

Creating Transnational Fandoms — Adaptation of Japanese terminology among English-language *dōjinshi* users —

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1. Abstract

This article examines the use of Japanese terminology in English-speaking fan communities, or “fandoms”, of ‘manga created and self-published by fans’ (Meyer 2010, 233), known as *dōjinshi*, specifically Japanese role-playing video game (RPG) *dōjinshi*, using Azuma’s (2009) concept of a postmodern “database” of media elements to demonstrate how the adoption and shared use of Japanese words by English-speaking *dōjinshi* fans online can help create transnational fan communities. Such communities utilize user-created content and user-managed online spaces to form postmodern fan networks that transcend geographical borders based on shared imaginings of a particular cultural construct: Japaneseness.

2. Introduction

There are two main genres of *dōjinshi* available in English, and both are intimately concerned with sexuality as well as being expressions of fan affection for pop culture texts. The first genre I will discuss involves sexually explicit *dōjinshi* featuring one or more (generally) female characters engaged in (generally) heterosexual sex acts, and is known in English-speaking fan communities as “*hentai*”, ostensibly aimed at male readers. This genre shares many aspects of content as well as fan practices of dissemination and consumption with the other main *dōjinshi* genre, which in an English-speaking context goes by the name of “*yaoi*” or “boys’ love” (BL); these BL *dōjinshi* contain depictions of primarily male-male romantic and sexual relationships, and their main readership is considered to be female.

This article begins by looking briefly at *hentai dōjinshi*, providing an overview of the genre and its presence in English-speaking fan communities, before moving on

to examine how the term “*hentai*” used by those communities online differs from the way it is used by Japanese native speakers. This is followed by a section dealing with the boys’ love genre, its origins and how it has migrated into English-speaking fandoms, the various terms employed by its users and the differences in nuance between Japanese- and English-speaking fan users. In the final section I argue that this reinterpretation of foreign terms or loanwords supports Azuma’s assertion: that fans of contemporary Japanese pop culture are postmodern users, who treat media texts not as privileged originals but as a ‘database of settings’ (Azuma 2009, 63) or parameters from which they can select preferred elements, such as particular characters, scenarios, or in this case words, creating new texts that alter or expand the initial text’s content and which become, for some fans, as authoritative as the so-called “original” material. In this sense, we might consider the adoption of Japanese words, and the ways in which their nuances and uses are changed, to be one form of database use: English-speaking fans with knowledge of Japanese “pick up” certain elements (words and phrases) from commentary by Japanese fans, and they are then reinterpreted through repeated use in online communities. These new lexicons, along with the visual and narrative content of the *dōjinshi* texts themselves, thus become new content through which members of those communities can, regardless of nationality, form shared understandings and imaginings of “Japaneseness” around which they can build networks of communication transcending geographical contexts.

The broadest definition of *dōjinshi* in both Japanese and English-language contexts is something along the lines of ‘books edited and published by individuals with the aim of presenting their own materials’¹. In practice, the *dōjinshi* available in Japan at specialist stores or sales events largely use characters or worlds from pre-existing media texts² and are produced by fans of those texts, and come in either comic form using manga styles and techniques, or in “novel” or short written story form; a minority of *dōjinshi* are based on original characters and settings. In English-speaking contexts, it is far more common to find fan-produced *dōjinshi* of pre-existing texts than “original” ones, perhaps because the former are more likely to find a ready-made audience in the fans of the initial texts; and drawn *dōjinshi* in comic form prevail over novel *dōjinshi*, which in English-speaking RPG fandoms are less visible than online “fanfiction” written by English-speaking fans themselves.

