# Fantasy at Play:
# Gender and sexuality in English-language Japanese video game fandoms

GLASSPOOL Lucy Hannah

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Letters (Philosophy)

Graduate School of

Languages and Cultures,

Nagoya University

December 2016

# Contents

# Abstract

This dissertation examines articulations of gender in Japanese role-playing game (RPG) fandoms, specifically surrounding the successful game series *Final Fantasy VII*, in the context of English-speaking online fan communities, focusing particularly on the U.K. and U.S.A. Through textual and discourse analysis of various commercial and fan-created works and practices, including in-game fiction, machinima, fan comics or *dōjinshi*, cosplay, and gameplay, it explores how far these fandoms provide sites in which to question normative concepts of gender and sexuality. It also considers the role imaginings of "Japaneseness" play in informing the construction of gender and sexual ideals in fan commentary. It argues that any potential in these RPG fandoms for troubling or deconstructing traditional binary identity categories is not found in primarily digital fan works, where particular ideas of Japaneseness are influential in the construction of gender and sexual ideals. Rather, it is to be found in fan practices where the body and the digital are deeply entwined in the processes of both producing and using media texts and where imaginings of Japaneseness and identity are partially subsumed in moments of intense physicality.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my doctoral supervisors Professor Chikako Tanimoto Matsushita, Professor Mark Weeks, and Professor Edward Haig, for their invaluable guidance and advice regarding my research; it would not have been possible to complete this dissertation without them.

I also want to express my love and appreciation to my family and friends for taking care of me from the other side of the world. In particular my dad, who would be proud of my research although he wouldn't understand a word of it; my mum, for supporting me completely in every way; and my sister, for spending so many of our teenage years struggling through Final Fantasy with me.

If it were not for your encouragement and belief in me, I would never have started or finished this degree. Thank you all.

# 1. Introduction and Theoretical Perspectives



## 1.1 Introduction to research focus

This dissertation examines articulations of gender in Japanese role-playing game (RPG) fandoms in the context of English-speaking online fan communities, focusing particularly on Western Europe and North America over the last twenty years[1]. Through a holistic analysis of various fan-created media and practices, it explores how far these articulations provide sites in which to question normative concepts of gender and sexuality, and considers the role imaginings of "Japaneseness" play in informing the construction of gender and sexual ideals in fan commentary. This dissertation ultimately argues that any potential in RPG fandoms for moving beyond traditional gender and sexual norms, and the gender politics that so often serves to reinforce the existence of binary identity categories, is not found in primarily digital fan media genres, where particular ideas of Japaneseness are influential in the construction of gender and sexual ideals. Rather, it is

[1] It is true that these are privileged areas of the world, and that it would also be useful and interesting to investigate fan culture and gender in areas that have been marginalized culturally and geographically. My research history to date has focused on relationships between Japanese and Western media use; I am from a Western background and I feel that it is necessary to interrogate my own gendered position as both academic and Japanese pop culture media user before embarking on an exploration of fandom in a wholly unfamiliar cultural context. Therefore, the scope of this dissertation is limited, but I hope it could provide a starting point for further research in a less well-travelled sphere.

to be found in the fan practices of gameplay and cosplay, where the body and the digital are necessarily entwined in the processes of both producing and using media texts and where imaginings of Japaneseness and identity are actually partially subsumed in moments of intense physicality.

What makes video game fandoms a significant site in which to address issues of gender and sexuality? In 1972, the first mainstream arcade computer game was released: *Pong*, a simple game of tennis (Atari). From such humble beginnings, the video game industry exploded into monstrous success, to the point where the market, including game software and hardware, is worth over £3.9 billion per year in the UK (The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment, 2016, 23), making the UK the sixth largest market worldwide and rivalling the popularity of film. The level of connection between game and user is, this dissertation will argue, unique among the many forms of media. Yet gender studies, which has been most thorough in examining the constitution of gender norms and their subversion through film, television and many other media, has only recently begun to consider the vast and diverse field of video games as an area worthy of study. There are many gaps as yet unfilled in terms of gender and, as the two are constantly intertwined, sexuality. This project will be of interest to readers in the field of gender and popular culture, and those concerned with how fan cultures manipulate normative ideas of gender through the practices of gameplay and fan creations.

There has been much productive research done on fan culture in various contexts, ever since the field of fan studies was popularized by Jenkins in 1992. There have been fascinating studies on fans of video games (Jones, 2006, Krzywinska, 2007), cross-cultural use of Japanese media by fans (Akatsuka, 2010, McLelland, 2005, Wood, 2006),

fandom and new technologies (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, Hancock, 2011), gender and sexuality in fandom (Gn, 2011, Isola, 2010, King, 2013), and fan roles in the creation of specific genres of amateur media based on pre-existing texts, known as "transformative works" (Ito, 2011, Lamerichs, 2011, Suzuki, 1998, Winge, 2006), all of which have helped inform the growing body of knowledge within this relatively new discipline. However, the majority of these studies focus on a single fan practice/media and/or its connections with the initial commercial text that inspired it. This dissertation addresses this by selecting one initial commercial text (specifically, products surrounding the popular Japanese RPG *Final Fantasy VII*) and, rather than focusing on a single genre of fan practice/media, conducts a holistic analysis of several genres of transformative works as well as the initial texts. This enables the making of a web of connections across different fan practices and media as well as between transformative works and the initial texts, and thus a more comprehensive, complex and nuanced study of gender and sexuality within one fandom. Further, this study does not privilege the initial game texts as "originals", but rather sees them as one set of simulacra within a complex network of industry and fan creations, the line between which is by no means distinct.

The dissertation also engages with considerations of globalization and localization, of whether culturally specific, in this case Japanese, media, through the practices of both production and translation into English, can actually be considered "Japanese" at all by the time they arrive elsewhere in the world, and whether the concept of such a stable national identity is even possible. This will lead to a consideration of the part fan imaginings of "Japaneseness" plays within RPG fan groups, and how this may affect articulations of gender and sexuality.

Why Japanese games, particularly? Issues of gender in relation to "niche"

Japanese media such as anime and manga in a Western, though frequently American, context have been widely discussed in media theory (Schodt, 1998, Napier, 2007). Video games and associated products developed in Japan have a much broader user demographic, and are by far the most widely used entertainment media of Japanese origin in the West today. The enormous reach of these games, and the active participation they generate amongst dedicated users, or "fans", means that a great deal of commentary has sprung up around them, much of it relating to gender and sexuality. Articulations of gender and sexuality available in Japanese games, and in fan works created by Japanese fans and imported by English-speaking users, equal those in games of Western origin in quantity, but may be quite different in content. By examining how these articulations, as well as ideas of "Japaneseness" itself, inform commentary on gender ideals in transformative works created by Western fans of Japanese games, this dissertation seeks to reveal how far specific ideas of Japanese culture constructed by a fandom transform fans' perspectives on and performance of gender and sexuality.

It would be unreasonable to expect such articulations to be uniform across the many genres of video game, even if limited to Japanese games in a Western, UK context: there are racing games, beat-em-ups, shooters, platform games, puzzle games, and many more categories. This research project therefore discusses gender through the locus of fantasy RPGs; this genre has large and dedicated fan groups or fandoms, as well as casual gamers, without a strong bias towards either male or female players in terms of numbers, and these fandoms are extremely active in play, discussion, and creation. Specifically, this dissertation examines materials and commentary surrounding the game world of *Final Fantasy VII*. The Final Fantasy series, developed by Japanese company Square-Enix and released primarily on Sony consoles, is one of the biggest RPG series' both in Japan and

in the West, in terms of both sales and fan communities. The original *VII* game was released in 1997 (by Square and Sony Computer Entertainment), and has become so popular with over 10 million units sold (Webster, 2010, paragraph 5) that it now has prequels, sequels, spin-offs, a feature film and an animation available. A high-definition remake was also announced by Square Enix this year, after more than a decade of requests from fans. The vastness of the game world and its long and intricate storyline has resulted in a huge and varied group of gamers and fans who, in terms of discussion and creating their own media, are one of the largest in Japanese RPG fandoms.

Further, in terms of the gender of their users, the *FFVII* games have a fairly even ratio of male to female players. They are not aimed particularly at one gender, unlike genres which were previously thought to appeal mainly to young men through violence (such as beat-em-up or first-person shooter games), or games whose content and advertising seemed to target girls (pet care simulations or home-making and fashion games[2]). Games directed specifically at male or female users have for years been accused by journalists and academics for promoting gender stereotypes and sexism. The Final Fantasy series does include elements of violence in its battle system (although it is now considered somewhat reductionist to assume that violence in games is appealing only to men); this system requires some strategy, as well as other non-violent in-game activities like the collection of items that will increase a character's abilities, and the building of a character team that strikes a balance between attack skills and healing or constructive abilities. The games also involve the unfolding of romantic and other relationships

[2] A clear example is the range of Barbie games by Mattel, whose "My Dreamhouse" titles include genres like "Fashion and Creativity," "Fairytales" and "Puppies and Friends". The colour scheme for these games is overwhelmingly pink. However, perhaps in response to long-standing criticism of video games for girls and of the Barbie brand generally, the My Dreamhouse website (http://kids.barbie.com/en-us/game/my-dreamhouse) now includes a section stating "You Can Be Anything," with options such as Doctor, Athlete, Artist and Pilot.

between characters through world exploration, puzzles and riddles, races, and many other activities. While the fighting aspect of the games is one of the selling points, it is by no means the only one. This may account for the even gender balance of Final Fantasy fans, and is one of the reasons this game series forms the case study of this dissertation.

There are two main areas of articulation and commentary to focus on, constantly intersecting and sometimes, but not necessarily, conflicting. First there is the "industry" side, which includes officially-released materials: the game itself, its plot, characters, visuals, and rules, as well as spin-off media, could all be considered to contain commentaries on gender and sexuality. Secondly, but according to Azuma (2009) not subordinate to this, is what might be termed the "fan" side, which has as its commentaries online discussion forums, fan comics, fan videos, cosplay sites, and game modifications, which often present different articulations from the official side. Here, also, is the interesting issue of the experience of gameplay itself, one of the main elements that characterises video games as distinct from any other form of media: the physical reactions, gameplay strategies, acceptance or challenge of rules. These industry and fan products and practices build on one another, influence and challenge one another in a complex network of shared knowledge and differing priorities. Crawford and Rutter stress the similarities between game and fan cultures, and 'the ways in which being involved in the gaming experience is linked to a rich intertextual web of other texts and practices' (2007, 275). The Internet is a crucial factor in the working of contemporary fan culture, it being the medium through which the network of different fan groups and media intersect, 'to construct and share gaming solutions, add-ons, updates, and mods [modifications of game code], as well as fictional stories and "fan art" based upon gaming narratives' (Crawford & Rutter, 2007, 279). As such, this dissertation does not merely analyze industry media

in relation to one specific fan genre, but examines a range of digitally-mediated fan media and practices and the relationships between them as well as comparing industry and fan articulations of gender and sexuality. This is one of the key areas in which this research differs from the majority of studies on Japanese pop culture and Western users.

## 1.2 Key terms

### 1.2.1 Gender and articulation

Before proceeding further it is necessary to outline some of the main terms used in this research. First, and crucially, is the particular concept of "gender" being utilized. Rather than supposing that genders, "masculine" and "feminine," are somehow essential categories, or are tied inextricably to the "natural" or biological body and a male/female binary, my own use of the term draws from Butler's work (1990, 1993). This holds that gendered practices, "performances," are not simply determined by essentials of masculine/feminine, male/female, but that they also serve to constitute these categories, naturalising the "social truths" of binaries and the sexed body in a historical and culturally specific manner (Butler, 1993, 4-5). This echoes Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in their denial of an "essence" of anything, and their assertion that what we have come to consider as being essential, such as "society", "the subject", or "gender" is rather the product of a series of relationships and practices of articulation, which is how they define discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, 96): those practices by which statements, claims, images, myths, come to be (1985, 105). Laclau and Mouffe see no split between material practices and theoretical ones; thinking and feeling are also practices. There is no essence, no fixed meaning or representation in these categories; there are attempts at achieving fixity, or

normativity in Butler's terms, and it is those sets of "articulations" – visual, oral, written and other statements – to which the most attention is paid at any given time that Laclau defines as hegemony; these are constantly challenged (1985, 111), but have historically proven extremely tenacious. Thus the term "gender" in this research refers to the constituted categories that seek to stabilise themselves through normative practices of articulation, but that are constantly challenged and destabilised in the same fashion. Where Butler has been criticized for focusing too narrowly on language, to the exclusion of the body and bodily experience (Bordo, 1993), I will make use of affect theory, in which the body is central (to be discussed in subsection 1.4.3).

This dissertation borrows the above term "articulation" to refer to visual and other depictions of gender, sexuality and Japaneseness. Initially "representation" was used to describe these depictions; however, following some points made in Section 1.4.2 by postmodern video game theorists on the distinction between "representation" and "simulation", I have chosen to use "articulation" in order to avoid confusion.

### 1.2.2 Fans and Fandom

This research focuses on "fans" and "fandoms" rather than so-called "casual" gamers, due to the amount of discussion and creative media they generate from the games they play, which is where some of the most interesting articulations of gender lie; but how can fans be defined? Jenkins, in 1992, was one of the first Western theorists to problematise the notion of the fan as a single, homogenous category, an "audience," passively and obsessively consuming their chosen media texts; he acknowledged the productive activities of fan groups; he also highlighted his own position as both an academic and a television fan, and the differing accounts these two groups often have of fan practices, a

topic he developed in later work (Green, Jenkins & Jenkins, 1998). Since then, others have taken his ideas further; Harris debates the relevance of the term "audience" as a static and homogenous group, declaring that '[a]udiences in and of themselves cannot be said to "exist" anywhere, and they do not hold still' (Harris & Alexander, 1998, 3). They are fluid, multiple, and active, and this is where she locates fans, also stressing the specificity of different fan groups or fandoms, something that Jenkins did not discuss particularly thoroughly.

However, the term "audience" is so heavily loaded now with notions of consumption rather than action and creativity that this dissertation does not make use of it in connection with fan groups; in the context of video games, particularly, where the activity of the player is an integral part of the media form itself, gameplayers, especially game fans, are *not* audiences. A more useful definition may be that of "produser", a term used extensively by Bruns to describe individuals or groups who are involved in 'the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content' (Bruns, 2006, 276) in a shift away from a more traditional producer-distributor-consumer model. In particular, the fandoms explored in this dissertation appear to resonate with Azuma's model of postmodern Japanese pop culture fans, who not only produce content but place transformative works on the same level of importance as the commercial text they are borrowing from, selecting and manipulating isolated elements without feeling the need to adhere to any overarching narrative framework the text may contain. These fans also borrow from one another's works, creating a "database" of transformable elements that includes both initial and fan texts (Azuma, 2009), thus blurring the disctinction between "original" and "copy". In this postmodern production environment, commercial texts also borrow from previous commercial and transformative works, so that 'the original is

produced as a simulacrum of preceding works from the start, and in turn the simulacrum of that simulacrum is propagated by fan activities' (Azuma, 2009, 26)

For the *Final Fantasy* fandoms being explored here, which are so prolific in creating their own material as well as being instrumental, through their consumption, for the game itself to run its course, "produsage" is a better term for these fan practices than a one-way model of audiencehood, as it combines the concepts of use, which includes active consumption, and production. It is very hard, then, to define what a fan or a fandom actually *is*; like everything else according to Butler and Laclau and Mouffe, they have no essence; all we may reasonably say is that, within the multiple groups who play Japanese video games, a fan is one whose pleasure lies not only in gameplay itself, but also in making an effort to engage with its cultural background, structure, or history; and who often, though not always, is involved in creating new materials from the original game, such as discussion forums, cosplay, videos, game modifications, or comics. Given this diversity, it is also an over-simplification to say that there is only one fandom or group of fans per game; rather they are multiple, intersecting, loosely connected through their enjoyment or interest in one game that is not limited to the act of gameplay itself.

The next section locates Japanese RPGs within a specific context, acknowledging their historical and current links to Japanese media such as manga and anime, as well as Hollywood film and board-based role-playing games that are so often cited as influences upon the development of RPGs. It also discusses the sites of video game fandoms, and the extent to which they operate within an electronic world.

## 1.3 Anime and the Internet: Contextualizing Japanese video game fandoms

There are two important and interlinking considerations to take into account when researching Japanese RPGs and their English-speaking fandoms. First, there is the evolution of RPGs from, and their links with, Japanese media such as anime and manga, from an aesthetic and technical perspective, and also in terms of their fandoms in the West. This leads to the second point of consideration: RPG fandoms in the West, which, arguably more than fandoms of any other media, practise almost exclusively via electronic and online devices.

Early video games from the 1970s were limited in terms of design, as the still emerging technology was very simplistic, and were unable to have "characters" as such; instead they used icons and geometric shapes. Japanese companies led the field in this stage of arcade games and early consoles in the late 1970s, and so their design choices were of some significance in shaping the features of games to come[3]. Once programming capabilities increased enough to allow 2D humanoid and animal characters or "avatars" to be used in arcade and console games, Japanese designers began to use the cartoon style of anime and manga to create their characters. In terms of popular culture, manga and anime style design and animation is naturalized far more in Japan, where comics are read by a wider sector of the population, than in the West; thus the style is familiar and comfortable to Japanese players.

There is also a link between manga, anime and video games in content as well as form and design. Just as many manga series' have been adapted for animation, so have

[3] One of the most popular Japanese companies, Taito, produced and distributed the popular arcade game *Space Invaders* in 1978, which used simple triangles, squares and lines to make up its field of play. Taito is now owned by Square Enix, the company responsible for *Final Fantasy*.

an increasing number of anime and manga been made into video games, and vice versa; the *FFVII* series, for example, began as a 3D console game and has since been adapted and extended as a digitally animated feature film and a three-part anime. Japanese RPGs, especially Final Fantasy, are generally extremely long, some requiring over fifty hours of dedicated gameplay in order to finish; in plot, therefore, they may be less closely linked to the Hollywood films that have been deemed an influence on video games (Smith, 2002) than to episodic series of some *shōnen* anime (anime aimed at boys or young men): a long, often complex storyline punctuated by frequent, escalating bouts of combat. Western game studies has discussed the evolution of RPG video games from both films and role-playing board games such as *Dungeons and Dragons* (Poole, 2004, 77,139), but has largely ignored the influence of Japanese popular culture on games like Final Fantasy. Japanese video games, while using the same technologies as, and having many connections with, Western game genres and design, also draw on specifically Japanese cultural forms and aesthetic traditions, and it would be a mistake not to acknowledge this in any study of a Japanese RPG.

It is clear that there are also many intersections between video games, anime, and manga within their fandoms. Three of the creative genres fans use to comment on Japanese popular culture are fanfiction, or stories written by fans using characters or storylines from the original media; *dōjinshi*, or fan-drawn comics; and "cosplay", where fans dress up and sometimes roleplay as the character of their choice. In the West, online fanfiction and *dōjinshi* sites that collect fan material from many different series' often include games, anime and manga all together, organising stories and comics according to series, genre and rating rather than according to the medium of the original product. As for cosplay, in the UK, at least, the events and gatherings where it takes place are often

under the common heading of science-fiction and fantasy, or Japanese culture conventions, where one can see a fairly even number of characters from games and from anime and manga.

Since the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a number of academic works have sprung up on the migration of fandoms onto the Internet (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, Lackner *et al*, 2006); whereas previously fan creations had been shared mainly through printed magazines, journals, and art, these practices have now moved online. For Western fans of Japanese pop culture, much of which is still not readily available overseas, the Internet is a prime site not only for discussing and disseminating fan works, but also for acquiring the primary material of that fandom, such as episodes of *anime* or scans of original *manga*. Despite this, the ideal mode of experiencing the original texts is still, according to many fans of Japanese transformative works such as *dōjinshi*, to own the physical item, something you can hold in your hands. As will be discussed later, this may be linked to the cultural capital accorded "Japaneseness" and Japanese products by some fans.

Video games, however, are rather different: from playing the original games, many of which can now be downloaded as a file from online stores, to discussion and fan creation, they are experienced almost exclusively through digital technology, from the console to the Internet, which these days are frequently linked. Not only does this occur to a level almost unknown in earlier fandoms, it may also present a new concept of fan groups to the researcher: where the various sectors of a fandom are sure, at some point or other, to have a presence online, one does not run such a risk of overlooking a major part of the demographic as when fan practices were carried out mainly offline; on the Internet, different groups, their practices and creations, are easily accessed and visible. Even

gameplay sessions which are conducted offline can be recorded and uploaded to a video sharing site; thus, the majority of video game fandom is conducted in an electronic space that can be and is disseminated online, which led to the decision in this dissertation to focus on fan practices that are, at some point in their process, mediated digitally. This, of course, comes with its own set of concerns: the Internet, point out Busse and Hellekson, creates a plethora of fragmented and diverse groups, so that while their material is readily available, 'it is much harder to get a comprehensive sense of a fandom' (2006, 15). This may be particularly true of Japanese RPGs, where groups of fans of the same game may be interested in very different facets such as gameplay, the design and structural code, the storyline and characters, or the non-game elements such as spin-off films and anime. As each group may present very different articulations of gender or sexuality, it is important to cover a broad spectrum of areas and practices within a fandom.

Thus, links can be seen between the long established forms of manga and anime and the more recent medium of Japanese RPGs, historically, aesthetically, and within fan practices and products, highlighting a distinction between Japanese and Western games and their fandoms that is not often made by video game theorists. Further, video game fandoms, more than those of any other media, exist almost entirely within an electronic world, and it is this that helps to make Japanese games distinct from any other Japanese media.

## 1.4 Theoretical perspectives and research methods

This section gives an overview of the key theoretical perspectives used to inform this dissertation and its analysis of gender articulations, including fan constructions of

Japaneseness, video game theory and postmodern play, and the connections between the body and digital images/practices in game fandoms. It then outlines the research methods used and introduces subsequent chapters.

### 1.4.1 Japaneseness

When discussing this research project and the game being used as a case study, the question "where does Japaneseness come into it?" is often raised. At first glance, this does not seem such an unusual question: the game is set in a fantasy world, on a fictional futuristic planet, and a casual observer or gamer may well not identify any specific cultural characteristics while playing; it is translated into English, and populated by characters with skin that ranges from pale to dark, and hair that varies from blond to red to silver. Iwabuchi mentions these aesthetic tendencies, wondering why Japanese media and audio-visual products exported to the West seem to be so culturally "odourless," having few characteristics of any culturally exclusive discourses that serve to delineate the boundaries of "Japaneseness" within Japan itself. This is odd, he argues, since, in order to combat the 'uneven power relations in a West-dominated history' (Iwabuchi, 2002, 15), Japan tends to employ a nationalising force which takes the form of a self-Orientalizing discourse, both incorporating and playing with Western Orientalist discourse, in order to represent itself as 'culturally exclusive, homogenous, and uniquely particularistic' (Iwabuchi, 2006, 19). Iwabuchi rather sees Japanese video games and animation as odourless: the characters and settings, particularly of video games, do not look especially "Japanese," and are rather defined by *mukokuseki*, a term that suggests the absence or disappearance of specific cultural characteristics or contexts (Iwabuchi, 2002, 28).

One motivation for this tendency could be as a marketing strategy; by avoiding cultural specificity, it may be easier for games to attract a broader user demographic, thereby increasing sales; as will be shown in Chapter 2, this is indeed a factor in the design and localization of Japanese video games. If we were to accept this as the primary reason for the *mukokuseki* phenomenon, then, we would not have to deal with any culturally specific "identities" or simulations of identity in looking at these games in the West. Given that this dissertation examines *FFVII* and its fandoms in an English-language context rather than a Japanese one, and with primarily Western fans, it is even less surprising that Japaneseness does not appear to be an issue of great interest at first.

However, Iwabuchi goes on to add that the massive popularity of Japanese video games worldwide has prompted Japanese commentators to 'confer a specific Japanese "fragrance" on these cultural products' (Iwabuchi, 2002, 31). He also mentions the "obsessively devoted" fans of video games and Japanese animation in the West, who, like their Japanese counterparts, engage in activities such as cosplay, and this popularity is why Japanese game makers and fans are once more associating "Japaneseness" with these games. This, he argues, leads to a basic contradiction:

> [T]he international spread of mukokuseki popular culture from Japan simultaneously articulates the universal appeal of Japanese cultural products and the disappearance of any perceptible "Japaneseness" which…is subtly incorporated into the "localization" strategies of the media industries.
> (Iwabuchi, 2002, 33)

So, the "yearning" for "Japaneseness" that Western fans of Japanese games articulate, in Iwabuchi's view, tends to lack understanding of the complex discourses in which such games are produced. These localization strategies that Iwabuchi mentions arguably

increase the *mukokuseki* attributes of Japanese video games when they are translated and marketed in different countries. Mangiron talks at length of the incredible freedom given to translators of Japanese video games into foreign languages, to have the games conform 'to the local standards of the target culture' (Mangiron, 2007, 308) by changing dialogue, cultural references, humour, graphics, even storyline.

One might suggest that any Japaneseness that might have resided in these video games is erased once and for all in the translation, or "transcreation" process (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006) that locates them within an English-language market. Yet games with massive fan followings, such as *Final Fantasy*, are certainly defined as Japanese within their fandoms, and perhaps it is these imaginings of Japaneseness that are interesting, rather than whether the games have any *inherent* Japanese specificity or whether fans lack understanding of an "authentic" Japan. A knowledge and appreciation of the Japanese background of these games is one factor that distinguishes the fan from the casual gamer. For some areas of the fandom, indeed, the idea of Japaneseness carries a certain cultural capital, and fans may privilege what they see as "Japanese" within the game and their own media creations. An example would be a prequel instalment of the game series, *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2008). The voices for this game were dubbed into English when it was released in the U.S.A. and U.K.; the gamer has no choice but to play it that way unless they import a Japanese version of the game. However, some fans so preferred the Japanese voice acting that they found Japanese versions of the game's film sequences or "cut-scenes," added their own English subtitles, and uploaded the videos to sharing sites such as YouTube, as if to watch the cut-scenes this way were a preferred way of experiencing of the game. Other fans in online communities use screen-names or signatures (a block of writing automatically attached each time the user makes

a post or comment) containing Japanese words, names, or script.

Although RPGs take many hours of play, during which performativity of some kind, non-normative or not, does arguably take place, it must be remembered that this is only a temporary state; the same holds true for other fan practices like engaging in online discussions or making videos. As Boulter discusses, because of its transitory nature and the limitations placed upon the user by the rules of the game, gameplay 'allows for a sense of freedom precisely as it limits that freedom…[it] does not alter, or radically interrogate, the facticity of the body…in the real world' (Boulter, 2005, 56). It is a game, he argues, but this is a part of its pleasure. On the other hand, the act of simply playing a game requires 'a profound amount of creative involvement and action on the part of the gamer' (Garrelts, 2005, 9), and so it is important to consider the video game as a medium through the theory that has grown up around it, and how a game's relationship with the player could affect identity performance. This dissertation shows how imaginings of Japaneseness carry a certain weight in forming fan ideas about identity in practices and media that are primarily digital; and how the importance of Japaneseness begins to decrease in practices where the fan's body becomes more central and embodiment is key to producing and experiencing media.

### 1.4.2 Video game theory and the postmodern

While the active participation of users is what characterizes postmodern media generally (Azuma, 2009) and fandom in particular, the active role of the gameplayer in the realization of the initial text itself is arguably one of the features that sets video games apart from commercial media like manga, anime. Unlike a film or a printed or digital comic, which exist as "finished" texts independent of any post-production user input, a

game is realized in its audio, visual and narrative aspects (by which we generally recognize a media text) only through the process of gameplay (Atkins & Krzywinska, 2007, 6); as Newman points out, it 'is nothing without a player' (2002). While other media such as paintings, sculptures, comics and so on arguably require a user to grant them significance, video games do not really "exist" as audio-visual media if they are not played. The closest analogy may be a written piece of music, which requires both a musician and an audience (in games, this is the same person) to be manifest. Video games differ in that the game will manifest differently every time it is played, because players make different choices from a set of options, move the controller in different ways, lose or win fights with different levels of damage, creating a variation of manifestations without straying from the game rules. This is known as the "ergodic" aspect of video games, which 'signifies the general principle of having to work with the materiality of a text' (Klevjer, 2002, 192). The ergodic function is more central to video game texts than to other commercial media such as anime or manga, though the active produsage of fans heightens the level of material construction in fan media.

The commercial CD-ROM version of *FFVII*, for example, does contain a number of finished, traditional representational texts in the form of distinctive artwork printed on the CDs and a CD booklet containing images and written information. These, however, are arguably peripheral to the central commodity of the game itself, which cannot be viewed, or even created in the sense of a text that unfolds a story, without the input of a gameplayer. The question of interactivity, which is linked to this gameplayer activity and is also argued to be a key feature of video games (Hjorth, 2011, 25), is a major factor in the theorization of game narrative, and the oft-contested relationship between gameplay and narrative will be examined further shortly.

Another key characteristic of the video game as distinct from other media is simulation (Frasca, 2003, Hjorth, 2011); if we use this concept in the way outlined by Baudrillard, this once again sets up games as part of a hyperreal, 'a real without origin or reality' (Baudrillard, 1988, 166), which refers to a world in which there is no longer any such thing as an "authentic" or "real" referent, in which people create and consume sets of simulacra: signifiers for things that never existed but which appear real. Baudrillard's characterization of simulation in a postmodern world is somewhat bleak, but is echoed in various aspects of the fantasy RPG genre, which looks increasingly realistic but in which there appear to be no original referents or basis in reality (Kingsepp, 2007). Frasca, a game theorist, likewise posits simulation as a postmodern alternative to representation, though he uses a narrower technological model of definition:

> Simulation does not simply retain the – generally audiovisual – characteristics of the object [the playable game character] but also includes a model of its behaviors. This model reacts to certain stimuli (input data, pushing buttons, joystick movements), according to a set of conditions… (Frasca, 2003, 223)

Frasca stresses that simulation, particularly in the more narrow sense of the digital enactment of a given scenario, 'does not deal with what happened or is happening, but what may happen. Unlike narrative and drama, its essence lays on a basic assumption: change is possible' (Frasca, 2003, 233). This resonates with Azuma's description of postmodern media as a set of databases in which the "small narratives" (grand narratives not being an inherent feature of postmodern media) of initial (commercial) texts are no longer viewed by fans as fixed and unchangeable, and in which a 'screen and a plot, which seem unitary on the surface outer layer, are just an aggregate of meaningless fragments

in the deep inner layer' (Azuma, 2009, 83), available for manipulation and alteration by the user. In most game genres, especially RPGs with their long duration that allows for an endless permutation of minor gameplay events, the act of gameplay not only produces the game as a recognizable text, it also produces a different text every time, because no gameplayer will make exactly the same sequence of moves in the same way as another. As Azuma explains:

> …the images on the screen or the narrative development are but one possible version generated according to the player's keystrokes. If the player plays differently, the same game can display a different set of screens or narrative development.
> (2009, 79)

As such, video games differ from any other media form in terms of narrative and how it is generated, which may account for the prominent discussion and disagreement on the validity of studying games from a narrative perspective that took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Juul, previously sceptical of the narrative approach, now suggests that this conflict, which includes 'rules versus fiction, games versus stories' has had 'no clear outcomes, but this need not be a problem' (Juul, 2011, 11). Rather, both approaches can and should be utilized when examining a game to provide a broad range of insights into the text and into the practices of its gameplayers.

There are numerous narrative and plot elements which are still very much present within the wider game experience. The development of the PlayStation (PS) and other consoles during the mid to late 1990s, when *FFVII* was released, meant 'the technological advancement from 2D to 3D graphics allowed games to integrate visual film techniques and narrative structures' (Hutchins, 2014, 29). Although during gameplay itself the

gameplayer usually only experiences the interactive elements (navigating menus, making selections and so on) and narrative elements (particularly cut-scene movie sections of the game in which the player is not active) alternately, in other circumstances and for other participants the same sequence of gameplay may be experienced in a more typically narrative fashion. For example, the phenomenon of secondary or "backseat" gameplayers of single-player RPGs opens up a space in which people participate in a gameplay session without interacting with it through the console, rather watching the action on the screen in a similar way to watching a film. In such a scenario, even the periods of interactivity of the primary gameplayer may be experienced as a linear narrative. This is similar to the practice of recording a gameplay session and uploading it to video sharing sites as a "walkthrough". In the many *FFVII* walkthroughs on YouTube, for instance, neither the primary gameplayer nor the thousands of viewers are experiencing the game interactively; it has been transformed into a more traditional "finished" audio-visual text with an uninterrupted narrative. Thus it is clear that narrative analysis has an important role to play in research on video games, particularly in this dissertation, where alternative fan uses of the initial games are not subordinated to the "original" text and its intended mode of play.

Ryan, one of the advocates of narrative theory in the narratology/ludology debate under discussion, is adamant that the inability of traditional 'literary narratology to account for the experience of games does not mean that we should throw away the concept of narrativity in ludology' (2001). Even in ludology, or the study of games *as games*, narrative elements can have a role in helping the ludic elements function. Juul, in his later work, explains that in most games 'the rules are initially hidden from the player – this means that the player is more likely to use the game world to make inferences about the

rules. In fact, the player may need a fictional game world to understand the rules' (Juul, 2011, 176). However, according to Szurawitzki, narrative or fictional elements are generally subordinated to ludic ones, because 'if the text has an instructional function on top of the fictional one, the fiction will take second place' (2010, 70). This, of course, differs in extent depending on the genre of the game; in the *FFVII* games, as RPGs, the narrative theme can be said to be quite prominent. Ryan also suggests that narrative will be pushed to the fore if and when gaming hardware development reaches its temporary or permanent limits, and that game designers will begin to pay more attention to complex characterization, dialogue, and situations to keep players interested, when 'the game will be played for the sake of experiencing its narrative design' (Ryan, 2007, 14). It must also be remembered that Szurawitzki's characterization of the instruction/fiction hierarchy applies mainly to the standard scenario in which an RPG is being played by a single primary gameplayer; in cases of secondary gameplayers or viewers of game footage, the instructional function may well be subordinated to the narrative, with the user more interested in interpreting the fictional elements of the text than in what the primary gameplayer is/was being instructed or forbidden to do.

While the narrative aspects of video games, particularly complex RPGs, are an important focus of study, many scholars have championed the use of theory that deals with the ludic or play elements of games, focusing on the features that set video games apart from other media, sometimes to the exclusion of narrative elements altogether. Juul, whose later work presents a more balanced approach, admits that 'the denial of fiction is an alluring position' (2011, 13). Ryan explains that, for the group of theorists known as the "Scandinavian school", who took this latter position, 'and even for some narratologists, games are games and stories are stories and these two types of cultural

artefacts cannot hybridize because they present radically different essences' (2007, 13). Ludology focuses on the experience and structure of play that visual and narrative theory cannot take into account (Eskelinen, 2001; Juul, 2001; Perron, 2003; Frasca, 2003a). The ludologists' stress on the play element of games is useful as it deals with the unique elements of video games (gameplayer input and interactivity), although this should not be to the total exclusion of visual and narrative theory, as some of the early Scandinavian school would have it (Eskelinen & Tronstad, 2003; Juul, 2001). The gameplay session itself throws up several different sites of pleasurable use, some of which are visual and narrative, and others of which relate to play itself, to physical sensation, to "winning" through following set rules, or refusing to be implicated in the game's designated goals by ignoring rules; and, in the cases of some players, of rewriting the rules entirely.

The action of the gameplayer and the system and rules in place to circumscribe that action, suggests Hjorth (2011), is what enables the production of any narrative in the first place. It is easy to see, if this is indeed the case, why ludologists see the ludic elements of video games as primary. Referring to Frasca's earlier (2003) argument on simulation versus representation, Hjorth states that 'computer games are simulations and are thus narratives based on 'forms of the future' – that is…the possible narrative outcome is determined by the player's moves' (Hjorth, 2011, 27). These moves, in their turn, are determined by the way in which gameplay is enabled or limited by a particular game's rules, and how gameplayers react to those rules.

Rules are also found in fan communities, for example in terms of manners on online forums or in the looser but still somewhat prescriptive expectations of sexual roles in some *dōjinshi* fandoms; they are not limited to games but also occur in the wider field of play. Huizinga, a classic game theorist, explains that '[a]ll play has its rules. They

determine what "holds" in the temporary world circumscribed by play' (1949, 11). Only in video games, however, are they so integral to the initial media text, and are thus a key area of analysis for ludologists. Rules guide the gameplayer through the game world, and, unlike social rules, in the case of *FFVII* at least are designed by the programmers to be untransgressable (though, as will be demonstrated in a later chapter, this does not mean they will be accepted passively by all gameplayers).

The importance of rules in video games is interesting if we consider Baudrillard's theorization of the Rule as something arbitrary, amoral and ungrounded, 'a system of ritual obligations' rather than a universal, transgressable, moralistic Law (Baudrillard, 1990, 133); rather ambivalent and by no means to be found throughout the hyperreal, the Rule is potentially a site of subversion:

> We…have more freedoms in games than anywhere else, for we do not have to internalize the rules; we owe the rules only a token fidelity, and do not feel we have to transgress them, as is the case with the law. Within the Rule we are free of the Law – and of all the constraints of choice, freedom, responsibility and meaning!
> (Baudrillard, 1990, 137)

These definitions of Law and Rule are, of course, very specific to Baudrillard's work, and we cannot presume that game scholars' definitions of rules have any reference to them whatsoever; it is an interesting point to consider, however, whether what we generally term the "rules" of Japanese RPGs are anything like the Rule that Baudrillard speaks of, or are closer to the Law of 'moral constraints and prohibitions' (Baudrillard, 1990, 131).

Frasca (2003) distinguishes between types of rule within the play of video games. Primarily he defines them as 'paidia' and 'ludus' games, where 'the latter incorporates rules that define a winner and loser, and the former does not' (Frasca, 2003, 230). Here

ludus rules are based on binaries of winning/losing, and what one must/cannot do; the gamer can only operate within the set structure of rules, and the impetus towards attaining the ultimate ending is strongly pushed: 'you must do X in order to reach Y and therefore become a winner. This implies that Y is a desired objective and therefore it is morally charged' (Frasca, 2003, 230), and thus possibly limited in terms of challenging any identity performance set out as a norm in the game. Paidia rules are somewhat different; they define what one *may* do, and are more generally found within online community games like *Final Fantasy XI* (Square Enix, 2002) and *XIV* (Square Enix, 2010); here there is nothing the player *must* do. However, as Frasca points out, there are still things that one may not do within the rules set out by the game designers, and so the opportunity for playing "freely" is still limited. He also defines another field of "meta" rules, created by gameplayers with programming skills, who modify the game to remove certain rules and give it new ones, often disseminating these mods within online gaming communities. Frasca is enthusiastic about the possibility for change found in video games as simulations, including their potential for modification of rules, insisting that it is up to both designers and users 'to keep simulation as a form of entertainment or to turn it into a subversive way of contesting the 'inalterability' of our lives' (2003, 233-4).

Perron (2003) goes so far as to define distinct terms for those who play video games, depending on their mode of play, and it is these specific terms that are employed throughout this dissertation, as they give a clearer view of what kind of play may be taking place at various points within games. 'Players', he says, are mostly those who engage with the comparatively "free" play of paidia rules: the enjoyment of play for its own sake, without any externally defined goals. This mode of play tends to be found more within open-ended paidia games involving a lot of world-building, such as *The Sims* (Electronic

Arts, 2000-2016) or multiplayer online Final Fantasy titles like *XI* (Square Enix, 2002) and *XIV* (Square Enix, 2010), although this type of play is also possible within more traditional RPGs, when players choose to focus on side games or world exploration. 'Gamers' are those playing a strictly ludus game in order to achieve the end or winning position (Perron, 2003, 251), for example gamers who buy a FF title and aim to complete it in the shortest possible time. Thirdly, he defines 'gameplayers,' who play ludus games (with overarching goals and rules) such as *FFVII* for the pleasure in play without necessarily following the main mission at all times, diverting from it for periods of paidia play in the huge game world but eventually returning to complete the game. In terms of the *FFVII* games, which come with broadly ludus rules and goals, this third position is one that the majority of users adopt at some point, if not during the first play-through then in replays. It may also be the one in which some gameplayers are playing with the gender binaries and largely heterosexual norms fictionalised in the plot goals of the Final Fantasy series: not by attempting to undermine the set rules, but by refusing to engage with the impetus to "win" by attaining the main goal, and instead playing happily in the inconsequential areas of the massive game world, in all its superficiality, with no care for what they "should" be doing. If they do set a challenge for themselves, it is instigated by themselves, not by any rule saying they must (Perron, 2003, 253). This is not to say that these gameplayers will not, at some point in the future, go on to become gamers and finish the game, or that they are knowingly attempting to play with identity performance; but, in the period of non-productive gameplay (that is, periods of paidia play that are not directly advancing the user towards completion of the game), they are potentially subversive in the sense of declining to engage with the simulation of, for example, heteronormativity promoted by completing or "winning" the game.

