that space, making accessibility an issue (to a lesser extent) there as well.

3.3. Where Everybody Knows Your Stage Name: The Regulars and the Newcomers

The most important common denominator in third places is the people that occupy them. Oldenburg notes, “The third place is just so much space unless the right people are there to make it come alive, and they are the regulars. It is the regulars who give the place its character and who assure that on any given visit some of the gang will be there. (1999, 33-34)” The *rakugo juku* is no different with a reliable group of regulars as I quickly discovered when I first signed up for the class. This section will focus on the students of this course addressing their motivation, roles inside the group and issues of identity.

When first signing up for the course, I assumed that everyone would be a beginner to *rakugo* and the course itself. However, when attending my first class, I was caught off guard by the comfortable atmosphere of the class, which felt more like a family than a group. Students openly discussed what story they might tell “this time,” suggesting a higher level of familiarity with *rakugo* than I had anticipated and indicating that most were not first-time students. In fact, 17 of the 23 students were at least in their second term, and several of them had attended for several terms. It was clear that this group were far closer together and far more dedicated to this class than I had anticipated. In time it would become apparent that many of these students were taking part in what Robert Stebbins calls “serious leisure. (1992)” Serious leisure, as opposed to casual leisure, requires perseverance, knowledge, training, and skill (6). According to Stebbins, as well as producing durable benefits leading to, among other things, a renewal of self, serious leisure leads participants to “identify strongly with their pursuits. (7)”

In addition to their dedication to this serious leisure I was further surprised by the variety of students, in terms of gender and background. Although *rakugo* is a comedy genre dominated by male professionals, almost half of the 23 students in the class were women. The youngest were two university students, one male and one female, and the oldest was a student in his sixties. Most of the other students were over thirty, but almost every age group seemed to be represented. Each time a student took to the makeshift stage to introduce themselves and revealed their occupation, the diverse nature of the group became even more evident. There were a couple of retirees; two elementary school teachers, who came from the same school; the aforementioned university students; a couple of businessmen and women; a retired member of the self-defense forces; a housewife; a medical equipment salesman, a retired high school principal and a CEO among the

group. An interest in *rakugo* and the time and money to attend the course seemed to be the only things that the group members had in common.

3.4. A rose by any other name: adopting a new name as a *rakugo* performer

Before examining the students further, it is necessary to introduce an aspect of the *rakugo* course that plays a large part in students creating an identity inside this group and performing art. The *kōzamei* or stage name for *hanashika* (*rakugo* performers) is an important part of the professional *rakugo* world with names being bestowed upon performers by their masters. Names can change when a performer rises in rank or when they are allowed the honor of assuming a now deceased master's name. In the *rakugo juku*, students assume names that they come up with themselves or on the suggestion of other students. Some incorporate the kanji character for horse (pronounced “ma” or “ba”) into their name as a way signaling an artistic lineage (albeit non-official) with the teacher of course, professional *rakugoka* Sanyūtei Tomba. After coming up with a name, students are referred to by that name for the remainder of the course and during any future interactions with group members.



Figure 1: Students of the *rakugo* class hold up *mekuri* with their *kōzamei* (stage names) on them. The instructors are shown at the far left and far right of the photo. Photo credit: Nittere Gakuin staff.

In addition to their new chosen *kōzamei* the students of the Kōjimachi Rakugo Juku (the official name for the course) adopts the “family” name of Kōjiya, named for the location of the course

(Kōjimachi). My name when performing *rakugo* is now Kōjiya Heiyū. After starting the course, I thought long and hard to choose a name that suited both the *rakugo* lexicon and expressed my background as a native English speaker and a foreigner. The name Heiyū combines the use of hiragana and the use of the kanji for yū, or “play”, a common kanji used in *rakugo* names. Phonetically, my stage name also sounds like the English phrase, “Hey, you.” Other students also chose names with personal significance. This practice may sound specific to the *rakugo juku* but in the third places described by Oldenburg, although different in intention, it is easy to imagine nicknames (Shorty, Tex, etc.) taking the place of actual names in the local pub or coffee house that someone chooses to regularly patronize, creating a third place specific identity. For this paper for the purpose of privacy students will be referred to by their *kōzamei*.