In Japan the majority of *dōjinshi* are drawn using either pen and ink or computer programs like Manga Studio designed for drawing comics, and are printed and bound

by companies catering specifically to *dōjinshi* artists. They are then disseminated as hard copies in stores that also sell regular commercial manga, and at *dōjinshi* events such as the hugely popular Comic Market (Comiket, held twice a year in August and December in Tokyo). While online communities for the sharing of electronic art, such as Pixiv.net, are growing more and more popular among Japanese-speaking artists and fans, the printed and bound *dōjinshi* remains the most usual format.

In English-speaking fandoms, however, the vast majority of *dōjinshi* are scanned and then distributed online in electronic format in the Japanese language (“raws”), or scanned and translated into English (“scanlations”). *Dōjinshi* created from scratch by English-speaking users, either digitally or in print, are in fact far less in number than those created in Japanese and transformed or produced by English speakers in digital form, perhaps because of the ‘dynamics of fetishism’ (Pelletier-Gagnon 2011, 106) that cause fans of Japanese pop culture to accord cultural capital to elements they consider authentically “Japanese”. It is thus the digitized *dōjinshi* that were initially produced in Japanese, and the online contexts in which they are found, that I will be concentrating on primarily: not only is this type the most numerous in English-speaking fandoms of Japanese pop culture texts, but it also matches the electronically mediated fan practices and products that form the core of my broader research in the field of postmodern fandom.

3. The expanded use of “*hentai*” in *dōjinshi* fandoms

As noted above, my examination of these online *dōjinshi* focuses on two main genres, *hentai* and boys’ love. In this first section I shall deal with *hentai dōjinshi*. The decision to use the term *hentai* rather than “heterosexual” or “aimed at male readers” to describe this genre in the present article was a deliberate one: as shall be shown presently, *hentai*, in English-speaking fandoms of much Japanese popular culture, has strong connotations of the pornographic and texts described as *hentai* are generally considered to be aimed at male readers, though they are not strictly limited to depictions of heterosexual relationships. The above two traits are generally characteristic of the *dōjinshi* genre examined in this section, although there are some departures from them: while most of the *dōjinshi* contain male-female relationships as their central focus, there are significant exceptions (such as female-female or female-hermaphrodite), and defining the genre as “heterosexual” would be to exclude

these exceptions; and, while the context of their dissemination (for example adverts for live-action pornographic websites on the sites where they are hosted) goes some way to setting them up as “aimed at male readers”, this is by no means absolute, and the online context makes it difficult to state definitively that their readers *are* exclusively male. The pornographic nuance of the term *hentai* in English-language fandoms is useful when defining the characteristics of these *dōjinshi*, as almost all the *dōjinshi* available on English-language fan websites which are not labelled by fans themselves as belonging to the boys’ love genre are sexually explicit (while many boys’ love *dōjinshi* are also explicit, their male-male relationships and primarily female readerships distinguish them from the majority of *hentai*). It is not easy, in fact, to find an RPG *dōjinshi* in an English-speaking context that is neither boys’ love nor pornographic. These non-boys’ love *dōjinshi* with sexually explicit elements are known in English-speaking fandoms as *hentai*, which is used as a general term for the genre.

The term *hentai* demonstrates one of the ways in which English-speaking fans of such material borrow from, and are influenced by, Japanese cultural sources, and also how these borrowed texts and terminologies shift and are transformed as they move between cultures. McLelland has traced the roots of the word from its Japanese use into English-speaking fandoms, and states that ‘the use of the term *hentai* to refer to erotic or sexual manga and anime in general is not a Japanese but an English innovation’ (McLelland 2006, paragraph 3). In a modern Japanese context, its meaning is both broader and more specific: in a sexual sense, it designates ‘a person, action or state that is considered queer or perverse’ (2006, paragraph 1) (“queer” here is rather different from queer in its US/UK usage as a political and activist term, as will be clarified further below), and is not necessarily linked to the popular media forms of anime/manga/games. Where it is applied to pornographic comics or animation, it is ‘only of an extreme, “abnormal” or “perverse” kind; it is not a general category’ (2006, paragraph 3). As pornographic drawn and animated materials began to spread into English-speaking fandoms, however, the meaning shifted to refer more generally to non-boys’ love drawn or animated pornography, and it has now become a loanword in English-speaking fandoms, much as the meanings and nuances of many English words have been altered by use in a Japanese context.