It is therefore crucial to examine the structure and rules of the game texts themselves, and the modes and practices of gameplayers, both during standard or primary gameplay and in their activities outside the main gameplay session, including alternative methods of using the initial game texts in the flesh and online. In doing so, we also return to the analysis of narrative or fictional elements. Märyä reminds us of 'the two elementary senses of 'layers' in the concept of game: (1) core, or game as gameplay, and (2) shell, or game as representation or sign system' (2008, 17). They attract users in different ways, as '[r]ules and fiction are attractive for opposite reasons' (Juul, 2011, 121). However, says Juul, these two "layers" are interconnected, though the interpretations of a game by different gameplayers may focus on one layer to a greater or lesser extent:

> The interaction between game rules and game fiction is one of the most important features of video games…This interaction gives the player a choice between imagining the world of the game and seeing the representation as a mere placeholder for information about the rules of the game."
> (2011, 2)

Here, the game user can prioritize either its fictional aspects, with the gameplay, rules and other structural elements treated as a vehicle for the story, or its gameplay aspects, so that the story is merely background for a challenging battle system or tactics for building up characters' abilities. When we consider the production of transformative works, however, it could be argued that, while both rules and fiction are important when considering the game text itself, the fictional aspect is what fans pick their elements (characters, plot points and so on) from to create new media.

Like contemporary gaming cultures, cosplay practices also entail both digital and embodied performance. Many video game scholars see 'the intersection and negotiation

between the two' (Garrelts, 2005, 16), between the human and the game hardware, as one of the most innovative advances games have made in setting themselves apart from other media; at least in terms of enabling users to engage with questions of identity. Likewise, the relationships between the cosplayer and camera and cosplayer and digital image provide a complex and innovative way of engaging with, or dismissing, norms of gender and sexuality. It may therefore be pertinent to introduce affect theory at this point, as it also serves to question Western privileging of social signification and meaning-making by highlighting the importance of the body in moving beyond traditional identity categories such as masculine and feminine, subject and object.

### 1.4.3 Identity and affect theory in embodied fan practices

To begin, let us define how the term "subject" is used in this dissertation. Foucault's understanding of the subject, which was an influence on Butler's early work, and the way in which it is produced leads to a particular theorization of identity. In poststructuralist thought, identity is not fixed but 'a temporary attachment to subject position' (Carter, 2009, 119), no more prediscursive or essential than the subject; what are commonly spoken of as "identities" (e.g. gay woman, Japanese man, etc.) are not fixed but 'a production of the contingent, disciplinary practices that Foucault describes' (Carter, 2009, 103). As such, identity is a product of discursive practices (Butler, 1997, 85), and is thus subject to the possibility of fluidity and change. Foucault advocates resistance to the concept of fixed identity, using the term 'in a pejorative sense, in contrast to "form of subjectivity," which for Foucault is a perfectly neutral expression' (Kelly, 1998, 104). However, Butler posits that, although identity is not inherent but produced through discourse, we are not altogether free to change or reject these identities as we see fit; we

are not even necessarily free to want to change them:

> To what extent has the disciplinary apparatus that attempts to produce and totalize identity become an abiding object of passionate attachment? We cannot simply throw off the identities we have become…
> (Butler, 1997, 102)

As she points out, the mechanisms and dominant discourses that produce what we come to call identity may, in the process of production, cause us to invest in and become attached to the very apparatuses that construct our identities, thereby rendering us unwilling to resist their normalizing force. This also applies to the process of subjection itself, where discourses 'enjoin the subject to participate in his or her own subjection' (McDonald, 1991, 59). It is worthwhile mentioning, as Lamerichs does in her use of Butler to talk about identification in cosplay, that in cosplay practices, as in gameplay, there is a ludic element, a sense of deliberate choosing and at the same time a playfulness that is 'less explicitly related to identity politics' and 'not confined to gender or political interventions' (Lamerichs, 2011). In this sense, she argues, the cosplayer *is* making a choice to perform a certain identity, although of course that choice may be informed, consciously or otherwise, by the hegemonic discourses of their cultural context.

The idea of identity continues to be of interest to many theorists engaged in the study of subcultures, and so it is important to pay attention to how they make use of it in terms of fan practices: as unchangeable and fixed, in place prior to the process of subject formation, or as fluid and multiple, shifting according to who or what the subject is interacting with (Okabe, 2012, Gn, 2011). The latter view certainly enables a reading that can recognize the complex practices and performances involved in cosplay and gameplay in a cross-cultural context, and may inform the discussions of gender and sexuality that

some fans may regard as central to their activities.

Butler, who in her most well-known work *Gender Trouble* (1990) takes a largely Foucaultian view of the subject as being produced through discourse alone, later goes on to try and reconcile the theories of both Foucault and Lacanian psychoanalysis in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), while maintaining an anti-essentialist poststructuralist position that allows for social and cultural variation. Butler's best-known concept is her account of the production of a gendered subject through performativity. This account, particularly in *Gender Trouble* (1990), sees the subject as 'the precarious, unstable and open-ended result of the reiteration of norms which regulate the conditions of a socially acceptable and intelligible subject status' (Vasterling, 2010, 171-2). The (legitimate) subject is produced through the repetition of performative speech acts which enact the norms set up by the dominant discourses of a particular cultural and historical context; thus, 'gender comes down to performance, if performance is understood as the repeated citation and, over the course of time, embodiment of compelling norms' (Vasterling, 2010, 172), which are overwhelmingly masculinist and heteronormative. It is interesting to note here that this is one area in which scholars like Gn (2011) regard cosplay as of particular interest, as some of the most frequently seen performances are arguably neither masculinist nor heteronormative, and in some cases, perhaps through affective pleasure, disdain from engaging with such categories altogether.

The above is a fairly early account of gender performativity, in which it is not hard to spot the influence of Foucault. In her later work, that is, from *Bodies That Matter* (2003) onward, she also engages Lacanian psychoanalysis. That is, that the psyche of psychoanalysis 'is precisely what exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity, to become a coherent subject' (Butler, 1997, 86);

this psyche exceeds the social, leaving room for consideration of 'why and how the subject becomes passionately attached to the regulatory regimes of the social' (Vasterling, 2010, 173). A psyche that is an effect of the social alone, she believes, cannot account for the 'unconscious "passionate attachments"' (Žižek, 1998) that help support existing orders of power. In short, Butler is arguing for a subject that is not purely a creation of legitimizing discourses within social signification. This is one of the points at which Butler's thought intersects to some extent with that of affect theorists: that the usefulness of affect for questioning normativity lies in the fact that it is not part of the social, although there is some interaction between the two.

The distinctions and links between the social and psyche could be described as somewhat similar to the concepts of social signification and affect. It is in the various linkages and disparities between social elements (such as interpreting and making meaning out of images and other texts) and those which cannot be so easily classified as social (the physiological reactions during gameplay, the moment of affection that can spark a fan's interest in a character or cosplayer, the orgasmic reaction during pornographic cosplay) that the multiple attitudes towards gender and identity performance displayed in cosplay and gameplay fandoms can be most usefully illustrated.

Affect theory will be used in this study to account for fan practices in which the human body and its reactions to other (human and digital) bodies are central, and will explore the connections between the social and non-social. Like Butler above, scholars of affect such as Massumi (1995, 2002), Sedgwick (1995) and Gilbert (2004) are focused on locating ways in which we can talk about the elements of experience that are not necessarily part of the social; in the case of affect, those particular experiences which occur within and between bodies. The centrality of the body and bodily responses in both

cosplay and gameplay can be examined more thoroughly by making use of affect theory that sees the body as connected to, but in some ways inassimilable in, semiotic systems of meaning.

Affect can be defined as an unmediated bodily experience of intensity that 'cannot be fully realised in language' and remains 'unconscious and unformed' (Shouse, 2005); a response that prompts an increase or decrease in the body's power to act (Deleuze, 1988, 49). We may have a strong response to an image that we cannot explain based on the content of the image alone, that we cannot fully explain at all. It is this effect of intensity, argues Gn, that can create an attachment by a fan to a certain game character and make them want to cosplay it or otherwise re-imagine it through creative fan practices: 'a visceral response that foregrounds the emotional investment of the fan in the image' (2011, 584), rather than a conscious wish to engage with a certain type of character because the fan identifies with it as similar to or different from themselves, likes the game the character comes from, thinks the costume will be a challenge, etc. As Shouse explains, the 'importance of affect rests upon the fact that in many cases the message consciously received may be of less import to the receiver of that message than to his or her non-conscious affective resonance with the source of that message' (2005, paragraph 12). This is not to say that the many other possible reasons for cosplaying a particular character or playing a particular game are not equally valid; just that a positive affective response to a character opens up another dimension of connection between character and fan, one that is worth considering, as it is not necessarily the same as the deliberate "picking up" of elements by fans from the databases of Azuma's model of postmodern Japanese pop culture (2009); or at least may provide one of the unconscious motives for fans to pick up certain elements.

The characteristic of affect that its theorists most value is the fact that it operates, at least to a certain extent, outside representional, semiotic systems of meaning (Hemmings, 2005, 549); instead, it is concerned with bodily experience, of sensation and movement, which has been somewhat neglected in past poststructuralist theory. Massumi, whose work draws on Deleuze's writing on affect as theorized by Spinoza (Deleuze, 1988, 48-51), insists that it is a state characterized by suspense, with the potential for disruption and action (1995), something that does not operate wholly within the the social and therefore not bound by its rules. Hemmings points out that 'it is affect's difference from social structures that means it possesses, in itself, the capacity to restructure social meaning' (Hemmings, 2005, 550), in that it allows for human experience that does not have to engage with either hegemonic or alternative representations of identity, sidestepping questions of binaries, of gender norms and gender activism in moments of pure sensation; even if such moments are only temporary.

However, Hemmings does go on to raise doubt about the optimism of this outlook, arguing that, much like gender performativity, affect can be as supportive of social hegemonies as challenging to them. She speaks of 'the myriad ways that affect manifests precisely not as difference, but as a central mechanism of social reproduction in the most glaring ways...affective responses that strengthen rather than challenge a dominant social order' (Hemmings, 2005, 550-1). The bodily experience of affect itself may lie outside social signification, but the potentials for action contained within affect can manifest in the social in ways that conform to dominant norms. For example, a game user may have an affective response, upon seeing a commercial for a new game, to a female character whose visual design conforms to stereotypical ideals of what a woman's body should be like, which reinforces existing norms of femininity. As Gilbert states, the

material affects triggered by a (character) body 'will always be mediated by the cultural – and indeed narrowly discursive – conditions in which they occur' (2004). On the other hand, it is as well to mention that affect might just as easily manifest in a form that does challenge hegemonic norms within a particular social and cultural context.

It should be made clear that Massumi does not dismiss the concept of social signification completely or seek to replace it entirely with affect; the social should just not be everything, he argues, the be-all and end-all of experience; in fact, intensity 'is asocial, but not presocial – it *includes* social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic' (Massumi, 1996, 9). His idea of a spectrum or continuum (Massumi, 2002, 11) that can contain myriad levels and types of experience within the scope of discourse – from signification at one end to pure affect on the other, and everything in between – is therefore useful for this research project, as it can take into account the potential bodily experiences of cosplay and gameplay, 'the specific sensuous differences between various types of aesthetic practice' (Gilbert, 2004), without having to dismiss Butler's primarily poststructuralist approach to gender and sexuality. For example, the concept makes it possible to consider the very embodied aspect of cosplay "in the flesh" and in the process of being documented (photographed), alongside the subsequent digital dissemination and viewing of one's own cosplay images and those of others.

Gn (2011) explores the connection between the body and electronic mediation through performance, presenting an argument against analysing cosplay purely as a practice explainable in terms of conformity with, or resistance to, gender and sexual norms within the realm of social signification. He suggests that, centred in the cosplayer's body, 'the cosplay act becomes an unstable, yet pleasurable simulation of the visual image'

(2011, 583). This reverses traditional representational thinking, in which an image is somehow a reflection of a "real" body, to offer a practice in which human bodies become simulations of the digital. It is more complicated than this, however, because the animated game character bodies being imitated and re-performed by the cosplayer cannot themselves be considered an "original"; they are not based on any "real" reference; as simulacra, pure image, 'there is nothing behind them' (Baudrillard, 1998, 169). So, just as Azuma characterises *dōjinshi* and other fan products as simulations of commercially released simulacra (Azuma, 2009, 26), the act of cosplay is 'a simulation of [already] artificial and ambiguous bodies' (Gn, 2011, 591). Here the cosplayer's human body becomes a complex site of interaction between the digital and analog, imitation and real: a link in the 'chain of infinite imitations and piracy' (Azuma, 2009, 26) by which Azuma defines postmodern pop culture and fandom, and at the same time a site of embodied pleasure in the 'affect and carnal sensation experienced through contact with the visual image' (Gn, 2011, 589). In this way, Massumi might argue, the cosplayer's body has the potential to become a site in which 'the edge of the virtual…leaks into the actual' (Massumi, 1996, 23); this is where possibilities for moving away from traditional identity categories can be found (23). Social signification and subversion of gender boundaries may come later, after that first affective experience.

Galbraith also draws on Azuma's work to theorize what he sees as a type of affect located specifically in a Japanese pop culture context: this is the concept of *moe*, 'a neologism used to describe a euphoric response to a fantasy character' (Galbraith, 2009) or types or parts of characters that produce that response (such as characters who wear glasses, or girls with twin pigtails). The term "*moe*" is often used in fan commentary to describe particular character elements that irrationally, even fetishistically attract fans (cat

ears, sailor outfits, and so on), and this is important, says Galbraith, because it refers back to Azuma's database of elements, in which not only are narratives 'de-emphasized to focus on characters, the focus can further shift from characters to constituent parts' (Galbraith, 2009). In this sense, the concept of *moe* is thoroughly postmodern. What is interesting here, though, is Galbraith's argument that *moe* does not, in fact, refer only to the specific characters/elements/styles themselves, but is also a response to characters such as those found in anime and games (2009). This response, he states, is affect: *moe* 'provides a word to express affect, or to identify a form that resonates and can trigger an intensity' (2009); such "intensity", according to Massumi (2002), is an affective reaction that prompts an emotional and/or physical response in the fan. Thus, it is important to recognize that *moe* is fundamentally an affective response, not just a way of describing a particular type of image. In this way, we can contextualize affect against a background of Japanese pop culture. Galbraith explains that, although the *moe* affect tends to be provoked by two-dimensional or digital images, it can also include 'people reduced to '*moe* characters' and approached as fantasy' (2009). This would appear to include cosplay, and indeed Galbraith goes on to mention this fan practice, noting with interest the way the cosplayer 'enacts…and then becomes an image' (2009). While this becoming, for Galbraith, refers to the cosplayer "becoming" the character, which was initially two-dimensional, it could also be used to talk about how the cosplayer literally becomes an image through the photographic and digitization process. Galbraith's conceptualization of *moe* will be utilized in Chapter 6 on eroticized cosplay, as his argument also includes a good deal of discussion on sexuality.

This discussion of affect in the context of embodied fan practices will finish by returning for a moment to the question of identification and the subject. Some affect

scholars are sceptical about the subject/object dialectic (Gilbert, 2004), particularly in the context of a theoretical approach that seeks to focus on movement and in-betweenness. Others, such as Sedgwick, insist that 'a turn to affect is an urge *not* to give up the notion of subject but to continue formulating new questions about it' (Koivunen, 2010, 59). Theorists on both sides, however, are interested in engaging with the concept.

The above discussion described how cosplaying a game character might be considered to be the simulation of a digital body that is already a simulacrum, rendering the cosplayer's body a complex site of connection between visceral, pleasurable sensation and the digital data-based body of the character. This is further complicated, however, by the fact that the practices of cosplay do not stop at the embodied act of cosplay itself. In fact, the majority of acts of looking and being-looked-at in cosplay takes place after the embodiment of the digital character, when images of the cosplayer in the form of photos and videos are uploaded, disseminated and viewed online. This being-looked-at-ness is possibly one of the primary differences between embodied experiences of cosplay and those of gameplay; while there are modes of gameplay in which the player is watched, even in the case of single-player RPGs like *FFVII*, and while there are arguments about the extent to which the player identifies with and "becomes" their digital avatar (Rehak, 2003, MacCallum-Stewart, 2008, Hjorth, 2011), gazing at others and oneself and being gazed at in return is one of the central aims and pleasures of cosplay. The cosplayer digitizes their own body (in gameplay the question of what body is being digitized is somewhat more complicated), creating yet another layer of simulation. These images of the cosplayer render the question of subject and object particularly unclear.

Gn states that the cosplayer's or gamer's body conflates the subject/object divide (2011, 588) because of the affective elements of its performance; at the very least, it

problematises the idea that the subject holds an active position over the object, while the object is passive and acted upon. One would tend to assume that the cosplayer, the human, would take the position of subject in their relationship with the animated character image, which would be relegated to the status of object. However, because the image is capable of causing an affective response in the cosplayer (Gn, 2011, 587) that is not under the cosplayer's conscious control, we may say that the image is *not* passive but acts upon the body of the cosplayer. When the cosplayer consumes that character image, their gaze 'is thus not one of detachment or mastery over the object, but an intense manipulation of the senses by the object itself' (587), as well as by the artists who created it.

Gn acknowledges the complexity of the relationship between cosplayer and image; however, he does not deviate from his classification of cosplayer as subject and digital image as object, albeit an object with the potential to act upon the subject. Perhaps this is due to the directionality of the gazes involved: though there is undoubtedly some level of identification with the character at work – which might lead to the cosplayer looking at an image as if the character *is him/herself* – Gn's research is focused on the embodied cosplayer looking at a computer-mediated image; the gaze is one-way, from cosplayer to image, which would make it reasonable to refer to the cosplayer as a subject. But this does not take into account the myriad other gazes at play in cosplay practice; most immediately, in embodied terms, the gazes of other fans and cosplayers upon a cosplayer during the act of cosplay itself. These gazes may be direct or mediated by a camera lens, and beg the question of whether the cosplayer here can still be classified as primarily a subject, whether they become an object under the gazes of their observers, or whether they can hold both statuses simultaneously. This is particularly interesting to consider in so-called eroticized cosplay at events, where the "sexualized" performance of some

(mostly) female cosplayers has a tendency to create rather blatant (though often contested) characterizations of them as objects of a heteronormative gaze. It is more interesting, perhaps, to argue that the cosplayer in this situation occupies a kind of liminal space between subject and object; or that, in the moments of affective pleasure the cosplayer experiences, these categories become irrelevant (Gn, 2011, 586).

The above, however, still only deals with one facet of looking and being-looked-at in cosplay. Another huge vista of gazes is opened up when the cosplayer digitizes their body through online images and creates an additional layer of simulacra. Here the analog, fleshly human becomes electronically mediated digital data, to be gazed upon by a far wider spectrum of observers on cosplay websites and video sites, and thus surely is eligible for object status. Add to this the fact that, while there may be fans who are looking at cosplay images because they are fans of the particular cosplayer in question, it is far more likely that they are consuming certain images because they are fans of the character the cosplayer is mimicking; through observation by other viewers, therefore, distinctions between cosplayer and character are blurred, problematising even further the issue of "original" and "copy", especially in the case of digital cosplay images, when the embodied human cosplayer is not always present or part of the gazing equation.

Such images may be consumed by other fans in a way that would make the classification of "object" seem appropriate; however, as with the initial character images discussed by Gn, there is also the potential for these photographs and films to step out of passivity, to become affective images themselves and act upon the bodies of their observers. Hjorth explains how, often, 'cosplayers outside of Japan draw from their favourite Japanese cosplayer before they role model an actual game character' (Hjorth, 2011, 141). This suggests that certain images of cosplayers may act as affective, albeit

digital, bodies, resonating with their observers; as a result of which such images become part of the database of "elements" from which fans inform their own fan creations. In this kind of situation, the digital body of the cosplayer may become a key point of fannish reference on the same level as the initial game character, leading to the same doubt over whether the image is necessarily in an object position or whether it inhabits a more ambiguous space somewhere along a continuum between active and passive. This is made more complex when the affective image in question is erotic or pornographic, in which case the intensity it generates may also be a sexual response and not just a fannish attraction to the character; the supposition that the majority of observers of this type of image is male also raises the question of whether the sexualized female image is necessarily reduced to object status through the male gaze, or whether the affective properties of the image accord the erotic cosplay what kind of subject status; or, again, something that does not fit into either subject or object but suggests the potential to move beyond categories.

Of course, there are several kinds of gaze and response because there are multiple observers of the image, and the more standard scopophilic and narcissistic gazes cannot simply be dismissed either; in fact, the online dissemination of cosplay images only serves to multiply the possible ways of being-looked-at; but this is only possible because of the various observing bodies reacting to the image, the interaction of digital and analog.

Finally, there is one more possibility with which to question the concept of a straightforward subject/object divide: the ways in which the embodied cosplayer interacts with their own image. One of the main goals of attending cosplay events and contests is to be photographed or filmed (Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 331), with cosplayers bringing their own cameras and sometimes even a photographer with them.

The images produced are of course intended to be shared, generally with as wide an audience as possible (through cosplay sites, social media, and so on); but cosplayers also consume their own images. This is partly for evaluative purposes: how successful or accurate does the cosplay look when mediated by the camera? What could be improved? and so on. There is also undoubtedly a form of narcissistic pleasure experienced when observing one's own successful cosplay, though this again is complicated by whether the cosplayer is identifying with the image *as an image of themselves* or *as an image of the game character*, fidelity to the imagined "original" being valued in the cosplay community (Rahman, Wing-Sun & Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 326). Neither do these identifications have to be mutually exclusive, particularly as cosplayers do not straightforwardly consume the images of themselves; they also engage in transforming and reimagining them, much as *dōjinshi* authors do to initial characters, using electronic art programs like Photoshop to add effects, lighting etc. that bring the image closer to the cosplayer's ideal interpretation of the character, as will be discussed further in the cosplay chapters. Thus the image created, while initially a photograph of themselves, may by the time it is posted online bear little resemblance to the cosplayer "in the flesh".

Lastly, cosplay practice, as mentioned earlier, does not only include embodied performance and still photography; performing scenarios based on the characters and game being cosplayed is also a significant activity, particularly in competitive cosplay with judges and prizes for the "best" costume, such as Nagoya's annual World Cosplay Summit. A large section of pornographic cosplay also involves moving video images. It is in the recorded videos of such motion-based performances that the potential to raise the concept of Massumi's movement-vision (2002) can be found. Movement-vision is made possible through the mediation of technologies such as film, in which we are able to watch

ourselves move in a way we cannot when looking in the mirror (mirror-vision). Movement-vision is exciting, says Massumi, because it shakes up the positions of subject and object, both becoming blurred and disjointed as they simultaneously and partially occupy the same person, providing 'an outside perspective on the self-other, subject-object axis' (Massumi, 2002, 51). This idea of movement-vision also raises interesting questions about the connection between gameplayer and character avatar during gameplay: if there is a level of identification between the two, then the gameplayer viewing the avatar onscreen during gameplay could also provide a site in which to gain a different perspective on the traditional subject-object axis. They are no longer part of that axis or obliged to take a position on one side or the other. Through being able to see the movement between myriad positions, a whole new spectrum of in-between-ness is made possible.

This section has covered the main theoretical perspectives used in this research: a broadly poststructuralist concept of gender and sexuality based on Butler's work, informed by Iwabuchi's theorization and problematizing of Japaneseness as a shifting and imaginary construct, will underpin each chapter's analysis of a specific transformative work or fan practice. The last three chapters will also make use of affect theory, as the connection between embodied practice and digital image is central to both cosplay and gameplay; a study of the latter will benefited by the use of video game theory, which deals with immersion, rules and the connections between gameplayer and game interface. The following subsection outlines the principal research methods employed in this dissertation

### 1.4.4 Research Methods

The specific object of research in this dissertation is articulations of gender and sexuality

in Japanese RPG English-speaking fandoms online, and whether these articulations, informed by fan imaginings of Japaneseness, provide sites in which to question Western hegemonic binaries of gender and/or sexuality. In order to interrogate this object, this dissertation poses three research questions:

1) What articulations of gender and sexuality can be found in localized English-language Japanese RPGs and related fan practices and commentaries in an online context?
2) How do imaginings of "Japaneseness" inform these articulations?
3) To what extent do such articulations provide alternatives to or potentially disrupt binary norms of gender and sexuality?

These questions will be explored not only through analysis of fan commentary, but also media produced by the industry side such as the initial games, and the shifting and ambiguous relationship that exists between the two. Therefore this dissertation discusses the ways in which game companies articulate gender and Japaneseness through in-game and other commercial narrative, imagery and rules, and how fan practices and commentaries engage with this.

Methodologically, the main approach to this research is textual analysis operating within a poststructuralist framework (McKee, 2003), used to examine electronically mediated commentaries and practices in selected media from both the official side, which includes visual, narrative and structural elements in RPGs and related products, and the fan side as an alternative area of articulation, which is comprised of a variety of fan media, websites and discussion forums (more specific information on this will be given later in this section). Some discourse analysis is also employed, as the various types of fan commentary could be considered to be a set of speech acts (written, oral, and visual) operating on the discursive formations of gender and Japaneseness.

Poststructuralist textual and discourse analyses are qualitative methods, centering around the analysis of formations of knowledge and power relations in a text (Gunter, 2000, 88). Unlike methodologies where meaning is understood to be held within the text, this approach holds that 'meanings are not located in the text itself…Meanings are produced in the interactions between text and audience' (Fiske, 1990, 164); the researcher must go beyond what is in the text itself and have recourse to a particular set of theories with which to carry out analysis (in this research, primarily poststructuralist gender theory, video game theory and affect theory). Meaning here is not a fixed, *a priori* truth, but rather shifts constantly according to the complex discourses, or knowledge formations, that are exerted upon it through the practices of both production and consumption. This reflects the fluid, unstable concept of gender taken from the work of Butler, Laclau and Mouffe introduced earlier, and can also be linked to Barthes' theorization of the text, which, he states, must 'not be thought of as a defined object' (1979, 74) but is rather 'a serial movement of dislocations, overlappings, and variations' (76).

This emphasis on fluidity and the rejection of any fixed, static meaning can be seen particularly clearly in poststructuralist discourse analysis, particularly analysis which utilizes the work of Foucault, although this type is more a philosophical approach than a set of precise analytical techniques. Graham mentions 'the awkward tension that arises when one attempts to do poststructural work while still satisfying the conventions of academic writing and scholarship' (2005, 2), leading to difficulty in creating a concrete methodological plan from a set of theories that rigorously reject concepts of absolutism and fixed rules, and which insist on uncertainty and doubt. The Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis does not allow for claims of objectivity on the part of either the text or the researcher: there is no "truth," no one meaning which can be searched for and found;

analysis of this type rather looks at *how* the discursive practices of certain formations of knowledge constitute (and are constituted by) a particular text. The relationship between text and society is dialectic: texts are 'socioculturally shaped but they also constitute society and culture, in ways which may be transformative as well as reproductive' (Fairclough, 1995, 34). This concept cannot be upheld by analyzing the text as a closed object; the cultural context and circumstances in which it was produced, and the ways in which it is used, must also be taken into account. This approach fits with the broadly poststructuralist theoretical framework of this dissertation.

How can one build a methodological approach on a theory that necessarily relies upon a refusal to be prescriptive and certain? Graham tells us that 'in an attempt to avoid prescription through ambiguity…poststructural work becomes vulnerable to judgement against competing epistemological claims to methodological superiority' (2005, 5), and there are certainly more easily applied methods of discourse analysis. Some focus on a close *linguistic* analysis of texts. Fairclough, however, attempts to broaden his analysis to potentially include other elements of media, stating that 'linguistic analysis…should be part of the discourse analysis of media' (1995, 16), thereby leaving scope for elements such as visuals and sound, and even, in the case of video games, rules and strategy. He also highlights the importance of not examining a text as an isolated object, but also considering the practices of the producers/consumers of the media text as well as its social context. His approach is similar to poststructuralist discourse analysis in that it denies the concept of a single "truth" inherent in the text.

A modified version of this loosely informs this research project, as it provides a clear framework for close textual analysis while allowing for the complex combination of elements that make up visual media, and for the multiple and shifting formations of

meaning that are generated through discourse, not only in the text itself but in the practices surrounding its production and consumption. Fairclough refers to a media artefact as a "communicative event," and outlines his basic theory as follows:

> Critical discourse analysis of a communicative event is the analysis of relationships between three dimensions or facets of that event, which I call *text*, *discourse practice*, and *sociocultural practice*…By 'discourse practice' I mean the processes of text production and text consumption. And by 'sociocultural practice' I mean the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is a part of.
> (1995, 57)

This type of analysis looks at the text in three stages, from micro (the text itself) to macro (sociocultural practice), with discourse practice, which includes text production and text consumption, having a mediating function in the middle. As Fairclough states, 'properties of sociocultural practice shape texts, but by way of shaping the nature of the discourse practice, i.e. the ways in which texts are produced and consumed, which is realized in the features of texts' (1995, 60). This process examines each dimension in relation to the various discourses, and relationships between discourses, surrounding it, and then analyses the connections between each stage in an interpretive way through the focus of the researcher's chosen set of theories.

In the context of Final Fantasy fandoms, this approach allows for a broad yet detailed analysis of various genres of media type and practice: the games, cosplay sites, *dōjinshi*, fan videos, and so on. A few key examples of each genre are analyzed on up to three levels, though not in a specific order. On the first level, the texts themselves: language, visuals, sound (if applicable) are examined for recurring themes (and also the significant *absence* of elements), and the discursive formations they constitute and are

constituted by. Another level is discursive practices: the methods of production and consumption of texts are considered through the media commentaries of produsers. It is also important to take into account sociocultural practice. Fairclough states that there are various possible levels of abstraction of sociocultural practice from the text: it 'may involve its more immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within, or the yet wider frame of the society and the culture' (1995, 62). This requires an analysis of various discourses surrounding online fandom, gender and Japanese popular culture in the West, in order to give an in-depth account of what discourses are at play across and between these levels.

Fairclough tries to leave room for flexibility in his methodological model: although he concentrates mainly on the text dimension and close linguistic analysis of written texts, he allows that one might 'choose to focus on discourse practice, either on processes of text production, or on processes of text consumption' (1995, 62). While this dissertation undertakes analysis of all three dimensions (though it does not make specific use of CDA terminology, as this approach just provides a general framework), it focuses on the text and its users, as my research topic centres on fandoms and fan practices.

Regarding the specific texts being analyzed, for material on the official side this dissertation examines the original PlayStation (PS) game *Final Fantasy VII*, released in the UK in 1997, and its later prequel *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, released on the PlayStation Portable (PSP) in 2008, using both a close textual analysis of key points and scenes (those which are most frequently discussed in fan commentary and coopted and reimagined in transformative works), and an overview of trends and themes found in the course of these lengthy games. It also includes tie-in media such as the 2004 digitally animated feature film *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (Nomura & Nozue, 2008). On

the fan side there is an even greater, almost unlimited, wealth of commentary to choose from. Online sites or communities from each popular fan media genre or practice were selected for close analysis based on highly-ranked online search results or links from related websites, contextualized by also referencing material from a wider variety of online sites to locate major trends and themes within a discursive framework.

The collection and presentation of material from fan websites and forums requires consideration of the issues faced by researchers when conducting online ethnographies. These include questioning whether fansites are public or private spaces, not deceiving participants by posing as one of them, and ensuring participant anonymity (Morey, Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). In the research conducted for this thesis, the method did not involve observation of a site or forum over a long period of time, and I did not engage with the activity on the sites by posting or commenting myself. The sites and forums chosen were open, that is, accessible without membership or a password and locatable through popular search engines like Google. Therefore, the materials were collected from locations where, in line with The British Psychological Society guidelines for online research, users could 'reasonably expect to be observed by strangers' (BPS, 2007, 3). Regarding anonymity, Morey, Bengry-Howell and Griffin (2012) point out that online utterances are reasonably easy to find via search engine. Instead of directly quoting from participant data, then, I have paraphrased most online comments from users whose content is not created with the aim of gaining viewers (texts inviting views include an online magazine article, public blog or public YouTube video), as well as changing usernames slightly to reduce their searchability. I have also omitted them from the reference list (although references and original usernames can be provided if required).

The fan media and practices under analysis include: scanned versions of fan

comics known as *dōjinshi*, particularly those concentrating on character relationships, namely "*hentai*" (pornographic, generally heterosexual, narratives) and "boys' love" (romance/sex between male characters); "machinima", fan-made videos of recorded and "modded" (modified) gameplay on sites such as YouTube, and the comments of viewers; and cosplay fan forums and photo sharing communities, as well as free and commercial websites dedicated to erotic and pornographic cosplay.

## 1.5 Chapter outlines

This dissertation is structured with each chapter exploring a different media or practice related to Japanese RPGs (and, often, Japanese pop culture more broadly). The order of the chapters reflects the main thrust of the dissertation, moving from practices/media that tend to reinforce normative binaries of gender and sexuality to those that begin to deconstruct or disconnect from those binaries. The order highlights my argument that this move is linked to the shift from primarily "digital" media and practices to those in which the connections between body and digital become of greatest significance.

The current chapter is the first chapter of this dissertation. Chapter 2 initially situates *FFVII* within contemporary gaming genres, before discussing the tensions that arise between industry and fans in the process of game localization into English. At the same time, it suggests that fan imaginings of Japaneseness in the games inform articulations of gender and sexuality found in transformative works. The second section addresses the dissertations's first research question by analyzing the fictional elements of the *FFVII* games: the in-game story, character relationships and designs. It is these elements that fans engage with extensively both inside and outside the game and adapt to

create transformative works; before beginning to analyze fan-created works, it is useful to look at how the localized games depict gender and sexuality, and how game users respond to this. The final section focuses specifically on visual fan commentaries on in-game articulations of gender and sexuality through videos that record and transform gameplay footage.

Chapter 3 explores pornographic fan comics, or *hentai dōjinshi*, primarily aimed at male fans. The first section gives some background to the format and production practices of these *dōjinshi*, followed by a discussion of how the use of specific terminology by English-speaking fans transforms the meaning of Japanese-language terms from native Japanese usage. It then examines *hentai dōjinshi* fandoms, beginning with an overview of recent scholarship surrounding pornographic materials and phallocentricity in an Anglo-American context. The following sections discuss the absence of androgynous male characters, and the visual centrality of the female characters, which at the same time sets women up as passive, hyper-feminine, sexualized objects.

Chapter 4 continues the exploration of *dōjinshi* and the fan practices involved in their translation and dissemination, this time focusing on fan comics featuring romantic and sexual relationships between male characters. This genre is known as "boys' love" (BL) *dōjinshi*, and is often characterized as being created for and by female fans, though the online context of the English-language fandom means it is difficult to state that this is always the case. The first section contextualises the BL genre from its beginnings in Japanese girls' manga to its present transnational use in English-language, primarily Western, online fandoms. It then considers the major areas in which BL *dōjinshi* differ from *hentai dōjinshi* fandoms, machinima, and the fictional elements of the games themselves. Finally, it looks at the online use of *dōjinshi* and how this, more perhaps than

the content of the comics, offers alternative ways of speaking about gender and sexuality.

Chapter 5 moves to look at cosplay, and it is here that affect theory is introduced, as the focus shifts from the primarily digital genres of machinima and *dōjinshi* to a genre in which the embodied user is central to performances of gender and sexuality and to the realization of digital cosplay images. The chapter first contextualizes cosplay in Japanese and overseas popular culture fandoms, including the connections between video game and cosplay cultures. The next section discusses so-called "non-normative" gender performances in cosplay by examining the concepts of "crossplay" (cosplayers who identify as female cosplaying a male character, and vice versa) and transgender cosplay, and the tensions between the two practices.

Chapter 6 continues the examination of cosplay, and also returns to the themes of the previous chapters to discuss deliberately eroticized and even pornographic cosplay performances and media, which shares some similar themes and imagery with *hentai dōjinshi* in its articulations of femininity but which also offers some alternatives to the concept of gender binaries in the relationship between the cosplayer, the camera and the digital image. Through the practices of amateur erotic/pornographic cosplay, female performers open up various possibilities for destabilizing subject and object, and suggest new ways for users and scholars of engaging with pornography without relying on issues of social signification and meaning-making.

Chapter 7 returns to the *FFVII* games themselves. The game, like those media covered in the first three chapters, is also realized through digital mediation; but at the same time takes place to a large extent "in the flesh" through gameplay: another practice, like cosplay, in which the embodied fan is central. The first section of the chapter explores modes of gameplay and the unofficial modifications fans make to circumvent certain

game rules. The second makes use once again of affect theory to investigate the interactions between gameplayer and digital avatar.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion chapter, which outlines the dissertation's main findings and gives suggestions for future research in this area.

# 2. Making Masculinity: Gender and Japaneseness in *FFVII* fiction and footage[1]



## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter considers both the commercial (though not necessarily privileged by fans or scholars) game text and transformative fan works that make direct use of it. It suggests that the fictional elements of *Final Fantasy VII* games themselves, and of transformative video works based on in-game footage, while upholding the playful or non-serious approach of fans towards gender and sexuality, do not attempt to promote alternative articulations of gender and sexuality to the same degree as other fan media like boys' love *dōjinshi* and certain types of cosplay to be discussed in later chapters. Indeed, the games' plot and character designs, as well as their use in machinima – videos created from footage of gameplay with added visuals and audio (Luckman & Potanin, 2010, 136) – often actively reinforce hegemonic norms of heterosexuality and masculinity; something that can also be observed in the pornographic *hentai dōjinshi* analysed in the next chapter. Such heteronormativity is facilitated through official and fan articulations of male game

[1] This chapter contains adaptations of material to be published by the author as a book chapter: Glasspool, L. "Making Masculinity: Articulations of gender and Japaneseness in Japanese RPGs and machinima". In Pulos, Alexis & Lee, Austin, eds. *Transnational Contexts of Culture, Gender, Class, and Colonialism in Play*. UK: Palgrave MacMillan 2016 (forthcoming).

characters and their relationships, which construct imaginings of an androgynous Japanese masculinity that is used by certain groups of fans to both promote the idea of the games' Japaneseness and comment unfavourably on male androgyny and its imagined links to homosexuality.

The first section of this chapter first briefly situates single-player RPGs like *FFVII* alongside other major game genres in the contemporary gaming world. It then looks at the development of Japanese RPGs (JRPGs) specifically, and their position in the fan culture web. Finally, it examines the English localization of JRPGs, showing how tensions between industry and fan ideals of localization can impact concepts of Japaneseness in English-speaking gameplayer communities, and providing context for the subsequent sections on the use of localized games in informing commentary on masculinity and sexuality. The second section discusses story and character designs in the official localized *FFVII* games, arguing that these set up an idea of masculinity that is interpreted by fans as both distinctly Japanese and androgynous. At the same time, the male characters and their relationships with both men and women within the games promote a traditional male homosocial dynamic (Flood, 2008) that privileges heteronormativity. The final section shows how machinima is used by some fans to transform these articulations, instead constructing a set of commentaries on so-called Japanese masculinity that links it in a derogatory manner with both androgyny and homosexuality.

Several major games comprise the *FFVII* game world, in addition to the digitally animated film *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (Nomura & Nozue, 2008) and a three-episode anime, *Last Order: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2007). The games were released on a number of platforms and span different genres. In order of release, they are:

RPG *Final Fantasy VII* (Square, 1997 on the PlayStation, 1998 on PC, and 2009 on the digital PlayStation Network); 2D action RPG *Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII* (2004-2007 on mobile phones in Japan only, but fan-subbed in English on YouTube), third-person/first-person shooter *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2006 on the PlayStation 2); mobile phone game with single and multiplayer options *Dirge of Cerberus Lost Episode: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2006), and action RPG *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2008 on the PlayStation Portable). In addition to these, major characters from the *FFVII* world have made cameos in the popular Kingdom Hearts series, a collaboration between Square Enix and Disney (2002-2012 on various PlayStation and Nintendo platforms), and fighting game *Dissidia Final Fantasy* (Square Enix, 2009 on the PSP). While this chapter focuses primarily on the first *FFVII* game and its chronological prequel *Crisis Core* (*CC*), it also uses examples from the other games and animated tie-ins, as the transformative media produced by fans often mixes material from several different titles. Furthermore, there has been a considerable shift in audio and visuals within the games, along with the development of technologies and the rise of new aesthetic ideals in Japanese popular culture, and so it is useful to compare elements such as character design between the initial game and later releases when analysing articulations of gender and sexuality.

## 2.2 Phantom Japaneseness: JRPGs and their English localization

As discussed in Chapter 1, video games are no longer marginal media forms or the sole province of the fannish or hardcore gameplayer, but have become mainstream, used casually by millions on a daily basis around the world. The localization and development

of games for export is therefore a central issue for the producers and users of games, to an extent that matches and now potentially even surpasses the film industry. Japan's rate of video game production is particularly high, and we should thus consider Japan 'a key example of video game development, localization and international exports' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 8). For fans of games developed in Japan, the question of localization is crucial, though often somewhat contentious, and leads us back to the value attached by such fans to imaginings of "Japaneseness" in so-called *mukokuseki* or culturally "odorless" (Iwabuchi, 2002) media.