3.5. Leveling the Playing Field: The *Rakugo Juku* as a Leveler

A third place has to be a leveler. By Oldenburg’s definition such a place is inclusive (24). As part of this inclusiveness class status has to become irrelevant. “Necessarily, a transformation must occur as one passes through the portals of a third place. Worldly status claims must be checked at the door in order that all within may be equals. (25)” To a certain extent this could certainly be the case for the *rakugo* class. While some class members did let others know what they did for a living there was no requirement to reveal more about your outside life than what you were comfortable with. The instructor Tomba considers that one of the positives aspects of the *rakugo juku*. “That’s one of the good things. I do not ask them about what they do for a living and such. If you want to talk about it that is fine, but we do not ask people who do not talk about their personal life. *Rakugo* has brought us together and that is enough. (Tomba)” That is not to say that students may not be aware of another’s profession as some come directly from work and are dressed appropriately but rarely if at all does class status come up as an issue in and outside the class. Of course, to be able to attend a class such as this one must have the time and financial means available making everyone present of a certain class but as much as it can possibly be the space is indeed a leveler.

The students themselves contribute to this place with a welcoming nature and jovial ribbing of each other. While their background and motivations vary many regulars have found their place in the Kojiya family. Suima⁵, a sociable businessman in his forties or fifties, found his way to the course after taking the advice of others. Originally Suima had enrolled and taken a speaking course at Nittere Gakuin taught by a well-known former television announcer when the teacher suggested that he try the *rakugo* course. Like some in the course Suima entered the class without any particular passion for *rakugo*. Impressed by the level of the students and the supportive and social aspect of the group, Suima continued studying at Nittere Gakuin and has now completed his

⁵ To preserve their anonymity and illustrate their *rakugo* identity students are referred to by their stage names.

eighth term. He has found a role in the group keeping the mood light with humor while working on his craft.

Other dedicated regulars have found a spot in the Kojiya family. Manji, an older male in his fifties, grew up with a love for rakugo and joined as soon as he found out about the course. Quiet in nature compared to Suima, Manji has an extensive knowledge of *rakugo* that he has built up over time and is willing to help others with their *rakugo* storytelling skills if asked. In addition to attending the course for several years Manji has also studied the art of *yose moji* and is now counted on each term to write the name of each new member in the distinctive writing style on a sheet which is used on the *mekuri*, a sign on stage that indicates who is performing.

The group has a handful of experienced female performers as well. Rin Rin, one of the more talented and experienced members of the group, did not originally start out as a *rakugo* enthusiast. While playing a small role in a play, she was told by her acting teacher that she needed to do *rakugo*. “My first thought was, ‘What’s *rakugo*?’ The only thing that came to mind was the television show, *Shōten*.” Following her teacher’s instructions, Rin Rin searched on the Internet for a place to study and applied for the course at Nittere Gakuin course. She said for the first year she failed to make any of the audience members (or her fellow students) laugh. It was only after discovering a professional *hanashika* named Shunputei Ichinosuke that she learned how to be funny.⁶ By imitating this *hanashika* Rin Rin was able entertain audiences and enjoy performing *rakugo* herself. When asked why she continues to attend rakugo courses at Nittere Gakuin she said, “Well, the first reason I continue coming is that I like *rakugo*. But just as important I continue coming here because I like the Kōjiya family. To me it feels like home there. When I’m here, everyone laughs, and I laugh. I really feel like I have been able to make some great friends here.”

In addition to the many regulars that make up the course there are always a few newcomers each term. Oldenburg likened the integration of newcomers into the regulars to that of a game of baseball in a sandlot. “Those who show up regularly and play a fairly decent game become the regulars. Similarly, the third place gang need only know that the newcomer is a decent sort, capable of giving and taking in conversation...and the group needs some assurance that the new face is going to become a familiar one (1999, 35).” In the *rakugo juku* as well, if the newcomers show an interest in *rakugo*, attend regularly and do their best they are quickly accepted into the group. Not surprisingly, the background and motivation of newcomers can vary as much as the regulars.