If we consider the Japanese use of the term “*hentai*” along with the English alternatives that most closely approximate it – McLelland suggests “queer” or “perverse” – we find that its nuances differ from both of these in terms of implied sexual orientation. In a UK context, at least, the words “queer” and “pervert” have

often been linked with the notion of homosexuality, whereas, McLelland explains, ‘*hentai* in Japanese has had a primarily heterosexual nuance’ (2006, paragraph 24). This part of its meaning can be said to have transferred partially intact into English-speaking fan usage, as the *dōjinshi* that fall under the category of *hentai* on English-language distribution sites are largely, though not absolutely, heterosexual.

Hentai, in the English usage, can refer to various forms of media, including anime, manga, *dōjinshi*, games, even explicit cosplay photos or videos, though it is most often used to refer to animated or drawn media. In Japan, commercial manga defined as *hentai* in English-speaking fandoms are rather known as “*ero-manga*”, stemming from the English loanword “erotic” (Kelts 2006), while sexually explicit *dōjinshi* tend to be labelled “*seijin-muke*” or the English “for adults”, or “*dansei-muke*” (“for men”). The content and production process of these two types of media differ slightly: commercial *ero-manga* contain “original” characters and settings, and are produced by artists and assistants working under the supervision of a publishing company, which edits, prints and distributes the manga in either monthly anthology form or as a collected volume of multiple chapters. Many are available for purchase in mainstream bookshops, convenience stores, or as a section of tabloid magazines such as *Nikkan Sports*, as well as in specialist stores. *Dōjinshi*, on the other hand, are generally produced and disseminated by single artists or small groups known as “circles”; they predominantly contain characters from pre-existing media texts (manga, games, films, etc.) – though some professional artists also produce *dōjinshi* using characters from their own commercial manga – and are self-financed and “unofficial”. In this sense, they are not subject to editing or restrictions of content and form (size, length, color, and so on) in the same way as commercial manga artists, though they may face greater budget restrictions and do not have a company to publicize their work for them. They are disseminated in some specialist manga/anime/game stores, at conventions, and by mail order via artist websites.

These differences, however, do not prevent *ero-manga* and explicit *dōjinshi* from sharing many traits: the materials used, presentation of sexual scenes, and censorship techniques are common to both media, as are the scanlation and distribution practices of their English-speaking fans. It is not surprising, then, that in English-language contexts both media should fall under the heading of *hentai*, though it is generally understood that manga are drawn by commercial artists and *dōjinshi* are fan-made and largely based on pre-existing media texts. In the same way, scholarly observations about the content and techniques of *hentai* manga may also apply in many cases to

hentai dōjinshi, particularly in terms of the articulations of sexual practices found in both media. In this way, English-speaking fan use of the term “*hentai*” is both narrower than the Japanese, in terms of only being applied to a set of media forms, and wider, in its use to refer to a broad spectrum of sexually explicit material.

4. The use of Japanese terms in boys’ love *dōjinshi* fandoms

The term “boys’ love” or BL, by which I describe the *dōjinshi* and their fandoms that are the focus of this section, in its current Japanese³ usage, is somewhat broader than the use of “*hentai*”: it does not apply only to print manga and fan comics but has come to encompass anime, video games, live-action films and light novels, all of which contain central themes of boys or men in scenarios of male-male attraction, some of which are romantic and some graphically sexually explicit. This genre is said to have sprung from the *shōjo* manga that emerged in the 1950s. *Shōjo* manga of this period were aimed primarily at girls and young women and often featured romantic narratives centring on a female character, her emotions and experiences. In many cases they addressed issues of female views and hopes regarding alternatives to hegemonic gender ideals by creating successful heroines not dependent on a male character, and some went so far as to blur distinct gender categories by creating female lead characters who dressed and lived as beautiful young men (such as *Princess Knight*, serialized from 1953 in *Shōjo Club*) and were portrayed as the romantic targets of other female characters (*The Rose of Versailles*, serialized from 1972 in *Margaret*).