There are many genres of video game, some of which have become major genres worldwide, such as platform games, "beat-em-ups", first-person shooters, racing games, RPGs, massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG), and world-building games; and others of which, like Japanese "dating simulation" games, have not become targets for widespread localization and export. RPGs are one of the most popular, and single-player RPGs have come to be the representative genre of the "hardcore" gameplayer; the Final Fantasy series (not including its two MMORPG titles) is typical of this genre, with its fantasy/sci-fi background, length and complexity, and has large and dedicated communities of fans as well as "casual" gameplayers.

The traditional single-player RPG is designed to be a solitary pursuit (although, as will be shown later, it is not always played in the way it was designed). There may be thousands of gameplayers using the same game world when a new title is released, but they cannot encounter or interact with one another in the game itself. Alongside the continued development of these RPGs, however, the last two decades have seen the development and explosion in popularity of the MMORPG. These began to take shape in the late 1990s, growing out of both traditional RPGs and older text-based multi-user

games played on PC networks. MMORPGs such as *FFXI* (2002) and *FFXIV* (2010, 2014) differ from RPGs like *FFVII* in their use of a "persistent world"; that is, a game world shared by hundreds of thousands of players through an online server, often in multiple languages, which is used and altered by those players around the clock. Not only do players share the game world, but they can also interact and team up with one another to complete missions and develop their characters.

Given the various developments in the world of gaming since *FFVII* was released we might expect to see such traditional RPGs, which are now comparatively limited in terms of technology, gameplayer interaction and character development, begin to lose popularity or relevance. However, this has not been the case: the *FFVII* game world remains perennially popular. This may be explained by nostalgia, the appeal of retro pop culture, or the element of fandom that is intertwined with gaming, by which gameplayers are attached to elements other than those relating to the game *as a game*, such as elements of Japaneseness. The following will elaborate on this supposition, outlining the development of RPGs in Japan and showing how their localization highlights the strong attachment of fans to aspects of imagined Japaneseness.

The Japanese video game industry shares many similarities with those of North America and Europe, being 'one of those industries in Japan that was imported from the United States during the twentieth century, but that was able to somehow "improve" the model' (Picard, 2013), particularly since the globalization of the industry. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the Japanese game industry has specific traits that distinguish it from other local video game industries.

First, while American and other game industries have since risen to compete with Japan, in terms of export and import ratios Japanese games have maintained dominance

within Japan itself. This has led to specific characteristics developing in Japanese gaming cultures that have not all spread to English-speaking countries, or, if they have, are often marketed in some way as "Japanese".

Compared to European and American video game markets, the Japanese market produces more "niche" genres that provide games for audiences with a fairly narrow demographic (Szurawitzki, 2010, 4). The most significant of these genres are PC visual novels or dating simulators (in which the player attempts to "date" one or more game characters by selecting the dialogue and course of action most likely to please the character); according to Poole, these 'in general do not cross over into the West at all' (2001, 248), although they have become slightly more visible over the past decade. Pelletier-Gagnon argues that the low presence of such exported PC games in the West can be attributed to the "uniqueness" of the game content (2011, 41). "Unique" here can be taken to suggest a specific type of Japaneseness, one that cannot be smoothly localized into a less culturally specific form. Producers tend to be unwilling to risk localizing and exporting games that appear to be too distinctly "Japanese", as they do not wish to lose revenue (Picard, 2013). A rare example that has been released in English is a dating simulation game for girls, *Hakuoki* (Aksys Games, 2012-2014), a historical romance set in the Bakumatsu period of Japan. It is somewhat difficult to find games like this available in English, perhaps because the context is so culturally specific. Visual novels and dating PC games tend not be chosen for commercial export, despite their popularity among Japanese fans and the English-speaking fan communities that use them unofficially.

While niche or fan-specific game genres like dating simulations are viewed by many scholars and industry members as "uniquely" Japanese, RPGs remain one of Japan's most popular game genres (Poole, 2004, 78). These, according to Poole, 'owe

their shared paradigms to one game series in particular: Final Fantasy' (2004, 77). Through its gameplay systems, extended and complex fictions and use of emerging technologies, in the 1990s the Final Fantasy series was a huge factor in the shaping of the RPG genre in Japan. The release of the PlayStation (PS) in 1995 was key to the development and influence of Final Fantasy, changing the distribution of games from cartridges to high-memory CD-ROMs and creating 'ways for media convergence by bringing music, videos and games into closer contact' (Märyä, 2008, 93). This type of advanced technological development by the Japanese computer industry, according to Baudrillard, also typifies the disappearance of the "real" in postmodern simulation; he states that the 'Japanese have…confused the real with the greatest number of dimensions possible...technical perfection, "high fidelity"...one no longer knows what object it is faithful to, for no-one knows where the real begins and ends' (1990, 30). In this way, groundbreaking consoles like the PS encouraged the loss of "original" and "copy" that characterizes contemporary Japanese pop culture fan culture (Azuma, 2009).

The PS marked the 'concept of 3D as the hallmark of a new era of digital games' (Märyä, 2008, 95). According to Asakura (2000), the release of *FFVII* caused a two-month surge in Japanese PS sales, which shortly after took off globally. This console, with the hugely popular Final Fantasy franchise showcasing its capabilities, took home consoles from 2D to 3D graphics and changed the landscape of gaming around the world. At the time, *FFVII* was generally regarded as the apex of the fantasy RPG, which may partially explain its continued popularity among fans today. While the methods and success of its localization were questioned by the game fan community (as will be discussed presently), the fact of its export made it greatly influential internationally as well as in the Japanese gaming community.

This begs the question of what makes JRPGs like *FFVII* suitable for commercial export and localization, while other popular genres in Japan such as the dating sim are ignored. Picard suggests that recognizable cultural icons and characters serve 'as much as "brand nationalism" in marketing "Japan"...as "transcultural currency" for the global "commodification of play"' (2013). In this sense, game characters or mascots embody a specific image of Japaneseness, one which is globalized but nevertheless recognized as Japanese. This could be said to apply to the in-game character images of the first *FFVII* game, whose simplistic, cartoonish designs were based more on elements said to inspire a *moe* response (Galbraith, 2009) like costume and hairstyle than on distinct facial features that made them easily memorable.

However, the same could be said for many characters and designs from visual novels and PC dating sims, which are not generally chosen for localization. It might therefore be argued that the images and icons chosen to represent "Japaneseness" in Western gaming industries are those which are not *too* Japanese; in other words, characters and settings that are considered culturally translatable and which Iwabuchi (2002) describes as having a certain level of *mukokuseki*. PC dating sims like the above-mentioned *Hakuoki* are often set in a specifically Japanese historical and cultural context, with Japanese character names and social dynamics at work in the narrative. RPGs like *FFVII*, on the other hand, are admired for their 'cyberfuturistic environments' (Holland, Walter & Squire, 2003, 34), with fantasy or science-fiction settings and characters. As Pelletier-Gagnon explains, '[t]he game…features a main character...who struggles in a setting that is exotic for both Japanese and American audiences' (2011, 50). This enables the games to provide cultural icons that come to represent "Japan" while retaining elements of familiarity for Western users, with settings and characters that carry a more

recognizable form of exoticism (sci-fi or fantasy) than specifically Japanese settings and characters would (Szurawitski, 2010, 4).

This, however, suggests an assumption by the Japanese video game industry regarding the users of localized games in English-speaking countries: that said users will recognize certain elements as being characteristic of Japanese games but will be uncomfortable with anything that appears too "foreign" or culturally specific to a Japanese context. Such a simplistic formulation of English-speaking RPG users does not take into account the varied gameplayer demographic. For example, Szurawitzki points out that 'many people that play localized games do not know that these games are originally developed in Japan' (2010, 4), rendering the idea of using game characters and elements as tools to market "Japan" somewhat ineffective, the concept of *mukokuseki* perhaps being carried too far for casual gameplayers to pick up on the Japanese "fragrance" attached to the games by marketers and dedicated fans (Iwabuchi 2002). At the other end of the scale is the large community of gameplayers who identify as fans of Japanese games, and who complain that localized games in fact demonstrate insufficient levels of Japaneseness.

This section will close by examining the tensions between the industry and fan gameplayers through the different processes and ideals of game localization, demonstrating that, in the communities surrounding the Final Fantasy series, Japaneseness is imbued with great cultural value by fans. It will also show that this "Japaneseness" is as much a shifting and multiple construct as gender, and is not necessarily limited to a specific cultural or geographical location.

Game localizations are not simply linguistic translations; more than any other media form,

they require the alteration and recreation of many aspects: dialogue, sound effects, text, packaging, advertising, visuals and even programming. It is important to distinguish, when talking about localization, between industry and fans, as their processes and ideals are often very different. Calling commercial industries "interpretative structures" and fan groups "interpretative communities", Pelletier-Gagnon distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up producers of content related to a game (2011, 18). There is a stress here on the participatory nature of fandoms, an idea that has been in circulation in fan studies since the 1990s (Hills, 2013, 131); this chimes with the characterization of fan as "produser" (Bruns, 2006). The creations and commentary of interpretative communities may also provide a site for 'more discursive, exotic or deviant interpretations of cultural forms' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 27). This suggests that localizations by fan groups potentially allow space for users to enact alternative or non-normative identity performances, although whether this potential is realized in practice is by no means guaranteed, as will be seen in subsequent sections.

The process of localization by interpretative structures is crucial for the popularity of Japanese games in overseas gaming communities, and here refers to 'the process of altering a product in order to make it accessible for users outside the original domestic market it was developed for' (Szurawitzki, 2010, 4). The definition of "accessible" varies from company to company, and certainly from company to fans; but the extensive nature of the process means that producers must bear localization in mind from the beginning. Because of this, the concept of an "original" version – one that might be argued to be inherently Japanese – becomes much harder to envisage, because the English-language version (and often many more languages) are being considered even while the initial development of the game is in progress.

The official localizations of the Final Fantasy games have been the objects of scrutiny by both fans and scholars, and highlight the gap between industry and fan translation ideals. According to Pelletier-Gagnon (2011) and translators Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006), industry game localization 'departs completely from one of the central notions of tradition translation theories: fidelity to the original' (15). This may be partly due to the difficulty in pinpointing an "original", but is also because the brief of in-house localizers is to produce a version that does not seem like a translation to the player, but like a game developed in their own language. As such, localization is seen as a process 'that erases all cultural markings from a product to the point of mistaking it with a local product' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 38). It is questionable whether the erasure of all cultural markings is possible, as various semiotic structures and visual elements would bind the game to a Japanese locale, to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, it is an aim that cannot be fully attained; but an aim nonetheless.

The erasure of cultural markings, in the case of the *FFVII* games, involved translation of in-game text narration and dialogue, packaging and promotional materials, and audio dialogue; and, also, broader customisation in the form of changes to cultural references. For example, humour is often recreated rather than literally translated, in order to remain amusing to users in the target culture, with 'the US localised versions…littered with jokes and puns which are actually absent in the original' (Mangiron, 2007, 312). For example, one of the quests in *FFXIV* (2010) involving one of the game's magical creatures associated with fire, Ifrit, is titled "真なる焔神イフリート" (*shin naru homura no kami*: True God of Flame) in Japanese but is localized in English in pun form: "Ifrit Bleeds, We Can Kill It". The Japanese version appears more dramatic than humorous, referring to Ifrit's fire-wielding properties, while the English version inserts a joke instead.

In this way, Japanese cultural references are erased in favour of elements familiar to the target culture. Recently, English-language localizers are increasingly in collaboration with game development teams and Japanese-language writers from the start of development, meaning that there may not even be a Japanese "original" to be translated. Further, in addition to text and dialogue-based references, in certain cases localizers are given the freedom to change visuals or even storyline. Mangiron cites an example from *FFVIII*, in which a left-facing swastika on militant character Seifer's coat sleeve, which in Japan is recognized as an auspicious Buddhist symbol, was changed to a European-style cross in the US and European localizations (Mangiron, 2007, 314). Here, the negative connotations carried by the right-facing swastika in the USA and Europe meant that the left-facing symbol was considered too jarring for users of the English-language version of the game, and was thus replaced with an image thought to be more neutral.

These changes to the Japanese game material make game localization more than a process of adaptation; it is a creative process of production (Szurawitzki, 2010, 4). Because of the unique level of freedom given to localizers, game translation theorists suggest a new model for their activities: Pelletier-Gagnon calls it "transfiguration", in which 'cultural products are broken down into pieces of cultural elements and then put back together in a re-imagined way so as to fit the new locale's system of value' (2011, 39-40). Transfiguration is more about meaning-making than the adaptation of meaning, and 'can potentially…shape the way customers interpret the game' (44). It is this altering of the play experience from the imagined "original" that distinguishes commercial transfiguration from fan ideals of translation of commercial games, which remain closer to literal translation (although fans who create transformative works display a much less rigid idea of translation in their reinterpretation of game elements).

Elements of Japanese video games can be seen as "translatable" (ripe for alteration, omission or addition in the localization process) and "untranslatable" (resist transformation and contain the "essential" elements of what makes a particular game recognizable) (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 51-2). However, the understanding of these two concepts is not the same for interpretative structures and interpretative communities. In the case of the Final Fantasy series, fans categorize what is translatable and what is not in terms of "Japaneseness"; some fans consider the elements they characterize as "Japanese" to be untranslatable and essential to their enjoyment of the game, whereas in commercial localization terms such elements most urgently require translation into the target culture. The removal of what are thought to be Japanese cultural markings is 'an attempt to eliminate the risks that come with the transcultural marketing of cultural products' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 41) on the part of game marketers, and indeed may account to some extent for Iwabuchi's *mukokuseki* aesthetic (Iwabuchi, 2002), in which the game appears at first to be culturally unmarked. However, it should also be remembered that the total erasure of cultural markers is not only impossible but, with the Japanese government's recent "J-cool" initiative[2] seeking to capitalize on Japan's soft power through exports in popular culture, may no longer be an entirely desirable practice for the industry.

Commercial risk is less a consideration for fans who recognize such games as coming from a Japanese cultural context. Fan localizers try to maintain as many game assets as possible without alteration of context. These game localizers and users share a different translation ideal, which values so-called "original" Japanese elements highly,

[2] A slogan attached by the Japanese government to various nation-branding initiatives since 2005, with the aim of increasing Japan's "soft power" through pop culture (Valaskivi, 2013).

preferring to either rely on users' existing knowledge of the games and wider Japanese pop culture to help them understand references, or to explain such references instead of altering them. The Japanese game is considered material to be preserved, not transfigured, at least when it comes to translating the game itself. Dissatisfaction with the official localization of *Final Fantasy VII*, which received 'an incredible bashing by fans' (Mangiron, 2007, 315), led to a team of fan translators and programmers working on a relocalization, "The Reunion", available at the Final Fantasy modifications website Qhimm.com, which can be patched (installed to replace or augment other parts of the game) into the PC version. This localization team states that it chose to relocalize the game because, as a comment posted to the forum by team member Daniel Burke on January 8, 2014 states, the commercial localization 'suffers from errors in grammar, spelling, context and translation…with little communication with the original authors', some of which 'alter the plot; one or two, severely' and 'warp…its original content' (Burke, 2014). The relocalization restores terms that it considers were "modified" for a Western audience in the official localization. For example, the Japanese name for one iteration of the main antagonist Sephiroth in FFVII is "リバース・セフィロス", (*rebaasu Sefirosu*: Rebirth Sephiroth) referring to Sephiroth's plan in the game to be reborn as a god to rule the planet. In the official translation (1998), this was changed to "Bizarro Sephiroth". The Reunion project re-translates it as "Rebirth Sephiroth", reinforcing the connection between this version of the character and the game's plot.

While this relocalization itself has its critics among the *FFVII* fan community, it points to dissatisfaction with the official localization, which was done by outsourcing the translations to freelance translators who had little experience of the material in the context of the game itself (Mangiron, 2007). Square Enix has since switched to an in-house

localization model. Now, job applications for Japanese-English translator positions require candidates to write an essay as if they were a character from one of the Square Enix games who had been transported to Japan for one day. This indicates that lately commercial localizers are also required to be familiar with the content of their company's games and with contemporary Japan, two things that appear to be valued highly by fans. Therefore, it cannot be stated that commercial translators are not also fans, or that translators who began working on fan projects will not move into the industry. What we can be clear on, however, is that the goals of commercial localization and fan translation differ considerably; further, that fan ideals and practices have been shown to have some influence on how the industry localizes its games. Fan localizations thus show fidelity to the imagined original of the Japanese game release, and in doing so demonstrate that the values and goals of interpretative communities can differ from those of interpretative structures.

Whether localizers seek to erase or preserve it, Japaneseness is a key concept in the overseas dissemination and use of JRPGs with large fan communities. However, it must be remembered that Japaneseness is not something objective or unchanging but is, like gender, a performative term, its meaning shifting according to who is doing the interpreting or imagining. Interpretation of Japaneseness by interpretative structures is indeed mobile; but interpretative communities see it as 'a constitutive part of some video game genres and titles and thus inseparable' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 85). Japaneseness is valorized by fans and then used in their own textual production. The concept of Japaneseness here appears more fluid for game producers than it is for fan users, though both are complicit in its creation. The erasure of Japanese elements in localized games causes fans to seek out the "missing" Japaneseness they see as being subtracted from the

initial game during localization, by obtaining Japanese versions of the game and subtitling cut-scenes in English while retaining the Japanese audio, uploading the subbed videos to YouTube; at the same time, they accept and appreciate the erasure of Japaneseness, in the sense that *mukokuseki* has become a form of Japaneseness itself in the form of an aesthetic style:

> …the dissemination of Japanese popular culture globally...ensures an erasure of 'Japaneseness' that is, in itself, a type of 'Japaneseness', a process whereby the *mukokuseki* encapsulates a type of 'unembedded' culture that is undeniably linked to a virtual imaginary of Japan.
> (Hjorth, 2011, 81)

The initially *mukokuseki* appearance of *FFVII* (its sci-fi setting, character designs and so on) has become an imagining of Japaneseness by fans, for whom its visual style is instantly recognizable, and by its producers themselves: 'the notion of Japaneseness in Final Fantasy is defined [by the company] as indistinguishable from the title's core text… The game's style is attributed as a representation of Japaneseness in video games' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 90). Here, fan imaginings are also used as a promotion tool for the Japanese game industry, with users labelling a particular visual game style "Japanese" in a game where Japaneseness is not based on setting, characters or narrative but on a particular aesthetic that has had a fragrance of Japaneseness laid upon it by both its producers and fans.

The above discussion demonstrates that, while *FFVII* and its spin-off games developed out of a tradition of table-top games and early video games imported and transformed from the U.S.A., the imagined concept of Japaneseness stemming from the culturally specific Japanese game industry and the insistence on maintaining that cultural

specificity by English-speaking fans is just as central to these apparently *mukokuseki* games and their fan communities as to those of *dōjinshi* and cosplay.

Bearing the above in mind, the following sections of this chapter will examine gender and sexuality in the fictional aspects of the *FFVII* game texts and their use by fan gameplayers, including in-game narrative, characters, and fan-made machinima. It concludes that, while the *FFVII* character designs do offer an alternative to dominant images of hegemonic "macho" masculinity found in many Western video games, the game story and manipulations of game footage in machinima videos still promote norms of heterosexuality and phallocentricity.

## 2.3 Heterosexual androgyny and Japaneseness in *FFVII* game fiction

### 2.3.1 Storyline

Just as the analysis of articulations of gender and sexuality in RPG fan cultures has taken care in this dissertation to cover a range of media and practices, so within the games themselves it is not sufficient to focus either on fiction (representation) or gameplay (simulation), as '[s]tories and games are prototypical categories…they bleed into each other' (Grodal, 2003, 132) and cannot be fully separated. It is important to include the intersections between both, and between fan gameplay within the game world and produsage of new fan texts based on that world, since these various arenas offer differing sites for the performance of gender and sexuality. As well as the commercial *FFVII* games,

therefore, this section examines the fan-made videos known as machinima: audio-visual works based on game footage and shared on sites such as YouTube, which, since the 2000s, has exposed 'a much broader audience to these niche videos' (Ito, 2011, 52).

In the following analysis, I will argue that official top-down localizations of the Final Fantasy games provide ample Japanese "fragrance" for fans to construct images of Japaneseness that are intertwined with gender: in this case, androgynous masculinity. However, although the bottom-up transformations of the games by Western fans make use of this they ignore how these images are linked to compulsory heterosexuality in the games. Instead, they create new fannish and arguably Orientalist articulations in which "Japanese" androgyny is intertwined with same-sex desire; in the case of machinima, this new imagining is employed to uphold Western hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity.

It is not easy to know where to begin discussing these multi-directional intersections of fiction and gameplay, fan and commercial texts. This chapter focuses on the fictional aspects of the initial games, specifically the narratives created by both producers and gameplayers in-game, as well as character designs, as these are the elements most frequently picked up by fans for reinterpretation and transformation. The dissertation returns to the question of gameplay in the final chapter.

Playing a video game, says Juul, is 'to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world' (2011, 1), and the fiction is what the gameplayer generally comes into first contact with when initially purchasing a game, or even before this point through advertising. In English-language commercial advertising for *FFVII* games (print ads and trailers), the user is generally presented with a montage that combines characters, setting, and visualizations of gameplay, while game packaging (CD-ROM/DVD art, game

booklet and so on) features backstory, characters, and gameplay descriptions. Juul admits that most games include a story in 'the package, in the manual, or in intro-sequences, placing the player's playing in the context of a larger story' (2001). The wider game story, especially for traditional single-player RPGs that need 'a system of progression (with a clear goal), a reward structure, and the regular introduction of new elements (levels, enemies, weapons, skills)', provides 'a narrative project as a unifying logic' (Klevjer, 2002, 194). It thus acts as a convenient framework within which to frame gameplay. Further, video games not only provide a narrative structure for the gameplayer through the broad plot but are also ideal for 'the full simulation of our basic first-person "story" experience because they allow "the full experiential flow" by linking perceptions, cognitions, and emotions with first-person actions' (Grodal, 2003, 132). This "experiential flow" will be touched on again in the final chapter on gameplay, but it is interesting to note that, in this sense, we can experience gameplay itself as a kind of story.

*FFVII*, which falls somewhere between the fantasy/sci-fi genres, 'is widely acknowledged as having one of the densest, most complex, most compelling stories of any single player RPG' (Smith, 2002). It is certainly complicated and extremely detailed, and has become increasingly so with the release of each new game and spin-off. The progression of this story presents the main character relationships in a way that appears to valorize both the heterosexual and (male) homosocial in line with still-dominant constructions of sexual norms in the English-speaking West. Consalvo, in her analysis of sexuality in the game *FFIX*, states that 'heterosexuality is normalized and presented as a "regular" part of life, while queerer interactions are either absent, or made to appear deviant' (2003, 172). This can be seen in the *FFVII* games, in narrative elements that are a compulsory part of the progression of a "ludus" type game (in which the gamer must

encounter and play through various normative scenes/images/dialogue in order to progress towards completion).

For example, in the first meeting between Zack, the main male character in *Crisis Core* (*CC)*, and female character Aerith, Zack offers to reward her for "rescuing" him with 'one date', immediately setting up a romantic interest. Later, as they talk, Aerith states that 'normal is best. I think so, at least'; this comes in the context of a conversation about SOLDIER, an elite, genetically/magically modified fighting unit, of which Zack is a member. The idea of the manipulated body as unnatural can be seen prominently in current discourses of athletic bodies (Magdalinski, 2009). The strict policing in professional sports over what athletes may or may not do to enhance their performance goes further than simply keeping things fair, making a more general division of things that can be accepted as "normal" and things that cannot. External influences such as drugs, cyborg-like prosthetics or cellular manipulation on the body are seen 'as a disruption to the body's inherent 'naturalness'' (Magdalinski, 2009, 155), something that is not limited to the athletic body. Aerith's comments that any body or identity not normal (i.e. SOLDIER) is 'weird' or unnatural underlines Consalvo's reading of *FFX* as setting up a "regular"/"deviant" binary. This can also be seen in the depiction of non-heterosexual characters, as discussed later in this section.

In the first *FFVII* game, as well as in *Advent Children* (*AC*) and *CC*, the presentation of heterosexuality as a norm can also be seen in male character Cloud's desire to have a closer relationship with his childhood acquaintance Tifa, who is routinely selected as a focus in *hentai dōjinshi* for her typically, even excessively feminine appearance, and to Aerith, who dies part-way through the game. Although Cloud and Tifa are never explicitly depicted as being romantically involved, in *AC* they are living together, sleeping in the

same bed and acting as surrogate parents for orphaned street children, providing a model of a heterosexual family structure that remains intact even in a post-apocalyptic world. This heteronormativity is suggested once again in an episode of *FFVII* known as the "Gold Saucer Date", in which Cloud is invited to spend the evening alone with another character in an amusement park. Depending on the choices the gameplayer (unconsciously) made earlier in the game, this character varies, but according to game statistics (Fergusson, 2012) is most likely to be Aerith or Tifa (though, as will be shown later, fan-created knowledge repositories and modifications online allow gameplayers to alter this to the character of their choice). Spending the majority of *CC* and *FFVII* moving around the game world as either Cloud or Zack (unlike MMORPGs, there is limited choice in *FFVII* when it comes to playable characters which can be used as the gameplayer's avatar), the gameplayer has no option but to enact these scenes if they wish to progress towards the game's climax and goal, though the mode of play and level of engagement with the characters and game world of course varies from person to person.

Although heterosexual relationships are positively portrayed through the above character interactions, the most intense bonds in the *FFVII* games are homosocial relationships between male characters, often in the form of hero-worship (Cloud/Zack, Cloud/Sephiroth) or love-hate (Cloud/Sephiroth). This is perhaps unsurprising, given that all the main (avatar) characters in the *FFVII* games are male, as are their main antagonists. One particularly sentimental episode is seen in a cut-scene at the end of *CC*, when Zack dies of his wounds after a battle, attended by a teenage Cloud. Zack passes on his sword to the teary-eyed Cloud with some inspiring life advice, pulling Cloud's head down to rest on his chest and touching his hand in a scene reminiscent of countless war films[4] but

[4] Such as Wade's death in *Saving Private Ryan* (2001), Boromir's death in *The Fellowship of the*

also of the now-legendary cut-scene in *FFVII* in which Aerith is stabbed by Sephiroth and dies, again accompanied by Cloud. As Zack dies the game's ending song begins, and the gameplayer is treated to a soft-focus montage of Cloud's memories of Zack; the scene is set up as the tearjerker climax of the game, based on Cloud's emotional reaction to Zack's death. War games and films, perhaps because they often take place in an all-male setting, tend to feature homosocial relationships, also a significant feature of Japanese genre cinema, particularly yakuza (gangster) films dating back to the 1960s. Such films frequently contained scenes of a male character dying who had a close bond to the male protagonist. By dying in the arms of his comrade, this type of scene draws focus away from 'wartime ideologies of sacrifice' and instead highlights the 'homosocial ethic' that bonds men together (Standish, 2000, 91). These homosocial scenes in the games, especially when contextualized against a background of other Japanese media, sometimes provide another possibility for interpretation by fans other than friendship or comradeship: one in which both same-sex desire and Japaneseness are implicated. This is due to the fact that the gap between homosocial and homosexual relations are 'tenuous and permeable' (Eberwein, 2007, 38), a blurred distinction that is utilized by some fans through media such as boys' love *dōjinshi* (see Chapter 4) to provide an alternative to the heterosexuality of male characters and create scenarios in which relationships between Japanese male characters are framed as romantic or sexual.

While scenes like the ones above are used by some users, like boys' love fans, to celebrate the relationship between Cloud and Zack as homosocial and/or romantic, within the games themselves, strong male-male relationships are mediated to discourage interpretations of homosexuality. This is done, Consalvo says, partly through use of

---

*Ring* (2001); parodied in *Wayne's World* (1992), *Spaced* (Season 1 Episode 4, 15 October, 1999).

Sedgwick's "erotic triangle" trope (Sedgwick, 2009, 198-201), in which a female character is introduced into the same storyline as two male characters who share a close relationship; with the inclusion of romantic/sexual feelings toward her on the part of one or both of the male characters, the woman in the triangle acts as 'a convenient placeholder to secure their heterosexuality' (Consalvo, 2003, 178). This technique allows the male characters to share scenes together and to be depicted as having a "fulfilling" relationship, while possibly preventing interpretations of homoerotic attraction. In *CC*, this is demonstrated by Zack's romantic feelings towards Aerith; in the final cut-scene, his scene with Cloud is sandwiched between a scene of Aerith sensing his death and his (post-death) monologue, in which he thinks about her and asks Cloud to pass on his greetings to her. In this way, some of the focus is removed from the male-male pairing and returned to the male-female "norm".

Another technique in the game story to maintain heteronormativity is the use of potential male-male sexuality for humorous purposes; this is also used, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in *hentai dōjinshi* aimed primarily at male users, and in many machinima videos online. While the *FFVII* games are by no means geared specifically towards male users (there is no particular gender disparity in the gameplayer demographics for *FFVII*), this could suggest that some of the same anxieties around male-male sexuality are at work in articulations of sexuality in the initial game texts. Homoeroticism is dealt with not by absenting it from the story but by attempting to render it amusing or awkward. The clearest example is the Wall Market episode of *FFVII*, in which Cloud is persuaded by Aerith to cross-dress in order to rescue Tifa from Don Corneo's mansion, which only women are allowed to enter. The more items of female costume Cloud collects, the more likely he is to be admitted; in addition to dress, wig,

etc., Cloud can obtain a pair of "bikini briefs" by paying a visit to member's club (brothel) Honey Bee and taking a bath with a group of hyper-muscular, moustachioed men in shorts and singlets. Cloud's reaction to this is one of extreme discomfort, signalled by his English version utterances such as 'this could be dangerous' and '…could you go do someone else?', while the spokesman for the group of men is given stereotypical "gay character" lines like 'why don't you stick around and play a bit? Daddy's so lonely…' (Square, 1997). The entire cross-dressing episode is characterized by Cloud's reluctance and Aerith's amusement.

In another episode, the above-mentioned Gold Saucer Date, there is the possibility for Cloud to date one of four characters (Tifa, Aerith, Yuffie, or hyper-masculine male character Barret) on an amusement park ride. The likelihood of the gameplayer having made the necessary sequence of decisions earlier in the game to lead to the Cloud/Barret pairing is considerably smaller than for the three female characters, implying that it is the lowest priority. In addition to this, the interaction between Cloud and Barret on the ride is quite different to that between Cloud and Tifa, for example, consisting of a protracted silence followed by a conversation about which of the female characters Cloud should have brought instead, and has been characterized by several users of a YouTube clip (aubirdforce, 2006) showing the scene as "awkward". By introducing such story elements, which are not set up as major game events but as amusing side-missions, the gameplayer may be dissuaded from reading male-male sexuality as a serious possibility in the relationships between male characters, whose homosocial interactions maintain and promote hegemonic heteronormative masculinity through 'the cultural framing of male bonding under the guise of fraternal relations' (Kaplan, 2005, 573), although of course this is not the case with some fans, who prefer to reimagine these male character

interactions in sexual terms.

The concepts of sexuality and gender are deeply linked in many fan media, and will be discussed throughout this research; in particular, the conflation of male homosexuality with femininity[5]. It could be argued that the still commonly-held assumption of a connection between gender performance and sexuality, which in some cases is valid, is another reason for the clear valorisation of heterosexual relationships and humorous treatment of homoeroticism in the initial game texts; unlike these attempts to fix sexuality into a binary construct of heteronormativity, the aesthetics of gender in *FFVII* are viewed by fans as somewhat more fluid, particularly regarding the male characters. This is explored in the next subsection, which moves from the game story to look at how character designs are used to articulate imaginings of gendered Japaneseness.

### 2.3.2 Character design

Aesthetic, as well as ludic and narrative, elements are valued by many RPG gameplayers: what the game looks like as well as what you can do with it. Although Poole suggests that cut-scenes and other features in which gameplay takes a back seat 'are merely tinsel around the real gameplay' (2004, 142), the high value given to game visuals is supported by the many comments on the pages of online fan-made AMVs calling for a high-definition remake of the first *FFVII* (a remake that was finally announced by Square Enix in June 2015). The importance of visual elements is certainly extended to the game characters, who are 'designed to-be-looked-at, as well as to-be-played-with' (MacCallum-

[5] This is displayed in fan commentary in the later cosplay chapters, where one of the reasons given for the lack of male crossdressing cosplayers was a concern that dressing in female costume might be taken by observers to be a statement about their sexuality; and in the *hentai dōjinshi* chapter, in which men with "feminine" visual traits in the initial games are either given more masculine features or turned into women in *dōjinshi*, in order to avert the possibility of sexual attraction to a known male character within the erotic context of comics aimed primarily at straight men.

Stewart, 2008). Indeed, Azuma, in his theorization of the database of initial and fan-made texts from which users select elements for transformation, argues that characters are prioritized over story, even over the "small narratives" that postmodern media supply (2009, 53). In RPGs, particularly, character background and development is seen as important; but it is initially the character designs that appeal to potential gameplayers, that hail us (Krzywinska, 2007, 115) to purchase a game.

Fan attachment to character aesthetics, particularly in a highly recognizable franchise like Final Fantasy, can impact on their purchase or enjoyment of a game. Poole reports that '[w]hen Japanese fans got their first look at Final Fantasy VIII there was palpable outrage, because it seemed the characters had been "Westernized": no longer the cute, deformed people of FFVII' (2004, 247), they were longer-limbed, slimmer and more "realistic"-looking, a tendency that has continued throughout subsequent FF games. These new character designs were influenced by both technological advances and aesthetic considerations, and have now become the recognizable standard for FF games; which, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, are interpreted and promoted by many English-speaking fans as uniquely Japanese, and are therefore not considered by them to appear "Western". This serves to support Pelletier-Gagnon's argument that Japaneseness itself is fluid, based on reiterated semiotic and textual productions rather than 'an already determined and unchangeable set of elements' (2011, 102), as fans embrace and champion new technologies and aesthetic trends as Japanese. Given that Western fans accepted the change in character design and continued to interpret them as Japanese, it can be said that, around the time of the change, at least, these particular imaginings of Japaneseness were very much Western driven.

The development of Cloud's official character design from the first *FFVII* through

to *Crisis Core* provides a useful illustration of how technological advancements can influence aesthetic choices, and the way in which the performance of male androgyny is co-opted as representative of both Japaneseness and female-driven consumerism.

Cloud's in-game character design in the first *FFVII* was so limited by the blocky 3D graphics of the early PS that it is difficult to judge whether he shows markers of either normative masculinity or femininity, although the deformed, simplistic "*chibi*"-style design of the player-controlled avatar could well be considered *kawaii* in the same 'asexual' way as Hello Kitty or similar cartoonish mascots (Hjorth, 2011, 78). The official character artwork displayed in promotional material and the game CD booklet, on the other hand, shows him as somewhat tanned and fairly toned, with fists clenched, trademark huge sword, and heavy-booted feet planted firmly apart (though this did not discourage boys' love fans from immediately casting him as a willowy, delicate "bottom" in numerous *dōjinshi*). By the time the *AC* film was released, CGI animation had developed enough to enable much more detailed character visuals, while the longer-limbed and less cartoonish designs of *FFVIII* had become standard in the FF games. The film is filled entirely with cut-scene-quality animation; having no gameplay element, it does not have to revert to the simpler character avatars limited visually by the complex operations of the game engine during active gameplay. As well as containing distinctly androgynous new characters (discussed in Chapter 3), in *AC* Cloud himself is blonder, paler, smaller in comparison with the other male characters and with detailed, delicate features. This trend continued further with the release of *CC*, in which Cloud is supposed to be several years younger than in the first game; to highlight the age difference his character design is even smaller and slimmer, his face rounder and eyes larger, and is yet more detailed, now fitting the later concept of *kawaii* as applied to certain human anime

characters and *bishōnen* Japanese idols: a *kawaii* that also incorporates gender connotations (Hjorth, 2011, 78).

Fan commentary on male character designs in the *FFVII* world sets them up as distinctively Japanese, more specifically a Japanese masculinity characterized by androgyny. For some users, androgynous males are interpreted as feminine: for example, in a comedy fan trailer for *FFVII* by the satirical review group Honest Game Trailers, who publicize their content on YouTube, the male-voiced narration states that the gameplayer will 'join up with hot chicks like Tifa, Aerith, and Sephiroth, whose beautiful silver hair, slender hips, and deep green eyes will leave you breath- wait, he's a dude? Aww, man! I have his picture up in my bedroom!' (Smosh Games, 2014). Here Sephiroth, Cloud's main antagonist and one of the most popular male characters in *FFVII*, is described using terms of attractiveness that are set up as feminine, and placed in a group with female characters on the basis of the particular *moe*-elements that make up his visual character design (while ignoring the actual composite of all these elements: Sephiroth, especially in the later games, is in fact tall and muscular with a deep voice, but this is not mentioned in the trailer). Such conflation of Japanese masculinity with the feminine echoes Said's well-known theorization of Orientalism, in which the so-called "Orient" is characterized as having a 'feminine malleability' (Said, 2003, 206), by extension rendering it inferior to a dominant West; this tendency can also be seen in American stereotypes of Asian men as weedy and/or nerdy.

Likewise, blogger "Karl", on his gaming review site, posts an entry titled "Why are Japanese RPGs so gay?" (Karl, 2006; username altered for anonymity) In this post, which is specifically about the *FFVII* series, the author criticizes Japanese RPGs in general, and *FFVII* in particular, for the use of 'cute things' in 'serious' games. What he means by this,

it transpires, is androgynous male character designs: complaining that Sephiroth is as "girly" as can be, 'even worse' than Cloud, the author conveys not only that he views their designs as feminine, but that this is to be deplored as insufficiently "manly". This is echoed in various other fan commentary targeting Square Enix and written by Western users identifying as male; another blogger, "Adam," complains on the gaming site Gamasutra.com that FF is filled with androgynous "emo" characters that only appeal to a small audience (Adam, 2007; username altered for anonymity). Karl goes on to conflate this androgyny with male-male sexuality through the use of the word "gay", and by finishing with a call for Japan to lay off the 'homoerotic heroes' and replace them with something 'more macho', citing a number of huge, muscular characters from U.S. games. This equates androgynous character designs with homosexuality, and, by extension, "macho" designs with heterosexuality.

Such fan commentary, in addition to drawing a crude binary line between "girly" and "macho" masculinity, also divides these masculinities on the basis of nationality by explicitly assigning "girly" characters to Japanese RPGs and "macho" characters to American games. This supports Pelletier-Gagnon's argument that Japaneseness, like gender, is a set of shifting imaginings that are constructed by both commercial media producers and fan produsers by 'associating elements such as androgynous characters to Japan and muscular characters to the West' (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011, 70). It is not only interpretative communities who articulate this: Square Enix itself has also supported this arguably Orientalist division. This can be seen in the localization of the game *NieR RepliCant* (Square Enix, 2010), released in Japan on PS3. The game, whose protagonist is a particularly androgynous looking boy name Nier, was not released overseas in English; instead, a different version of the game, *Nier* (*NieR Gestalt* in Japan) (Square

Enix, 2010) was created with an older, more "macho" main character of the same name for both Japan and the U.S.A. The reason cited for this by Square Enix developers Yosuke Saito and Taro Yoko was that, after discussion with their U.S. office, it was decided that a 'slender young boy' would not go over well as protagonist in an American action game, and so a macho main character was prepared specifically for the North American market. (DEVELOPER'S TALK, 2010) Players in Japan, on the other hand, were able to purchase both games.

This particular imagining of androgynous masculinity as distinctively Japanese by Western users is reinforced by the user comments on both Karl's and Adam's blogs. Commenters' textual productions convey a knowledge of Japanese pop and gaming culture, setting themselves up as fans. They, like the blogs' authors, interpret the designs of main characters Cloud and Sephiroth in an arguably Orientalist way as both feminine and distinctively Japanese. Almost all the commenters viewed this as a positive quality, some citing it as an example of female consumer clout in the gaming world stemming from Japan, arguing that *FFVII* is a Japanese game, and is not only marketed to men. This user goes on to say that, in their opinion, women, not men, dictate what is considered manly, and men should accept this (oxygenskiis, 2006; username altered for anonymity). Some commenters also saw the character designs as a pleasing alternative to Western norms of masculinity; Pyrotech (2006; username altered for anonymity) makes light of the appearance of the Western male characters and suggests that the design of FF characters creates a deeper, more emotional connection to them, while Yuri (2006) opines that women like the aesthetics of 'metrosexual boys' who carry swords, like Cloud and Sephiroth. Only one commenter aligned themselves with the authors in producing a negative view of this androgynous masculinity. It could be suggested that in-game

articulations of gender and sexuality have led to a broadly positive stereotype of Japanese masculinity among English-speaking users. However, the following section shows how one practice led by male fans takes these images and reimagines them as homoerotic in a distinctly denigratory way.