Monaka, a housewife at the time of joining,⁷ was initially motivated by a conversation overheard at a restaurant where she was working: “A regular customer came in for the first time in a while to reveal that she had cancer and that the doctor said she didn’t have long to live. She then stated that

⁶ Rin Rin did not actually discover this performer via a live show or television, but an application made for smart phones, showing that traditional acts such as rakugo continue to show relevancy through utilizing new technologies.

⁷ She later returned to the workforce after the term.

she had decided to live out her life eating delicious foods and listening to *rakugo*.” The choice of *rakugo*, out of all the possibilities for a bucket list, triggered Monaka’s interest and she began to listen to *rakugo* and read a popular comic about *rakugo* called *Dōraku Musuko*.⁸

Juzo joined at the prompting of his wife. “I had been interested in *rakugo* before but had planned to do it in my forties or fifties. However, after I quit being a comedian my wife told me that I had lost my charm. She asked me, ‘What do you really want to do?’ and the answer was *rakugo*.” As a struggling comedian turned successful businessman Juzo had found himself still wanting to perform in some capacity:

‘I’m different than the others in that I like *owarai* (modern Japanese stand-up comedy). I looked for something that I could do and that was *rakugo*. I like to make people laugh but writing material is a pain. If I do *koten rakugo* there is already basically a script so depending on my expression I can make people laugh. I also don’t need a partner and can do it alone. Thinking along those lines *rakugo* was my only choice’.

Another factor that influenced Juzo’s turn towards *rakugo* was its usefulness in the business world. Juzo noted that fact that mentioning that he was a former comedian was useful when making a sale, but saying he did *rakugo* provided additional weight, especially with business clients in their fifties and sixties.

Other students started taking the class with the idea of using it in their workplace. For example, Wine was motivated to study *rakugo* because she was teaching her elementary school students culture and language through *rakugo*. “Since I am teaching it, I thought I had better study it myself.” Wine had had a fleeting interest in *rakugo* as part of a student club in high school but had never performed herself. The architect Mandam saw the class as a way to learn *rakugo* with the intention of entertaining coworkers at parties.

This section has looked at the motivations and backgrounds of some of the students of the *rakugo juku*. It also looked at how a creative community such as this can function as a leveler. Through the assumption of new names, an emphasis on *rakugo* and classroom environment that places little importance on the students’ outside life participants are able to share this space as equals, sharing a common respect for *rakugo* even though their reasons for taking the course may vary.

4. Creating a Neutral Space: Methods and Interactions of the *Rakugo Juku*

In the previous section I introduced the students, both regulars and newcomers, and looked at their motivation for coming to the *rakugo juku* as well as examined how the site could be viewed as a leveler. In this section I will spotlight how the class itself functions, as a place of education

⁸ *Dōraku Musuko* is a comic by Oze Akira and published by Shogakukan following the struggles of a *zenza* training to become a professional *hanashika*. Professional *hanashika* Yanagiya Sanza serves as an advisor on the *rakugo* aspects of the comic.

and as a place of socialization and will focus on similarities and differences of this site and third places.

4.1. Inside the Class: The Flow of Learning

Classes at the Kōjimachi Rakugo Juku are held from 7-9 pm every Thursday during the twelve-week terms. At the beginning of each class, students pick up their nametags from the front counter of the lobby. The structure of the class varies during the term, as the public performance gets closer. When I joined the course one week late, I was anxious to catch up on any missed knowledge. The students and teacher, *hanashika* Sanyūtei Tomba, were welcoming, although somewhat surprised at the appearance of a foreigner, but everyone soon turned their attention to the class.