Suzuki states that it was a common trope in *shōjo* manga that ‘ideal relationships should transcend gender’ (Suzuki 1998, 248); to reflect this, and to depict human relationships without the visual stigma of female repression in a male-dominated hegemonic cultural context, some artists in the 1970s began to replace girls with boys in narrative romances. The most well-known of these early male-male romance manga in both Japan and the English-speaking West are Hagio Moto’s *Heart of Thomas* (serialized from 1974 in *Shūkan Shōjo Comic*) and Takemiya Keiko’s *Song of the Wind and Trees* (serialized from 1976 in the same publication). These manga, which abound with dark melodrama and tragedy, are set in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, and at the time of publication were not labelled as a fully-fledged sub-genre but regarded as part of the *shōjo* manga corpus.

Around the same time, *dōjinshi* were growing more prolific thanks to events at

which artists and readers could gather, such as Comic Market (Comiket), first held in Tokyo in December 1975. It was at this time that fan *dōjinshi* which featured male characters from pre-existing media and reimagined those characters as engaging in male-male sexual relationships became visible within *dōjinshi* culture (Mori 2010, 71-2) and began to grow in popularity with female artists and readers. Such fan texts became known by the collective term “*yaoi*”. *Yaoi* is an acronym, generally regarded as standing for the phrase “*Yama nashi, Ochi nashi, Imi nashi*” (“no climax, no point, no meaning”), ‘emphasizing that the plots were little more than vehicles to stage the sex scenes between the youthful male characters’ (McLelland 2005, 13), and signaling the highly sexualized features of these *dōjinshi*. Indeed, McLelland also offers an alternative derivation – *Yamete Oshiri ga Itai* (“Stop, my ass hurts”) (2005, 13) – which not only highlights the texts’ sexual nature but also the theme of anal penetration, which is central to much of the sexual activity depicted within them.

The sub-genre of *dōjinshi* known as *yaoi* continued to flourish in many fandoms; original *yaoi* manga magazines were also published, and narratives of male-male romantic or sexual relationships became alternatively known by some fans as “*June*”, after the title of one of the earliest and most well-known publications in the genre⁴. The Japanese “gay boom” of the 1990s did nothing to discourage this flourishing. This boom entailed an increase in public awareness of male homosexuality and a concomitant increase in commercial media depictions of male-male relationships, not only in manga and anime but also television dramas such as *Dōsōkai* (1993). It was in the 1990s that the term “boys’ love” emerged, coined, according to Sugiura, by an editor at the manga publishing company BiBLOS (Sugiura 2006, 136). Used initially to classify commercial manga, the term boys’ love and its short form, BL, has broadened in scope to include manga, *dōjinshi*, anime, novels, games, and film.

In a Japanese context, BL covers not only multiple media, both original and fan-created, but also varying levels of explicitness: the BL comics section on Amazon Japan, for example, carries over 9000 manga titles, and these range from high school romances, the culmination of which is a kiss, to explicit sadomasochistic pornography, and everything in between. The use of the term *yaoi*, on the other hand, appears to be reserved in Japan mainly for fan-produced *dōjinshi*, particularly those containing mainly explicit content, rather than multiple media forms; although some Japanese fans, as well as scholars such as Mori, use the terms interchangeably. Mori, discussing manga genres in the 1990s, speaks of ‘*yaoi* (boys’ love)’ (Mori 2010, 70), using both terms to talk about pornographic manga, though she also modifies boys’ love to “hard

BL” at times, to emphasize pornographic content. The introduction of new terms into a media discourse, it is clear, does not automatically mean that older terms fall into disuse; in the context of Japanese media aimed at female users and containing themes of male-male attraction, the variety of terms available stemming from both Japanese words and English loanwords, each with nuanced and shifting usages, suggest a multiplicity of interpretations and reading practices by fans, who are themselves by no means uniform in terms of gender, sexuality, age or nationality. The same lack of fixed definition regarding the terminology of this genre can be seen in both English-language fan practices and scholarship, and is complicated by the use of these media in a transnational context.