## 2.4 Machinima videos and manipulation of Japanese masculinity

It was never the intention of this dissertation to divide practices and articulations according to essentialist male/female binaries, although *hentai* and BL *dōjinshi* communities do show some tendencies towards this. However, the above standpoint regarding masculinity and sexuality taken by some self-identified male fans does, it transpires, tend to be reiterated in the popular machinima genre of fan videos based on *FFVII*. Machinima has been characterized as a genre populated, in the RPG world at least, largely by male produsers. This is debated by Stein (Jenkins, Jones & Stein, 2007), but it does seem to be the case that many of the more technologically advanced machinima, at least, present similar attitudes towards the performance of androgynous masculinity and homoeroticism as do *hentai dōjinshi*, which have a primarily male readership. High-ranking machinima clips for *FFVII* on YouTube, particularly, tend to depict male-male desire in a humorous/parodic/derogatory fashion, similar to articulations (such as Cloud's encounter in the bath-house) in the initial games discussed earlier.

The following shows that many *FFVII* machinima hold to the heteronormative performances of the given in-game fiction, some even going further and extending masculinism to blatant sexism (though not all user responses to these videos support these articulations), at the same time imagining a connection between homosexuality,

androgyny, and Japanese masculinity.

Machinima are 'remixes of Japanese animation...forms of video making that rely on appropriating commercial culture, reframing and remixing found materials' (Ito, 2011, 52). Stein suggests that creating these transformative works is in fact similar to gameplay: fans see the source text 'as elements available for their play, and as elements which set up rules to be followed or hacked or cheated or broken, depending on how they like to play' (Stein in Jenkins, Jones & Stein, 2007). There are various types of fan video based on game material involving the creation of new works, such as "AMVs" (anime music videos), in which fans edit together cut-scenes or film footage and add a piece of background music; machinima is a more complex extension of AMVs, requiring a greater amount of technical "play", as it generally requires the recording of actual gameplay as well as the editing and addition of vocal tracks and music.

In recent years, machinima created by female fans has become more visible, especially for world-building games like *The Sims* (Stein in Jenkins, Jones & Stein, 2007). However, some scholars argue that machinima, which Stein (2007) argues involves more advanced technical skills than AMVs, is still a practice dominated by male fans; as Hancock puts it, 'the traditional technophile demographic: white, male, middle class' (Hancock, 2011, 33). This may be due to the widespread Western cultural assumption that it is still difficult for women to gain the same access to technology or technological skills as men, which may have discouraged female fans from engaging in machinima practices (Jones in Jenkins, Jones & Stein, 2007). This should be, he states, 'a caution to the rhetoric around machinima as emancipatory when the reality is that it merely replicates the marginalization of women through technology' (2007). Indeed, this

section's analysis of Final Fantasy machinima suggests that the practice and culture of machinima is often very far removed from emancipation, through content as well as technology.

Jones' opinion is supported by the attitude of one of the most prominent machinima websites, Machinima.com. The homepage of this website states that 'Machinima is a programming movement aimed at young males around the world' (Machinima, n.d.); its "about" page elaborates, explaining that Machinima (the title of the site) is 'one of the top entertainment networks on YouTube', with game-related videos 'all aimed at the coveted 18-34 year-old male demographic'. With the intended users clearly outlined in terms of sex and age, we can now turn to YouTube to examine how the supposedly masculinist culture of machinima and the videos themselves articulate gender and sexuality in *FFVII*.

The Machinima.com YouTube channel features several *FFVII* fan videos, based on a variety of official texts. All these machinima display a high level of technical ability and fan knowledge, including many references to the in-game story as well as to gameplay elements, and the intertextual use of characters. One of the most popular videos, with over one million views, is titled "Final Fantasy Machinima: Real Men" (Machinima, 2009); it is made using recorded and edited gameplay from a game that includes many FF characters including *FFVII*, *Dissidia Final Fantasy* (2009), with (male) fan voice actors providing dialogue, and depicts a one-upmanship masculinity contest between main characters Cloud from *FFVII* and Squall from *FFVIII*, both of whose designs display the androgynous, *bishōnen* traits criticized by users like the bloggers discussed earlier, and who are accused by the same of being "emo" (overly emotional). The video uses the theme of masculinity for humorous purposes, creating a deliberate contradiction between

the characters' aesthetics and their voiceovers, which are done in an exaggeratedly laddish or "frat boy" manner.

By utilizing the hegemonic masculinity of lad or "frat boy" culture in the form of play fighting and crude sexual humour, the video's creators also promote heteronormativity. Like BL *dōjinshi* users, they reimagine the strong homosocial relationships between male characters as homoerotic; the dialogue is littered with insinuations of sexuality between Cloud and Zack, such as:

> *Squall (mimicking Cloud)*: Oh, Zack, take me from behind!
> *Cloud*: That was just once!
>
> *Cloud*: Behold! My super secret weapon!
> *Squall*: You're not gonna pull Zack out of your butt, are you?
> *Cloud*: No. Something better!

These articulations of male-male sexuality are engaged with in a playful way and are not obviously derogatory, and some users may interpret the use of humour as a lighthearted attitude towards sexuality, the reimagination of the game characters being used to explore taboos about homosexuality. On the other hand, the humorous context could be used to imply that these articulations are not to be taken seriously, to be interpreted as a valid option for one's sexuality. While the characters' aesthetics and utterances appear to invite a link with homosexuality for these machinima users, the fact that the discussion of homosexuality is depicted 'out in the open and in the manner of a joke' (Kaplan, 2005, 584), together with the performance of excessively "laddish" and normative masculinity by the voice actors, could prevent a reading of such sexuality as legitimate. This is underlined by the sexualisation of the few female characters, who are set up as the

appropriate targets of male desire. The same technique can be seen in other FF videos from the Machinima channel, such as "Final Fantasy Machinima: Tough Love" (Machinima, 2010), which again is largely made up of male FF characters making or becoming the target of gay jokes.

As with female fan produsers in the machinima community (according to Jones), female *FFVII* characters themselves are significantly under-represented in the more technically complex machinima videos on YouTube. Where they are included on the Machinima channel, their combat abilities are often downplayed and their sexuality exaggerated, creating another link between this machinima fandom and the male-led *hentai dōjinshi* fandom, where a similar thing occurs. There is only one speaking female character present in the first video discussed above, and she is referred to by the male characters as "bitch". The second video features two female characters, whose screen time is of short duration and who are merely the targets of male characters' romantic/sexual advances. Another video on the channel is a cleverly made type of "reverse" machinima, using stop-motion animation of commercial FF action figures, with digital effects added in post-production to mimic a video of gameplay. "Final Fantasy: The Final Fantasy" (Machinima, 2009a) broadcasts fannish knowledge in the shape of characters from various games in the FF series, many in-game references, and, in an odd comedy side-step into another fantasy franchise, Elrond from *Lord of the Rings*. While the male characters set out on a combat-related quest, the female characters, including Tifa, are deliberately excluded, being left behind with Elrond after being told 'no-one ever puts girls in their parties'. The video creators' opinions of Tifa and co. are succinctly put in a line of dialogue from Elrond, who is shown having sex with them while the male characters are adventuring elsewhere: 'Final Fantasy girls…so useless in battle, but so

useful in bed!'. This sexualization of female characters while their combat powers are dismissed is mirrored in tropes found in both *hentai dōjinshi*, and in erotic gaming cosplay websites to be discussed in the erotic cosplay chapter.

The above treatment of female FF characters is supported by many of the thousand-odd user comments on the YouTube video, but there are also dissenting commenters in terms of the in-game strength and usefulness of the women, particularly Tifa: comments pointing out that people do put girls in their parties (Ninelives in Machinima, 2009a; username altered for anonymity), that the commenter used female character Tifa a lot (battlefrog; username altered for anonymity), and that female characters are generally among those with the best game stats (Gleamquest & Gleamquestcrow; username altered for anonymity) show that other users of these machinima, who also signal their experience as gameplayers, do not subscribe to the characterization of women as weak. On the other hand, apart from the odd, isolated comment about liking the video if it wasn't 'sexist as hell" (FlyingShadow; username altered for anonymity), the video's users do not appear to contest the sexualization of female characters, to whom they also assign peaceful attributes like being good at "healing" and "magic", rather than specifically aggressive combat powers. The comparative lack of female characters in general is a trait shared with boy's love *dōjinshi*, as are the womens' healing, nurturing attributes when they are included; female sexuality, on the other hand, is almost never depicted in such *dōjinshi*, whereas in these machinima it is one of their defining characteristics.

In the interpretative community of machinima, then, women are dismissed as nothing other than sex objects, androgynous masculinity is equated with homosexuality and then mocked, and Japaneseness is used as an inferior Other against which to validate

Western dominant masculinity. Nor are these articulations strongly contested by other machinima user.

This chapter has argued that, through the narrative elements of the games, androgynous masculinity is connected with heterosexuality. When the localized artifacts are picked up by fans, however, Japaneseness is interpreted somewhat differently: the construction of androgynous Japanese masculinity is retained, but the heterosexuality is removed, replaced by sexualized male relationships. These interpretations are used by fan communities in different ways, as the preceding chapters have shown; in machinima, they are used largely to bolster Western constructs of heteronormativity and dominant masculinity. While the regimes of value of the industry and fan communities are aligned up to a certain point (the promotion of heteronormativity), their goals begin to sharply differ when machinima fans place Japanese masculinity in opposition to heterosexuality.

The next chapter continues to examine transformative works created by and aimed at primarily male users, in the form of pornographic fan comics or *hentai dōjinshi*. Through a discussion of the translation and online dissemination processes used to transform these fan texts into English, it shows that, while this genre does contain a few non-normative articulations of gender sexuality, it more generally sets women up as passive, hyper-feminine, sexualized objects.

# 3. Pornography "For Men": *Hentai dōjinshi*, hegemonic masculinity and the heterosexual imperative[1]



## 3.1 Introduction

Of the many forms of fan media found around Japanese pop culture, amateur comics or *dōjinshi* are perhaps the most directly concerned with sexuality, while at the same time require the least bodily participation on the part of their fans in their produsage; while some dexterity is required to draw the *dōjinshi*, the localization, digital dissemination and consumption aspects do not necessarily demand much bodily engagement from the user (although of course there are more physical modes of consuming these media). This chapter focuses on one of the two main genres of *dōjinshi* available in English-speaking Final Fantasy fandoms: sexually explicit *dōjinshi* featuring one or more (generally) female characters engaged in (generally) heterosexual sex acts, known in the US and UK as "*hentai*" *dōjinshi* and 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

[1] This chapter contains adaptations of material that has been published by the author as a journal article: Glasspool, L. "Creating Transnational Fandoms: Adaptation of Japanese terminology among English-language dōjinshi users". 『多元文化』Vol. 15, February 2015, 27-33.

*dōjinshi* genre, which will be discussed in the next chapter and which 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 chapter examines the particular trends of the *hentai dōjinshi* genre within the context of English-language Final Fantasy fandoms online, and the ways in which the *dōjinshi* contents in their intersections with fan practices in an online context may reflect or impact upon fan concepts of gender and sexuality.

Section 3.2 outlines the format and production practices of the *dōjinshi* being examined, and also the main terminology used by English-speaking fans, showing how far the use of Japanese-language terms such as *hentai* has altered from native Japanese usage in an English-language online context. The next section examines *hentai dōjinshi* fandoms, beginning with an overview of the current scholarship surrounding pornographic materials in an Anglo-American context, much of which arose out of the pornography debate that accompanied second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s. A certain amount of discussion still revolves around the "positive" and "negative" impact of pornography as a media genre, particularly with the relatively new medium of the Internet transforming the way it is produced, distributed and consumed; there have also been studies related specifically to Japanese pornography (Shibata, 2008), including *hentai* manga and animation (Buckley, 1991, Ortega-Brena, 2009, Perper & Cornog, 2002). This chapter, however, is more concerned with how the articulations of gender and sexuality in and around them conform to or differ from Western hegemonic ideals of masculinity that seem to uphold a particular societal framework centred around male dominance.

The main focus of this chapter is on English-translated electronic *dōjinshi* and a

selection of the websites that disseminate them. It shows that the *hentai dōjinshi* genre, in ways that intersect with the other media discussed in this dissertation, allows fans of Japanese pop culture to rearticulate game elements according to Azuma's (2009) database concept of media simulacra, integrating their own imaginings of Japaneseness in their interpretations of translated *dōjinshi*. In doing so, they provide various articulations of sexuality to other English-speaking fans and prompt a wide range of secondary user commentary on gender and sexual ideals. However, the chapter ultimately suggests that the prevalence of images and narratives in this genre that can be read as supporting phallocentrism, heteronormativity and male domination virtually obliterates the fans' playful appreciation and reimagination of the game texts, leaving an impression of the traits for which mainstream heterosexual pornography is most stereotypically criticised: compulsory male heterosexuality, passive female sexuality, and male domination.

### 3.2 *Hentai dōjinshi* terminology: cross-cultural fan use

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'[2]. In practice, *dōjinshi* available in Japan at specialist stores or fan events largely use characters or settings from pre-existing media texts 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

[2] 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.

to find fan-produced *dōjinshi* of pre-existing texts than "original" ones, and drawn *dōjinshi* in comic form prevail over novel *dōjinshi*, which in the Final Fantasy fandoms are supplanted by online "fanfiction" written by English-speaking fans.

In Japan the majority of *dōjinshi* are drawn using either pen and ink or computer programmes designed for the purpose, and are then printed and bound by companies catering specifically to *dōjinshi* artists. They are then disseminated as hard copies in chain stores like Toranoana and Mandarake that also sell regular commercial manga, and at *dōjinshi* selling events such as the famous Comic Market (Comiket). 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 common format.

In English-speaking fandoms, however, the vast majority of *dōjinshi* made by Japanese artists are scanned and then distributed online in electronic format either in the Japanese language ("raw") or translated into English ("scanlations"). It is these electronic *dōjinshi*, and the online contexts in which they are found, on which this chapter mainly concentrates: not only is this type the most numerous in English-speaking fandoms, but it matches the electronically mediated fan practices and products that form the core of this dissertation.

As stated previously, this examination of these online *dōjinshi* has been divided into two main genres, this chapter dealing with *hentai dōjinshi* and the next with boys' love. Rather than "pornographic", the term *hentai* is used because it refers specifically to the genre of sexual material aimed at primarily heterosexual men that is the focus of this chapter, whereas "pornographic" has far broader connotations. Likewise, the decision to use the term *hentai* rather than "heterosexual" or "aimed at male readers" 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 is generally considered to be initially aimed at male readers, but is not strictly limited to depictions of heterosexual relationships. These traits are all characteristic of the *dōjinshi* examined in this chapter: while most contain male-female relationships as their central focus, there are significant exceptions, and defining the genre as "heterosexual" would be to exclude these exceptions; and, while the context of their dissemination 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 these readers are exclusively male. In addition, the pornographic nuance of the term *hentai* in English-language fandoms is useful when defining the characteristics of the *dōjinshi* examined in this chapter, as almost all the *dōjinshi* available on English-language fan websites which do not fall into the boys' love genre are sexually explicit. It is not easy, in fact, to find a Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* in an English-speaking context that is neither boys' love nor pornographic. Because of this paucity, the current chapter focuses on *dōjinshi* with sexually explicit elements in this chapter, and refers to them as *hentai*.

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 traces 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' (2006, paragraph 3). In the current 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' (McLelland, 2006, paragraph 1), and is not necessarily linked to the popular cultural media of anime/manga/games. This is changing slowly: today, a Google search brings up approximately 760,000 results for the term "変態マンガ" (*hentai manga*). However, this is a minority compared with the more widely used Japanese term "ero" (erotic) manga; a search for "エロマンガ" (*ero manga*) returned more than 4,200,000 results. Where it is applied to pornographic comics or animation, *hentai* is 'only of an extreme, 'abnormal' or 'perverse' kind; it is not a general category' (McLelland, 2006, paragraph 3). As pornographic drawn and animated materials began to spread into English-speaking fandoms, however, the meaning shifted to become more general, and has now become a loanword (a word of foreign origin that has become part of another language's vocabulary), 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" (in terms of strange or abnormal, though there may be a derogatory connotation too) or "perverse" – we find that its nuances differ from both of them in terms of implied sexual orientation. In a UK context, 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: the Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* that fall under the category of *hentai* on English-language distribution sites are largely, but 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 (as will be discussed in a

separate chapter), though it is most often used to refer to animated or drawn media. In Japan, commercial manga defined as *hentai* in English-speaking fandoms is rather known as "*ero-manga*", stemming from the English loanword "erotic", while sexually explicit *dōjinshi* tend to be labelled "*seijin-muke*" or in English "for adults". 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, and so on) – 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, colour) 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 on 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 does not seem unusual, 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 terms of availability to English-speaking fans who do not have access to hard copies of *dōjinshi*, fan *hentai* texts distributed online are considerably more numerous than boys' love titles. As will be shown in the next section, localized digital *hentai dōjinshi* contain a number of gendered and sexual performances that do not, at first glance, appear to conform to the deeply entrenched "gendered, heteronormative reality in which men remain in control" (Garlick, 2011, 236). The majority, however, are heterosexual, and have a good deal in common with content found in the live-action or photographed heterosexual pornography that has been a staple of the industry in the West since the later twentieth century, from videos and magazines to new online technologies. This may be one of the reasons why such *dōjinshi* are so readily translated and available to English-speaking fans online; they do not offer anything too shocking or unexpected, particularly to fans with a solid grounding in anime/manga/game cultures, while the Japanese "fragrance" attached to them through their visual style and the methods outlined in McLelland's (2000) work provide something just different enough to be titillating.

The following section outlines the main ways in which the relationship between pornography and gender is theorized within an Anglo-American context, as it could be argued that, once scanlated and disseminated to English-speaking fans online, *hentai dōjinshi* become to some extent part of a Western sexual economy. The subsequent section discusses how gender performances in these *dōjinshi* continue to inscribe heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity in the tradition of mainstream Western

pornography (Garlick, 2011, Hirdman, 2007, Williams, 1990). This leads, in the later sections, to a consideration of fan commentary on these texts, including non-consensual narratives, as this is a trope that tends to be pinpointed by English-language scholarship as a particular feature of Japanese pornography. This does, to some extent, appear to be the case among scanlated Final Fantasy *dōjinshi*; the chapter considers how such narratives enable fannish discussions of the games to mix with commentary on sexuality among English-speaking users, while simultaneously perpetuating the stereotypes of dominant phallic masculinity highlighted by other aspects of the *hentai dōjinshi* genre.

### 3.3 Pornography and phallocentricity

Pornography as a contemporary genre was first interrogated deeply during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s (for example the Women Against Pornography group, founded in the U.S. in 1976, whose members included scholars and activists Andrea Dworkin and Adrienne Rich). Since then it has been the subject of much debate in Western scholarship, though it was not until the early 1990s that the study of pornography moved beyond feminist arguments concerning its morality or its positive/negative effects to closer analysis of the features, functions and use of pornographic materials (Williams, 1990). As Linda Williams explains in her influential volume *Hard Core: Power, pleasure, and the "frenzy of the visible"* (1990):

> The feminist rhetoric of abhorrence has impeded discussion of almost everything but the question of whether pornography deserves to exist at all. Since it does exist, however, we should be asking what it does…
> (4-5)

The standpoint from which the research in this dissertation is conducted is closely aligned with Williams's approach: rather than attempting a "moral" judgment (though it is still a critical one) on *hentai dōjinshi* and the fan articulations surrounding it, this chapter examines how these cross-cultural articulations function to uphold or problematise the hegemonic constructions of masculinity promoted by mainstream Western pornography through Japanese pornographic texts made use of in English-speaking online contexts.

Williams, like Butler (1990) and other poststructuralist gender theorists, is insistent that gender and sexuality are not "natural" or fixed concepts; that female sexuality, if "freed" from patriarchal domination, would not necessarily be free from 'violence…relations of power…transgressive sexual fantasies' (Williams, 1990, 20): these concepts do not stand 'outside history and free of power' (23), but are subject to the workings of various discursive formations throughout histories and cultures. It is true, she argues, that 'the disciplinary practices Foucault describes so well have operated more powerfully on the bodies of women than on those of men' (4) in a Western context; this is due to the dominant male economy (both literal and metaphorical) that persists in the US and Western Europe, a gendered economy that hinges on a particular construction of hegemonic masculinity. It is this masculinity that is reinforced by most heterosexual live-action pornography; however, such reinforcement is not necessarily successful all of the time.

In pornography, as elsewhere, this masculinity most frequently centres on the concept of the phallus. The relationship of the phallus to the penis here is a complicated one. As Hirdman (2007) reminds us, the penis does not necessarily *equal* the phallus:

> …phallocentrism is an imaginary idea, relying on the invisibility of the penis in order to maintain its authoritative position in culture. The phallus is powerful as a symbol for masculine sexuality precisely because it is not seen as a penis, but as a metaphor.
> (164)

This refers to a metaphor for male power and dominance. However, in hardcore pornography, and certainly in the *hentai dōjinshi* under discussion, 'the penis is everything but invisible' (Hirdman, 2007, 164), despite Japanese censorship issues that apply to *dōjinshi*. This means that the penis, on display clearly and centrally, is under tremendous pressure: in order to uphold the metaphorical phallic order, it must not appear vulnerable or soft, but, like other images associated with the phallus (weapons, muscles, and so on), must remain hard and spectacular.

According to Williams, the 'most blatantly phallic of all hard-core film representations…the most representative instance of phallic power and pleasure' (1990, 95) is the so-called "money shot", or the moment a male performer in a pornographic visual text ejaculates. Yet, while representative, the money shot is problematic in terms of asserting male dominance, as its visual depiction (in live-action and photographic pornography, at least) necessitates 'a swerving away from more "direct" forms of genital engagement – of the tactile sexual connection' (Williams, 1990, 101). In order to capture the moment of ejaculation on camera, the male performer cannot be engaged in penetration at the time of climax; this disconnection, while 'undeniably spectacular…is also hopelessly specular; it can only reflect back to the male gaze that purports to want knowledge of the woman's pleasure the man's own climax' (Williams, 1990, 94). Female pleasure is a staple of contemporary pornography, as a display of what the penis – and, by extension, the phallus – is capable of. One might argue that the climax of the female

performer (which often miraculously coincides with the moment the male performer disengages from her body in order to provide the money shot) is an attempt to reiterate phallic power and stress the influence such power has over the female body; the male body remains 'a machine that functions with a nearly emotionless, rational efficiency' (Garlick, 2011, 234), retaining control where the female body lets go.

There are other problems that accompany the positioning of the penis as the bearer of the phallus in pornography aimed at male users. Depicted as large, ever-erect and capable of attracting and satisfying vast numbers of women, the pornographic penis upholds the idealised concept of the phallus as something hard, permanent and unassailable; but in doing so it sets an impossible standard for heterosexual masculinity, which has long managed to remain the Western hegemonic norm. This, Cook argues, can create 'conditions under which many men may become increasingly anxious with respect to their inability to perform' (Cook, 2006, 59). He further suggests that this can have some impact against the (supposedly) immutable phallic power that limits the gendered and sexual roles possible for Western heterosexual men in the process of insisting upon its own strength and permanence. By revealing to the users of this type of pornography the anxieties about masculinity expressed within it:

> It may also make them more aware of those processes in society and Web porn that intensify the anxiety they are assumed to feel as Western heterosexual men. These effects may result in some desire for either personal or social change on the part of these men for whom this anxiety and its intensification are troubling. (Cook, 2006, 59)

Male performers and users of heterosexual pornography are limited in their choice of acceptable sexual roles by the shadow of the ever-ready, penetrating penis and the

ramifications it has for the gendered male body, which is often 'synecdochally represented by the hard, erect penis' (Garlick, 2011, 235); the body itself is frequently absent from the visual frame, while the female body and face are constantly present. Desire and pleasure for women in pornography are expressed verbally and in the face, since it is more difficult to see bodily indications of female pleasure than it is to see male indications; and the eroticization of the female body, while regarded as problematic by many feminists and gender theorists, at least allows that it is permissible for women to feel and show sexual pleasure. Men, on the other hand, are barred from the visual eroticization of other parts of their bodies in pornography by the demand posed by the phallus that it remain in control; as Hirdman explains, 'the sexualization of the heterosexual male body seems to result in the loss of its heterosexuality, linking it to feminization and homoeroticism' (2007, 163), neither of which are deliberately depicted or seen as permissible in mainstream English-language porn. Thus the male body is not lingered upon; it is absent or fragmented, 'focusing on legs, penises, and the torso – the performing body…the mechanical performance of sexuality' (166).

With the unspoken injunction against feminization and homoeroticism that accompanies the performance of this particular phallic body comes another limitation: in addition to not losing control, male bodies 'are almost never penetrated within heterosexual porn' (Garlick, 2011, 235). The potential pleasures linked with being penetrated, by a male or female performer, are largely forbidden in this construct of heterosexual masculinity by the need to maintain the dominant fiction of the all-powerful and impermeable phallus (Waldby, 1995). It is one of the imagined boundaries that can separate the dominant male body of hegemonic masculinity from the female or feminized body; and, in insisting that this is a "natural" and ideal state and that male desire must be

represented solely by the penetrating penis, pornography of this type may also serve to distance male users from other sources of erotic pleasure.

These theorizations of pornography and masculinity are largely centred upon media of Western origin, distributed and consumed in English-speaking contexts. The next section looks more specifically at *hentai dōjinshi*, which, along with *hentai* manga, share many of the aforementioned features of Western pornography, particularly in their scanlated and digitally distributed English forms. It is important, however, to consider that this genre 'is characterized by specifically Japanese historical and cultural approaches to both aesthetics and sexuality' (Ortega-Brena, 2009, 18), which will have some influence on the media form of *dōjinshi* as well as on the fans who consume them; these factors may impact significantly upon their use, fan interpretations, and the ways in which those fans perform gender and sexuality in their own commentaries.

### 3.4 Nowhere and everywhere: the spectacular embodiment of the phallus

The sample of *hentai dōjinshi* under analysis[3] was taken primarily from two of the largest

[3] Romanization of titles/circles/authors is taken, where possible, from The Doujinshi and Manga Lexicon (http://doujinshi.mugimugi.org/):
*Cu-Little Baka-nya* (Cu-little2: Beti/MAGI/Mimikaki 1997); *Kachou Fuugetsu* (SFT: Kawakami Takashi 2002); *Off Limits* (Bakunyu Fullnerson: Kokuryuugan 2002); *Advent Girls* (FULLMETAL MADNESS: Asahi 2004); *B2B Body 2 Body* (IRODORI: NITTA KUMI 2004); *FF7MT Masochist Tifa* (M: Amano Ameno 2004); *IROHIME vol.1* (Bakunyu Fullnerson: Kokuryuugan 2004); *Chichi Taihou –Chichi Magnum-* (Alpha to Yukaina Nakamatachi A: Aotsuki Shinobu 2005); *Ero Tifa7* (Finecraft69: 2005); *Hachi* (Doronuma Kyoudai: Mr.Lostman/RED-RUM 2005); *Mission AC* (Aa/Ai no Terrorist: Yuiga Naoha/Toda Yōchika 2005); *Tifa no Oyashoku* (Yasyokutei: Akazaki Yasuma 2005); *Chichi Taihou 2* (AKABEi SOFT: Aotsuki Shinobu 2006); *Ero Tifa7 vol.2* (Finecraft69: 6ro- 2006); *Ero Tifa7 vol.3* (Finecraft69: 6ro- 2006); *Kachou Fuugetsu Soushuuhen* (SFT: Kawakami Takashi 2006); *Tifa W Cup* (Ohkura Bekkan: Ohkura Kazuya 2006); *Tokuresen Tabobi* (Quick kick Lee: Yoshimura Tatsumaki 2006); *Ero Tifa7 vol.2.5* (Finecraft69: 6ro- 2007); *FF Naburi I* (Ruki Ruki EXISS: Fumizuki Misoka 2007); *Goumonkan 07* (Yuugai Tosho Kikaku: Tanaka Naburu 2007); *Love Love Lockhart GA* (LoveRevo: Waguchi Shouka/Mugiwara/B-suke 2007); *MORAL CRISIS* (Alice no Takarabako: Mizuryuu Kei 2007); *DYNAMITE RAVE* (Brave Heart petit: Kojirou! 2009); *FF Nabu Reifu* (Ruki Ruki EXISS: Fumizuki Misoka 2009); *EGG PLANT FFVII* (NAS-ON-CH: NAS-O 2010); *Tits Bullets Limitation* (Finecraft69: 6ro- 2011); *TIFA!2* (ACID-HEAD: Murata 2012);

websites distributing *hentai* materials in English: Fakku.net (FAKKU, n.d.) and Doujin-Moe.us (Doujin-moe, n.d.). These sites were chosen for their large number of Final Fantasy *dōjinshi*, and because they do not restrict public access by asking users to create either a paid or free account to use their materials. This makes them somewhat less private than sites which require membership, and commenters can reasonably expect their online utterances to be viewed by strangers. Fakku allows its users to upload raw and scanlated manga and *dōjinshi*, categorizing them by means of series, author and content "tags" and making them available to read online and sometimes download; Doujin-Moe does not allow user uploads, but rather commissions various scanlation groups to translate *dōjinshi*, which are then hosted on the site for online reading or download. Both websites have areas where fans can comment on the *dōjinshi* they have read, wish to read or will not read; each site has a large Final Fantasy section, with a sub-section for *Final Fantasy VII* (*FFVII*) from which the majority of the *dōjinshi* for this analysis were taken. Others came from the site Final Fantasy Hentai (Final Fantasy H, n.d.), which is dedicated solely to the dissemination of pornographic Final Fantasy *dōjinshi*, images, games and animated clips.

There are several links between scanlated *hentai dōjinshi* and the Western live-action pornography most frequently discussed in English-language academia, both in their content and in the spaces of their dissemination and consumption. Many websites offering *dōjinshi*, like other sites whose users can access content for free, generate revenue through hosting advertising. On sites like Final Fantasy Hentai, these adverts are limited to other *hentai*-related websites, or websites that offer pornographic images drawn by Western artists using manga-inspired styles. Fakku, on the other hand, hosts adverts for live-action and 3D Western-style animated pornography in the form of flashing

banners down the right-hand side of each page, providing photographs and video clips of performers and telling users, for example, 'Don't Cum Till You See This' and 'How to: Female Ejaculation'. Clicking on these adverts will direct the user to their websites. In this way, the *hentai dōjinshi* hosted on sites like Fakku are connected with pornographic media that is familiar to many Western English speakers, and are partially drawn into that cultural context.

The content of the *dōjinshi* analyzed, while presenting several significant differences to much Western live-action or photographed pornography, is largely heterosexual (one or more women engaged in sex acts with one or more men). This section suggests that these fan texts provide fantastical, sometimes even humorous depictions of sex, often based on knowledge of the *FFVII* game world; but also that they intersect in a number of ways with the upholding of phallic, dominant masculinity that appear to be a central concern of much English-language pornography. It is, of course, important to acknowledge that the new possibilities offered by the Internet for the production and dissemination of pornography means that porn subgenres have proliferated in recent years, such as porn made by and for women. It could be thought, therefore, that the centrality of phallic masculinity in pornography will become increasingly undermined by the new varieties and forms becoming available. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the majority of videos on major dissemination websites like Pornhub (pornhub.com, n.d.), which is similar to a pornographic YouTube, are heterosexual material aimed at men. While Pornhub contains many genres, including "Hentai" (2,947 videos)[4] "For Women" (4,337), "Gay" (33,840), "Shemale" (18,300) "Virtual Reality" (454), and so on, the number of videos offered in these categories is

[4] As of November 30, 2016.

lower than the number for categories containing heterosexual videos, including "Teen" (78,632), "Hardcore" (77,213), "Blowjob" (40,513), and "Amateur" (77,492). This suggests that, although it is more difficult in the Internet age to talk about one overarching "mainstream" pornography, there is still a prominence of material that caters to heterosexual men and centres on the gratification of the penis.

The centrality of the phallus, in pornography most often conveyed in images of the penis, is a crucial feature of the *FFVII hentai dōjinshi* found on the above websites. This feature, though theorized to date in a primarily Western, psychoanalytical frame, is also part of Japanese erotic tradition. Sandra Buckley, in her overview of sexually explicit manga in a Japanese context, details the history of pornography and its circulation in Japan, beginning with the Edo-period woodblock print as the 'technology of reproduction' (Buckley, 1991, 165) that began the commercialization of pornographic materials and their widespread dissemination. From these woodblock prints, known as *shunga*, to the thousands of sexually explicit manga and *dōjinshi* available today, '[p]leasure remains intricately bound to penetration' (Buckley, 1991, 168). Even in historical Japanese depictions of female-female sex, a phallus substitute such as a dildo was generally involved, implying that it is the phallus that is the ultimate granter of sexual pleasure.

The primacy of phallic images and penetration in sex acts can be seen in the vast majority of *hentai dōjinshi*. In each of the scanlated *dōjinshi* examined, female orgasm is delivered through penetration of some kind. The phallus here is most often embodied in the penis, which is almost always drawn erect, though there are also other phallic substitutes used such as fingers, vibrators, weapons, and tentacles. These visual images are supported by the dialogue of female characters, which, in the Japanese versions, features sexual terms used in Japanese mainstream pornography, and in most English

translations includes sexual terms used in Western pornography (notably "dick" / "cock"). They also tend to emphasize size – a facet of the "spectacular" that Williams describes – in relation to pleasure: female character Aerith, working as a prostitute in *dōjinshi MORAL CRISIS*, says admiringly, 'ahh! Amazing! It's so big!' (2007, 9), while hugely popular character Tifa, in *Kachou Fuugestsu Soushuuhen*, cries out, 'Your big cock feels so good!...I'm cumming…!" (2006, 40). Among all the *dōjinshi* surveyed, only one was found in which the female character being penetrated does not reach orgasm.

The drawn medium of *dōjinshi*, compared to live-action pornography, involves both limitations to, and alternative opportunities for, the upkeep of phallocentricity through the depiction of the hard, pleasure-giving penis. As Buckley points out, Japan has had strict censorship laws regarding genitalia, and these technically apply to the amateur field of *dōjinshi*. These laws, which forbid the uncensored depiction of adult sex organs, grew out of a crackdown on pornography in the Meiji period that stemmed from 'the desire to meet with the perceived moral standards of the West' (Buckley, 1991, 168). Today, neither the UK nor the majority of the US has censorship laws of this particular kind, but in Japan they are still nominally enforced, and therefore *dōjinshi* are unable to show the entire, uncensored erection as is the standard in Western heterosexual pornography. Accordingly, alternative phallic substitutes to the penis have been introduced into Japanese pornography to a greater extent than they have been in the West. In *FFVII dōjinshi*, which are based on a science-fiction/fantasy game, these often take the form of objects appropriated from the game and redeployed as sexual tools: monstrous tentacles[5] (a sub-genre of *hentai* that has become notorious in the English-speaking West among casual

[5] This feature could also be said to take influence from Edo-period *shunga*, such as the well-known woodblock print of a giant octopus pleasuring a woman in Hokusai's *Ako to Ama* (*Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, 1814), shown as part of the British Museum exhibition "Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art" (2013).

observers of Japanese popular culture), as in *Off Limits* (2002), in which Tifa is experimented upon by an evil scientist and his many-tentacled creation; or, occasionally, mechanical objects like weapons, seen in *Ero Tifa7 Vol.1*, where a modified version of male character Barrett's gatling gun, which is an extension of his arm, bearing the sign 'For Anal Use Only' (2005, 11), is used for anal penetration. It is crucial to note that these substitutes invariably take the form of objects with aggressive or forceful potential; they are never fragile or delicate items. This helps maintain the hegemonic ideal of masculinity as active (rather than passive) and inviolable. Buckley (1991) argues that such visual innovations uphold the idea 'that the phallus is not equal to the penis; it transcends the anatomical, signifying the power that is the privilege of the bearer of that organ' (191). These alternatives to the depiction of the penis, born through necessity in Japan and now consumed in the West, may be equally supportive of the same phallocentric social structure and dominant masculinity that much heterosexual English-language pornography tends to uphold.

The censorship law restricting full display of adult sex organs is, in practice, more relaxed than it once was. This can be seen in the increasingly visible penis in *hentai dōjinshi*, which has rendered it the primary representative of phallic power in these texts. While some *dōjinshi* artists use digital pixilation to censor the entirety of the sex organs, the majority use black or white rectangular "bars" to strategically obscure portions of the organs. Of the 28 *FFVII hentai dōjinshi* examined closely, only three use the pixilation method; all but two of the remainder use the bar method. This bar method has become more relaxed and the bars increasingly small, so that in most cases it is more a passing nod to censorship regulations than a legitimate attempt to hide anything. Thus the erect, often exaggerated, penis is shown almost in full. The sex organs can be further reclaimed

from censorship in the process of scanlation into English. The editing on many older translated *dōjinshi* is fairly basic, especially when done by individuals rather than organized scanlation groups, and most censorship is left as it is. However, with advances in graphics technology available to amateur editors, *dōjinshi* such as *Tifa W Cup* (2006), translated by *hentai* scanlation group Sahadou.com (Saha, n.d.) are now being "de-censored" using art programs like Photoshop; here, censored portions are erased and painstakingly redrawn to fit the demands of Western fans accustomed to completely uncensored pornography.

As in much heterosexual pornography, the crowning moment of these *dōjinshi* is the moment of orgasm, or the money shot. Here, too, the male orgasm tends to coincide with, or even induce, the 'orgasmic bliss of the female' (Williams, 1990, 101), upholding Williams' theorization of the money shot as the representative moment of phallic power. And here the possibilities for creativity given to artists who work on paper rather than in live-action enable techniques that not only make the money shot even more visually spectacular but also do away with some of the phallic vulnerabilities that accompany it. Because it is a drawn medium there is no pressing need, either technical or financial, to adhere to realism, and artists make the most of this to create exaggerated explosions of ejaculate that would be physically impossible for live-action performers. This volcanically visible orgasm, when it is performed outside the body, often covers the face and body of the female character, the sheer quantity an even clearer suggestion of phallic control over the female body than the more restrained money shot of live-action pornography.

A more crucial difference from the pornography theorized by Williams and similar scholars can be observed when orgasm does not occur outside the female body. As argued

earlier, in order to be "spectacular" and maintain constant visual proof of its effectiveness, the penis must be shown in its moment of climax, which in live-action pornography can only be done in a moment of disconnection. This, Williams tells us, makes it a 'perversion' and a 'fetish substitute for less visible but more "direct" instances of genital connection' (Williams, 1990, 95); in the instant the penis visually displays male pleasure it is no longer joined in intercourse, thus calling the purported omnipotence of the phallus into question.

*Hentai dōjinshi*, on the other hand, have no such limitations, and a number of artists make use of the so-called "X-ray shot", where the female character's body is rendered transparent so that the penis is visible inside her at the moment of ejaculation. The works of circle Ruki Ruki EXISS are particularly notable for depicting spectacular money shots by combining both exaggerated quantities of semen and internal X-ray shots. In *FF Nabu Reifu*, for example, Tifa is shown in a two page orgasm sequence as her sex partners climax inside her; the moment of ejaculation is shown graphically using an X-ray shot in close-up; yet, on the following page, she is drawn with her face and breasts also covered with semen (2009, 18-20), while one of the anonymous male characters states that 'I'm not even *close* to done with you yet' (20). This is another feature of *hentai dōjinshi* that underpins the dominant status of the phallus: male characters, however old, appear to be in a constant state of erection, without a moment of sexual weakness in which the all-powerful status of the phallus could be called into question. Thus, the scanlated versions of Japanese *hentai dōjinshi*, through their particular medium, both reinforce the performances of masculine phallic power found in mainstream Western pornography and go even further in this assertion, by overcoming the technical limitations of live-action film and photography and negating the areas of potential vulnerability of phallocentrism that lie within those limitations.