In the first few weeks, the classes usually began with the teacher asking students to volunteer to come up to the *kōza* (the high stage with a single purple cushion for the performer to sit on) and speak for a short time about something that happened to them that week or whatever they wanted to talk about. However, in the first couple of classes, Tomba began by demonstrating how to take the stage. After removing his slippers, he made his way up to the *kōza*, which consisted of two long tables with a traditional *zabuton* cushion in the middle), knelt down on the *zabuton*, placed the *tenugui* and *sensu* in front of him and bowed to the audience. After speaking for a short time he then slowly got up, stepped behind the *zabuton* and carefully flipped the cushion over so no dust would get on the audience. Following this demonstration, a few student volunteers would then come up one by one, doing their best to maintain the ritual order. In this way, students get used to speaking in front of others on the *kōza*.

The actual format from class to class is set by the teacher, Tomba, and is far more relaxed and fluid than one might anticipate for such a traditional art form. In the world of *rakugo*, when performers take the stage, but before they begin their story, they have a short talk called a *makura* (pillow). During this introduction, a *hanashika* may talk about current events in a comedic style (something akin to a stand-up comedian) or rely on some time-tested short humorous stories to warm the audience up. While doing this, the *hanashika* is actually assessing the audience to decide which story to tell. In a similar way, the teacher of this course uses the first few minutes to assess the direction the class should take each time, and then proceeds with instruction.

The class is large, and students have different levels of ability, so in the latter half of the class students are split into groups. First-time students leave the main classroom and are taught in a separate room by an assistant. There they receive more individual attention and are taught in more detail about the basics of *rakugo*. The six students in this group, which included me, had the opportunity to do exercises that would build up our speaking skills and improve our timing, a very important element of any style of comedy. Exercises usually involved reciting *kobanashi* or short stories (really only a few lines long) with all the students trying their hand at them. The brevity of the stories ensured that each student had several chances to speak. The stories also enabled

students to practice playing different characters, forcing them to change their identity with the movement of their head.

A few weeks into the course all the students chose stories to practice. Stories performed in *rakugo* are from *koten* (classic) *rakugo*, a catalogue of stories dating back hundreds of years, making it easier for the amateur to select material. In the case of *manzai*, the burden to write original material is on the performer, making one of the initial hurdles to performance quite high, especially for an amateur. Having materials at hand does not mean that learning and performing *rakugo* is easy. Memorizing a fifteen-minute story, which may include archaic or uncommon terms and situations, is still a challenging task. After students choose their stories, the group focuses more and more on allowing students to go to the *kōza* and perform as much of the story as they know.

4.2. Not exactly a third place

This detailed description of the class structure exposes several areas where the *rakugo juku* doesn't seem to pass as a third place. First of all, primarily the *rakugo juku* is not a place where conversation is the main activity, one important requirement for a third place (1999, 26). Friendly conversation certainly does occur at the beginning and end of the classes as well as outside socialization (which will be explored later) but the main, tangible goal of this gathering is to practice and eventually be able to perform *rakugo* at a high level. This stands in contrast to third places which have no clear goal other than socialization or escape. In addition, the *rakugo juku* does not keep long hours, cutting down on its accessibility. Oldenburg envisions a third place as sites that keep long hours, making itself available to anyone seeking relief. “Third places must stand ready to serve people’s needs for sociability and relaxation in the intervals before, between, and after their mandatory appearances elsewhere. (32)” If anything, the *rakugo juku* has more in common with the tea ceremony studies of Kaeko Chiba (2011) and the amateur Noh classes observed by Katrina Moore (2014) among others. However, it should be noted that while conversation is not the primary activity and hours of this place are more limited than a pub or coffee house the mood is consistently humorous and playful with the ultimate goal of entertaining each other while having fun oneself taking top priority. Although the course is focused on practicing a certain artistic performance, the mood, set by the students, the teacher and of course by *rakugo* itself fosters “playful spirit” that Oldenburg requires in a third place (38). In this subsection the methods and flow of the class were introduced in an effort to see if use of this environment in such a manner qualified itself to a third place. In the next sub section, I will look at the roles that students assume in this community of learning.