Western fans of Japanese media dealing with male-male attraction have had ample time to get used to many of the tropes presented in *yaoi*, as a somewhat similar genre of fan-produced texts, known as “slash”, has been growing in popularity over the last four decades. Slash, much like *yaoi dōjinshi*, arose in the 1970s and was originally a ‘predominantly female fandom which imagines same-sex scenarios between the male leads of popular TV dramas and action movies’ (McLelland 2005, 17). Initially developing out of stories written by fans about *Star Trek* characters (the term “slash” springing from the “/” mark between the names of the two male characters who are paired together, i.e. Kirk/Spock), slash now makes use of a much wider variety of media texts. It primarily takes the form of written fanfiction that invites comparison with Japanese novel *dōjinshi*, though fan-produced pictures and comics are also not uncommon, particularly since the increase in electronic scanning and art technologies and the migration of fandoms online in the Internet age.

Scholars such as Stanley (2010) and Isola make comparisons between slash and *yaoi*; drawing parallels between the two genres in terms of ‘the female deployment of a same-sex male sexual desire’ (Isola 2010, 87), Isola states that ‘*yaoi* and slash form and frame a multimedia media community that transcends linguistic, national, and cultural borders’ (85). Isola conflates the genres slightly, seeing in their undeniable similarities and the crossovers between fanbases a potential for ‘a shared act of imagining’ between users cross-culturally (2010, 85). Thorn also sees similarities between *yaoi* and slash in terms of the historical positioning of female fans in cultures of masculine hegemony, arguing that ‘what these fans share in common is discontent with the standards of femininity to which they are expected to adhere and a social environment and historical movement that does not validate or sympathize with that discontent’ (Thorn 2004, 180). This is not to say that the histories and experiences that

have led to a state of “discontent” are the same for Japanese and English-speaking fans, only that there may be parallels in the culturally specific methods of expressing it in the media they currently use.

The use of Japanese boys’ love/*yaoi* media by fans in the English-speaking world does currently converge in some ways with slash, particularly online: some users of fanfiction based on Western media are introduced to Japanese texts through English-language fiction based on Japanese media, found on large community websites like Fanfiction.net, while others discover Japanese *dōjinshi* scanlations based on the Western media they read/write fiction about. Some websites go so far as to equate the two terms, particularly if they contain written fanfiction based on texts of Japanese origin: Advent, a section of multi-fandom site Noiresensus.com devoted to the hugely popular RPG *Final Fantasy VII* (1998-2008), notes on its main archive page that ‘the majority of the files contained in this archive are classified as *yaoi* or *slash*’⁵, suggesting that, although these fanfictions are produced by English-speaking fans in an English-language online space, they are equally qualified to be considered *yaoi* as they are slash, based on the perceived Japaneseness of the media from which they are appropriated.

BL/*yaoi*, however, is a much more recent addition to English-speaking spheres than slash, being popularized in the US and UK, for example, in the late 1990s; knowledge of the genre, says Thorn, has ‘grown exponentially, thanks to the Internet’ (Thorn 2004, 172), in an online environment in which fans became able to share both information and the manga/*dōjinshi* themselves; the spread of the Internet was instrumental in making potential users aware of the existence of these Japanese media and providing them with access to it.