Manga/*dōjinshi* media may also have other potential to maintain this hegemonic, phallic masculinity. Cook discusses the anxieties that can be reflected in, and created by, English-language live-action pornography online, arguing that the proliferation of available material, while going some way to normalising porn as a genre, also highlights anxieties around what it is to be a Western heterosexual man. Some users of this pornography may feel anxiety that they cannot perform to the same "standard" as the male performers they see on such websites, and this may cause them to reflect on, or even wish to change, the societal processes that enforce such standards (Cook, 2006, 59); though of course this is by no means the case for all porn users, depending on the type of pornographic text they are using and their motive for, and way of, engaging with it. *Hentai* is in some ways different from mainstream live-action pornography. While often conservative when representing the dominance of the phallus and the sexual roles of both men and women, it is not populated by "real" humans; the performers in *dōjinshi* are not always human at all; when they are, they are drawn, highly stylized, and perhaps less threatening as an impossible standard of phallic masculinity than the male actors in live-action pornography:

> …the animated body in general is markedly "less human" than a live film body and therefore far less individualized…On an erotic level, it provides us with an excellent receptacle for our own desires and the fantasies awakened by the material.
> (Ortega-Brena, 2009, 28)

The penises and the characters attached to them in *hentai* may be more spectacular than those found in live-action pornography, but they are also, in a sense, less threatening: being two-dimensional and acknowledged as imaginary, they are not 'a real body trapped

in representation' (Ortega-Brena, 2009, 18), and so do not pose the same competitive challenge to male users as the flesh-and-blood actors of Western porn. This is carried even further by the often fantastical quality of Final Fantasy *dōjinshi*, and the alternative phallus substitutes such as tentacles, which can function to distance the user even more from anxieties about standards set by living human performers. In this way, *hentai* might indeed be termed "playful", perhaps to a greater extent than contemporary Western pornography (although lighthearted, humorous and pastiche porn also exists in the mainstream). Its phallus substitutes, born in a context of fantasy genre and censorship, do not make even the pretence of being realistic; they are bizarre, at times whimsical, sometimes treated with humour, and, because they are so blatantly fantastical, do not demand emulation from the user to the same extent as live-action pornography is said to do. Of course, this also means they do not highlight the same anxieties as Western pornography or stimulate the critical questioning or desire for change that such anxieties can spark in its users.

Despite these differences, *hentai dōjinshi* based on *FFVII* appear to conform to the characteristics of English-language Western pornography in more ways than they contest or move beyond them, at least in terms of the performance of the penis. The next section considers the rest of the male body, and its absence, as well as the presentation of non-male bodies in scanlated *hentai dōjinshi*.

### 3.5 The invisible man: gendered body performances in *hentai dōjinshi*

The observations made by Garlick (2011), to the effect that the constant focus on the penis as the ultimate phallic representative in pornography often renders the rest of the male

body visually absent, are upheld to a large extent in the *hentai dōjinshi* examined in this chapter, as is Hirdman's (2007) claim that the eroticization of the male body is forbidden by the same heterosexual phallic performance. Through an examination of the ways these *dōjinshi* make the male body absent, through anonymity, exclusion from the image and replacement with non-male but still phallus-bearing bodies, this section demonstrates further that the genre is very often supportive of a narrow ideal of heteronormative, phallic masculinity.

The *dōjinshi* medium gives its creators a great deal of licence when it comes to depicting exactly what they wish to show and leaving out things they do not. In mainstream Western pornography, the male body 'is usually more fragmented than the female' (Hirdman, 2007, 166), with few shots taking in or lingering on the entire body, but focusing first on the penis and then on other particularly muscular and active areas such as the legs. This is the case in the majority of the *FFVII dōjinshi* samples, and is supported in the placing of the female character in the centre of the visual frame, or at least in a position in which her body is clearly visible, with the male characters' limbs and genitals "aiming" in her direction from a more peripheral position in the frame. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the placement of objects in visual media can reveal flows of power and possible ideological readings as tellingly as the theme or content of the image can. Although they are focusing on Western visual images, the status accorded female characters in the plots and male characters' utterances in these *dōjinshi* suggest that their ideas could also be applicable to English-language *hentai*. In this approach, Tifa, whose body is centralised in the pages of *dōjinshi* like *Ero Tifa7* (2005), can be classified as a "Goal" element in the type of image described above, while the limbs and erect penises springing from the edge of the frame become the 'strong, diagonal line' that

characterises what is termed a "Vector" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, 59). Vectors, lines of action within a narrative visual image, emanate from "Actors", in this case the male characters to whom the penises belong. For Kress and van Leeuwen, Actors take the most active role in the image, aiming at the Goal to which the Vector points. The Goal then becomes 'the participant *to whom* or which the action is done, or *at whom* or which the action is aimed' (2006, 64). In *Ero Tifa7* Tifa is clearly the Goal in the majority of the sexually explicit images; it is thus implied that it is the male characters who act, through the medium of their erections, and the female character who is acted upon, suggesting once again the dominant status of the phallus and its active role in the maintenance of a dominant masculinity. At the same time, however, it does not allow for the eroticization of the male body beyond the genital area.

Actors in this sense need not even be present in the image: their action is implied through the presence of a Goal and Vectors, but they themselves become anonymous. The viewer of the image can see what is happening to the Goal, but not who or what makes it happen (2006, 64). In the *FFVII dōjinshi* examined in this chapter, this sense of anonymity goes even further to fragment the male body. *Chichi Magnum* (2005), for example, absents the male body completely during sex: the pornographic scenes contain only Tifa being penetrated by what appears to be a series of "floating" penises, with almost no indication that they are attached to a body other than the dialogue of the male characters; there is no visual marker to connect this dialogue to even a two-dimensional interpretation of a human. Apparently, nothing but the penis is required to bring Tifa to orgasm, as there is no hint of foreplay or non-penetrative sex; in the English-speaking Western context in which this text is disseminated and consumed, and in connection with the live-action English pornography advertised alongside it, this absence of the rest of the

male body may function as a particularly overt articulation of the idea that power is concentrated in the phallus and represented most emphatically by the penis.

The two male characters, Rude and Reno, featured in *Chichi Magnum* are supporting characters in the original *FFVII* game and the *Advent Children* film, somewhat given to comedy, and it is only in this comedic role that their faces and bodies are shown in the *dōjinshi*; during the sex scenes, these bodies and personalities may as well not exist. In other *dōjinshi* this facelessness is even more marked, in the form of anonymous male characters who do not have names but provide an ever-ready supply of erections without being involved in game-related plots or emotional relationships with the female characters. Of the *dōjinshi* analysed here, 15 (over half) involved a female character engaging in sex acts with one, and frequently more, anonymous men. Most of these also involved a non-consensual premise or scenes, for example *FF7MT Masochist Tifa* (2004); this aspect, and English-speaking fans' reactions to it, will be discussed in the next section.

An exception to the non-consensual trope in this respect is the prostitution-themed *dōjinshi MORAL CRISIS*, which includes portrayal of both anonymous male characters and a main male character, Zack, one of the initial game's "good guys". As in *Chichi Magnum*, Zack is given a personality strongly based on the game, but is not permitted to link that personality, or his face, with female character Aerith in a sexual context. In fact, he is not depicted in a sexual relationship with her at all, but is confined to the role of friend, advice-giver and potential, but unrealised, romantic interest. It appears that emotional connections, at least when it is the male character's emotions in question, are not generally eroticized in these *hentai dōjinshi*, certainly not to the same level as physical connections. This may spring from the ideals of 'physical strength and stoicism' (Standish, 2000, 163) forming part of a fairly traditional construct of Japanese masculinity that has

long managed to remain the hegemonic concept; this stoic masculinity has been contested in recent years, but its focus on physical strength and wariness of emotional display are articulated in the depiction of anonymous, bulky male bodies in *MORAL CRISIS* as sexual, while Zack, who has an emotional relationship with Aerith in-game, is kept at a platonic distance.

Sex scenes in *MORAL CRISIS* are confined to Aerith and the many anonymous male characters to whom she sells herself. While the bodies, in addition to the penises, of these characters are shown slightly more than in *Chichi Magnum*, their faces are undefined and completely eyeless, with dark pencil shading forming shadows where the eyes would normally be. This technique, a not uncommon feature used in various kinds of manga to depict anonymity, uncommunicativeness or deceptiveness, heightens the anonymous status of the male sexual performers even further.

These faceless bodies and bodiless penises serve to emphasise the suggestion of the penis as the primary repository of phallic power. This, according to Hirdman, is useful for the bolstering of Western phallic hegemony and the particular construction of masculinity that is required for its maintenance. However, it may also have a contradictory impact, not only on women inhabiting the same cultural context, as has been the focus of so much feminist scholarship, but also on the male users of such pornography, in terms of devaluing forms of sexuality that integrate not merely the penis but the rest of the body, the brain, and emotional involvement.

In manga and *dōjinshi*, emotion is most eloquently expressed by the characteristically large eyes, which are drawn with sparkles, tears, or englarged or narrowed pupils at moments of character emotion or to suggest specific personalities (Bryce, Barber, Kelly, Kunwar, & Plum, 2010, paragraph 5). For Hirdman, the elimination

of the eyes, face and most of the body:

> …not only reduces male sexuality to the penis, it tends to separate men from their own sexuality by constantly claiming that the penis and hence male sexuality is something outside themselves – a detached and alienated part with a will of its own, sometimes commanding its bearer.
> (Hirdman, 2007, 164)

Garlick (2011) holds that the concentration of phallic power in the penis removes potential for legitimate sexual pleasure from the rest of the male body, which must not lose control because of the vulnerability that comes with "letting go", as this may be seen to "feminize" the male body or allow the possibility of passivity, which in turn is linked in this context to homosexuality. Since dominant Japanese and Western phallic masculinity is still overwhelmingly heteronormative, feminization and homoeroticism in heterosexual pornography of this type is to be avoided.

Avoidance of this kind can be observed in the male bodies of most Final Fantasy *hentai dōjinshi*. As stated before, many male bodies are not shown at all during sex scenes, making such avoidance easy. Where bodies are on display, they tend to be rigidly muscular, another indicator of phallic substitution, or bulky, and, other than the penis, are not to be touched. In the case of main male characters, particularly, bodies are either obscured or absented, or have exaggerated musculature to make up for the fact that they have prior, dangerously emotional connections to the female characters. This is especially apparent in the visual depiction of main male character Cloud, who, in official media, has gradually become more slender, with smoother and more delicate features, in comparison with how he is drawn in many *hentai dōjinshi*. These *hentai* portrayals are in great contrast to the majority of boys' love *dōjinshi*, where Cloud tends to be depicted as

exaggeratedly small, willowy, and pretty. The only *hentai dōjinshi* in the sample that portrays Cloud as anything close to this is *Body 2 Body* (2004), which has an unusually plot-driven premise and focuses on Cloud's emotions rather than those of the female characters, with a good deal of introspective narration as well as full body and face frames. This focus on emotion, coupled with plentiful images of Cloud's less muscular body, leads some readers accessing it on the Doujin-moe website to regard it as unusual. Some of their comments are complaints, oft-repeated in the *FFVII* fandom by (primarily male-identified) users, that Cloud is too "emo"[6]:

> **Hiroshiro**: It's fine, although Cloud is kind of too emo in this. But it's ok 'cos Tifa is always really sexy.
> **Hentailove**: whoa tifa is hot! But come on, Cloud was seriously emo.
> (B2B, 2009; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

Others, however, applaud the concept of *hentai* with a plot, while noting how unusual it is:

> **ABKyuuri**: Other than being emo, hentai which has drama and a plot is unusual. That makes this doujin kind of original...
> **Floki6**: I like how it's drawn, and Tifa's portrayal. Personally, I think it's the cutest version of her I've seen. It seems more romantic and less about lust, perhaps that's down to the focus on foreplay?
> (B2B, 2009; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

Comments such as this demonstrate that, at least within the English-language readership of Final Fantasy *hentai dōjinshi*, the depiction of a male body that is not hyper-masculine

[6] Emotional or angst-filled

or relegated solely to a penis and a speech bubble, but which is actually connected to a person with emotional complexity and attachment to the female performer, is not completely regarded with suspicion as "feminized" or threatening, but can be part of an interesting and entertaining text.

However, *Body 2 Body* is an exception; the majority of male bodies, when they are not absent and visually detached from the penetrating penis, are anonymous, faceless and/or phallic and muscular, obeying the injunction against receptive pleasure. If any hint of penetration of the male body occurs, it is generally in the context of a "gag" or comedy story or panel, is not shown explicitly, and is always to the anger and consternation of the penetrated party. In the final panel on the final page of *Advent Girls*, for example, male character Vincent ingests a new type of materia (a kind of magic used in the *FFVII* game), which leads him to try and have sex with Cloud. Both characters are drawn clothed, from the waist up, in a more blocky and "cartoon-ish" style than the heterosexual sex scenes; Cloud is visibly shown attempting to escape as he exclaims 'No way! Not me!' (2004, 19). The way this is presented as both alarming to Cloud and comedic may negate its erotic possibilities for some users, in contrast to the boys' love *dōjinshi* genre discussed in Chapter 4. This comedic treatment of male-male eroticism was also explored in Chapter 2 in the discussion of machinima videos. Humour can be used for 'challenging that which has become normalized and compulsory' (Krefting, 2014, 2), particularly through the self-conscious crafting of "charged" humour, which addresses social norms to problematize them and offer solutions. In these *dōjinshi*, the possibility of male-male eroticism is raised using jokes; however, it is at the same time given a negative spin by the male characters' utterances, which express distaste for the idea. In FF *hentai*, at least, the male body remain impenetrable and closed to sexual contact with other men.

There is, however, another body in *hentai dōjinshi* which possesses a penis, a body put on display to a far greater extent than that of the male character and which is not immune to eroticization. This body type is known as the "*futanari*" among both Japanese and English-speaking *dōjinshi* users, and is a characteristic peculiar to Japanese *hentai*, not often found in mainstream Western porn. The *futanari* is, in English, perhaps most accurately described as a hermaphrodite, possessing both male and female genitalia. By no means to be found in many *hentai dōjinshi*, it is nevertheless a visible characteristic, and, despite the "chicks with dicks" sub-genre of live-action porn, is much more frequently seen in *hentai* than in live-action pornography of Western origin. Ortega-Brena states that 'graphic hermaphroditism…is popular in the genre' (2009, 27) and that erotic anime as a whole, particularly of this type, 'provides the spectator with what can be deemed as both masculinized and/or feminized points of view, depending on the context and narrative moment' (2009, 27), thus providing a space for potential articulations and interpretations of gender fluidity. However, it does not follow that both these points of view will be accorded equal status by the user or automatically grant an even-handed approach to the gendered depictions of sexuality found in these erotic texts.

Perhaps one reason for the continued existence of the *futanari* sub-genre with both Japanese and Western users is the fact that, though both sets of genitalia are present, the body they belong to is otherwise marked as female. Of the *dōjinshi* analysed in this section, three include *futanari* sex scenes; in these scenes, an originally female character, through some magical mishap, suddenly grows a penis and has to be "assisted" by another woman to relieve the immediate arousal and desire for sex that accompanies it. This is one of the ways in which elements from the games are picked up by fans and, as part of the database of simulacra theorised by Azuma (2009, 33), are redeployed in the process

of eroticization: in *FFVII*, materia is used to enhance characters' battle abilities, but is not presented as having a sexual function. In these *dōjinshi*, materia is taken from its in-game context and reimagined by fans, producing a greater variation of bodies to engage in erotic practices than are available in the game.

In one sense, the *futanari* can be viewed as transgressing the binary norms of sexed bodies; outside pornography, binary sex norms of male and female are still upheld more strongly in the West than the (admittedly still extant) binary gender ideals of masculinity and femininity. A sexed body like the *futanari's*, which does not merely cross from one side of the binary to the other, thereby maintaining its either/or status (as in the case of transsexualism), but straddles the centre line and refuses at least temporarily to fit anywhere, can be far more troubling than mere gender ambiguity. In addition, it is a body that both possesses a penis and admits the possibility of being penetrated as well as penetrating, something that is virtually never seen in mainstream porn outside the gay porn genre in connection with bodies that are identified as male.

Nevertheless, there are also ways in which the *futanari* body can be said to support phallocentricity and the injunction against masculine eroticization. First, depictions of the *futanari* allow, once again, images of the spectacular penis in the same visual frame as a body otherwise marked as female by breasts, vagina, narrow waist and curving hips, with no intrusion of a male body upon which erotic pleasure might be inflicted. Hence there is no danger of the male body losing control, while the female (or at least *not male*) body can be shown displaying the extreme pleasure and satisfaction that penetrative sex apparently accords it; something that is denied the male body by the centrality of the penis as representative of phallic control. In *Advent Girls* (2004), *Tifa W Cup* (2006) and *Chichi Taihou 2* (2006), both female and *futanari* characters are drawn with the full body and

face displayed during sex scenes; Tifa, in the latter *dōjinshi*, stimulates both (previously) female character Yuffie's erection and other erogenous zones such as the breasts, in panels displaying the entire aroused body; whereas, in comics where she is paired with a male character, her attentions are confined solely to the penis. Both Tifa and the *futanari* Yuffie express their sexual pleasure verbally: as she penetrates Tifa, Yuffie exclaims, 'it feels too good…ah!' (13), while Tifa states, '…So big…It's…so good…' (12). The frank articulation of pleasure, both verbally and in the close-ups of both characters' faces, differs from strictly male-female heterosexual *dōjinshi* in that pleasure is expressed all over the body by both performers, rather than this being confined to the female character. However, this state of affairs is only temporary.

In these *dōjinshi*, Yuffie is "cured" after (or by) ejaculating, and her body returns to its previous female state. Once this has happened, her sexual desire for her female partner appears to vanish as well, which once more locates primary sexuality, first and foremost, in the penis, the 'detached and alienated part' (Hirdman, 2007, 164); the rest of Yuffie's body functions merely as a medium upon which the sexual desire concentrated in the penis is displayed, and, when the penis vanishes, so does the sexual urge for the other female character. This simultaneously supports the norm of heterosexuality. In these *futanari dōjinshi*, male users can enjoy overt descriptions of how good possessors of a penis can feel, all the more because Yuffie is experiencing it for the first time, without the threat of feminization and loss of phallic control that erotic expressions of the male body may offer.

There are other instances of sexed body-shifting in *FFVII dōjinshi*, the most notable being a straightforward swap of male character to female. This shift, seen in *Mission AC* (2005), features characters introduced in the *Advent Children* film. The *dōjinshi* begins with a

familiar sex scene between Tifa and multiple anonymous male partners, but also contains a second story. In the second half, Cloud is surprised by a visit from one of his main enemies in *Advent Children*, a beautiful and somewhat obsessive young man named Kadaj. Cloud is understandably shocked, given that he had killed this character at the end of the film. Kadaj then explains that he and his brothers have been reborn, and, in a half-page panel, reveals that he has chosen to return as a woman in order to seduce Cloud over to his side. In this panel, Kadaj's face is drawn in an exaggeratedly *kawaii* style, with huge eyes, thick lashes and blushing cheeks, while the background is composed of delicately drawn flowers, often used in manga aimed at women to signal romance or beauty. Cloud proceeds to have sex with the newly female Kadaj. However, afterwards, Kadaj's two brothers, also reborn as women, make an appearance, and Kadaj proclaims, 'Next you'll have to deal with them!! You'll feel an afterglow after you're done!' Cloud takes one look and promptly tells them to 'get out' (21).

The reason for Cloud's rejection of Kadaj's siblings becomes clear in the visual techniques used to depict these two new characters: as opposed to the delicate, fine-lined drawing style used for Kadaj, the brothers are drawn using simplistic, bold lines, and, other than the addition of breasts and a pair of pigtails, their bodies and facial features are not softened in any way but remain very much as they appear in the film. Character Loz, in particular, retains his short hair and muscular bulk and, in the English scanlation, is labelled a 'Hulk type', about whom Cloud states, 'the one on the right is especially rejected' (21). In this *dōjinshi*, then, it appears that altering the sexed body is only permissible if the gender markers are also similarly switched to match, as evinced by Cloud's sexual desire for the female and feminine Kadaj and his positive disinterest in the female and *masculine* Loz.

This perpetuates a strict demarcation between male/female binaries, and also ties sex firmly to expressions of gender within an idealised frame of heteronormativity. Another point regarding the shift from male to female in *Mission AC* supports this, in connection with the official character designs. In *Advent Children*, Cloud's character design is refined considerably from the first *FFVII* game, with paler skin, a slimmer body and more delicate features. In this *dōjinshi*, however, perhaps because he is to play the penetrating role, he is drawn as more muscular, with a less "pretty" face. The film version of Kadaj is, if anything, more closely bordering on androgyny than Cloud: extremely slender, with skin-tight clothing, rounded facial features and long hair, he certainly fits the *bishōnen* category of male characters so popular with many boys' love fans. Despite this beauty, in the *dōjinshi* he must be transformed into a woman, so that his sexed body "matches" his gender attributes, in order to be a candidate for a sex scene; it is less threatening to the heteronormativity that accompanies the upholding of phallic power to make Kadaj female than to deal with the troublesome issue of male feminization and eroticization that could be incited by a sexual depiction of his official, beautiful but male, character design. Kadaj's two brothers, whose new female sex and masculine gender markers do not allow them to be neatly categorized one way or the other, are rejected outright for sexual or erotic potential.

So, while the *futanari* and transsexual bodies put on display in these *hentai dōjinshi* may at first appear to offer some alternative to the strictly heterosexual, binary ideals of sex and gender promoted in the majority of mainstream English-language Western pornography, which is linked to these texts of Japanese origin through their mutual spaces of dissemination online, a closer look shows that such bodies are drawn back into that phallocentric system of hegemonic masculinity.

There is one body yet to be considered, the one most on display in *hentai dōjinshi*: the female character. The final section examines this body and the *hentai* narrative in which it is depicted most controversially (controversial in mainstream English-language media, that is): the non-consensual sex scene. It considers the relative popularity of this trope in *dōjinshi* scanlations; where it is located within scholarship on pornography with regard to hegemonic masculinity; and how English-language fan articulations inform accusations that such pornography entails, and leads to, 'the sexual objectification of girls and women' (Shibata, 2008, 114).

### 3.6 Hyper-femininity, forcible pleasure and informed user response

While the male body is fragmented, absented or made anonymous in most *hentai dōjinshi*, the female body is displayed in its entirety, in as much visual detail as possible. As with mainstream heterosexual pornography disseminated in the UK, while it is acknowledged that there are some female users, the Japanese audience of what is known as *hentai* manga/*dōjinshi* in English-language contexts is presumed to be largely male. Though it is impossible to accurately gauge the ratio of men and women using scanlated English *dōjinshi* online, their frequent proximity to Western pornography aimed primarily at male users (for example on the Fakku website) suggests that the majority of those users are presumed to be, or articulate themselves as, male and heterosexual. This, perhaps, explains the popularity of *dōjinshi* in which female characters are depicted centrally, explicitly, and with certain exaggerated characteristics.

There are hundreds of artists creating Final Fantasy *hentai*, and their technical abilities and drawing styles vary greatly. In the *FFVII dōjinshi* scanlated into English,

however, particular trends are visible, suggesting that English-speaking translators and readers privilege certain features of body and performance over others. First, there is an imbalance in the characters that are depicted. *FFVII* contains three central female characters: Tifa, Aerith and Yuffie. All three are represented in scanlated *dōjinshi* to a certain extent, as has been shown in the discussion above, but Tifa is the most frequent by a considerable margin. Of the 28 *dōjinshi* in my sample, 23 feature pornographic scenes with Tifa, while only six feature Aerith and seven Yuffie (including those in which Yuffie becomes a *futanari*). This may be due to Tifa's major role in the official games, leading to more *dōjinshi* being created about her in the first place; but their deliberate selection by scanlators and users from the thousands of Japanese raws available indicates something more than just numbers.

Perper and Cornog, whose paper on erotic manga and its assimilation into the US shows the depictions of women in *hentai* in a far less negative light that most earlier Western scholars, state that, in these manga, 'the *range* of depictions of women has expanded immensely' (2002, 38-9) and does not simply consist of women as sex objects or the 'passive slaves of men' (38), which has been one of the main claims of anti-pornography groups and scholars (Williams, 1990, 22). Leaving aside the question of passivity for the moment, in *hentai dōjinshi* this range includes some variation in female body types as well: Yuffie, like her commercial character design, is often drawn as short and narrow-hipped, with small breasts and fairly short hair, a kind of "boyishness" that perhaps explains her frequent choice for *futanari* roles. Aerith and Tifa, on the other hand, tend to have their physical attributes exaggerated in *dōjinshi*, another example of how fidelity to the "originality" of characters is not always a priority for the fans who use media as databases: characters, along with materia, weaponry and other objects, are

elements that are there to be borrowed and reimagined, in this case for purposes that include the erotic gratification of the readers (and also, according to translated artist comments at the end of *dōjinshi*, of the creators). This is especially the case with Tifa, who has an ample bust in the games and film but whose breasts are exaggerated in the majority of *dōjinshi*, sometimes to over twice their original size, and whose waist and hips are correspondingly shrunk and expanded. *Kachou Fuugetsu Soushuuhen* (2006) is an extreme example of this: the cover shows a scantily-clad Tifa, whose breasts are the size of her head and whose waist is twice as narrow as her hips, and it is this exaggeration, to a greater or lesser extent, that comprises the majority of visual depictions of the female body in *FFVII hentai dōjinshi*. While there is variation, it is the traditionally hyper-feminine body that is most often selected for translation and dissemination among English-speaking fans online.

This propensity for the exaggeration of Tifa's breasts is recognised and flagged by both *dōjinshi* artists and scanlators. *Tifa W Cup*, which contains a sex scene between Aerith and *futanari* Yuffie, includes an exchange between the two characters on the subject:

> **Yuffie**: …Compared to Tifa, you just don't stand out at all, do you?
> **Aerith**: Ah! That bitch just has a pair of cow tits! Mine are beautiful!
> (2006, 36)

On the Fakku website, several users also make note of and express ambivalence about the exaggeration of Tifa's body:

> **Angle**: Just no, they're too big…
> **Vorksism**: Tifa's boobs don't seem to match the rest of her body but…it's nice

> on occasion.
>
> **Timeout**: You think these are big? I guess you're a newcomer to hentai.
>
> (Tifa Delivery Service, 2008; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

Such comments demonstrate that the hyper-feminine female body is not regarded as an ideal by all users of these scanlations and English-language sites, and is seen by some users as a specific characteristic of *hentai* media. The translator of *DYNAMITE RAVE* (2009), one of the Doujin-Moe site scanlators, suggests in his translation notes that, contrary to what mainstream live-action Western pornography might lead us to believe, large breasts are not necessarily seen as sexually desirable:

> As time goes on, I become less interested in doing literal translation…I have left in 'erotic tits' a lot as I couldn't think of a better adjective as while they probably just mean 'huge/wobbly', huge tits aren't always a good thing in the West.
>
> (2009, 21)

By stating this, the translator appears to imply that large breasts are, by contrast, a "good thing" in Japan, where the *dōjinshi* was first produced and disseminated. This articulation of what constitutes the desirable in Japan as opposed to the West may be based on the translator's personal experiences; but it is also reasonable to suppose that this idea was introduced and/or reinforced by the prevalence of the exaggerated female body in *hentai* manga and *dōjinshi*, with which the translator, as a member of the Doujin-Moe team, is clearly familiar.

One possible influence on the proliferation of large-breasted, wide-hipped female characters in *hentai* media of Japanese origin is suggested by Buckley's concept

of the "motherbody", which refers to a body whose primary attributes include an ability and readiness for reproduction. In an ageing society, with the issue of reproduction a constant background concern in mainstream media, the reproductive female body is of paramount importance; it becomes 'the motherbody…an organ of the body politic' (Buckley, 1991, 179), a body able to bear children. Buckley describes the influence of the motherbody as impacting mainly upon young women, whose measures to avoid its pressures include the production and consumption of boys' love media. Nevertheless, the exaggeration of breasts and hips in *hentai dōjinshi* may potentially serve not only an erotic function but also display the impact of this contemporary societal concern on the predominantly male creators and users. This is supported to some extent by the depiction in some Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* of lactation or pregnancy. Another, perhaps more persuasive, possibility is the difficulty of showing female pleasure visually, even in drawn media, where it is primarily announced verbally and with flushed cheeks and wet genitalia; larger breasts, with large, erect nipples, may be another technique by which to convey the arousal caused by the penis and other phallic substitutes, though it means a departure from the official character designs. In this case, the presentation of the character as eroticized through bodily exaggeration is a more pressing concern than loyalty to an imagined original.

It must not be supposed, however, that the various English-speaking users of scanlated *dōjinshi* online will interpret the depiction of the hyper-feminine female body in these ways, or even that Japanese users will all come to these texts with the same background and make the same articulations based on the material they consume. Yet this does not negate the possibility of Western fans possessing knowledge of Japanese culture that can inform their use of *dōjinshi*.

Perper and Cornog argue that the difference in media form and cultural influences between Japanese manga-style pornography and traditional English-language pornography means that 'Western readers can find themselves disoriented' (2002, 19). Throughout their paper, they reiterate the idea that Western readers of translated *hentai* may "misunderstand" its content due to their lack of knowledge of the Japanese context in which it was produced, stating that 'the Westerner must be warned not to conflate manga with Western comics in how each connects to its own culture' (2002, 90). It may be true, to a certain extent, that *dōjinshi* users form opinions and articulations on gender and sexuality in Japan based solely on the characteristic features of the *hentai* texts they consume, which can lead to somewhat narrow and biased ideas. However, many fans of both Japanese culture and *hentai*, who are not "casual" readers but who have a wide variety of knowledge and experiences with media of Japanese origin, are familiar with the fact that these features are specific tropes that do not necessarily hold outside *hentai* or pornographic contexts; and I would argue that Perper and Cornog perhaps tend to essentialise "the Westerner" here, without sufficient reference to the intertextual knowledge of postmodern users.

As mentioned earlier, a good deal of journalism and scholarship on Japanese pornography (Abraamson & Hayashi, 1984, Kinsella, 2006), including *hentai*, has focused in the past on the high proportion of non-consensual situations or rape found within it, making the case for either censorship or creative freedom. Objections to this theme in pornography centre on two points: the depiction of women and girls as sexual, commercialized objects, and the depiction of women gaining pleasure from sex against their will. Both of these feature in *FFVII dōjinshi* fairly often, and, as with almost every variation of sex scene, concentrate on the extensive depiction of male phallic sexuality at

work on the female body. The final part of this section examines the portrayal of non-consensual sex acts in scanlated *dōjinshi*, the possible reasons for the continued proliferation of such texts, and the online responses of English-speaking *hentai* fans. It suggests that English-language fan response to such scenes is by no means entirely positive; however, negative responses are due more to fannish affection for the female characters than to a desire to express moral disapproval over the sexual acts themselves. Thus, *dōjinshi* containing this type of material continue to be scanlated, disseminated and actively consumed, perpetuating support for a hegemonic discourse of male-dominated sexuality.

Of the scanlated *dōjinshi* in this analysis, 17 contain scenes of non-consensual or coercive sex: well over half the sample. According to Abramson and Hayashi, this is by no means unusual, with 'the recurring theme of bondage and rape…evident in almost all forms of Japanese sexual material' (1984, 178). They also argue that pornography of this kind is designed for an entirely male audience, and that, while information on sex in general is available for women in Japan, 'visual pornography is not created for that audience' (1984, 178). This, of course, was written prior to the spread of the Internet and readily accessible sexual material of all kinds in Japan, the US and much of Western Europe; even so, the contention that visual pornography, especially the type containing bondage and rape (the authors interestingly conflate these into a single theme), is not created for women, is both outdated and inaccurate, given the wide use of such themes in both boys' love manga/*dōjinshi* and in the heterosexual "ladies' comics" aimed at Japanese women (Shamoon, 2004), as well as the potential female artists and users of *hentai* media online. We may say, however, that within the context of *hentai dōjinshi* the majority of online users is likely to identify as male, based on the contextualisation of the

digital *dōjinshi* on websites like Fakku that also contain advertising for live-action pornography aimed at male viewers.

The continued popularity of non-consensual *dōjinshi*, which range from rape to brainwashing to forced prostitution, indicates that both producers and users find something satisfying in the depictions of this type of sex. According to early commentators on pornography, these depictions reflect and uphold the 'supposedly essential nature of woman's powerlessness' (Williams, 1990, 22) amid the male-dominated social structures that phallocentrism uses to ensure its endurance, and this may indeed be one of the pleasures of consuming such texts for some users; but it is only one facet of the many uses of these *dōjinshi*.

In the context of dissemination and consumption in Japan, non-consensual pornography has been suggested to have a cathartic value, in which users can find vicarious satisfaction for socially unacceptable behaviour:

> In a culture that endorses strict codes of behavior and highly defined roles, the depiction of rape also provides a context in which Japanese men can vicariously abandon all of the explicit signposts of good behavior.
> (Abramson and Hayashi, 1984, 182)

Ortega-Brena agrees with this, highlighting the fantastical world of *hentai* as 'an imaginary space that escapes the severe everyday constraints imposed by work and social and familial responsibility' (2009, 21). For some users, then, non-consensual scenes in *dōjinshi* may act as a cathartic pleasure in disobedience of ever-present social rules – which also exist in the UK and elsewhere in the West, albeit in different forms – while 'the fantasy setting makes it clear that one should not – and need not – emulate the

characters' (Perper & Cornog, 2002, 23).

The depiction of rape and coercion in Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* may also serve as an expression of, and a reaction against, anxieties about the increasingly unstable position of phallocentrism, which has long managed to maintain male-dominated societies in both the West and Japan, though of course this domination takes different cultural forms. Over the last few decades, female financial independence, gender equality laws and the power of female consumption have begun to trouble the continuance of male domination in various new ways. The expression of absolute control over the female body and mind, depicted graphically in many of these *dōjinshi*, may be one way of articulating anxieties about the contemporary societal threats to the concept of masculinity in charge. This is highlighted through the marked difference between the abilities and power of the female characters in the official *FFVII* games and in the *dōjinshi*.

The female characters of *FFVII*, while possessing many traditional markers of femininity – Tifa's ample breasts, long hair, and short skirt, for example – are portrayed in the games and film as being extremely strong and capable, both physically and magically. In terms of gaming, with proper character training they can cause as much damage to enemies as the male characters, and in battle contexts are physically aggressive towards male opponents, an aggression that may suggest a source of anxiety about the instability of dominant masculinity as well as related issues such as a psychoanalytic castration complex. In non-consensual *dōjinshi* scenes, however, they are rewritten: while never presented as initially weak or yielding, they are nevertheless rendered fallible; sometimes by the reimagining of in-game magic elements (such as materia) to negate their own magical abilities, occasionally by drugs or hypnosis, sometimes through financial coercion or other forms of blackmail (such as "slut shaming"), and sometimes

for no clear reason at all. This redeployment of elements strips them of their considerable physical power, rendering them helpless against the male performers' assault and placing the male characters firmly in control. This is something commented on by English-speaking users, some of whom accept it as a *hentai* trope and some of whom are dissatisfied by the lack of consistency with the original games. As two users point out on the Fakku page for the *dōjinshi FF7MT Masochist Tifa*:

> **Kenji115**: Why is it that in every Tifa doujinshi they forget that by the end of the game she can kick Sephiroth's ass, and even at the beginning can easily take out the armed guards from ShinRa. It's completely ridiculous that a bunch of random thugs could frighten her.
> **Hikaru2000**: This is hentai, forget about canon.
> (FF7MT, 2010; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

The first commenter is concerned with fidelity and authenticity as regards the games, whereas the second accepts the characteristics of the genre, which does not, for the most part, operate according to perceived notions of authenticity and plot-based narratives but takes the quickest route to its primary uses, in this case sexual gratification and a repudiation of the anxiety that can be caused by the instability of hegemonic, phallocentric masculinity. The depiction of acknowledged strong female characters as completely controlled and dominated in this temporary space can act as another type of catharsis for some male users, and in this way does not only fill a sexual function but also serves to bolster an increasingly uneasy masculinist ideology.

Perper and Cornog, in their defense of *hentai* against accusations of misogyny and the portrayal of women as sexual objects, discuss the endings of manga that contain rape, pointing out that these can actually help reject 'monoform types of female passivity'

(2002, 38-9), depending on what kind of ending they have. Within the *FFVII dōjinshi* containing non-consensual scenes examined in the chapter there are two main types of ending, which could be termed the "revenge end" and the "bad end". The revenge end is similar to that talked about by Perper and Cornog; at the end of these texts, 'retaliation crashes down upon the rapists' (2002, 53), usually instigated by the female victim herself, thus marking rape and assault as negative acts that will be met with punishment and hatred. The bad end *dōjinshi*, not discussed in Perper and Cornog's paper, does not end with revenge; in the sample analysed here, this bad end rather involves the final submission of the female character, her addiction to the sexual pleasure provided by the penis, and her continued imprisonment/prostitution/slavery.

While Perper and Cornog are optimistic about the function of the revenge end, in which rapists are depicted as 'ugly, stupid, and criminal' (2002, 53) and are always punished, their analysis deals only with translated and commercially released erotic manga in the US. Perhaps due to concerns by publishing and internationalization companies over the type of content they are willing to provide, their otherwise extensive sample includes hardly any "bad end" manga. The field of amateur scanlation, however, is not limited by company rules or commercial considerations, and, because of its operation in an almost entirely online context, is able to bypass many official regulations and even laws. Of course, there are countries like Australia and the UK where the possession, web hosting or viewing of certain types of drawn pornography is illegal, which may cause *dōjinshi* users to avoid posting or viewing some kinds of material. Still, online, non-commercial *hentai* fan sites, accessed by and disseminating texts to English speakers all over the world, are clearly not limiting themselves to the morally satisfying revenge end applauded by Perper and Cornog.

Bad end *dōjinshi*, which include the majority of the lengthy *Ero Tifa* series, extend forcible male control from the female body to the mind. This is initially accomplished by drugs/hypnosis/redeployment of in-game magic, which brings the body under control; the mind, however, is controlled by the male characters through sexual pleasure. Perhaps more than any other *hentai* sub-genre, bad end *dōjinshi* conform to Williams' description of one of the most debated tropes in Western pornography: the insistence on consent through pleasure:

> …traditionally, the crime of rape only becomes a crime on the level of mental states: rape is rape only if the victim does not consent to the sexual act performed on her or him…Traditional, male-centered pornography's fondest fantasy is to insist on this consent by repeated representations of the rape that turns into ecstasy…The woman's pleasure vindicates the man's coercion.
> (Williams, 1990, 165)

In *Ero Tifa vol.3* (2006), Tifa is financially blackmailed into spending the night with Don Corneo, a minor character from the *FFVII* game[7]. Using materia, he takes control of Tifa's body (but not her mind; that only occurs after intercourse); after filming her having intercourse with him, Corneo orders her to 'let your sexual desire overflow!' (2006, 15). Although inwardly unwilling, Tifa is physically unable to resist him (in the sense that her body "wants" him) and, after having sex several more times and reaching orgasm, agrees to marry him. As with many other *dōjinshi* of this type, in the sex scenes we see many panels containing both close-ups and full-body shots of Tifa; Corneo, by contrast, is generally shown only partially or with the frequently used eyeless face. *Ero Tifa vol.3*

[7] In the original game, Tifa has to be rescued from Don Corneo, a middle-aged, obese, brothel-frequenting gangster, when she strays into his no-males-allowed mansion.

shows how in-game situations and plot points, which in the context of the game hint only obliquely at sexual possibilities, are used in *dōjinshi* as the trigger for sexually explicit scenes; in this way, database users can make use of plot and setting elements, as well as characters and objects, for eroticization; and what are fairly minor side-stories in the game can become reinterpreted, in one reading, for ideological projects such as male hegemony.

This is a fairly mild example of a non-consensual Final Fantasy *dōjinshi*, which, in the sample under discussion, include abduction, brainwashing, gang-rape, bestiality (monsters), and incest. Common to almost all of them, however, is the idea of the forced female orgasm, and the exhortations of male performers that the female characters "give in" to pleasure – pleasure granted by men. Over and over, male characters speak lines such as, 'Just abandon your body to the pleasure. We'll expose your true self' (*Kachou Fuugetsu Soushuuhen* 2006, 18) and 'Let go…Give your body over to pleasure' (*IROHIME Vol.1* 2004, 16). The idea of uncovering some kind of female "true self" appears to link these bad end *dōjinshi* closely with the type of pornography described by many feminists in the early 'rhetoric of abhorrence' (Williams, 1990, 4) as essentialising women and depicting them as passive and powerless. The brainwashing or "mind-break" technique often used by male characters in fantasy/sci-fi non-consensual *hentai* furthers this idea of passivity: by removing the woman's mental control, she not only lacks the strength to resist but also the will; everything, in fact, that makes her 'a human subject with her own sexual will and human dignity' (Shibata, 2008, 115). This is acknowledged in the text by the unwanted physical reaction of orgasm, and through dialogue: at the end of *Tits Bullet Limitation*, another financial blackmail and mind-break *dōjinshi* by the author of the *Ero Tifa* series, Tifa exclaims despairingly, 'My pain, my regrets, my sorrow…They turned it all into naked pleasure!" (2011, 26) and 'I'm sorry, Cloud…I've

discarded my humanity!' (27).