4.3. Utilizing students as teachers:

In this sub-section, using my observations as a student of the course, I will look at how the students and teacher interact with each other while in the class. Through participation and observation, a picture of a surprisingly neutral and equal learning environment immerses.

For the first few weeks of the course, after students speak, Tomba takes to the *kōza* (the high stage and cushion on which *rakugo* is performed) and, depending on the students' experience levels, introduces the fundamentals of *rakugo*. Often during the course, he also uses more experienced students to illustrate a technique. In *rakugo* the *hanashika* performs all the parts of a story alone using changes in the direction of the head (left or right) to signal a different character. In addition to the need to change direction when speaking in the voice of a different character, a performer also needs to be concerned about the power relationship between the characters. When portraying the more powerful character in the story the *hanashika* turns his or her head to the right towards the *kamite*, or upper area of the stage. When performing the role of the less powerful character, the *hanashika* turns his or her head to the left towards the *shimote*, or lower part of the stage. In one class, to illustrate this technique, Tomba called up two students to sit side-by-side on the *kōza* and act out a short conversation. After a short back and forth between the two students Tomba then asked one student to return to his seat. Then the remaining student acted out both parts of the conversation, turning his head at the points where he switched parts. This is an example of how the teacher chose to use students as agents of instruction.

In other situations, during the class, the teacher did not hesitate to illicit the opinions of the more experienced students. After students had practiced their story in front of the class, Tomba often asked experienced students how they felt about the performance. The students would then offer constructive advice on how to improve the performance. This created an environment that was less top-down in instruction style, which helped foster a sense of shared responsibility when working toward a final performance where everyone was successful.

The class at times functions without the teacher, as well. Towards the end of the term there are a handful of classes left before the big performance, which are actually allotted for the purpose of *jishū*, or self-study. In these sessions the teacher is under no contractual obligation to come, and it is expected that the group practice by themselves.⁹ During these sessions, students take turns practicing their story in front of everyone with some critiquing from the other students to follow. Any criticism is always tempered and encouraging with the student performing often being the harshest critic of his or her own work.

When I first signed up for a course teaching amateurs how to perform *rakugo* I first imagined a class with a strict hierarchy where the teacher was the clear undisputed leader of the class. This was based partly on my observations and interactions with professional *hanashika* and their apprentices. However, Tomba's employment of students as teachers and the independent leadership roles that more experienced students assumed during the course helped create a place

⁹ The teacher does come if his schedule permits, but it is expected that the students self-govern the group at this time.

closer to the leveler ideal described by Oldenburg (23). For a class led by an experienced professional the democratic nature in which the course was conducted created a level and somewhat neutral environment that fostered a friendly learning environment. This sub-section looked at how usage of students as examples and leaders in the class promoted a democratic atmosphere leading to a more equal footing. The next section will look at how this learning and social environment is not limited to one specific place hence the need to look to extend the definition of third place or create a new framework to fit this situation.

4.4. Class outside the classroom: Straying from the third place

When examining the *rakugo juku* one factor in conflict with the definition of third place is the fact that the group dynamic was not tied down simply to one site. Learning for the Kōjimachi Rakugo Juku students was not limited to the classrooms at Nittere Gakuin. While enrolled in the course I observed several chances to practice and receive instruction, from the teacher or other students, outside the classroom. One of the more frequently attended learning opportunities were the practice sessions held in the final month leading up to the big performance. With the large number of students in the class, getting enough time to perform in front of others became more difficult as more students had completely memorized their stories. Four additional practice sessions were organized by the students for those who wished to attend. They were held on consecutive weekends at a small local community center in downtown Tokyo. During these sessions, held from 1:00 to 5:00 pm, students took turns telling their stories. The atmosphere of these sessions was relaxed but focused, with several students bringing snacks for everyone. The modest cost of borrowing the room (the only Japanese-style room available at the center) was split among the students who attended. The teacher attended these practice sessions when his schedule permitted and provided advice, but these sessions would be held regardless of whether a teacher was present.