As in Japan, the term *yaoi* was in use in English-speaking fandoms some years before the term boys’ love or BL, and both are now used in online fandoms; but the ways in which they are employed and the nuances they are given by English-speaking fans often differ slightly from Japanese usage. In Japan, *yaoi*, where it is still used, continues to refer firstly to fan-created comics or novels based on pre-existing texts. There are many English-language websites that also use the term in this way: BlackSKY Scans, for example, is a Livejournal.com (LJ) page offering ‘FFVII Yaoi Doujinshi Scans’⁶, creating a link for the users of the page between *yaoi* and the fan-produced medium of *dōjinshi*. Others, however, use it in a broader sense to signal both fan-produced and commercial, “original” media: the Yaoi Shares LJ community allows posts to be made by its members offering both electronic scanlations and

subtitled anime episodes for free download, and hard copies of manga/*dōjinshi* for sale from members' private collections. In this case, *yaoi* does not differentiate between fan-produced and commercial media; though, in the case of scanlated commercial manga, it could be argued that this also has become fan-produced, that is, reinterpreted and recreated or *produced* (Bruns 2006), to a certain extent through the practices of translation and editing. *Yaoi*, in this particular community, refers to the male-male content in the media offered, rather than any nuance of specific production practices.

In other instances, *yaoi* can refer not only to media of Japanese origin but also to works by fans of the genre who produce their own English-language media based on Japanese texts, or original media inspired by the aesthetics or content of BL/*yaoi*. Yaoi-Con, the US's largest convention catering specifically to this genre, has been held annually since 2001, and features discussion panels with Japanese commercial manga artists, cosplay, a manga library, fanfiction contests, anime music video contests, and a dealer's room with both commercial publishers of Japanese manga in English and amateur artists producing their own works⁷. The use of *yaoi* here does not limit it to one medium or even to a specifically Japanese cultural context of production and use.

As these examples suggest, there is no firm consensus in English-language fan communities as to exactly what media the term *yaoi* should describe; and this is equally the case in scholarly works. The edited book *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (Levi et al., eds. 2010) suggests, by its title, a preference for the newer English loanword term, but the contributing authors use both BL and *yaoi*, not often specifying whether they are talking about commercial manga, fan-made *dōjinshi*, or both. This use of multiple terms may well stem from a sensitivity to the more fluid ways in which those terms are used among non-Japanese fans, as it is these users on which the book's theoretical focus rests⁸; it certainly makes it difficult to give a fixed definition of the term *yaoi* in an English-speaking context, whether that context be fandom or academia (which are by no means easy to separate at times and have in fact led to the coining of a new term, "aca-fan" (Jenkins 2014)), pointing to a diverse and variable user environment for these media.

The issue of explicitness complicates the *yaoi* term further. As mentioned above, in Japanese-language fandoms the acronym *yaoi* is said to stem from the sexual explicitness and perceived lack of plot in early male-male *dōjinshi*. For some English-speaking fans, *yaoi* can be used in a similar way, not to classify narratives of male-male attraction along production lines but according to the level of graphic sexual

description. Meyer, for instance, speaks of ‘BL and its more explicit subgenre *yaoi*’ (Meyer 2010, 232), suggesting that the term BL may be used broadly to refer to media depicting male-male romance but that *yaoi* contains specifically sexually explicit material. The link between *yaoi* and graphic sexual imagery can be seen in fans’ appropriation of another Japanese loanword, *shōnen-ai* (literally “boy-love”), for use as an indicator of explicitness. While no longer in popular use among Japanese fans to describe either manga or *dōjinshi*, this term emerged in the 1990s in English-language fandoms, around the same time as *yaoi*. Like BL, it is often used synonymously with *yaoi* to describe male-male content in manga, anime, *dōjinshi* or English fanfiction, regardless of the level of sexual content: Gongaga Yaoi, a long-running but now defunct website carrying video game *dōjinshi*, among others, displayed the Japanese kanji for “*Shōnen-ai Dōjinshi*” as the title on its top page⁹, and offered both explicit and non-explicit raw and scanlated *dōjinshi*.