According to Perper and Cornog, in their discussion on revenge end non-consensual manga, this female pleasure can have a positive interpretation; what counts, they say, 'is that women's sexuality is no longer restricted to emotions acceptable in polite society' (2002, 39). These texts give female performers a site in which to express (acceptable) sexual pleasure without the censure of society. Bad end *dōjinshi*, however, encourage pleasure in the female characters and then punish them for it, through the use of what in English is deliberately objectifying and humiliating language: *IROHIME* is especially voluble in this sense, with Tifa's male kidnappers, after months of forced group sex, commenting, 'She's become a good cum-dump, hasn't she? Nothing but a living cock-hole…' (2004, 31), while Tifa begs for more. In *dōjinshi* such as this, the female character 'gets pleasure, but she must pay obeisance to a value system that condemns her for her pleasure' (Williams 1990, 209). This seems a far cry from the positive potential of female sexual pleasure suggested by Perper and Cornog.

Further, Williams holds that if the performer is entirely powerless, real pleasure cannot occur at all. In her analysis of sadomasochism in Western heterosexual pornography, she states that, in such texts, there is still an exchange of power present despite the clear-cut submissive and dominant roles, and that the submissive performer 'also deploys force and achieves a modicum of power by turning punishment into pleasure' (Williams, 1990, 209). In most non-consensual *dōjinshi*, however, the objective of the male character is not punishment in the form of pain, as in most sadomasochism, but of forced pleasure itself and humiliation regarding that pleasure, and so the female characters are unable to garner power in this way. The helplessness inflicted upon them by the brainwashing trope does not allow for any exchange; and, as Williams points out:

> …without a modicum of power, without some leeway for play within assigned sexual roles, and without the possibility of some intersubjective give-and-take, there can be no pleasure for…the victim. There can be no pleasure, in other words, without some power.
> (1990, 227)

The female characters in bad end *dōjinshi* are not permitted subjectivity, and there is little give-and-take. Thus, the pleasure they are forced to experience cannot easily be considered a liberatory expression of female sexuality, but rather a deliberate eroticization for the enjoyment of the *dōjinshi* users and an expression of the control exercised over the female body by both the male characters and the artists.

Another feature of some bad end Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* that enhances these images of the female character under total male control is pregnancy and/or lactation, a theme that is rare in mainstream Western pornography, where the pregnant female body is not generally regarded as particularly erotic. Four of the non-consensual themed *dōjinshi* in the sample end with Tifa's pregnancy, and several also include lactation during intercourse. This may be explained as an extension of the "motherbody" mentioned earlier, which, in *hentai*, can be signified by the depiction of female characters possessing exaggerated breasts and hips. Pregnancy and lactation may also serve to support the idea of the woman's body under complete phallic control: when it comes to potency and power represented by the penis, pregnancy may be even more effective than the money shot. Here, the male body is able to have an influence that changes the physical form of the female body, regardless of the female character's desire or lack of it. Thus, pregnancy becomes another articulation of the powerlessness of women who have been brought forcibly under male, and by extension phallic, control.

It is difficult to conceive of a way in which the contents of these bad end *dōjinshi* can do anything other than reaffirm the anti-pornography arguments that sexual material of this kind denies women subjecthood and commodifies them, through the themes of mind-break, sexual addiction, prostitution, and so on. However, these texts do have other potential functions, articulating anxieties about the instability of dominant masculinity in societies where gender roles are rapidly shifting, or the reproductive and population issues in contemporary Japan. In addition, the responses of English-speaking users to the scanlated versions of these *dōjinshi* are by no means wholly supportive of non-consensual themes, and go some way to rejecting the criticism made by Shibata that material objectifying women works by 'strategically transmuting the viewer's primordial human sexual energy…into the modality of sexuality marked by objectification, addiction, violence, and criminality' (Shibata, 2008, 120).

Many of the fan responses on sites like Fakku are critical of the non-consensual sub-genre as a whole, particularly in connection with characters to which they have an attachment through playing the games. Commenters on *EGG PLANT FFVII* (2010), another bad end *dōjinshi*, simultaneously express their appreciation of the art style and their distaste for the subject matter; one, "Blacky", appears to favour instead the idea of Tifa in a consensual, traditionally romantic relationship with Cloud, with whom she is involved emotionally in the game; in the *dōjinshi* sample, this type of narrative is not common, and it may be possible that some fans of a particular character will read *dōjinshi* whose themes they do not particularly care for simply because they wish to see more of that character. Like the *dōjinshi* artists themselves, these users are able to pick up preferred elements from the media they consume while rejecting others:

> **Lozsama**: I've seen lots of final fantasy hentai doujins and Tifa gets raped a lot, I wonder why Tifa? Sorry, but why can't it be more vanilla
> **Sheenie**: Very good art, but I'm not really a fan of rape.
> **Blacky**: The ending where it was just a nightmare and she wakes up cuddling Cloud was missing :3
> (EGG PLANT, 2011; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

These users are by no means shocked by the inclusion of rape in a *hentai dōjinshi*; they are not the unknowing, singular "Westerner" of Perper and Cornog's theorisation but are informed in their reactions by previous experience of the genre. Yet, despite their repeated exposure to this type of content, they have not become inured to it or fully accepting of it but are able to articulate and share their own dissenting opinions. It cannot be ignored, however, that rather than responses based on any kind of moral consideration or distaste for scenes of rape or coercion on principle (except for Sheenie's comment, which is still a somewhat mild protest), these are possibly fannish responses to seeing a personal favourite character in distress; Tifa, in particular, has an extremely large fanbase, some of whom may well object to this particular depiction of her. Regardless of motive, this is one of the advantages of online dissemination and consumption; the anonymity afforded by the websites enables discussion and conflict of opinions more readily than a face-to-face meeting. Fakku user profiles do not include personal information, and the comment system can also be used as a guide by other users when deciding what they wish to read and what to avoid.

This is not to say that there are no comments praising or showing approval of non-consensual *dōjinshi*, which might also be attributed somewhat to the veil of anonymity accorded by the Internet. The comments page for *FF7MT Masochist Tifa* contain both

negative and positive reactions to the fairly extreme material it contains, as well as the comments of users who have been informed by the articulations of previous fans:

> **Rubygrace**: This is too sad... The whole time I was reading I just wanted someone to come in and save her. No girl deserves this....
> **Rosstoryo**: ...she turned into a slut, and that's how we all like it. (:
> **Newoka**: …the ending was good! we should have more pregnant stuff on here!
> **CammiebidII**: OK, I've chosen not to read this after looking at all these comments. Cheers guys.
> (FFVIIMT, 2010; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

The users of these pornographic scanlated *dōjinshi* are by no means passively accepting of the articulations of gender and sexuality found in the contents of the comics; their reactions are varied and complex. They are rather informed by previous experience with the genre and possibly other media of Japanese origin, by the articulations of other users and translators, and by both personal preference and the discursive formations around acceptable types of gender and sexuality in their own cultural contexts. Further, as mentioned earlier, the particular space offered by drawn and animated sexual material does not allow the user to forget its fantastical, unreal status; as Ortega-Brena remarks, it can potentially be both titillating and pleasurable but, at the same time, 'relentlessly announces our fantasizing onanism to our face' (2009, 29). The *dōjinshi*, and their users in this English-speaking, globalised context, remain at the level of "surface play".

This chapter has shown how scanlated *FFVII hentai dōjinshi* and their online sites of dissemination and consumption offer some areas of articulation that potentially raise and reflect instabilities in heteronormative dominant masculinity in a contemporary Western

context. User response to the content of these English-language *dōjinshi* is also by no means uniform or blindly supportive of an idealised, male-dominated system of gender and sexual roles, but is informed by various cultural contexts, knowledge of the games and *hentai* genre, and the articulations of other fans. However, it is clear from the bulk of these texts, from the phallic spectacular penis to the depictions of the female body and mind under total male control, that the tendency of such fan creations is to support the characterization of heterosexual pornography as an active promoter of phallocentricity and heteronormativity, despite the inclusion of bodies such as the transsexual and *futanari*.

This chapter has discussed how these media support phallocentricity through a near-obsessive focus on the penis to the exclusion of other erotic possibilities for men; how the hyper-feminine female body is depicted and fetishized through aesthetic and narrative techniques as a target of phallic agency; and how this serves to bring the strong female characters of the *FFVII* games under total control. This leads to the conclusion that, while *hentai dōjinshi* deployed in an English-language online context do offer a fantastic and playful variety of articulations of sexuality and a range of contradictory user responses, these media still largely conform to the heteronormative and masculinist stereotypes attached to mainstream pornography; the users' playful manipulation of the simulacra provided by the games and other media in the database is all but subsumed in the prevalence of hegemonic gender and sexual norms.[8]

The next chapter examines masculinity and sexuality with reference to boys' love *dōjinshi* written by and aimed at female users, and their online dissemination and

[8] These ideologies are also supported to some extent in machinima videos, another fan medium that is characterised as being made by and for predominantly male users; Chapter 2 explored the similarities and connections between these fan media in their treatment of androgynous masculinity, heteronormativity and the deliberate weakening and dismissal of female game characters and their agency.

consumption in an English-speaking context, comparing areas of similarity between *hentai* and boys' love in terms of gender articulation[9], and the possibility that boys' love texts are, as some scholars would have it, a utopia of alternative gender and sexual possibilities created by fans that provides girls and women a site of escape from the promotion and demands of male-dominated hegemony.

[9] Although the *hentai dōjinshi* genre (aimed at largely heterosexual men) does include a very small minority of texts featuring male-male pornography (usually between an adult man and a character who looks like an adolescent or younger), I have not found any featuring Final Fantasy characters. However, future research might benefit from a comparison of such hentai texts with boys' love media.

# 4. Something for the Ladies: Boys' love *dōjinshi* and re-imagining gender norms[1]



## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined sexually explicit Final Fantasy *hentai dōjinshi* in an English-speaking online context. It showed how the eroticized reappropriations of game elements by fans, especially characters and objects, tend to uphold (some by chance and some more deliberately), and to a lesser extent express anxiety about, the continuance of phallocentric masculine hegemonies in both Japanese and Western contexts.

In English-speaking Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* online fandoms, largely heterosexual *hentai* texts are the most numerous in both raw and scanlated form. However, while there may be more *dōjinshi* aimed at a primarily male audience, there are also drawn pornographic media that are mainly created by and cater to female users. Again, the anonymous and fragmented characteristics of online use make it impossible to state that these media are entirely scanlated and used by women, or that there is no male readership for such materials; nevertheless, given the original Japanese user demographic and the

[1] This chapter contains adaptations of material that has been published by the author as a journal article:
Glasspool, L. "Simulation and database society in Japanese role-playing game fandoms: Reading boys' love "*dōjinshi*" online". *Transformative Works and Cultures*. Vol.12, 2013. Retrieved from http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/433/360.
doi: 10.3983/twc.2013.0433.

results of previous academic studies, as well as the differences in content between these media and *hentai dōjinshi*, it is likely that there is a higher percentage of users who identify as female.

In Japan, the closest genre of drawn media, aimed at female readers, to *hentai* manga and *dōjinshi* is known as *redikomi* or "ladies' comics". This genre, emerging in the 1980s, contains explicit heterosexual pornography, which can appear similar in theme and style to that contained in the *hentai* material scanlated and disseminated in an English-speaking online environment. However, these common areas can operate differently in the context of a female readership. Shamoom (2004) sees the depiction of the female orgasm in *redikomi* as a central and positive feature for female readers, the techniques of manga and lack of limitations in the drawn image enabling depictions of 'the different truth of the female body impossible to capture on film' (Shamoom, 2004, 78); similarly, rape fantasies and the loss of control discussed in the previous chapter are, in this context, theorised as a way for the female character, and through her the female reader, to experience pleasure without feeling "dirty" about it in a society with narrow mainstream ideals of "correct" behaviour: she can justify it by the fact that she is unable to resist (2004, 97). Shamoom also argues that, unlike pornographic manga aimed at men, which tend 'towards the fantastic, showing bodies that are increasingly superhuman in ever more bizarre settings', *redikomi* put 'their emphasis on reality and the real sex lives of their readers' (2004, 87), representing a different kind of visual pleasure from *hentai* texts and the heterosexual live-action Western pornography discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter. The absence of visual depictions of the male body during sex, with the focus on the female character's body and face, according to Shamoom, 'seems to indicate that the female orgasm, and the woman's fulfilment of her desire, holds greater

importance than the man's' (2004, 93). These vastly differing interpretations of themes and techniques contained in both *hentai* and *redikomi* manga show, once more, the inadequacy of analysing these media based on the content of the text alone; the specific cultural contexts of the artists and users will always inform fan interpretations of content and the articulations they subsequently create themselves. When considering online fandoms, in particular, '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).

Despite their popularity in Japan with women in their twenties and thirties, *redikomi* do not have much of a presence in English-language Western contexts, either commercially or in the field of amateur scanlation, and in terms of role-playing game (RPG) *dōjinshi* are practically nonexistent. Shamoom posits that, in the case of the US, this may be because 'American women still do not consume visual hard-core pornography of any kind' (2004, 78). However, this statement is questionable, due to increases in live-action porn directed by and aimed at women. In the context of Japanese pop culture, fandoms, also, the last two decades has seen a rise in popularity among English-speaking users of another type of drawn media aimed at women: "boys' love" (BL) or "*yaoi*" manga and *dōjinshi*. While pornography does not comprise the whole of the boys' love genre by any means, it is certainly a significant part of it, and, in online *FFVII* fandoms, BL *dōjinshi* are widely disseminated and consumed.

This chapter examines English-language *FFVII* boys' love *dōjinshi* as one of the 'new sexual economies' provided by the diversity of sexual material on the Internet (Garlick, 2011, 222). It first contextualises the BL genre from its beginnings in Japanese girls' manga to its present transnational use in English-language, primarily Western,

online fandoms, and gives an overview of the terminology through which fans and scholars engage with these media depicting male-male romance and sexuality. It considers the major areas in which *FFVII dōjinshi* falling into this genre differ from, and are even opposed to, *hentai dōjinshi* fandoms and articulations of heteronormative masculinity. It argues that BL texts and the transnational practices of their dissemination and use offer spaces in which users may play with alternative ideals of gender and sexuality, but that these alternatives are not often taken up or politicized by fans to challenge normative discourses. It suggests that this may be due to the postmodern user's disinterest in political issues that limits criticism of hegemonic norms to the level of imagination and play.

## 4.2 Boys' Love in the West: A historical contextualisation

The term "boys' love", by which the *dōjinshi* and their fandoms that are the focus of this chapter are described, in its current Japanese[2] usage 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 is romantic and some graphically sexually explicit. This genre, like its less popular counterpart "*yuri*" (which features romantic or sexual relationships between girls or women but is rarely found in RPG *dōjinshi* created by and for women) is said to have sprung from the *shōjo* or girls' manga that emerged in the 1950s.

Suzuki states that it was a common trope in *shōjo* manga that 'ideal relationships should transcend gender' (1998, 248); to reflect this, and to depict human relationships

[2] "ボーイズラブ" or the romanized abbreviation "BL".

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 (though this, of course, does not mean that issues of female anxiety were negated in these texts just because female bodies were not depicted, or that these boy-centered narrative romances became a majority).

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 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 plot, no climax, 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 signalling 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.

BL covers not only multiple media, both original and fan-created, but also varying levels of explicitness: the BL comics section on Amazon Japan 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 current 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 fans, as well as scholars such as Mori (2010), use the terms interchangeably. Mori, discussing manga genres in the 1990s, speaks of '*yaoi* (boys' love)' (2010, 70, author's translation), 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. 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 the concept, as a somewhat similar genre of Western fan-produced text, 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). Slash currently appropriates a wide variety of media texts, including Western and Japanese video games, most often in the form of online fanfiction. Thorn sees similarities between BL and Western 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 Western fans, but that there may be parallels in the culturally specific methods of expressing it in the media they currently use.

The terms BL and *yaoi* are a little more complicated to define in an English-language context than the *hentai* discussed in Chapter 3. This is due to the varying levels of sexual explicitness present within the genre. As mentioned above, in Japanese-language fandoms the acronym *yaoi* is said to stem from the explicitness and perceived lack of plot in early male-male *dōjinshi*, while BL is used as a more general term for narratives containing male-male relationships. 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. 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 non-explicit BL. While not now widely used 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*. 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' (2010, 60). Although not employed in this way by all English-speaking fans, the use of *yaoi* and *shōnen-ai* as part of a ratings system points to the possibility of greater variation in the content of BL *dōjinshi* than is found in *hentai*.

The apparent need for terminology with which to signal the explicitness of this genre is one of the ways in which BL can be said to differ from *hentai dōjinshi*: while the latter are invariable sexually explicit and generally require a warning of the fact on their

covers ("over 18" or "for adult"), BL texts vary greatly. There is a broad continuum of depictions of male-male relationships, from platonic to pornographic. This indeed proved the case in the *FFVII dōjinshi* that form the core of this chapter: unlike *hentai dōjinshi*, of the 39 BL/*yaoi dōjinshi* comprising the sample analyzed, over a third contained no explicit depictions of sexual acts at all. For this reason, I have chosen the term boys' love or BL from the number of terms available for describing these particular texts, as it encompasses both ends of the explicitness spectrum and everything in between.

The following section considers common themes in the scanlated *FFVII dōjinshi* available on English-language fan sites, with particular reference to heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity and the troubling concept of "feminization". Drawing on the considerable body of scholarly literature around BL studies, it gives the main scholarly theorizations of the bodies and sexualities within drawn BL texts; using examples from the *FFVII dōjinshi* in the sample, it argues that articulations of certain gender performances, together with the pseudo-homosexualization of pre-existing characters, can create a space for the (mainly female) users of these *dōjinshi* to 'be subversive in the face of limited participation and to find more playful, more transgressive, more satisfying ways of joining the cultural conversation' (Stanley, 2010, 99). This enables fan engagements with fluid gender performances that are pleasurable as well as potentially politicizable. Such an analysis poses an alternative to previous writing investing female users with 'negative, compensatory motivations' (100) based on psychoanalytic theorizations of BL that see it as depictions of a pseudo-heterosexual relationship or as a response to an inherent sense of "lack" of a phallus by the female user.

## 4.3 Heteronormative games and alternative pastiche performance

The sample of BL *FFVII dōjinshi* in this chapter[11] was taken from a number of fan websites that disseminate scanlated texts free of charge. Like the websites used to collect samples in Chapter 3, they were all accessible without needing a subscription or password, and were open to public viewing. Unlike those large *hentai* sharing websites like Fakku, which are funded by related pornographic advertising, or Doujin-Moe, which have paying subscribers as well as free users, the BL sites carrying *FFVII dōjinshi* tend to be smaller and with less traffic, often making use of free websites such as LiveJournal, with which users can create their own individual or community sites from a choice of set formats. A number of *dōjinshi* were taken from one such LiveJournal site, BlackSKY Scans (BlackSKY Scans, n.d.), which specializes in *FFVII* BL *dōjinshi*, both raw and scanlated, and others from Arigatomina Doujinshi (Arigatomina, n.d.), which offers *dōjinshi* based

[11] Romanization of titles/circles/authors is taken, where possible, from The Doujinshi and Manga Lexicon (http://doujinshi.mugimugi.org/):
*Custodio Angel* (SWAT Kikaku: Kitakami Ryou 1997); *Custodio Angel Latter Part* (SWAT Kikaku: Kitakami Ryou 1997); *DYNAMITE PASSION* (Steal/TOKUGETSURO: Akutagawa Yukiro/Sakamoto Miki 1997); *Vincent Tokuhon vol.1* (Dr. Ochanomizu: Tokugawa Ranko 1997); *Broken Hearts* (Missing Link: Hotaka Ran 1998); *Nanji no Awaremi no Ooku ni Yori* (Yuubin Basha: Akizuki Ryou 1998); *Tenshi no Genshou* (Slayers: Yashio 1998); *Cheap Thrill* (Yuubin Basha: Akizuki Ryou 2000); *LSD* (Yuubin Basha: Akizuki Ryou 2000); *Endorphine* (K. Haruka Company: K. Haruka 2001); *SEX PISTOLS* (Yuubin Basha: Akizuki Ryou 2001); *Bring You Back To Me* (K. Haruka Company: K. Haruka 2003); *Nostalgia* (Yuubin Basha: Akizuki Ryou 2003); *ZILCH* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2005); *Pink no Kyouryuu* (K. Haruka Company: K. Haruka 2006); *Positron* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2006); *Zero* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2006); *ZILCH 2: Darker Than Darkness* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2006) ;*ZILCH 3: Hitotsu Kanzen Naru Kiseki no Ooi no Shita* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2006); *CARDINAL RED - Anklet* (K. Haruka Company: K. Haruka 2007); *HONEY BLADE* (kiki; Fujiwara Beni 2007); *Idea* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2007); *NAKED* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2007)
*Gokusaishiki no Sora, Kami no Uta, Kokkyousenjou no Heishi* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2008); *Barbie* (Yuubin Basha: Akizuki Ryou 2009); *Cocytus* (nightflight: Yui 2009); *Liquid Bloom* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2009); *MONSTER* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2009); *Nubatama no* (HarpyKiller: Syouri 2009); *sence of distance* (nightflight: Yui 2009); *taste blood* (SOCIOPATH: junko 2009); *Egoist!* (HarpyKiller: Syouri 2010); *instinct reunion* (nightflight: Yui 2010); *MONOCHROME* (ERY's & Plough: Aizawa Erii 2010); *Strife Delivery Health* (kiki/nightflight: Fujiwara Beni/Yui 2010); *Tandeki* (nightflight: Yui 2010); *DAREDEVIL!* (HarpyKiller: Syouri 2011); *PINK CLOUD ASSEMBLY* (kiki: Fujiwara Beni 2011); *SANSARA* (HarpyKiller: Syouri 2011)

on a range of pre-existing texts. BlackSKY is a free account, and contains compulsory advertising chosen by LJ, unrelated to its content; Arigatomina is a paid account, and contains no advertising. Both of these sites are run by individuals rather than scanlation groups; while they have one or two translators contributing to *dōjinshi* scanlations, it is not on the same scale as the larger *hentai* websites. The majority of the remaining sample came from the now defunct Dragonfly Doujinshi Scanlations (Dragonfly, n.d.), a scanlation website with a *FFVII* section on a paid server that had a number of volunteer staff for translating, editing, cleaning, and proof-reading. None of these sites allow user uploads of *dōjinshi*, but commenting and interaction is encouraged by the LJ users.

The users of these websites and the *dōjinshi* offered upon them, both scanlators and readers, are clearly aware to a certain extent of the game narratives and the status of characters' relationships within the *FFVII* series; as with *hentai dōjinshi*, there is much terminology in these BL *dōjinshi* specific to the Final Fantasy games and film (names, places, objects, and so on), and a knowledge of this terminology is necessary in order to produce a translation in which the game elements will be recognisable to readers. This is not to say that the scanlators or readers are necessarily gameplayers as well, but that some familiarity with the characters and setting is required for full understanding and enjoyment of those elements when they are appropriated and played with in a BL context (Daliot-Bul, 2014, 113-14). This is particularly the case in non-explicit *dōjinshi*, which often include plot elements stemming from and expanding on a specific point in the game narrative; here, more focus is placed on providing background to or reimagining events in the game, resulting in the deepening of the male characters' relationships with each other, and so prior knowledge of those events is an advantage for the reader. This is also often the case with explicit *dōjinshi*, where sex 'serves to deepen or problematize a

relationship that already exists between the characters' (Pagliassotti, 2010, 75), though perhaps to a lesser degree. In both instances, an awareness of the narrative and character depictions and conventions in the role-playing games can also highlight the shifts in gender performance, and alternatives to some of the hegemonic models suggested in the game narratives, when those narratives and characters are redeployed in BL scenarios.

The narrative of Japanese fantasy RPGs often involves the (frequently male) main character and his companions overcoming various obstacles; in doing so he becomes closer to a female character, the ending of the game containing the implied suggestion that they will continue to develop this romantic relationship. The last scene of *Final Fantasy VIII*, for example, sees main character Squall dancing at a ball with Rinoa, a young woman whom he at first detests but grows more attached to over the course of the game. The impetus to attain this fairy-tale style ending is strong; after all, to win is one of the basic purposes of gaming. As Frasca, writing on video game analysis, tells us, 'you must do X in order to reach Y and therefore become a winner. This implies that Y is a desired objective and therefore it is morally charged' (Frasca, 2003, 230). In *FFVIII*, reaching the final animated or "cut-scene" above also means the end of active gameplay, signifying that the gamer has won, which is generally seen as the primary objective of gaming. Reaching this scene of idealised heterosexual romance is, for such gamers, the moment of most satisfying climax: they have overcome all obstacles to beat the game. This sets up the romantic heterosexuality portrayed within the cut-scene as a desired outcome and a positive norm within the game itself, as discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7. This norm is not questioned within the game narrative. Final Fantasy BL *dōjinshi* go some way in their content towards providing alternatives to this particular in-game goal and making apparent the multiplicity of sexualities, and the ways in which sexuality has

been linked almost inextricably to gender in the English-speaking West.

The gender and, indeed, the sex of the ostensibly male bodies found in BL comics, both commercial and fan-drawn, has been the subject of much scholarship to date. Some writers, such as Penley, consider the characters in explicit BL *dōjinshi* to constitute a typical romance formula where the sexual partners play out 'the usual erotics of domination and submission…in which dominance and submission are invariably the respective roles of male and female' (Penley, 1992, 490). In this theorization, which echoes the dynamics found in the *hentai dōjinshi* examined in the previous chapter, the "*seme*" (the character who penetrates) is read in an uncontested way as male, while the "*uke*" (the character who is penetrated) 'is placed in a subordinate (read, feminine) position' (McLelland, 2000, 19), suggesting a representation of the female as passive and submissive. The *uke* position, in this way, may perform a kind of "femininity" (the next section will return to the question of the *uke* and femininity), which in this argument appears to be equated with femaleness, in order to remain within the domain of legitimate heterosexual subjects. This reading of the *uke* role as a substitute female may be due to the hegemonic discourse around male penetration that is still maintained in the West: the fiction that 'penetration is irredeemably patriarchal' (Jackson, 1999, 168) and that allowing the male body to be penetrated renders it vulnerable and destabilizes this idea of patriarchy. This concept was also touched on in the previous chapter, in the significant absence of male characters being penetrated in *hentai dōjinshi*. In such a normative reading, the *uke*'s body, upon penetration, is considered to take on a female role through its so-called feminization, for to recognize it as male would be to see it as a threat to hegemonic constructs of inviolable masculinity.

However, the reading of *seme* and *uke* in binaries of male/female,

dominant/submissive, essentializes what is a social and cultural construct. As Jackson argues, '[t]here is nothing intrinsically "queer" about a man being penetrated; the act is capable of being defined as such because of the symbolic meanings which penetrative sex has acquired' (1999, 171). Bordo reminds us that '[i]nviting, receiving, responding – these are active behaviors too' (1999, 190); to regard penetration as an intrinsically dominant act, and to equate it therefore with maleness and masculinity in opposition to femaleness and femininity, is to mistake 'potent consequences' for 'preexisting foundations' (Haraway, 2003, 6)[12]. Given this, it is necessary to consider the alternative readings suggested for the bodies and themes found in BL *dōjinshi*.

The opposing argument to the *seme* as male and *uke* as female reading posits that BL's challenge to heteronormativity comes from the fact that both characters *are* configured as male within the narrative, which opens up a space in which to question the hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity at work in wider society. Here, BL consists of 'male homosexual stories' (Stanley, 2010, 100), wherein both *seme* and *uke* are figured as male. Unlike the previous argument, which centres very much on the concept of penetration and is therefore specifically applied to explicit *dōjinshi*, the concept of homosexuality in this argument does not point only to penetrative sex acts between male characters but encompasses emotional and romantic attraction found in non-explicit *dōjinshi* too.

Use of the term "homosexuality" to signal a politicized challenge to heteronormativity in an LGBT or "gay rights" sense in these *dōjinshi* is fraught with

[12] This point could offer the potential for less heteronormative and male-dominant readings of *hentai dōjinshi*, too. However, the hyper-feminization of female characters in that genre, as well as the absence of males being penetrated, tends to reinforce a heterosexual male-female binary; while the frequency of storylines based on non-consensual sex stemming from strong females' loss of power might make the concept of actively "inviting" penetration less probable.

tensions, however. As scholars like Isola (2010) and Stanley (2010) point out, the depictions of male-male relationships in BL do not deal with issues of sexual identity and "realistic" situations that gay men often face: the *dōjinshi* examined in this chapter make no mention of coming out, dealing with the reactions of colleagues or family; they are deliberate fantasies, rather than 'texts that attempt realistic representations of those relationships' (Stanley, 2010, 104). BL is argued (though perhaps debatably, as some users do identify as gay men) to have little relation to 'homosexuality as it actually exists and is only part of a world of fantasy which should be allowed freedom of expression' (Lunsing, 2001, 287)[13]. In the *FFVII dōjinshi* under consideration, this is assisted by the sci-fi/fantasy setting of the games from which elements are taken for reappropriation. One of the most popular male character pairings, Sephiroth and Cloud, are often shown as having a troubled, love-hate relationship; but this is never depicted as being due to the fact that it is "homosexual"; where Cloud keeps his relationship a secret from his friends and colleagues, it is not because he is in a relationship with another man but because Sephiroth is his in-game enemy, or because their sexual and emotional connections are often violent and contain power dynamics in which Cloud takes a submissive role. If his submission to being dominated is something that should be hidden, it is due to heterosexist constructions of masculinity that work towards 'maintaining male domination' (Jackson, 1999, 174) by disallowing male passivity: not because Cloud is "homosexual" but because he is a *man*.

*Dōjinshi* like kiki's *Zilch 3* (2006) and *Strife Delivery Health* (2010), in which the

[13] It could be argued, then, that male-male eroticism should also be permissible in male-centred porn like *hentai dōjinshi*, as these are just as much realms of fantasy as BL. Yet it is very often avoided, as seen in Chapter 3. This may be because *hentai* is aimed at primarily male users, for whom fantasies in which male characters are penetrated orally or anally (and can be read as not dominant) may be challenging. For the mainly female users of BL, images of a non-dominant male may be less problematic.

*seme* Sephiroth controls the sexual activity almost completely (in some cases with Cloud's consent and some without), 'play with the erotic potential generated by differences in status or power' (Stanley, 2010, 104) through their articulations of sexualized relationships between male characters; the use of two male characters, rather than one male and one female, serves to distance these power erotics from the male/female binary found in much *hentai*, which leads back to masculinist notions of male dominance and female submission, and which Penley (1992) uses to frame sexually explicit BL. This use, it could be argued, is a tool with which to escape the binaries of heteronormativity and hegemonic male dominance, rather than an attempt to define the reappropriated characters as "homosexual".

Further, the word homosexuality is not mentioned in either the narration or dialogue of the *FFVII* scanlations in the sample, and so describing the male-male relationships within them as homosexual is to subscribe to a fixed and Western binary of sexuality, whereas, as McHarry argues, BL boundary transgression 'is not necessarily one binary crossing but…a consistent undercutting over hetero- and homonormativity' (2010, 182). For Akatsuka (2010), indeed, it is rather the characters' disavowal of, or silence regarding, homosexuality that is most challenging to gendered, heteronormative binaries. In this sense, rather than silence regarding homosexuality being homophobic or detrimental to openly gay men, the ambiguity caused by refusing to affix a label to romantic or sexual acts between men can open up a multiplicity of readings. Hall suggests that there may be culturally specific ideas of sexuality at work here, saying that 'in America the idea that "the personal is political" roots many rights discourses around identity politics' (2010, 219), while in Japan matters of sexuality are more private. Sexual acts that are not for the purpose of procreation are 'often viewed as asobi (play)' (219), rather than important

factors in determining one's identity in public or political spheres.

It is in the realm of play, which acts as an 'experimental laboratory' (Daliot-Bul, 2014, xxix), that new sexual possibilities can be explored. The transgressive potential of BL, here, lies in its refusal to categorize male-male attraction as "homosexuality". The disavowal of this fixed sexuality and the attendant discourses of heteronormativity that strive to marginalize it, Akatsuka posits, produces a 'hermeneutic ambiguity that…enables multiple readings of any text by readers with multiple positions, motives, and desires' (2010, 166). By BL characters performing same-sex sexual acts while refusing to subscribe to a stated sexual "identity", he suggests, '[n]arratives of identity and behavior are pitted against each other, resulting in a subjectivity that rather than *is* something, only *could* be something' (2010, 167).

McLelland, responding to this concept of possibility rather than certainty, suggests an alternative to BL as both pseudo-male/female relationship and as male-male relationship: in this reading, the penetrated or *uke* body is figured as neither male nor female, and so transgresses sexual and gender limits. Its 'indeterminate nature' should not 'necessarily be read as 'male' or even 'homosexual'' (McLelland, 2004, 21). The paradoxical *uke*, it is argued, performs a variety of possible sexes and genders for the consumer to "pick" from as she/he chooses, creating a choice for users who desire freedom in the selection of gendered identity. The *uke* can be seen as male, with a penis that can represent the phallus (although it does not actively penetrate the *seme*). Some *dōjinshi*, on the other hand, obscure or censor the uke penis while displaying other parts of the body, making a phallic reading less likely. Buckley also discusses the ambiguity of sex and gender in BL, positing that the 'images and stories of androgynous…lovers might be read as an alternative site of sexual fantasy, where nobody is the motherbody' (Buckley,

1991, 180).

The absence of a female body is one of the characteristics of BL. While it does grant users a fantasy space in which there is no reproductive pressure or troubling depictions of women, however, their almost total absence centres these *dōjinshi* firmly around masculinity and bodies that the user understands, from prior knowledge of the games, to be male. This may not be traditionally hegemonic masculinity, as shall be demonstrated later, but could give rise to criticisms of misogyny and do little to challenge the phallocentrism found in heterosexual pornography aimed at men.

According to Pagliassotti, female characters who do appear in BL texts 'are often demonized, rather than valorized' (2010, 62) by both authors and readers, 'devaluing or erasing women as positive presences within the narrative' (77). Blair agrees that online (mainly female) reader comments regarding female characters in English-language fandoms are 'frequently very negative and occasionally virulently, even violently, misogynistic' (2010, 110), but argues that this is due to the portrayal of female characters as rivals and antagonists attempting to come between two male characters, and the way they are depicted, being peripheral characters at best, as 'lacking nuance' (2010, 112).

Female characters in *FFVII* BL *dōjinshi* may well be regarded as peripheral[14]. However, they cannot be said to lack nuance to the same extent as females in original BL manga may do: the female characters in *FFVII dōjinshi*, as well as the male, are based on pre-existing characters, with long back-stories, detailed personalities and relationships with other characters, established through the lengthy games and film, and so 'encounters take place within a larger story context that is familiar to the fans who read it' (Pagliassotti,

[14] Of the 12 non-explicit *dōjinshi* in the sample, 7 include female characters (5 with dialogue and 2 without); of the 27 explicit *dōjinshi*, 6 include female characters (5 with dialogue and 1 without).

2010, 76). Character information is readily accessible online, and even readers who are not gameplayers will be likely to bring a certain amount of background knowledge to their consumption of *dōjinshi*.

In addition, the roles of women in the *dōjinshi* sample (mainly Tifa and Aerith) are not generally as rivals seeking to come between the male couple. If anything, their portrayal is closer to the "motherbody" outlined by Buckley, although, unlike in *hentai* texts, this female body is not eroticized or exaggerated beyond the proportions found in the games; it does not suggest motherhood in the sense of an ability for reproduction, but rather in a sense of watching over and caring for the male characters in non-erotic scenarios. This motherliness can be seen in the frequent caregiver roles of Tifa and Aerith in *FFVII* BL: they bandage Cloud's wounds, make sure he eats, worry about his health and tell him 'it's alright' (*Zilch*, 2005, 30). The first volume of the *Zilch* trilogy, based on the *Advent Children* film, sets up the idea of motherhood overtly: Aerith's mother appears briefly at the beginning of the *dōjinshi*, talks to Cloud about her daughter and gives him money, saying 'it's for your family' (2005, 15), before he returns home to Tifa, with whom he is cohabiting, and the street children they are caring for. However, while their living arrangements put Cloud and Tifa in the position of surrogate parents, and lines such as Tifa's wifely 'how about some supper? I can fix it soon' (2005, 24) suggest a couple in a long-term relationship, nothing is shown between them beyond platonic affection. Passion in these BL *dōjinshi*, whether sexual or emotional, is the province of men and their relationships with other men.

It could also be argued that the caregiver role assigned to Tifa and Aerith prevents them from displaying the strong, even martial physical power they possess in the games. As discussed in the previous chapter, *hentai dōjinshi* also deprive female characters of

their in-game power through making them erotic objects; whereas these BL texts portray them as homemakers and helpmeets to the male characters, though, it could be argued, in an equally masculinist way. Tifa, Aerith and Yuffie may not engender the 'disgusted reaction' (Blair, 2010, 110) of female fans reserved for women set up as rivals coming between the male characters or lacking character depth and background; but neither do they make it easy for fans to read BL *dōjinshi* as a vehicle for female characters to 'affirm women's lives and competencies' (Pagliassotti 2010, 62). On the other hand, the marginalization of women in BL may have another function, maintaining reader focus on the body of the *uke*:

> …females are also marginalized because their physical body and interaction with the male protagonists rearticulates too blatantly the problem of sex as gender and masculinity as privileged over femininity. That is, it reasserts the very heteronormative equations that the *uke* is meant to subvert.
> (Akatsuka 2010, 169)

In this theorization, the peripheral nature of female characters is not due to 'any innate dislike of all female characters…or because the readers [or writers] hold misogynistic views in general' (Blair, 2010, 121). Instead, it is used to circumvent the problematic female body, particularly the sexualized female body, which, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, can be so easily co-opted for the maintenance of phallocentric, binary hegemonic constructs.

The absence of women as eroticized beings in these *dōjinshi* also removes the possibility of normative, procreative sexual practices. Krzywinska, in her writing on transgression, posits that a cultural system is dependant on transgression for its shape and boundaries; that this is performed through "taboo" identities and activities, and that

eroticism that is not for the purpose of procreation can be considered a challenge to normative discourses of sexuality, 'as the sex depicted exceeds production / work' (Krzywinska, 1999, 194), questioning the boundaries of "permissible" desire. This eroticism gives BL the potential to question norms by non-conformance with these "allowable" activities. As such texts are repeatedly created, disseminated and consumed, according to Butler (1990), they have the potential to challenge sexual and gender norms through reiterated performance.

Despite this, Matsui believes that, while BL allows female users to reverse the dominant male gaze of heterosexual pornography through the so-called "*yaoi-me*" (literally "*yaoi*-eye") that 'draws boys and men into the orbit of the fan's desire, turning them into objects of voyeuristic pleasure' (Meyer, 2010, 234), it has lost its subversive potential over the years and descended into pure pornography for girls' satisfaction of sexual curiosity, and that the 'representation of the erotic body from the predominantly "male" perspective of pornography does not enable girls to outgrow the hackneyed code of sex as commodity' (Matsui, 1993, 187). In this view, she argues, it still conforms to the somewhat male traditional perspective of the female as victim.

Matsui's views appear somewhat to place her among anti-pornography theorists, but she does raise an argument that has been used to voice doubt about the potential of BL to provide a satisfactory alternative to the dynamics of dominance and submission that feature in much heterosexual pornography. It should be remembered, however, that the creators and users of sexually explicit BL texts do not necessarily aim to play such a transgressive and challenging role in the first place; as Juffer suggests regarding pornography aimed at women:

The persistent academic emphasis on making the pornographic "strange" –

> violating gender roles, pointing out hypocrisies, and so on - …may not work in the contexts in which readers use these texts, for the stimulation of sexual pleasure and fantasy.
> (1998, 20)

Some user readings, rather than making the sexual content of BL "transgressive", are more concerned with its function as erotic stimulus, a function similar to that of most *hentai dōjinshi*. Stanley points out that sexually explicit BL can be linked, like slash, with 'sexual fantasy literature'; they are genres that 'tend to dispense with theory in favor of praxis by actually engendering feelings of desire, pleasure, arousal and so on in the reader' (2010, 105). There are multiple users of BL 'with multiple positions, motives, and desires' (Akatsuka, 2010, 166), and the pleasurable function should not be dismissed.

In addition, it has already been demonstrated that, at least in the case of *FFVII dōjinshi*, there are also a significant number of non-pornographic texts. These *dōjinshi*, such as the *Custodio Angel* series (SWAT Kikaku, 1997), contain romance or a certain amount of erotically charged tension, constructed through the characters' physical proximity and emotional entanglements in the course of the story; but the focus of the narrative is on providing sequels, prequels or alternatives to the in-game story, thereby adding to the complexity of the characters and their relationships with one another. The *Custodio Angel* series is over 150 pages long and does not include even a kiss scene; nevertheless, through dialogue and plot it creates nuances to the relationship between Cloud and Sephiroth that enrich and reimagine the content of the game, and provides a space in which fans, through their "*yaoi-me*", may build their own fantasies of a continuation into romantic or sexual physical acts.