Socializing after classes also provides students with a chance to become closer to the teacher and each other. Each week, a regular group of 7-10 students goes to a local restaurant with the teacher (and sometimes the assistant) for a meal and drinks. For most students, this is a chance to get to know other students beyond their interest in *rakugo* and to spend more time with the teacher. The setting is more casual but nonetheless educational for those who choose to join. As Ohnuki-Tierney states, “Commensality binds people together who interact face to face in almost all societies to establish a sense of community or we” (qtd. in Creighton, 194). These after-class meals are chances to learn about aspects of the world of professional *rakugo* known only by an insider. Students and the teacher share their thoughts on *rakugo*, the latest news, gossip about members of the group, humor in general, and even the baseball pennant races. The tone is usually jovial with lots of ribbing going back and forth between the teacher and his students. It is here where conversation takes over as the main activity and the positive social aspects of the third place that Oldenburg envisioned are most evident.

Attending the after-class activities was voluntary with no noticeable social penalty for those who chose not to attend. If someone could not take part due to commitments at home or studying for a test, there were no protests from other members. Besides the regular group of about seven members who went out after every class, there were other members who attended the first and last outings of the term. There was an unwritten rule that all the students would pay the teacher and assistant's tab by splitting it evenly among the members (with the occasional discount agreed upon for university students).

In this section I examined how the *rakugo juku*, as apposed to third places, is in fact not dependent on any set location. While it can be noted that most of the social interaction of the *rakugo juku* takes place in the classroom social interaction after class and at other sites can play an important part of the social component of this group. In the next section I will explore how a new framework can be adapted to look at this similar to but not exactly third place.

5. Discussion: From Third Place to Third Face

So far in this paper I have examined different characteristics of the Kōjimachi Rakugo Juku attempting to discern if a learning community such as this could be considered a third place according to the requirements set out by Ray Oldenburg. What has emerged is a site that shares some of the traits of a third place but diverges in ways that make it difficult to call this *rakugo juku* a true third place. As a private class it requires tuition to attend making this place inaccessible to the general public. The cost of tuition could also be prohibitive for the average person to share this possible third place. This is in direct contrast with the pubs, cafés, coffee houses and such that Oldenburg references as ideal third places with very little limitation on accessibility.

The *rakugo juku* does succeed to a point in being a leveler with an environment that is welcoming and ignores class distinctions. Members of the course share as much or as little as they choose about their work and personal life. This emphasis on the one thing that the various members share, an interest in *rakugo*, creates an environment where class is not relevant. In addition to serving as a leveler the *rakugo juku*, for many members, provides a “home away from home”, the kind of welcoming group (albeit for a limited time each week) and place that Oldenburg felt necessary in a balanced life (1999). This welcoming and conducive atmosphere has led to a large portion of return students, which have become the regulars. This has in turn led to jovial camaraderie and playful ribbing very similar to what you may find a local bar.

This “friends by set” system is successful because of the “paradox of sociability” described by Oldenburg (60). “One must have protection from those with whom one would enjoy sociable relations...The average individual may regularly engage a host of friends only if he or she can be free of them whenever that freedom is necessary or desired. (Ibid)” The *rakugo juku* succeeds because as a friend set because people can disengage as they see fit. They can also restrict their interaction to *rakugo*-related activities, leaving as soon as the class is over. The cyclical nature of the course (two three-month long terms a year) also helps keep the friendships fresh, allowing

members to have a break from the intense *rakugo* practice and interactions with classmates for a few months in-between terms.

However, the most problematic and obvious difference between the *rakugo juku* and the third places that Oldenburg describes is that it is not dependent on one place. All of the examples Oldenburg references, the pubs, coffee houses, pool halls, public squares, are actually specific places that are unmovable. The people come to them for relief and socialization. In the case of the *rakugo juku*, the place is not as important as the people that occupy that space. In fact, the qualities of the *rakugo juku*, the camaraderie and jovial friendships, exist outside of the classroom at the Nittere Gakuin. Whether it is at a restaurant after class, backstage at a performance, or at an excursion to see a different *rakugo* performance, the social dynamics of the *rakugo juku* group, the Kōjiya family, exist outside of the space of the physical classroom in Kōjimachi.