However, Pagliassotti points out that ‘*yaoi* is often used to refer to harder, more sexually explicit boys’ love stories, and *shōnen-ai* for softer, less explicit stories’ (Pagliassotti 2010, 60). Some fan articulations support this: one user reply to the query ‘What is the Difference between Shounen Ai and Yaoi?’ on Fanpop.com offers this definition:

Yaoi is a shortening for a Japanese phrase that translates to “No [*sic*] plot, no climax, no point”. It’s basically male on male porn. The genre is totally focused on getting two males into a sexual situation...

Shonenai is just two cute looking guys in a close relationship. Sometimes there is sex and/or nudity, and sometimes they are gay, but it’s really just about cute guys in close relationships...

(User ID: “darmintoutau”)

Another states, ‘they are both about Boys Love, but *yaoi* tend to be more graphic than *shounen ai*’ (User ID: mari_giovani)¹⁰. While not employed in this way by all English-speaking fans, the use of *yaoi* and *shōnen-ai* as part of a ratings system constructs a particular nuance of sexual explicitness in *yaoi* in Western fandoms, signalling the type of content rather than media form; as has been demonstrated, this is by no means universal, but it cannot be discounted.

The apparent need for terminology with which to signal the explicitness and

non-explicitness of this media genre is one of the ways in which BL/*yaoi* can be said to differ from the *hentai* genre examined in the previous section: while the latter are invariably sexually explicit and generally require a warning of the fact on their covers, BL/*yaoi* texts vary greatly. Even within *dōjinshi* of this genre, which were the first media to be described by the *yaoi* acronym in Japanese due to their frequent sexual content, there is a broad continuum of depictions of male-male relationships, from platonic to pornographic. For this reason, the term boys' love is growing in use in English-language fandoms; whereas *yaoi* has been invested in the English-language with sexually explicit nuances and the less widely-used *shōnen-ai* with the less specifically sexual "close relationships", BL encompasses both ends of the spectrum and everything in between. In both Japanese- and English-language fandoms it is the least prescriptive and most able to take in the varied themes, levels of sexual content and reading practices found in an English-speaking online context.

5. Japanese terms as a transnational *lingua franca*

With the migration of fandoms online and the anonymity that attends this, it becomes difficult to locate geographical or cultural sections; rather, the Internet creates a plethora of fragmented and diverse groups (Busse and Hellekson 2006, 15). When considering online fandoms, 'it is important to remember that we are dealing with a range of different histories and experiences, and that we should not generalize based on "our" use of the Internet' (Goggin and McLelland 2009, 10). Yet, according to scholars such as Wood (2006), these globalizing (but not homogenizing) technologies can provide fans with strategies that are not based on content alone for challenging social norms and hegemonies, such as dominant gender binaries.

Azuma links his theory of database consumption, in which fans no longer revere the original text as a grand narrative but selectively pick up their favourite elements from a plethora of official and fan-produced simulations, specifically to the structure of the Internet:

...the behavioural pattern in database consumption, where the body of a work is understood as a database (the invisible), while the simulacra (the visibles) are extracted from it based on the preferences of the consumer, perfectly matches the logic of the Web...

(Azuma 2009, 102)

The Internet can be said to mirror the patterns of fan consumption, which, in the case of English-speaking fan communities, is carried out within its environs, forming a connection between technology and users based on how they manipulate the various media texts or simulacra.

These online communities of users can certainly be seen as globalized, with groups of fans organizing themselves and consuming works according more to language than cultural or geographic specificity; it is hard to tell, for example, whether scanlators and readers of the *dōjinshi* found online are American, British, South African, Chinese, and so forth. There may be clues in the word usage and spelling, but web technologies allow these fans ‘the freedom of anonymity and the potential to construct or present an online identity resistant to social constraints’ (Wood 2006, 409). This enables textual circulation among fans in many countries without the need for their particular backgrounds to be specified.

Indeed, the online consumption of *dōjinshi* transnationally can ‘transcend even the rather obvious constraints of language barriers’ (Wood 2006, 405), through shared terminology specific to various types of fandom that operates in an even broader field than English-language fandoms. Wood lists the Japanese words which have come to be shared among BL fans regardless of their native language, like *yaoi*, *uke*, *seme*, and *bishōnen* (2006, 405). Kelts adds to these instances of shared terminologies, although his examples show words migrating both from and into Japan: the Japanese use of the term “*ero-manga*”, for instance, derived from the English “erotic”, and the tendency in the West to use the Japanese word “*hentai*” instead (Kelts 2006, 127).

This suggests that, although a good deal of scholarship shows how cultural elements flow outwards from Japan, in the process of which they are picked up and used by both international fans and Japanese economic and political institutions for the project of “J-cool” (Allison 2009, 90), the flow works in multiple directions. This highlights the complexity of the processes of globalization, which are emphatically not West-rest, or even, as can appear the case with the video game industry, Japan-rest; like Azuma’s database model there is movement in many directions, with English-language fandoms online not being limited to a Western geographical context, and Japanese *lingua franca* terms also connecting speakers of other languages like French and Spanish (although there is not the scope in this article to explore outside English-language fandoms); and, while there may appear to be a privileged original, as

in the promotion of an idea of “Japaneseness” by *dōjinshi* fans in an English-speaking context, these online practices underline its artificial and fantastical character.

The use of terms such as those this article has discussed, which may also serve to promote the cultural capital of “Japaneseness” among fans, simultaneously dislocates them from their original cultural context; they become a method of transnational communication, a *lingua franca* that facilitates the sharing of discourse in a geographically non-specific online society through the fetishizing of an imagined cultural identity. While such practices may raise some concerns that merit further research about the essentialization of Japaneseness through a kind of “positive” orientalism, they also have the potential, through those shared imaginings, to provide a site in which the articulation of the varying national and cultural contexts of fan users as difference is subsumed in their collective appreciation of popular culture.

Notes

- 1 From the *What is the Comic Market?* presentation (English version, 2008, 3), available from the Comiket website (<http://www.comiket.co.jp/info-a/WhatIs.html>). The definition from the Japanese version reads, ‘個人が自分たちの作品の発表の場として編集発行する本’ (2008, 3). Comiket is the largest *dōjinshi* convention in the world, with over 500,000 visitors attending twice yearly.
- 2 In Japanese, “二次創作同人誌” or “パロディー同人誌”.
- 3 “ボーイズラブ” or the romanized abbreviation “BL”.
- 4 *June* magazine was published by Magazine Magazine from 1978-1979, then re-launched in 1981; it was characterized by romantic rather than explicit sexual manga and stories. It is still running.
- 5 http://www.noiresensus.com/bookshelf/ff7/index_marchive.html Accessed August 11, 2012.
- 6 <http://blacksky-scans.livejournal.com/> (Livejournal membership required for access) Accessed August 12, 2012.
- 7 A notable example is the original webcomic Teahouse, ‘a yaoi webcomic about fancy whores’ (<http://www.teahousecomic.com/>), whose American female amateur artists print and produce goods and hard copies of their online comic and who attended Yaoi-Con, much as Japanese fans produce *dōjinshi* and attend

Comiket.

- 8 This fluidity and the multiple use of terms cross-culturally was also the subject of discussion, though not consensus, at the conference “Global Polemics of BL (Boys Love): Production, Circulation, and Censorship” held at Oita University in January 2011.
- 9 <http://web.archive.org/web/20111229181545/http://www.gongaga.com/> Accessed December 5, 2010.
- 10 <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/anime/answers/show/223026/what-difference-between-shounen-ai-yaoi> Accessed November 17, 2010.

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