5.1. From Third Place to Third Face: A New Framework for an Extension of Third Place

If it is indeed true that the *rakugo juku* is not comparable as a third place, why look at it through that lens at all? The limitations of the comparison could be identifiable for most observing from the outside. However, enrolling in the course and interacting with the students, teacher and staff provided a picture of a social space shared by people with a common purpose and varied backgrounds. Breaking the third place theory down to its most basic elements one is confronted with what is most essential for the success of a third place, the people that occupy it. It is this social interaction, not the four walls that hold up the roof, that Oldenburg sees as most important. Oldenburg laments, “Both the joys of relaxing with people and the social solidarity that results from it are disappearing for want of settings to make them possible. (xxix)” The *rakugo juku* is not solely dependent on one specific location but it does possess many of the qualities that Oldenburg saw as needed in a society that is becoming more fractured and less social. This leads to the potential need for a new framework to look at social spaces such as the *rakugo juku* that keeps many of the traits of third place while adapting to the mobility of this group. At this point I would like to introduce an extension of third place that is not limited to location and places a heavier emphasis on identity built through association and performance. Because this new framework is built on the concept of third place while adding a component dealing with identity through group association, I believe it should be called “third face.”

5.2. Assuming the Third face: Identity and a Third Place

One of the qualities that Robert Stebbins identifies with serious leisure, something that many of the members of the *rakugo juku* could be considered as participants, is that those that choose to dedicate themselves to such an endeavor “identify strongly with their pursuit” (1992, 7). Katrina Moore’s study of older women amateurs practicing Noh also notes that many women are able to shed their outside identity and assume a new identity through training and association with the art form (2014, 75-93). Kaeko Chiba, while focusing on women practicing the art of tea ceremony

also looks at the issue of identity (2011). Both Moore and Chiba look at participation in these art forms as a source of empowerment for women of different classes. While different than this study in focus, both point out how an art form and association with groups practicing that art form can provide participants with a new identity, separate from home or work, a third face that can be assumed when taking part in this practice. This identity creation, finding a third face as apposed to a third place, can also be found in the students of the *rakugo juku*.

Once joining the *rakugo juku*, students become a member (even if only for one term) of the Kōjiya family. They assume a name that they will be known by for the remainder of the course or whenever they participate in *rakugo* in the future. Issues of class or background are ignored, irrelevant in an environment where students come for the love of *rakugo* and stay for the social aspects of the group. Returning for a second term I was struck by the long-term member Koji when he stated, “Ah, it feels good to be back with the Kōjiya family. It just feels comforting.” This, in a sense, is the third face. Members come with a shared interest in *rakugo* while enjoying the social aspects of a group of adults with varied backgrounds that under normal circumstances would never meet.

This isn't to say that all members have the same commitment to the group or the art. In addition to the hardcore members that attend most terms, a handful of students take the course for one term and for some reason or another that is enough for them. Others may attend the course but limit their participation to the class itself, not taking part in the after-class social aspect. Yet others may take a term or two off for private reasons like a family illness or being busy with work. This though is also a quality of the third places that Oldenburg describes. Becoming a regular is as open commitment when it comes to taking part in a third place. Students at the *rakugo juku* can commit as deeply as they want or take a step back for a while. Even then, through *rakugo* and through this creative community, members have a third face which they can resume when they choose. This trait, not confined to any one place but to a group and an art form, can also be seen to some extent in practitioners of tea ceremony, Noh, and other creative arts that require a serious commitment. For *rakugo* and the *rakugo juku* in particular, with their use of *kōzamei* this third face is especially pronounced. Under this name, participants take the stage and act out several characters in humorous stories, assuming a stage identity. Once off the stage and with the group, members continue to play the part of *rakugo* enthusiast, not needing to maintain their first or second faces. This framework of third face links many of the qualities of third place to the identity building of taking part in a serious leisure activity. With this third face, many of the students of the *rakugo juku* have indeed found that “home away from home” which Oldenburg finds so important but, in this case, it is a mobile “home.”

5.3. Revisiting the Kōjiya Family

After experiencing one term as a member of the Kōjiya family I was able to return for one more term a year later. I had originally intended to take the next term after my summer course but

because of personal reasons I instead had to withdraw and re-enter the course the following summer. As a returning student and with less of an emphasis on research I was able to see the group through different eyes. Some of the members that I first studied with, Monaka and Wine, were no longer with the group. Others that started at the same time as I did, like Mandam and Juzo, had returned for their third term. Instead of the nervous excitement of their first term the two displayed a calm confidence in the group and on stage. They were of course still humble and looking for advice from the teacher and other students but because they had already successfully performed publicly twice before they now knew what it took to prepare themselves for another storytelling. They were now regulars. Through their regular attendance and enthusiasm for *rakugo* they had paid their dues and like the newcomers-turned-regulars described by Oldenburg they had been accepted into the group (1999, 35).

Some other regulars returned to the class for the first time in a while after skipping terms while others kept their consecutive streak of attendance intact. Once again, the students went through the course, learning their routines while forming or resuming their third face while in the group. Perhaps it was the wrap party, after another successful course final performance, where the bonds formed through this activity and community was most visible. Manji, the quiet but knowledgeable and respected longtime regular, had brought along a woman to the party, a first for him. After the group had dragged the information out of the normally shy and soft-spoken member that she was indeed his girlfriend the reaction was that of surprise and joy throughout the Kōjiya family. As the night continued many made sure to get in some friendly ribbing regarding this development in their end of the term speeches. Through this class and this creative performance art students from a wide variety of backgrounds were able to form social bonds and identities specific to this group and this art. After a long and jovial evening, the students, teacher and staff of the *rakugo juku* went their separate ways with most promising to reunite and resume their third face when the next term begins and this social space reforms.

6. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to look at a creative learning community through the lens of a third place. Upon closer inspection the amateur class for *rakugo* enthusiasts at Nittere Gakuin, while possessing several of the qualities of Oldenburg's third place, this social space differs in several ways and requires a new framework that takes into account the mobility of the group and the building of identity inside that group. By looking at the interactions between students inside and outside the class, their roles and the identity they assume away from their home or work life a larger picture emerges where the performance art of *rakugo* and the group in which they study it allows students to assume a third face. This third face is less dependent on a specific location and instead is assumed when interacting with the *rakugo juku* group or while performing *rakugo* elsewhere. This third face helps fulfill several of the social aspects of Oldenburg's third place while placing greater importance on the identity that members take away from this class. Eriksen

notes that, in addition to humans possessing multiple identities based on kinship, ethnicity, gender and other factors, they also possess complementary social identities, which are not fixed or innate (2001, 272). If that is true than this social identity or third face which these students assume plays just a large role in social relief or individual fulfillment to these students as the regulars in the third places described by Oldenburg.

Throughout this study as a student and observer of the *rakugo juku* I have marveled at the power of this creative art and the social space built around it. I have discussed how the combination of the two has helped create this loyal and dedicated community where identity outside of this semi-third place is irrelevant. The role of *rakugo* and this class in each student's life does vary of course. For some this was just a momentary hobby, a taste of the world of *rakugo*. For others, *rakugo* and the Kōjiya family have become something they return to regularly, receiving the creative and social satisfaction that their home or work lives cannot provide. As a researcher of Japanese comedy, I will move on to another research project that may lead me in other directions. Still, I move on with the knowledge that in the future I can resume my third face and be welcomed back to world amateur *rakugo* and the Kōjiya family when necessary.



Figure 2: The Kōjiya “family” pose for a photo after the public performance that concludes the course. Photo credit: Nittere Gakuin staff.

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