This deepening of character relationships through non-sexual narratives that entail the use and extension of in-game elements is quite different to the *hentai dōjinshi*

previously examined, in which the female character's relationship with male characters is not explored in any way other than the sexual; and where, if the relationship is shown to deepen, it is due to the physical reactions of her body to the all-powerful phallus rather than a carefully thought out extension of in-game narratives and characterizations. Still less is it like mainstream pornography, Japanese or Western. It therefore seems somewhat inadequate to define current BL as simply pornography or 'the hackneyed code of sex as commodity' (Matsui, 1993, 187); while this may indeed apply to some of the sexually explicit *dōjinshi* in the sample when used as sexual stimuli for the reader, the genre, and its users, are made up of multiplicities of content and readings which do not allow this to be considered a definitive statement.

These theories regarding BL, over which there has been lively debate among the increasing number of BL scholars, provide in themselves some notion of how such texts are capable of provoking myriad ideas of sex and sexuality that are not inextricably linked to hegemonic binaries. Wood states that BL texts 'ultimately reject any kind of monolithic understanding of gendered or sexual identity' (Wood, 2006, 397), and this is part of what makes them "queer". This fragmentation of interpretations generated by BL *dōjinshi* once again displays parallels with 'the differing modes of "reading up"' (Azuma, 2009, 33) utilized by producers/consumers in Azuma's postmodern database model in which multiple consumers, once they possess the settings of a media text like a game, 'can produce any number of derivative works that differ from the originals' (33); though whether this multiplicity can thus be considered "queer" is less certain.

Gender, like the sexed bodies discussed above, is also treated more playfully in BL than in Final Fantasy *hentai dōjinshi*. The concept of playfulness is central to Stanley's reading of BL texts, which, in her opinion, are 'more about pleasure and fun than

compensation and lack' (2010, 99). This way of engaging with BL refuses to take too seriously the psychoanalytic theory that would see the manipulation of eroticized male characters by female users as having 'negative, compensatory motivations, leaving women, as so often in non-feminist psychoanalytic theory, making up for a lack of something' (100), most specifically the phallus denied them by hegemonic constructs of what it "is" to be male and female. Instead of a way of dealing with an essentialist lack, Stanley sees the use of BL texts by female fans as 'more playful…more satisfying ways of joining the cultural conversation' (99) after centuries of limited participation. Here, the reappropriation and recreation of game elements in BL is about fun, enjoyment, a postmodern refusal to engage with overt politicization in text production. If fans wish to imbue *dōjinshi* with a political reading of a serious engagement with issues of female subordination, that is possible, thanks to the 'multiple positions readers inhabit prior to the hail of the text' (Akatsuka, 2010, 161); but, Stanley argues, it should not be considered inherent to the texts themselves.

One of the gender-centric reappropriations of game elements found in this sample of BL *dōjinshi* is cross-dressing, a fairly unsubtle way of playing with gender markers. Much of this stems from a side mission in the first *FFVII* game, in which main character Cloud must rescue Tifa, one of the girls of his group, from Don Corneo, a lecherous middle-aged man who lives in a mansion which only women are permitted to enter; the only way to complete this otherwise fairly orthodox mission, Cloud is told, is to dress as a woman and sneak into the mansion. This he does, albeit reluctantly, stopping off at an all-male bath house along the way to pick up women's clothing (it is implied that the gay men who use the bath house keep women's clothing and wigs there)[15] while collecting

[15] This scene may point to a conflation in the original game of male homosexuality (represented by the

the elements of his costume.

In the *hentai dōjinshi* discussed in Chapter 3, sex scenes based on this part of the game generally feature Tifa, the female character, as the central eroticized and penetrated body, usually during her captivity by Don Corneo and without her consent. However, elements from this episode in the game have made their way into many fan-created BL texts, generally involving Cloud, in a dress, seducing or being seduced by another male main character. The artists attempt to distance these scenes from being viewed as simple portrayals of pseudo-heterosexuality in various ways: by using the female clothing as a contrast to visually highlight the male-sexed body beneath it, in *dōjinshi* such as *Fairy Syndrome Honey* (2009), the cover of which displays a muscular, assertive-looking Cloud in a dress, sporting his large trademark (and one might say deeply phallic) sword; or by stressing the importance of love over gender/sex, thus denying any gender primacy, as can be seen in the English dialogue of scanlated *dōjinshi Barbie*, in which the two male main characters are talking as they make out:

> **Zack**: It's almost…kinda like I really *am* doing it with a girl.
> **Cloud**: So why don't you just do it with a real girl, then?
> **Zack**: You just don't get it, do you? I don't care if you're a boy or a girl, as long as it's you!
> (2009, 13)

In the majority of *hentai dōjinshi*, as we have seen previously, there is little space for the erotic potential offered by feminine gender markers attached to a known male body, as this could raise the question of feminization, which poses danger to the male body as the 'one-dimensional, phallic representative' (Garlick, 2011, 225) of dominant masculinity.

---

bath-house) with transvestism, a not-uncommon misunderstanding even in the 1990s by people unfamiliar with LGBT concepts. The in-game scene is discussed further in the gameplay chapter.

In *hentai*, characters with feminine attributes are likely to be either given "masculine" attributes like large muscles and phallic objects, or turned into women, in order to uphold the matched binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine. The cross-dressing theme in *Barbie*, on the other hand, celebrates the erotic possibilities of feminine gender attributes, while character Zack's comments deny the supposition that sex with 'a real girl' is a male character's only choice. The reading of the *uke* as feminine *and* male, suggests Akatsuka, may indeed be positive for BL users in terms of troubling norms of masculinity as dominant and femininity as subordinated to it:

> [The] *uke* as subject can revalue femininity because [as a male] he is the privileged benefactor of patriarchy as well as deconstruct its abjection by parodying this privilege through *uke* as object…
> (Akatsuka, 2010, 168)

Here the *dōjinshi* artists and users have the *uke* perform femininity using the culturally privileged male body, drawing that body into a subordinated gender performance and making it work against hegemonic norms to create an articulation of femininity as intelligible.

The choice of characters depicted and the visual framing of images in these *dōjinshi* also serve to question the primacy of the phallus and dominant masculinity. As discussed before, in contrast to heterosexual *hentai* Final Fantasy texts, BL *dōjinshi* contain very few anonymous characters; the relationship between two well-known characters is pushed to the fore, not only in non-explicit *dōjinshi* but also in explicit ones as the premise for sex, whether that entails romantic love or passionate hate. Neither do these *dōjinshi* use the faceless/eyeless visual techniques utilised in *hentai* to draw attention away from the male character and onto the penis. *Strife Delivery Health* (2010), which has a prostitution

theme, is an example of this: featuring sex scenes between popular pairing Sephiroth (one of the main enemy characters in the original games, who here performs the penetrating or *seme* role) and Cloud (here the *uke*, and, once again, cross-dressing), although the erect penis is depicted explicitly – with the usual half-hearted bar censorship method – there are many panels showing the bodies and facial expressions of both *seme* and *uke*, as well as kissing and the frequent meeting of eyes to signal romantic intimacy that goes beyond simply genital connection. In these explicit *dōjinshi*, the body of the *uke* remains the central focus. However, the body and face of the *seme* are also much in evidence, and the *uke* is not completely centralized in the frame or surrounded by peripheral penises as in *hentai dōjinshi*; the anonymity of male *hentai* characters gives way to full visual depictions of both sexual partners. In *Strife Delivery Health* the face and body of the *seme*, Sephiroth, are lingered on, displayed in multiple panels on each page. His body, not limited to the penis, is eroticized as *uke* Cloud strokes his cheek, kisses him, and licks his torso (2010, 24); panels containing only the naked Sephiroth (28) suggest that, in BL *dōjinshi*, both characters involved in sexual acts are available for the fan's voyeuristic pleasure, whereas in *hentai* the male body is absented as far as possible.

BL readers are not required to identify with any one perspective; through the layout of the pages, with their multiple frames, the 'reader's perspective, and therefore identification, is also multiple and fractured' (Akatsuka, 2010, 171). One panel may be drawn from the *seme*'s point of view, the next from a third person perspective, the next from the *uke*'s (*Nubatama no* 2009, 15; *Zilch 3* 2006, 11). Most English-speaking BL fans, accustomed as they are to reading manga-style texts right-to-left (scanlators do not 'flip' the pages when presenting *dōjinshi* in English, as used to be the practice when early commercial translations of manga were produced in the 1990s), become familiar with the

correct reading order of panels on a page, which leads them through multiple and quickly shifting points of view and discourages them from becoming fixed, even temporarily, in identification with a single sexual or gendered role.

The aesthetic traits of BL *dōjinshi* also provide some alternatives to the hegemonic body ideals displayed in the character designs of the first *FFVII* game and the majority of heterosexual *hentai dōjinshi*: muscular male characters and slender, lithe females with optional large breasts. Although there are some BL fan texts that maintain these ideals, many follow the popular styles of BL and *shōjo* manga: boys with willowy bodies, 'expressive eyes, harmonious features, hairless skin, and sometimes beautiful outfits' (Meyer, 2010, 236), at times bordering on androgyny (at least when clothed) and blurring the lines between genders. This often best describes the *uke* character, and the way they are fetishized and eroticized is sometimes regarded, as shown earlier, as a kind of feminization.

It must be remembered, however, that definitions of masculinity are constantly shifting and that 'hegemonic masculinity appropriates…whatever appears to be pragmatically useful for continued domination' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, 844). With the rising male beauty culture in Japan and the relatively recent concept of the "metrosexual"[16] in some Western cultures, it can no longer be assumed that the attributes of the *uke* listed by Meyer are necessarily feminine, but may rather be in the process of co-option into a new hegemonic masculinity that plays to the power of female consumerism. In this sense, the character designs in BL media – and the shift towards androgynous aesthetics in commercially released titles like the FF series – may well have

[16] "Metrosexual" is a neologism derived from "metropolitan" and "heterosexual", sometimes used to describe self-identified straight men who are meticulous about grooming and appearance and may borrow certain aspects of what are commonly considered urban gay lifestyles.

an economic function, to increase sales to female users. In Japan, these male aesthetics are finding their way out of pop culture texts like games and comics, and can now be seen on the street, with young men in fashionable urban areas using cosmetics, shaping their eyebrows, or undergoing laser hair removal (Miller, 2006). In the West this is occurring to a degree, but is minimal, with the traditional muscular frame and ungroomed face remaining prominent.

While *FFVII dōjinshi* do display popular patterns regarding who is the penetrating *seme* and who the receptive *uke* partner in sexual situations – artist kiki's works (Kiki website, n.d) promote the tall, muscular Sephiroth as *seme*, and the smaller Cloud as *uke*, pairing – it is not unheard of for such patterns to be inverted by other authors, who may invert the sexual roles of these pairings (such as in *Tenshi no Gensou*, 1998), or render both characters equally beautiful, creating more varied gender elements which users may use to complicate definitions of who is "feminine" and who "masculine" based on sexual role. Kadaj, for example, one of the male characters from *Advent Children*, was discussed in the previous chapter, being reimagined as female in *hentai dōjinshi Mission AC* (2005) due to his "feminine" gender markers. In BL *dōjinshi* such as kiki's *Positron* (2006), by contrast, Kadaj is not only allowed to remain male, with his slender body, pretty face and long hair intact, but is also given a very aggressive *seme* role. Such *dōjinshi* show sexual roles being uncoupled from their "matching" hegemonic gender performances.

The styles and character designs shown in these *dōjinshi* also point to wider trends in popular Japanese culture, particularly those aspects that have become well known to female fans in the UK and elsewhere in the West: the continuing popularity of the *bishōnen* or "beautiful boy" figure, which appears, as shown by McLelland (2000), in Japanese women's media ranging from manga to music; and the growth of *kawaii* or "cute"

culture, which Aoyagi (2005) tells us is very much linked to female consumption.

Indeed, the later games in the Final Fantasy franchise appear to have made alterations to their character designs in a similar fashion. As seen in Chapter 2, comparison between the character design of Cloud in the original game, the 2004 (USA 2008) film *Advent Children* and the 2008 game *Crisis Core* clearly shows him becoming paler and less muscular, with softer features and hair. This trend is shown to an even greater extend in the introduction of Kadaj (see Chapter 3), whose visual gender markers are more nearly androgynous. There is no statement from the Square Enix company confirming that this is due to the growing popularity and economic weight of media aimed at young women, which present an ideal of masculinity closer to that found in BL *dōjinshi* and manga. The changes in character design may be because the technological capabilities used for game visuals have advanced so far from the blocky styles of the 1990s. However, it is also the case that the increasing use of *kawaii* visual characteristics 'in such key games as *Final Fantasy*…has afforded many 'flexible' modes of gender performativity' (Hjorth, 2011, 80); this is particularly visible in Square Enix RPGs, and may be another instance in which the fan production of simulacra is able to influence the perceived 'privileged original' of the official games (Azuma, 2009, 38).

Through the consumption of these materials, English-speaking fans are becoming familiar with the tropes, visual style and form of Japanese women's and girls' comics. This familiarity with both form and content once again links fans to a sense of Japaneseness: the style of *dōjinshi* mark them as distinctively Japanese media, while character designs promote recognition of wider themes such as *bishōnen* and *kawaii* that are also becoming part of the fantasies of a particular idealized Japan. Within the *dōjinshi*, fans make use of the game narrative itself, adapting a minor plot point playfully to remove

focus from the heteronormative ideals of the game's main ending, and creating visual and written images that depict gender fluidity in a positive light and allow for sex acts involving an emotional and erotic connection that does not hinge on absolute binaries of male and female.

### 4.4 The online use of *dōjinshi*: Global engagements and separations

Previous sections showed how the content of *dōjinshi* reappropriated by English-speaking fan communities can inspire various readings of gender and sexuality, some of which appear to perpetuate hegemonic, phallocentric masculinity, and some of which, through the techniques of playful pastiche and reinterpretation of game elements, may provide a space in which fans may question the validity of such hegemonic gender norms. The aesthetic style of this genre, coupled with the high cultural capital granted to imaginings of Japaneseness by fans, also serve to promote female-centred ideals of masculinity that are more gender-fluid than those still dominant in European and U.S. societies.

This final section shifts from the content of these *dōjinshi* to the practices of their dissemination, which make extensive use of the electronically mediated technologies that perpetuate the proliferation of simulacra, linking fan practices once more to the "database" concept. This section argues that the transnational community created by the circulation of and commentary on BL *dōjinshi* on the Internet provides a space for shared fantasies of alternative sexual and gender articulations. While these fantasies do not often lead to overt politicization of the texts by their users, the blurring of the boundaries between "play" and "real life" mean that those articulations still have weight outside the fandom.

The process of online dissemination is not one-way from scanlators to readers: fans

often provide scanlators with scans of raw *dōjinshi*, which are then translated and distributed either on the scanlator's website or the provider's; by becoming involved in the production of English-language scanlations, the provider acts as both distributor and reader of the text, playing multiple roles in the transcreation process: he or she becomes a produser.

Further, because dissemination of scanlated *dōjinshi* is largely an online phenomenon, it is easy for readers to become text producers themselves by communicating with the fan producers and distributors, creating yet another layer of fan articulations; as Stanley explains, 'the conversations among creators and their audiences create an immediate community of shared interest' (2010, 105). This occurs between Japanese fans and produsers, for example the *dōjinshi* artists who communicate with readers through website mail forms, blogs and social networks like Twitter; and between English-speaking fans and produsers, in this case scanlators. As mentioned earlier, *dōjinshi* scanlation sites hosted on LiveJournal actively court user comments, as do many of the *hentai* sites hosted on paid servers, and the scanlators and distributors will often reply to those comments, encouraging another body of fan commentary to build up around the *dōjinshi*, which themselves can be considered commentaries on the "original" game texts. This type of online communication, Blair suggests, can offer fans a temporary experience of free speech, since 'the anonymity granted by participating in internet forums, where it is possible to invent an entirely new persona simply by changing usernames, frees people to act in ways they never would in real life' (2010, 115). The sometimes openly misogynistic comments of BL fans regarding female characters, she argues, can be partly ascribed to this anonymity, and 'can be read as a symptom of the social norm[s]' constructed through reiteration and acceptability of such articulations in

BL sharing spaces, 'and not necessarily as reflecting the offline opinions of the commenters themselves' (2010, 116). This argument could also be put forward with regard to user comments endorsing violent or non-consensual *dōjinshi* on *hentai* fan websites like Fakku.

It must be remembered, however, that online free speech is not a worldwide privilege. McLelland discusses the recent laws set in place in English-speaking countries like Australia, the UK and Canada 'to render illegal all sexual representations of 'children' (variously defined as under the age of 18 or 16) in any medium, including purely fictional representations, graphic, textual or otherwise' (2005, 4). Outlining the obvious ramifications of such laws for BL fans – whose chosen media, through its particular aesthetics, often contains eroticized characters who appear young even when they are known to be over 18 (and the apparent age of a drawn character is surely a subjective estimate, unless the written dialogue makes it clear) – McLelland suggests that compared to the ''unpanicked' community' (2005, 22) of Japanese BL fans, 'western yaoi fans are necessarily precipitated into a defensive position regarding their activities' (23). In Japan, obscenity laws are rather different, and, while depictions of the genitals must be censored, questions of legal age of consent as it pertains to drawn or animated characters go (currently) unasked. The publication and sale of commercial manga featuring characters under 18 is seen as acceptable and is distributed by major retailers like Amazon. In the West it is rather different. Many English-language BL sites like Noire Sensus carry warnings and disclaimers (Checkpoint, n.d.), or, as is the case with LJ sites like Arigatomina, require readers to become members in order to access sexually explicit *dōjinshi*, and enjoin them not to redistribute texts (Ari_scanlations – Profile, 2009). McLelland deplores the way in which laws regarding 'child-abuse publications' (2005,

25), aimed at dealing with legitimate concerns of paedophilia, also have the potential to misleadingly position producers and readers of BL, who are attempting to 'express (and, importantly, share) their interest and enthusiasm for the youthful male body in an uninhibited manner' (19) as disseminators of child abuse material through misunderstandings of aesthetic preferences in manga and Japanese cultural tropes. Issues such as this show that online BL fandoms cannot be regarded as globalized or homogenous; cultural specificity is clearly at work, in this case to limit creative and imaginative freedom in certain English-speaking cultures, while it is protected in others (such as the U.S.A.).

Be this as it may, there are still possibilities for a 'space for the development of community fantasy' (McLelland, 2005, 28) in online fan practices cross-culturally, although the idea of a globalized Internet must be treated with caution. With the migration of fandoms online and the anonymity that attends it, it becomes difficult to locate geographical or cultural sections; rather, the Internet creates a plethora of fragmented and diverse groups (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, 15). Yet, according to scholars such as Wood (2006), these globalizing (but not homogenizing) technologies can provide fans with strategies for challenging prevalent hegemonies of gender binaries and heteronormativity that are not based on the visual or narrative content of *dōjinshi* alone. This questioning of gender norms through articulations of alternative possibilities of gender is more likely to be undertaken by the users of BL *dōjinshi* than users of *hentai* texts; however, this is by no means absolute, since it has been shown that some online Final Fantasy *hentai* users are quite eager to add their own critical commentary to the body of fan articulation surrounding an often normative genre.

Azuma links his pattern of database consumption, which he ascribes to

contemporary users of Japanese popular media, to 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 seen as a parallel of fan consumption, which, in the case of English-speaking Final Fantasy fan communities, is carried out within its environs, forming a connection between technology and users based on how they manipulate 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 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. 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). The use of such terms, which may 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 culturally non-specific online society.

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 word "erotic", and the tendency in the West to use the Japanese word "*hentai*" instead (Kelts, 2006, 127), as was discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter. So, 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 sources for the project of "Cool Japan" (Daliot-Bul, 2014, xxxiii), the flow also works in multiple directions. This highlights the complexity of the processes of globalization, which are emphatically not in a "West-rest" binary between the West and the non-West, 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, and while there may appear to be a privileged original, as in the promotion of an idea of Japaneseness by Final Fantasy *dōjinshi* fans in an English-speaking context, these online practices underline their artificial character.

Fan practices of disseminating and consuming *dōjinshi* through online technologies once again place such texts and their use in the realms of simulation. However, the possibility of questioning hegemonic social constructions within postmodern simulation has been considered limited in Jameson's writing (1984) due to its 'essential triviality', which 'reinforces and intensifies' the logic of late capitalism (paragraph 101) and the hegemonic apparatuses that have upheld it. On the other hand, scholars such as Baudrillard do see certain areas of potential in the concept of seduction, in the games with signs that people play, with and within simulations, in contrast to the "serious" labour of producing meaning and identity (Baudrillard, 1990, Grace, 2000). Despite the much-

theorized limitations of simulacra and the hyperreal for providing sites of challenge to dominant norms such as binary gender roles and heteronormativity, which, while shifting, are very much extant in the UK and elsewhere, Wood sees the online practices and myriad geographical groups of BL fans as 'a global counterpublic that is both subversive and fundamentally queer in nature' (Wood, 2006, 396). Both the aesthetics of *dōjinshi*, whose gender fluidity and sexual ambiguity can be read differently by their various users, and the use of the Internet in their dissemination and consumption, which 'allows for a greater concatenation of texts across cultural boundaries' (2006, 406), can grant fans significant "fantasies of resistance". In this sense, "fantasies" can be understood as the images and narratives within these fictional texts, which contain a range of gender and sexual possibilities that have the potential, at least, to spark critical consideration of binary heteronormativity in some users, even if the creator of the media text had no critical intent[17]. They are undeniably playful, perhaps not "serious", but this does not make them entirely ineffectual:

> Messages produced "just in play" on weighty social realities are diminished in their impact, as they are received as lighthearted and inconsequential to those realities. Yet the messages are heard, and, more important, the players themselves (those who produce and reproduce these messages) recognize themselves in the messages.
> (Daliot-Bul, 2014, xxix)

While "fantasies" of resistance may not lead to immediate or overt political activity in opposition to gender norms, this is a mode very much tied to the globalized, postmodern

[17] This could also apply to some of the humorous depictions of male-male sexuality discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, although the way those depictions are situated among utterances of distaste towards homosexuality and women as the focus of sexual desire may lessen the likelihood that it is deliberately "charged" humour or that fans will make critical use of it

setting in which these fan practices are carried out. Appadurai raises this as 'something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*' (Appadurai, 2010, 48). He sees the imagination, in contemporary globalization, as 'central to all forms of agency' (2010, 48).

Thus, the transnational consumption of BL game *dōjinshi* as simulacra, and the images of gender fluidity they generate, provide an area in which to question the depictions of binary gender roles and heteronormativity found in both the Japanese RPGs that form part of the database from which these fan texts are generated, and in the numerous scanlated *hentai dōjinshi* that make up part of the secondary database. The digitized practices of localizing, distributing and consuming *dōjinshi* by BL fans in a transnational English-speaking context show that there are areas of simulation where non-hegemonic concepts of gender and sexuality can thrive and spread. Rather than promoting the traditional forms of activism encouraged by some branches of feminism and Queer movements, these areas may be limited by the characterization of the postmodern media user as disinclined to engage "seriously" with political issues (Jameson, 1984, Baudrillard, 1990), keeping criticism of hegemonic norms at the level of imagination and play. However, messages generated through play may transgress the borders between "play" and "reality" as the boundaries between the two blur through the continuous recycling of simulacra without an original.

The next chapters on cosplay will move from the drawn simulacra of *dōjinshi* and the visual/plot-related aspects of in-game narrative and fan videos to a fan practice that incorporates more embodied performance as well as digital images of that performance: cosplay, or the practice of dressing and performing as an already established character

from a media text. They will continue to engage with some of the same issues we have seen in the previous chapters based on almost entirely electronically-mediated fan practices and media: the relationship of simulation to original in Azuma's database model of fan media use (2009), the performance of normative and non-normative models of gender and sexuality in a cross-cultural context, and the reappropriation of in-game material for the purposes of erotic stimulation and how this may undermine or bolster potential for questioning masculinist and heteronormative binaries. The chapters will take up and complicate issues of female sexualisation and objectification found in the previous discussion of *hentai*, examining how cosplayer agency and fan status helps eroticization in cosplay move beyond the strong impression of phallic centrality and male domination found in the *hentai dōjinshi* genre. They also return to questions raised in the current chapter around gender and sexual fluidity, looking at how various gendered practices within cosplay both support and challenge the notion of a playful, de-politicized postmodern fandom.

# 5. Embodied Performance and Gender in Cosplay



## 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter moved from sexually explicit *hentai dōjinshi* to consider the other popular *dōjinshi* genre in the Final Fantasy fandoms: boys' love, or fan comics mainly created by and aimed at female users, featuring relationships between male characters that range from friendly to romantic to explicitly erotic. It demonstrated that the transnational produsage of such *dōjinshi* can, in both their content and the practices of dissemination online, spread some non-hegemonic concepts of gender and sexuality. Slippage between the "play" space of fan activity and other aspects of the users' lives allows those non-hegemonic concepts to spread, although the postmodern user's disinclination to engage with political statements and activity, for example LGBTQ criticism of BL, may decrease the likelihood of some fans challenging normative discourses outside the fandom.

This chapter examines gender and sexed performance in game cosplay, a practice in which the body of the cosplayer is crucial, both to their own performance and experience in real-time and to the creation of digital media which is disseminated online and used by fans for various purposes. It argues that a minority of game cosplay practices can provide more deliberate and politicized articulations of alternative models of gender than either *dōjinshi* or machinima manipulations of game footage. At the same time, the

majority of cosplay (including erotic cosplay) moves away from "meaning-making" and questions of normativity or identity-based gender and sexuality, through affective response to the various bodies and images in *FFVII* cosplay fandoms. In this way, cosplay could be argued to provide a more exciting prospect than any of the practices explored in preceding chapters in terms of fandom moving beyond traditional gender politics.

The cosplay examined in this chapter is that disseminated and used specifically on the English-speaking Web through cosplay galleries and forum websites, though the chapter also refers to cosplay conventions and contests attended by non-Japanese users as well as Japanese, such as the international World Cosplay Summit[1]. This analysis mainly makes use of Final Fantasy cosplay examples, in order to later compare interactions between the human and digital in cosplay with such interactions in RPG gameplay, the other fan practice around gaming in which the body is so crucial.

The chapter first gives a historical overview of cosplay and contextualizes it in Japanese and overseas popular culture fandoms, particularly as an online fandom on the English-speaking Web, including the current state of connection between video game and cosplay cultures. The next sections discuss so-called "non-normative" gender performances in cosplay by comparing the concepts of "crossplay" and transgender cosplay, which are contrasted and debated in fan commentary. Utilizing affect theory, it argues that cosplay practices can contain both affective and social dimensions. This means that cosplay can encompass the apolitical, "fannish" gender play associated with the *dōjinshi* genre, and at the same time make deliberate and even activist identity statements.

[1] Held every August in Nagoya, Japan, and in which I participated as a part-time worker and volunteer for four years from 2010-2013.

## 5.2 Game Cosplay on the English-speaking Web

The fan practice of cosplay involves, in its simplest form, dressing up as a character from a (usually) pop culture media text; it frequently entails being filmed and photographed, or giving in-character performances in front of other cosplayers and observers. In Japan as well as overseas, fans cosplay not only Japanese anime/manga/game characters but also characters from non-Japanese films, TV shows, etc. When defined by the name "cosplay", this activity is recognized by the majority of people, both in Japan and worldwide, as a fan practice stemming from specifically Japanese popular culture, 'and the particular media environment that includes prolific *anime* and *manga* cultures' (Hjorth, 2011, 139). However, researchers point out that the beginnings of cosplay may lie elsewhere.

Okabe asserts that "cosplay" as a practice began in Japan in the 1970s, when pop culture fans 'began to borrow the practice of masquerades from U.S. science fiction conventions' (2012, 229), but did not become a named practice until the 1980s. Gn also sees cosplay as emerging from Western costuming activities at sci-fi and fantasy meetings (2011, 583); however, these activities were relatively low-key and private, and did not attain anywhere near the scale and public recognition of cosplay today.

The term "cosplay", supposedly coined in Japan in 1984 (King, 2013), is a shortened form of the English "costume play"; alternatively, Winge posits that it may be a composite of "costume" and "role-play" (2006, 65), as performing as a particular character, not simply dressing like one, is an important facet of cosplay activity. This interpretation of the term grants cosplay a connection with RPGs (role-playing games)

such as Final Fantasy, not merely in name but also in practice, as the final chapter will argue. Cosplay as a specifically Japanese fan activity emerged between the 1970s and '80s, beginning at *dōjinshi* markets and events like Comiket (Winge, 2006), where sellers 'used cosplay as a tool to promote their *doujinshi*' (Rahman, Wing-Sun & Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 318). By the 1980s, cosplay had become popular enough among fans for Comiket organisers to request that it be practised only within the convention hall itself, as cosplayers had grown numerous enough to cause comment and perhaps complaint in the public streets outside the venue (Okabe, 2012, 229). Such regulations ensured, whether deliberately or not, that the growing practice of cosplay remained an "insider", fannish activity, kept separate from general public notice[2]. Japanese fans also distinguished themselves from the "outside" by the use of particular jargon and abbreviations, such as "cos" (*kosu*) for cosplay and "'layer" (*reiyaa*) for cosplayer (Tanaka, 2009, 31), marking themselves as part of a specific fan community.

These origins of cosplay in Japan show once again the links between the many kinds of fan media and activity (which have only increased as computer technologies have developed), in this case between fans who are interested in three overlapping types: the initial text of the game, the secondary simulacra of *dōjinshi*, and cosplay based on either the initial media text or the secondary text. Okabe, whose study focused on female Japanese cosplayers in Japan, found that his informants 'were all authors or consumers of *dōjinshi*' (2012, 228). This overlap between media and practices is not limited to Japanese fans or early cosplayers but can also be observed in current English-speaking cosplay fans in Japan, in the UK and online. This tendency argues against the isolated

[2] It should be noted, however, that cosplay has become more public in some areas of Japan, with many cosplayers gathering in outdoor public spaces like Tsurumai Park in Nagoya for photoshoots.

study of one type of fan media, demonstrating the necessity of paying close attention to the ways in which multiple media and activities are connected through fans.

Since the 1980s, cosplay has grown within Japan beyond a private activity for insider fans to become well-known within the wider society, thanks to a combination of commercialization and mass-media coverage (Tanaka, 2009, 26). While cosplay had indeed begun with a certain commercial aspect – an aid to selling *dōjinshi* at conventions – it now supports a large industry, with magazines such as *Cosmode*[3], physical and online stores selling off-the-rack costumes, wigs, accessories, etc., and programs broadcast on commercial television channels, for example *CoscosPlayplay*[4] on Fuji Television Network. Tanaka views the commercialization of cosplay as an example of the complexity of social progress: on one hand, she argues, 'in contemporary society the expression and formation of identity has become increasingly reliant on a capitalism that consists of the purchase and selection of commodities and the display of style'; on the other, 'such acts in themselves create the possibility for freely emergent self-expression' (2009, 31).

Whatever the implications of commercialization for "free" self-expression and the concept of the fan in the cosplay world (where cosplayers wearing purchased costumes are not accorded the same status within the community as those who create their own from scratch (Okabe, 2012, 235)), there can be no doubt that, along with the development of the Internet, it has assisted the growing awareness of cosplay, not only within Japan but worldwide: print magazines from Japan are purchased online and imported by English-speaking cosplayers, and English-language Web stores sell cosplay apparel and

[3] http://cosmode.infor.co.jp/ First published September 2002 by Eichi Publishing Inc., then from July 2007 by Inforest Co., Ltd.
[4] http://blog.fujitv.co.jp/coscos/index.html First broadcast April 14, 2008 on Fuji TV ONE.

accessories, making it easy for fans to develop their initial interest in cosplay into a practice. Some of these stores are based in the target country; others are located in Japan, and use this fact to tap into the cultural capital accorded by some fans to particular ideas of Japaneseness. Assistcosplay.com's English-language online store (Assist Cosplay, 2012), for example, uses only Japanese-looking models, and reinforces its Japanese status through the text on its front page: the top right of the page invites customers to 'cosplay with Assist Cosplay Shop from JAPAN', while a prominent banner proclaims the shop to be the 'No.1 Shop in Akihabara, Tokyo', with a small Japanese flag displayed above the word "Akihabara", which is well known among overseas fans of Japanese pop culture as the "otaku" centre of Japan. In another sliding banner advertising wigs, the site reinforces the concept of Japanese cosplayers representing high standards of cosplay, declaring 'Best product satisfaction from Japanese cosplayers'. In this way, English-language commercial sites support the international dissemination of cosplay while encouraging fans to invest the idea of Japaneseness — that is, Japan as the expert centre of cosplay — with value. King, in her study of Australian cosplayers, goes so far as to state that cosplay's 'main attraction lies in its 'Japanese-ness'' (King, 2013).

In the USA and Europe, dressing up as fantasy or sci-fi characters at conventions and meets has been a fan activity since before cosplay as a named practice came into being. However, as it has grown more popular overseas, conventions have begun to designate this activity as "cosplay" even when the event is not based solely on Japanese popular culture. The MCM London Comic Con is a huge convention held twice a year in the UK, encompassing fantasy, sci-fi, American comic and Japanese pop culture fandoms. In addition to commercial dealer stalls including those selling *dōjinshi*, celebrity guests, a video game expo, film screenings and a special Japanese culture area, one of the big

attractions is its "Totally Cosplay and Masquerade". Here, cosplayers, photographers and other fans can gather to cosplay, watch panels and performances, take part in workshops, pose and take photos, and compete in the onstage cosplay performance competitions. Cosplay at this event is not limited to Japanese media, including non-Japanese science-fiction, fantasy and film characters. The Comic Con also hosts the finals of the Euro Cosplay Championship, in which competitors from across Europe give a performance in costume, which again is not limited to media of Japanese origin. At such "general" events, the influence of Japan on cosplay culture is acknowledged, for instance by the presence of members of the Japanese cosplay industry on the Championship judging panel; nevertheless, it is not necessarily portrayed as a privileged original. Instead, these events claim the term "cosplay" and apply its traditions and practices to a less culturally specific range of popular culture (something that will be seen again in the next chapter on pornographic cosplay).

There are certainly also events aimed at non-Japanese cosplayers that operate as spaces in which to enjoy the practice as part of a distinctly Japanese subculture. Hyper Japan, a convention held in London every summer, features events covering "traditional" Japanese culture such as cuisine, kimono, arts and music, and "pop" culture, including manga, anime, video games, subculture fashions like lolita, and cosplay. The Hyper Japan website emphasises Japaneseness by using Japanese-language script as well as English on its home page, much like some of the BL *dōjinshi* fansites in the previous chapter. Further, Hyper Japan, which describes itself as a "Japan specialist", also offers package tours to Japan: one for experiencing Japanese food culture, and one, the "J-Pop and Go! Tour", geared towards fans of Japanese pop culture. In the tour advertising pages, Japanese "traditional" and "modern" or "pop" cultures are very clearly demarcated; at the

convention, however, they are mixed somewhat, forming a positive and rather fantastic depiction of a multiple, highly exotic and non-everyday Japaneseness. This event has facilities for cosplayers to pose and take photos, and offers a catwalk for cosplayers to display their costumes more prominently. It also hosts the heats for UK teams wishing to compete in the World Cosplay Summit.

The World Cosplay Summit, or WCS, has become perhaps the most internationally well-known cosplay event, and is held annually every August since 2003. With support from the Ministry of Foreign affairs, among others, and with an affiliated academic symposium, WCS has become a major industry-government-academia-civil-society collaboration, providing an ideal site in which to internationalize cosplay by drawing in cosplayers and other fans from all over the world, but also promoting the concept of cosplay as part of specifically Japanese popular culture. With cosplay fans in many countries competing for the chance to travel and cosplay in Japan, which is set up through the competitive element of the early heats as a desirable goal in itself, this international event can be said to function as an aspect of the much-debated "Cool Japan" phenomenon, something which Allison states is '[t]aken seriously…even by the Japanese government which hopes to channel it as a form of "soft power"' (Allison, 2006, 13). So, while cosplay is being practiced in some overseas contexts as a non-Japanese-specific fan activity, events like Hyper Japan and WCS both encourage the concept of internationalization and at the same time maintain the cultural capital of Japaneseness in cosplay and of Japan as cosplay's geographical and cultural centre; through the coexistence of these facets, Japaneseness inspires 'an imaginary space at once foreign and familiar' (Allison, 2006, 18). Hence, Japan-specific cosplay events are able to internationalize and localize cosplay while encouraging a certain imagining of Japaneseness as inherent to the practice.

Events such as these, where cosplay is practised "in the flesh", certainly aid the current spread of cosplay around the world. However, the initial dissemination of cosplay in the English-speaking world, and its still-continuing explosion in popularity, has been argued to be largely thanks to the Internet; and, although cosplay at its first level must involve an embodied experience through the cosplayer's physical presence, an equally important practice is the subsequent digital manipulation, dissemination and discussion of cosplay images. Hoff[5] (2013) describes cosplay prior to the 1990s as an "analogue" experience: fandoms operated in relative isolation, as it was difficult to obtain information about or communicate with fandoms in other countries. Events were publicised through the medium of specialist magazines, and cosplayers exchanged print photos directly, limiting the consumption of cosplay to a small scale: either in-the-flesh observation at the events themselves, or among the circle of acquaintances to whom the cosplayer's photos were shown. These modes of dissemination and consumption made it difficult for cosplay as a named practice to gain a footing outside Japan or to become interactive internationally.

The advent of the Internet altered the experience of cosplay and expanded its practices and priorities: it became "digital", with increasing importance placed on cosplay as fan media as well as fan practice. According to Hoff, 'the online world and its global reach provided an extension of reality for cosplayers' (2013); cosplay was no longer limited to the physical, and, with the erasure of geographical boundaries for dissemination and consumption, the idea of cosplay as a Japanese fan practice was able to spread across the world through the sharing of photos and information. As Gn explains, 'technological

[5] A scholar writing on cosplay, Edmund Hoff is also the main international coordinator of the World Cosplay Summit in Nagoya.

convergence and the ubiquity of Web 2.0 have facilitated the simultaneous exchange of information, images, and commodities…across the globe' (Gn, 2011, 584), referring specifically to the assimilation of Japanese technologies and products in the urban West. Today, in Japan as well as the majority of countries where cosplay is practised, online activities are equally important to cosplayers and observing fans as the events themselves. Tanaka states that 'most 'layers have personal sites or blogs, and are registered on cosplay photo-posting sites… "Posting photos" is one of the most important activities in cosplay culture' (Tanaka, 2009, 31). Tanaka compares the structure of cosplay photo-posting sites with overseas fanfiction websites (2009, 31), where authors and readers who share a fandom can both post their own fan creations and consume those of other people. She also mentions social media such as Facebook and Twitter as venues for photo sharing, though Hoff (2013) argues that these, while having a broader general reach, are not as convenient or effective as specialist cosplay sites due to the restrictions that can be placed on content (for example, in 2012 Facebook suspended all accounts with the term "cosplay" in the account name, as the names were seen as aliases, which were against Facebook rules (Hoff, 2013)). Though the main photo-posting sites are technically country-specific, by virtue of the Internet they are not in fact limited in terms of who can post and who can consume according to location. Rather, Hoff says, the only barriers to global cosplay communication are those of language: the actual practices and media created by cosplayers, such as attending meets and conventions, taking photographs and disseminating them online, are similar all over the world.

It is true that language barriers can limit communication in the form of fan interaction (for example between a Japanese and a UK cosplayer). However, the similarities in fan practices as well as in site formats, and Internet literacy, means that

cosplay fans from different language backgrounds are not precluded from posting photos to certain sites or from consuming the media other fans have created. Cure (Cure WorldCosplay, n.d.), the largest cosplay photo site in the world with over 350,000 members, is a primarily Japanese-language site; but there are cosplayers and observing fans from many countries with Cure accounts; they post photos there, look at pictures of their favourite cosplayers, and include their Cure account number on the cosplay cards (similar to business cards) that the majority of cosplayers carry at events; yet they do not necessarily speak functional Japanese. This is aided by the addition of an English-language page on the Cure site. The English version has limited features compared to the Japanese, however; nor does it take into account cosplayers who do not speak English or Japanese. The determination of many cosplay fans to join and utilise the site, therefore, means they are willing to overcome language barriers. This may be due to the fact that it *is* currently the largest cosplay site worldwide in terms of members and photographs, and thus offers the widest variety of cosplay images and the chance for one's own pictures to be consumed by a greater number of people; there may also be another aspect to the desire to join, and this is the attraction of Japaneseness, where Japanese cosplay is, consciously or unconsciously, given high status.

The digital and the online have thus become an inextricable and vital part of cosplay: cosplay activities in the flesh, while involving their own unique pleasures, are invariably mediated digitally and become media to be disseminated, consumed, commented on and used as inspiration. One of the central pleasures of and motives for doing cosplay in the flesh is being looked at, and 'the ritualized practice of posing for photos' (Rahman, Wing-Sun & Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 331); and the great majority of observation of a cosplayer takes place online, via that cosplayer's digital image. It is these

interactions between the physical and the digital that make cosplay of such interest in exploring the diverse articulations of gender and sexuality within fan culture, and is also one of the aspects that connect cosplay and video gameplay.

Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung note the shared practice of role-playing as a character in digital games and cosplay, pointing out that 'digital game players have the opportunity to escape from reality...by entering an imaginary cyber world... This role-playing is a unique mode of self-transformation' (2012, 321). It was also stated above how the origins of the word "cosplay" can be interpreted as including the concept of role-play. The final chapter of this dissertation shows that there are indeed significant similarities in cosplay and gameplay practice, although the type of physicality involved and also the question of an audience or "user" create differences between the role-play performances in these two fan activities. Cosplay and video games have been linked in both scholarship and popular culture, with some game scholars seeing an important gendered connection between the practices, where cosplay displays the growing popularity of gaming among women, and their agency as gamers (Hjorth, 2011, 141). While the extent to which Hjorth describes cosplay as emerging from Japanese game cultures specifically (141) might be debated, it is possible that 'an emerging rite of passage in games programs appears to be some young female game players becoming cosplayers, then 'produsers', then game makers' (2011, 137), a process of immersion towards production that highlights the significance of cosplay for issues of gender in relation to games.

In terms of popular culture, some of the major English-language cosplay photo-sharing sites, such as Cosplay.com (2002), have sections dedicated to video game cosplay, in which Japanese RPG cosplay is well represented. The Final Fantasy series is

perennially popular for cosplayers worldwide – with Cosplay.com hosting over 4000 user photo galleries for *FFVII* characters alone – as it is the biggest selling Japanese RPG series to be exported overseas and so could be argued to appeal to game fans as well as fans of specifically Japanese pop culture[6]. Some events go so far as to deliberately link video games and cosplay: in 2009 the MCM Expo (now the MCM London Comic Con), which also features commercial Japanese video game companies like Capcom and Konami, broke the world record for the most video game cosplayers (376) in attendance at one event. Additionally, in 2013 the Hyper Japan convention discussed above co-hosted the UK heats for the WCS (The World Cosplay Summit, 2013) with Play Expo, self-styled 'the world's most diverse video gaming expo'. One of its slogans, displayed on the 2014 version home page, read 're.play, now.play, pro.play, cos.play'. Such collaborative events make it clear that, from a commercial as well as a fan point of view, video games and cosplay are linked through the element of play.

Having contextualized cosplay in terms of international practice and the continued upholding of imagined Japaneseness, the following section uses the affect theory discussed in Chapter 2, Section 1.4.3 to examine two forms of sometimes-conflicting cosplay performance. In one of these, crossplay, the idea of gender as a binary concept, indeed as the focus of cosplay, is subsumed, according to fan commentary, by affective attraction to the character being cosplayed. In the other, "trans" cosplay, the presentation of gender is of central importance, cosplay being used both for fannish pleasure and as an identity statement by "non-normative" practitioners who nevertheless serve to uphold binary gender constructions. This section concludes that cosplay encompasses both

[6] For each of the four years I worked at WCS, at least one of the representative teams did a Final Fantasy cosplay performance

meaning-making and affect, frequently with both operating simultaneously. Like *hentai dōjinshi*, it may to an extent support dominant gender norms; more than BL *dōjinshi*, it can function as a deliberately politicized statement about gender. At the same time, the motives and goals of crossplay fans tend to dismiss cosplay as a site in which to debate gender norms by prioritizing affection for the character and the process of costuming over considerations of identity.

## 5.3 Engaging with "non-normative" gender performance: Crossplay

Much existing cosplay scholarship takes an interest in its gendered aspects, particularly in the context of cosplay in Japan, where the great number of female cosplayers has led to it being discussed in terms of how it can impact on specifically female resistance to normative gender discourses (Hjorth, 2011, Okabe, 2012, Tanaka, 2009). One cosplay practice often talked about in both academic and fan contexts is "crossplay", which, in its most straightforward definition, is cosplaying a character with the opposite gender to the cosplayer (Gn, 2011, 588), e.g. a cosplayer who identifies as female cosplaying a male character.

However, there is also another, smaller cosplay practice that, on the surface, appears to be closely linked to crossplay but which is new to academia. Unlike crossplay, this cosplay subcategory does not have a standard term by which to refer to it; it is called "trans" cosplay by some of its practising fans, and so this is the term that will be used here. It involves cosplay by fans who identify as transgendered (though some fan

definitions also include transsexual, intersex and "gender variant" cosplayers). Within the cosplay community there are online groups set up by and for such cosplayers, with dedicated cosplay galleries, discussion forums and so on; the links and disparities between trans cosplay and crossplay are articulated in such discussions, particularly the perceived difference in aims and pleasures experienced by the respective subcategories. Trans cosplay and its engagements with the more prolific crossplay have not attracted the attention of scholars to date, perhaps because of trans cosplay's marginality; however, the fan-articulated tensions between the two subcategories demonstrate some distinct differences in the (often multiple) aims and pleasures to be found in cosplay.

This section examines the practices of crossplay, claiming that the specifically Japanese concept of *kawaii* may disrupt normative constructions of gender in Final Fantasy cosplay on English-language fan sites. Further, crossplay, while not free from social significance, generally prioritizes a set of categories based on fan knowledge and affection for a character, relegating gender to a relatively insignificant spot in the hierarchy of "good" crossplay. The next section shows that trans cosplayers set themselves up in contrast to crossplayers by claiming aims and pleasures based on a sense of strongly-felt and fixed, albeit non-normative, gender identity, rather than crossplayers' supposed temporary "shift" of identity in line with their affection for a particular character. Trans cosplayers hope to be accepted and recognized as the gender of the character they are cosplaying. Here, the importance of the cosplayer's material body is subsumed by the identification they feel with the game character and the wish to deliberately 'express their own identity through a costume' (Lamerichs, 2011). These linked but often at-odds subsections demonstrate that cosplay can incorporate the more deliberate politicizing of identity performance in a way that is intricately involved with social signification and

meaning-making, and also be the site of affect-based, playful pleasures that have little to do with upholding or resisting essentialist gender and sexual norms.

These two sections primarily use case examples from both a large non-cosplay-specific gallery site which has substantial cosplay sections, namely deviantART (a website where people can upload fan art, photography, digital art tools and so on, as well as set up specific themed communities), and dedicated cosplay sites covering cosplay of multiple media fandoms, such as Cosplay.com (2002). These are all English-language sites, and all offer groups, sections or discussion threads for crossplay and/or trans cosplay, as well as video game cosplay galleries.

To begin examining gender articulations in cosplay fandoms it is necessary to take into account the previous literature covering cosplayer demographics, as these may account for the way cosplay in the past has been written of as though it was an exclusively female fan practice, involving issues of gender pertaining particularly to women. Just as video game fandoms still tend to be persistently, though mistakenly, characterized as largely male in the press, the reverse is true in discussions of cosplay in academia, especially those relating to cosplay in Japan; but the practices of male cosplayers and those who do not align themselves with binary norms of gender can also provide valuable and interesting additions to an analysis of gender articulation in cosplay fandoms.

There is a tendency in cosplay scholarship to focus on female cosplayers; they are the object of Tanaka's (2009) research, as well as Hjorth's interesting examination of the links between cosplay and gaming (2011). Indeed, she goes so far as to say that 'cosplayers…de-centre the male role of the *otaku* as prime game consumer' (2011, 139), stressing the primacy of female cosplayers and the importance of cosplay as a tool that can be used by female gamers to become more involved in the industry. Perhaps this trend

in cosplay studies is because, as Okabe states, the 'majority of cosplayers in Japan are women' (2012, 225). His paper concentrates on Japanese women cosplayers, linking their practices specifically to boys' love *dōjinshi* fandoms; and his admitted focus on women does not take much account of the possibly differing pleasures of other cosplayers. For example, he states that, much like participants in subcultural fashions like lolita or fairy kei (which features pastels, frills and nostalgic 1980s children's characters like My Little Pony), 'cosplayers see their audience as other women fans and not the heterosexual male gaze' (2012, 241). This is an insight into one sector of the cosplay world; however, there are multiple aspects of cosplay, including but not limited to male cosplayers, transgender cosplayers, and, as the next chapter shows, cosplayers whose work is deliberately eroticized and, either in an amateur or professional context, almost certainly aimed at attracting a male sexual gaze. It is thus imperative to also consider other types of cosplayer alongside the assumed standard female fan.

Having said this, statistically there *are* rather more female cosplayers than male (King, 2013), even in English-speaking online fandoms. For example, a survey of cosplay galleries on Cosplay.com, which yielded over 4000 instances of photoshoots featuring *FFVII* characters (Cosplay.com Results, 2014), showed a ratio of approximately three female-identifying cosplayers to one male. The popularity of crossplay in fandoms of initially Japanese series' like Final Fantasy, then, could be partially accounted for, not by fan desire to change identity or to engage in some deliberately subversive gender performance, but by simple demographics: male characters are very popular, and *someone* is going to cosplay them; sheer numbers dictate that some of these cosplayers will be women. As Tanaka suggests, 'in many cases, the leaning of cosplayers towards "*dansō*" [females cosplaying male characters] probably happens unconsciously' (Tanaka, 2009,

40), without any conscious decision to perform a "non-normative" role. Of course, this explanation is not meant to be a final or singular answer to the question of the motivations and pleasures of crossplay. Within the field of *FFVII* crossplay itself, this reason alone cannot account for the vast numbers of female and tiny minority of male crossplayers, or the type of male characters female crossplayers choose to imitate. It is here that more culturally specific factors and issues of normative gender and sexual discourse inform the facts and figures of crossplay.

Female fans cosplaying male characters do comprise the great majority of crossplayers. Female-to-male (FtM) crossplay is known in Japan as "*dansō*" (男装), literally "dressing as a man"; given the lack of standardized English terminology for this practice in cosplay fandoms, this chapter uses the Japanese term, as well as "*josō*" (女装) to refer to the much rarer practice of male-to-female (MtF) crossplay. Tanaka states that many cosplayers perform *dansō* (2009, 39), but makes very little mention of *josō* or reasons for the lack thereof. D*ansō* has become the majority crossplay in game cosplay, and this section suggests that it can provide a potentially non-normative performance of masculinity that is nevertheless not politicized in crossplayer commentary and which has been criticised by some trans cosplay commentators.

Gn claims that 'there has been a growing fascination with…'ambivalent' bodies that display shifting gender markers within contemporary Japanese animation' (2011, 586), games, etc., and that this trend is reflected in the cosplay world. It could be said that *dansō* serves to encourage this, not only by the choice of male characters being crossplayed but also by the ways in which they are cosplayed. Okabe states that female cosplayers who look good dressed as men tend to be popular in the community (2012, 238). However, Yashima points out that 'the "male characters" chosen are not masculine.

There are no female cosplayers wishing to transform into macho characters' (2009, 275). Setting aside the problematic definition of "masculine" for a moment, the second half of her statement, that one never sees traditionally "macho" or hyper-masculine characters being crossplayed, rings somewhat true: the Cosplay.com galleries for *FFVII* character Barret, one of the few characters from the game who could be considered typically "macho", do not contain any examples of crossplay, whereas the majority of the other male characters display many instances of it. Instead, there 'are only *dansō* cosplayers who imitate androgynous characters or those like Sephiroth from FF who look…tall and beautiful' (Yashima, 2009, 275-6). Yashima's citation of one of the most popular *FFVII* characters, Sephiroth, reflects the prominence of "androgynous" or "tall and beautiful" male characters within the Final Fantasy series, and their popularity in crossplay. The Cosplay.com galleries for characters Cloud, Sephiroth and Vincent Valentine show that over half the cosplay for each character is *dansō*. These three are the most popular male characters in terms of total number of *FFVII* cosplayers on this site (451, 180 and 308 respectively at the time of survey), and all fall well within one of the types outlined by Yashima, particularly since the initial 1990s character designs were developed and refined from their original blocky appearance through the film *Advent Children* (2008) and sequel and spinoff games.

The proliferation of *dansō* in cosplay of these types of character is perhaps less due to any ideological gender-centric stance than to the fact that the notions of "authenticity" and '[c]ommitment and adherence to the original character are important' (Rahman, Wing-Sun & Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 326) in the cosplay community; most female cosplayers' features and builds are better suited to achieving a close resemblance to androgynous or *bishōnen* male characters than to "macho", so these are the ones they

choose to cosplay. This can be seen in the rates of crossplay in the Cosplay.com galleries for the various male *FFVII* characters, which rise as the characters display more recognisably androgynous or so-called "feminine" visual traits: from nothing for the hyper-masculine Barret, through an average of 60% for Cloud and Sephiroth, to 91% for Kadaj (whose particularly androgynous features were discussed in Chapter 3).

Okabe, after extensive research interviews with Japanese cosplayers, suggests that these female *dansō* cosplayers may not be interested in creating a "realistic" replication of masculinity (2012, 238); he rather characterises their performance as a postmodern simulation, in which:

> …the masculinity mimicked by cosplayers is a copy without an original. The men modeled by cosplayers do not exist in reality. Rather, cosplayers are referencing the cross-dressing model constructed by the cosplay community…
> (2012, 239)

In this understanding of *dansō*, the primary reference of crossplayers is not even the initial simulacrum of the game character but other cosplay, fan-simulacra at their own level, from among their peers. Certainly, the ideals and knowledge formations constructed in a bottom-up way by a particular cosplay community are given high value by cosplayers in that community (Okabe, 2012, Hjorth, 2011), and Okabe's point is, to an extent, valid. On the other hand, the 'primacy of the affective image' (Gn, 2011, 587) in the form of the initial game character should not be dismissed, particularly when one considers that it is not *only* crossplayers imitating these male characters.

The Cosplay.com survey conducted here showed a rate of 60% *dansō* crossplay in the Cloud and Sephiroth galleries. Almost all of the rest is made up of male-to-male

cosplay[7] of these "androgynous" and "beautiful" characters. So, does it follow that male-to-male cosplayers are also expressing the "cross-dressing model" of the cosplay community suggested by Okabe when they choose to cosplay such characters? Given the high evaluation of what is recognized as "good" crossplay in the cosplay world, it is entirely possible that the aesthetics of popular *dansō* crossplay, which generally enhances the androgynous rather than traditionally masculine (physically strong, muscular) aspects of male characters, do have an impact on choices in male-to-male cosplay as well.

There are also aesthetic modes at work in initial texts of Japanese origin that may encourage the cosplay of characters like Cloud by both male and female cosplayers, and which Hjorth (2011) sees as providing a site peculiarly suited to playing with Western gender binaries and stereotypes by fans. This can be most clearly seen in the concept of *kawaii*, which, as seen in previous chapters, is at work in many forms of Final Fantasy fan media. Gn explains that 'the popularity of the *kawaii* (cute) aesthetic has been pivotal to the growth of the ACG [anime-comic-game] industry and its relevant fan communities' (2011, 584); it is not only within fan-produced media that *kawaii* aesthetics are visible, but also in initial game texts themselves. The assimilation and rising popularity of *kawaii* in wider Japanese culture through its increasing commercialization, as well as in Western fandoms of Japanese media, could also cast doubt on Yashima's (2009) assertion that the male characters being mimicked by crossplayers are "not masculine"; to be sure, according to standards of heretofore dominant and even stereotypical masculinity, they are not. But perhaps, through the cultural capital accorded *kawaii* aesthetics in recent

[7] The remainder (less than 1%) is made up of what is known as "gender-bending": where a cosplayer alters a character's costume to match their own self-identified gender, rather than maintaining strict fidelity to the initial design through crossplay. See Sephiroth gallery of cosplayer ID "precious" for an example: http://www.cosplay.com/costume/419034/. This harks back to the practice in *hentai dōjinshi* of changing male bodies to female to match feminine gender attributes; although in this case gender attributes (costume) are altered to match the sexed body of the cosplayer.

years (including the rise in male beauty practices (Miller, 2006)), definitions of masculinity are expanding to include traits previously defined as "feminine". Iida argues that young Japanese men are beginning to respond to increased female consumer power – a key factor of *kawaii*'s development – with the 'employment of feminine aesthetics and strategies…to redefine masculinity' (Iida, 2005, 57), perhaps in emulation of popular male idol groups like Arashi, who are carefully groomed and styled to appear slender and youthful or "boyish" rather than physically strong or mature (Glasspool, 2012), as this aesthetic is what many Japanese women appear to like (or are encouraged to like by management companies and media). If so, it is possible that both male cosplayers and female crossplayers *are* cosplaying characters who have this newly-defined "masculine" trait; it is simply a different form of masculinity.

The rise of *kawaii* is driven by consumption (as well as capitalism's drive to expand production) and by efforts such as the Japanese government's Cool Japan initiative, which seeks to promote a narrow version of the concept overseas as an aspect of desirable Japaneseness. This indeed raises concerns that the deliberate adoption of *kawaii* aesthetics may lead to a partial commodification of "self" (Davis, 2003); or, specifically in the case of *kawaii* female characters produced and promoted by men, 'only serve[s] to support unthinking consumption' and the status quo (Miller, 2011, 25) instead of acknowledging how *kawaii* is used by some female Japanese practitioners as a form of parody of conservative gender norms: manipulating, tweaking and exaggerating traditional ideals of femininity like sweetness and softness in a drag-like parody (24). Nevertheless, Hjorth suggests that the use of *kawaii* in male and female characters, 'in such key games as *Final Fantasy*, has afforded many 'flexible' modes of gender performativity' (2011, 80). Talking specifically about Western fans of such games, she argues that fan produsage of

Japanese texts like Final Fantasy can create a space in which to perform alternatives to binary gender norms through the fans' attachment to characters with *kawaii* visual traits:

> For non-Japanese, such forms of…self-expression through the *kawaii* – characterized by youthful feminine or androgynous styles…have provided an avenue for creative identity formation and gender performativity that seemingly transcends the gender tropes within Western culture…
> (Hjorth, 2011, 142)

This performativity is not, however, necessarily a deliberate engagement with or critique of gender binaries as such. Hjorth earlier defines *kawaii* as a type of "affective" language (2011, 75); if we think of the affective in Massumi's terms, as 'a prepersonal intensity' (Massumi, 1987, x), a response to another body (physical or digital) that is in operation before it comes into contact with social signification, it could be said that fan cosplay of male characters displaying *kawaii* traits in many cases has little to do with a desire to make a political or identity-based statement. It is rather based on a visceral and unreasoned attraction that leads to a cosplay performance that still incorporates the social (in the form of a set of rules based on peer-reviewed accuracy and familiarity with the character) while disregarding considerations of gender norms.

In this way, it may be that both male cosplayers and *dansō* crossplayers engage in cosplay of male characters of initially Japanese games, highlighting their androgynous and gender-fluid aspects not from motives of gender politics but through the influence of visual ideals generated on a peer level within the cosplay community and the specifically Japanese aesthetic mode of *kawaii*.

Given the acceptability and high cultural capital of the above gender fluidity in the world of Japanese pop culture cosplay, then, we might also expect to see *josō* (MtF)

crossplay flourishing alongside *dansō* practices. However, this is emphatically not the case in either Japan or the West. Male crossplay of *FFVII* female characters, for example, is almost non-existent in English-language cosplay sites, even in the case of character Yuffie, whose character design displays the most "boyish" gender markers of short hair and flat chest. Slightly more common, but only just, is male cosplay of Cloud during his cross-dressing Wall Market episode in the original *FFVII* game (discussed in previous chapters); as a male Cloud cosplayer explains on his Cosplay.com gallery, however, 'No, it's not crossplay' (Nightrain, 2011; username altered for anonymity), because Cloud is still a male character, albeit one currently engaged in a drag performance. There are in fact more instances of female crossplayers cosplaying the cross-dressing Cloud to be seen online than male.

This scarcity of *josō* crossplayers might partially be explained, once again, by the demographics that provide one possible reason for the plethora of *dansō* crossplayers: because there are more female cosplayers overall, cosplay of female characters can be pretty well taken care of without male cosplayers being needed to fill the gaps. This prosaic explanation, though, surely does not account for the really huge disparity in the numbers of *dansō* to *josō* crossplayers, or the sparse coverage of *josō* practices in academic literature (Yashima, 2009, being a rare exception). The English-language cosplay community has generated its own discussion of this question, and sees a possible explanation in the cultural context of Western cosplay, which is practised against a background of still-dominant binary gender/sexual norms and prohibitions that are not particularly open to expressions of gender fluidity when those take the form of explicit male "feminization" through cross-dressing[8].

[8] This is not to say that mainstream Japanese society has less entrenched gender norms than the

Participants in Cosplay.com's Crossplay Construction Forum make it clear that, in the words of one user, 'cosplay is cosplay. Gender and sexuality are trifling concerns compared with what series, what character and whether the safety pins will hold' (Faust, 2003; username altered for anonymity). This expresses the hierarchy of priorities among crossplayers, many of whom also engage in regular (non-crossplay) cosplay: crossplay is not entirely "free expression", as there are many user-generated rules and categories to be observed if one is to do "good" cosplay; but the most important are related to fan knowledge rather than ensuring that genders match up. For these practitioners, insofar as they express their thoughts online, the point of cosplay is showing love for the character (Faststart, 2013; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity); they do it because they like it, not with any 'deeper meaning' (sweetsin, 2013; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). From this perspective, it would appear that for these crossplayers the 'playful engagement with the animated body and their own bears minimal relation to an expression of a certain gender identity' (Gn, 2011, 587), but is based more on how attracted they are to the character (King, 2013, n.p.). Indeed, there are many members of these sites who do both crossplay and "straight" cosplay.

Yashima agrees, concluding that most *josō* crossplay is not a deliberate gender performance but a practice based partly on attraction to particular '*moe*-elements' like hairstyle, glasses and so forth. (Azuma, 2009, 52) displayed by the female character: 'I like maid costumes, so I want to wear one. Kitty ears are cute, so I want to wear a cat-ear

West or is completely *au fait* with male cross-dressing; indeed, some Japanese cosplay events, unlike European ones, ban *josō* crossplay altogether. However, MtF cross-dressing and transgenderism has a prominent place in traditional Japanese arts (the *onnagata* in Kabuki), and in the twenty-first century can be seen in some areas of Japanese media, such as TV variety shows, where gender-fluid comic "talents" like Matsuko are fairly popular (though these have also been criticized for generating narrow stereotypes of transgender people). This does not mean it is more acceptable for the Japanese male population to perform gender fluidity in their everyday lives; but it is at least more visible than in most Western countries.

headband. On the face of it, this is the kind of desire they have' (Yashima, 2009, 268). There is, Yashima argues, no particular wish to "become" a different gender or sex, even temporarily, or to trouble normative binaries in this: it is desire *for* a female character or her elements, not to *be* her, which prompts their performance. It should be noted here that the distinction between 'wanting to be the other and wanting to have the other' (Fuss, 1995, 11) appears to reflect a much-contested tenet of Freudian psychoanalysis in which 'to desire and to identify with the same person at the same time is…a theoretical impossibility' (11). Fuss is intensely critical of this dualistic construction of 'identification and desire as…mutually exclusive' (Butler, 1991, 26); she argues instead that the lines between attraction and identification are much more muddy and complex. Bearing this in mind, it is as well to be wary of Yashima's statement that male crossplayers have no wish to *be* a female character, that is, to identify with her. By being open to the notion of multiple motives for *josō* crossplay, the 'critical displacement of the identification/desire opposition...opens up a new way of thinking about the complexity of sexual identity formations' (Fuss, 1995, 12) through performance. In addition, crossplay is also about displaying liking and loyalty towards a particular character, and so male crossplayers may be 'trying to increase the sense of that character's existence' (Yashima, 2009, 273), raising her profile and visibility in order to make her an "alpha" character within a particular fandom (280). This, of course, can equally be said of *dansō* crossplayers and cosplayers in general.

Nevertheless, it is suggested in cosplay forums that, for *josō* cosplayers, hegemonic norms exert a great deal of influence, multiplying the pressures of social signification beyond the fannish hierarchy operating in *dansō* crossplay. In the UK, for example, it is still considered more "deviant" or "transgressive" for men to cross the dominant gender

binary by cross-dressing than for women. A journal entry on gender in cosplay in the Trans-Cosplayers deviantART group points out that MtFs get a lot more criticism from society in general because what society perceives as transvestitism seems far more taboo for a person born male to participate in (Sacredfire, 2010; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). Cosplay.com user "Maylane" agrees that the same holds true in the cosplay world, where there is not as much stigma attached to crossplaying females crossplaying compared with males, who are more likely to worry about the gender issue, and what portraying a female character could 'appear' as (Maylane, 2008; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). While the user does not explicitly state what this "appear" refers to, we might reasonably assume that, in the process of engaging in a non-normative gender performance, the possibility of non-normative sexuality could also be raised, as the two concepts are still closely linked in Japan and in many Western societies. In Yashima's evaluation, '[a]t the ground level of cosplay, "sexuality" has more stability than "gender"' (2009, 289), suggesting that it is less acceptable within cosplay to display fluid sexuality than gender fluidity. This might become a cause of uneasiness to male cosplayers for whom *josō* is not intended to be a statement regarding either gender or sexuality. Not participating in *josō* could thus be a measure 'to avoid stigmatization by outsiders' (Okabe, 2012, 235) or insiders who are not knowledgeable about crossplay.

According to Gn, 'a particular act of queer simulation – such as a man imitating a female animated character – is deviant in relation to the gendered norms that have been naturalized within the subject's socio-cultural locus' (2011, 590), even if the male crossplayer was operating initially within the field of affect and had given little thought to questions of norms or deviance. Here, normative identity categories impose additional

constraints on the affective pleasures of cosplay, based on the spectre of social stigmas attached to practices still perceived as "deviant" in wider society; suggests that, far from seeking to create performances that "subvert" gender and sexual norms, many male cosplayers actively avoid such performances.

The above collision of socially constructed prohibitions and discourses with the pleasures of affect also offers an explanation for the dominant mode of *josō* practice for men who do engage in crossplay. This mode is one that trans cosplayers find particularly unhelpful for their own identity-based practices, as will be shown shortly, and broadly consists of crossplay for humorous effect. Both Yashima (2009) and King (2013) mention this mode, in which:

> One does not sense many feminine nuances from males cosplaying female characters above the clothing they put on… Unfortunately, it is not possible to see beautiful men who are more feminine than women at cosplay spaces like Comiket.
> (Yashima, 2009, 277)

The closest one is likely to get to this "beautiful man" role is that performed by female *dansō* crossplayers. Other than donning the costume, most male crossplayers do not include any other feminine gender markers in their performance (such as altering the voice, carefully applying makeup, and so on). An exception to this is when *josō* cosplayers attempt to "pass", if not actually as female then as closely resembling the initial character; one of the few examples in English-language *FFVII* fan media online is the user "Tifa Crossplay", who posted a *josō* Tifa image featuring careful attention to costume, makeup and hairstyling on the online cosplay image group Look my Cosplay! (n.d.). However, this type of male crossplay is very rare. Most attitudes of male

crossplayers towards *josō* place 'male-to-female cross-play firmly in the realm of humour' (King, 2013). This is recognized within the cosplay community itself; the author of the Trans-Cosplay DeviantART journal entry on gender and cosplay complains that 'crossplaying men…don't take it seriously and are just doing it as a joke' (Sacredfire, 2010).

By not attempting to "pass" and retaining traditionally masculine gender markers, these *josō* crossplayers are arguably some of the most playful cosplayers in the community, in that they do not feel the need to mimic the initial character or show "fidelity" to the same extent as other cosplayers, and are thereby disqualified from being considered "serious" or "good" cosplay by the standards constructed within the community itself. By highlighting and playing with these community-based categories in cosplay of their favourite characters, these crossplayers may come the closest to Gn's 'playful engagement with the animated body' (Gn, 2011, 587) and are the least deliberately concerned with creating a "good" performance in terms of either cosplay or gender. This, says Gn, is the best way to 'produce a 'pure spectacle' of the image that bears no reference to any essentialist concept of deviance and subversion' (584), thus declining to engage with the binary categories of masculine/feminine or heterosexual/homosexual with any kind of seriousness.

The above discussion shows that the various practices of both *dansō* and *josō* crossplay display a tendency to evade fixed identity- or politics-based statement-making through motivations based more on affective attraction and assimilation of Japanese aesthetic modes like *kawaii*. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, affect and social signification or "meaning" are not necessarily mutually exclusive but exist in different levels of connection within fan communities. Through affective pleasure crossplay, and cosplay

more generally, 'becomes a creative, pleasurable gesture that is at once incompatible with, yet not external to, the discursive effects of the gendered body' (Gn, 2011, 589). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the potential for readings of gender subversion or transgression that could be made in these cosplay performances, even where a crossplayer has no particular intention of challenging normative gender ideals. In this way, English-language crossplay fandoms do contain some possibility, albeit unconsciously, for raising questions about the validity of binary gender discourses.

## 5.4 Engaging with "non-normative" gender performance: "Trans" cosplay

This section turns to the motivations and pleasures of trans cosplayers and the tensions they articulate between themselves and the more affect-based crossplay fans, and suggests that such cosplay explicitly seeks to produce meaning in terms of gender identity.

"Trans" cosplay is represented on a fan level by various online cosplay groups, which offer a number of definitions. The deviantART group "TG-Cosplay" states on its front page that it offers 'a haven for transgendered cosplayers' (TG-Cosplay, 2010), suggesting that its focus is on specifically transgendered fans. The "Trans-Cosplay" group on the same site defines trans cosplay a little more broadly, advertising itself as a 'Support Group Community for Transgender, Intersex and Gender Variant Cosplayers…to express their chosen gender identity irrespective of their assigned biological sex at birth or current status in their Transition, whether it be pre-operative, post-operative, etc.' (Trans-Cosplayers, 2010) The phrase "gender variant", in particular, could encompass a wide range of identifications. The support offered is not only for cosplay-related issues (costume construction, chest-binding etc.) but also for living as a trans individual outside

the world of cosplay.

Yashima comments on the gender fluidity that many scholars and crossplayers see in current cosplay: 'In a cosplay setting…the forms of gender/sexuality expressed cannot be understood in terms of a "nature" or "true identity"' (2009, 288). Despite this frequently expressed opinion, what all trans cosplay groups do appear to agree on is support for the concept of a "true" gender identity, not based on biological sex at birth but nevertheless essential: TG-Cosplay insists it is for 'those of us who want our true, inner gender to be acknowledged', while Trans-Cosplay explains that for 'trans-cosplayers, dressing as a character of their gender is a tool used to further their attempts at…presenting their true gender to society' (2010). This is one of the clearest distinctions to be made between crossplay and trans cosplay. Gn, in his paper supporting an affect-based analysis of cosplay, is doubtful of the efficacy of explicitly identity-based challenges to normative gender discourses, as such an approach, 'with its constant reference to established gender norms, precisely 're-inscribes' the dominant ideology it claims to work against' (2011, 590). However, it must be considered that trans cosplayers are not necessarily attempting to move beyond or break down gender and sex binaries as such; rather, many are concerned with locating themselves on what they see as the "correct" side of the boundary line. They may be considered non-normative according to hegemonic discourse that states one's gender should match one's sexed body, but most do not appear to wish to undo these categories entirely.

Further, these online communities, in addition to supporting cosplayers who locate themselves under the "trans" umbrella, also profess to have a didactic function which takes such groups beyond personal support for their members and into the realm of the political. For this reason they also welcome cosplayers and fans who are not "trans" but

who are interested in and supportive of trans people (although pictures in the groups' galleries are usually required to be trans cosplay), with the aim of disseminating information and understanding of transgender issues in general as well as the motivations of trans cosplay. The front page of TG Cosplay states that '[w]e hope to educate the world about alternative genders and sexualities', and aligns itself specifically with 'the LGBT movement', which has always been involved openly in identity-based political activity. The manifesto of this deviantART group, then, is explicitly political and activist, in contrast to groups that focus on crossplay. The Trans-Cosplay group also identifies with the LGBT community, displaying its alignment through the presence of banners on its main page linking to other LGBT-related groups on deviantART, such as "LGBT Cosplay" and "Rainbow-Support". These affiliated groups are not only specific to cosplay but also include lifestyle and identity support groups, highlighting the fact that trans cosplay communities, while focusing on cosplay and fandom, are also centrally concerned with supporting their members' identity issues outside cosplay and spreading understanding of transgendered people and LGBT more generally.

The main motive of these groups, it seems, is to provide a space in which trans people can express their "true" identity and become part of a support network; and the choice of cosplay as the medium through which to do this surely has significance. The reason many trans cosplayers give, apart from the many fan-based motives for cosplay more generally, is that cosplay is a space apart from the so-called real world (Chen, 2007) and everyday life (Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung, 2012). The author of the Trans-Cosplayers journal entry discussed above explains that for trans-cosplayers, dressing as their gender by cosplaying a character that matches their gender is used to support their attempts to present their 'true gender' to society and be understood. Dressing

as a character of their gender is a 'step outside' of their real lives (Sacredfire, 2010; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity).

It is important to note, however, that cosplay in this sense is not necessarily viewed by trans cosplayers as 'a form of escapism' (Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung 2012, 333) or pure fantasy, as it may be for some other cosplayers; the "real" world here is not opposed to a wholly "imaginary" cosplay world. Rather, for these cosplayers the gender they present through mimicking a particular character is more "true" or "real" than the one they are (mistakenly and because of their anatomical sex) presumed by others to hold in everyday life. They 'use cosplay to further their gender image to the world, as a means to present themselves in the *right* gender' (TG-Cosplay, 2010). In this way, instead of an escapist space or a site of fantasy that is primarily playful, trans cosplay 'presents an alternative reality that functions as a more humane and democratic society than the real world' (Chen, 2007, 22). Contrary to the 'dreamlike states of hyperreality' (Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 333) which scholars argue define many types of cosplay performance, for trans cosplayers it is a gendered performance that they feel to be more "real" than the real world. This is another area in which trans cosplay can be demonstrated to differ from crossplay and other forms of cosplay, where affect and playfulness are of great importance.

Nevertheless, this "alternative reality" in which one's "true" gender can be presented is not without its difficulties, which many trans cosplayers in their online commentaries link directly with crossplay. One aspect of this appears to be linked to the performance of *dansō* cosplayers and the type of masculinity they present, as covered earlier in the crossplay discussion. The author of the Trans-Cosplayers journal article reflects the opinions of Yashima (2009) and Okabe (2012) that female crossplayers, who

are to be widely seen in most areas of cosplay, do not seek to give a "masculine" performance when they mimic male characters:

> Crossplaying fangirls do not attempt to make themselves more masculine, and do not state that they are attempting to present as male. This creates a stereotype, a false benchmark, for watchers to think of all cosplayers they assume to be anatomically female as "just crossplaying fangirls," disregarding the ideaa that there could be something more to the situation.
> (Sacredfire, 2010; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

The prevalence of *dansō* crossplay in the cosplay world, argues the author, can have a detrimental impact on the project of FtM trans cosplayers of presenting a "real" gender that is at odds with their anatomical sex; for, as one trans user states in this article's comments section on the same page, 'when I cosplay as a male character, this is not cross-dressing. I am a man' (active-bones in Sacredfire, 2010; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). However, observers instead mistakenly view such trans cosplayers as "standard" crossplayers, who, according to active-bones, are getting completely different outcomes and pleasures from cosplay than trans people, making it more difficult for the intentions of trans-cosplayers to be perceived (2010; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). Though these trans cosplayers are arguably using cosplay as a form of coming-out, the dominance of "standard" crossplay, and the assumption that this is what they are doing, merely produces 'different region[s] of opacity' (Butler, 1991, 25): their performance is not understood as coming-out, and they are therefore forced to remain closeted. It could be said that the author here is referring to the more playful and affect-based pleasures of crossplay, viewing them as contrasting and even detrimental to the serious business of gender presentation in trans cosplay.

Other fan commentary on this article also displays agreement with the author's opinions. User “Prof-Nusken” points out that people regard crossplay as somewhat of a standard in the cosplay world and will not modify their ideas to include ‘transpeople’ (Prof-Nusken in Sacredfire, 2010; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity), while Sacredfire agrees that the different motives and pleasures of the two forms of cosplay makes things difficult regarding the identity-based aims of trans cosplayers, particularly when the two might be inseparable to the average observer (2010; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). This comment also highlights the importance for trans cosplayers of being gazed upon, and the importance of being observed in a particular way. This shows that it is not simply the performance itself that is significant in trans cosplayers’ attempts to make meaning through cosplay, but also the reception of that performance.

While the majority of user commentary in these trans cosplay communities focuses on the difficulties created by the more prolific and widely observable *dansō* crossplay, the discussion is sometimes extended to include *josō* crossplay as well. The author of the Trans-Cosplayers article calls this a “side-query”, again demonstrating the relative rarity of male crossplay, but does state that the feelings of MtFs are hurt by men who crossplay but don't take it seriously and are just doing it for a laugh (Sacredfire, 2010; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). The author comments that, while it is good for MtF crossplayers to have the fortitude (in terms of gender) to step ‘out of the box’ and show appreciation for their fandom, it is all too common to see people engage in this practice simply because it is funny (Sacredfire, 2010; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). It appears that, for this trans user, fandom is a serious business.

As in the discussion above, the pleasures of *josō* crossplay are considered here to be mainly humour-based and somewhat different from those found in *dansō* crossplay; nevertheless, the shared element of crossplayers "not taking it seriously" remains. This illustrates the fundamental difference, for trans cosplayers at least, between crossplay and trans cosplay. As Cosplay.com user "Ranma 1-2" explains, crossplayers are ''playing' at being a character. [At the e]nd of the con the makeup, wig, costume, all comes off and we go home. We don't live like this' (Ranma 1-2, 2009). As Lamerichs states, 'this practice is occasional and, to some degree, ludic' (2011). It is here that the ludic element, or the "play", of cosplay becomes a significant term: for crossplayers, while they are generally in earnest about displaying love for their fandom and giving a "good" performance, in terms of gender at least it is playful in the sense of not being fixed or essential but something that can be assumed or set aside depending on the context of the performance. Trans cosplayers, on the other hand, are precisely opposite in that they very much wish to "live like this", to live and be recognized as the gender of the character they are cosplaying, something they often find difficult outside the cosplay world; for such fans, cosplay is not so much "play" as a gender statement of the utmost personal and political significance. This may explain the assertion of the above trans cosplayers that crossplayers do not "take it seriously". The "it" in this phrase is ambiguous: what are crossplayers not taking seriously? Given the criticism of *josō* crossplay and its humorous motives, perhaps it is cosplay itself. However, "it" is more likely to refer to gender, which for trans cosplayers is bound up with cosplay at a basic level. Although crossplay does generate discussions of gender and sexuality (as in the Cosplay.com forum threads discussed earlier), trans cosplayers appear to recognize that the practice of crossplay itself is less concerned with meaning-making and more about various types of affection for a

character or the desire to create "good", highly-evaluated cosplay through the use of challenging costuming techniques. While trans cosplay politicizes the concept of a "true" identity, crossplay revels in the in-between-ness of affect. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that there is no element of affect present in trans cosplayers' choice of particular characters, or that these two cosplay practices are binary opposites; there is rather the potential for both affective and social dimensions, to different extents, to exist in both crossplay and trans cosplay.

This chapter has demonstrated that cosplay fan practices cannot simply be characterized as either apolitical play or deliberate gender transgression. Both the affective and social signification aspects of Gilbert's (2004) discussion of affect exist within game cosplay fandoms, sometimes directly opposing one another but both sharing space on the spectrum. Given this, it is inaccurate to say that postmodern media spaces are totally apolitical or that their inhabitants are unwilling to engage in gender activism. Certainly, this can be seen to some extent, as was discussed in the previous *dōjinshi* chapters, and is visible in the crossplay practices detailed in this chapter; but the coexistence of crossplay and trans cosplay, despite the tensions between them, shows that more traditional forms of politicized activity are still ongoing among media audiences and fan produsers. It is, therefore, unhelpful to try to categorize or label a fandom in a definitive way, or to argue that either "serious" or "playful" modes of gender performance should be preferable in fan activities. In cosplay, at least, the question of breaking down gender and sexual hegemonic binaries is rendered rather problematic by the disinclination of crossplayers to notice or engage with them in the first place, and by the identity-based practices of trans

cosplayers who aim to assert their “true” position within these binary structures but do not actually seek to undermine the structures themselves.

The next chapter will maintain the focus on gender in cosplay, while also bringing in issues more closely related to sexuality through a discussion of eroticized/pornographic cosplay practices and images, and the ways in which this type of cosplay generates questions around the notions of fandom and authenticity and subject and object categories.

# 6. Sex Sells: Fandom and the eroticization of cosplay



## 6.1 Introduction

It is acknowledged by the majority of cosplay fans and practitioners that 'cosplay is centrally concerned with embodying a character accurately' (Lamerichs, 2011). However, there is a particular type of cosplay that calls the primacy of this aim into question. Known variously as "sexy", "eroticized" and even "pornographic" cosplay, this group of practices has not yet been dealt with extensively in academia but is frequently discussed and debated within cosplay and wider Japanese pop culture fandoms. Such cosplays offer another motivation for cosplay performance, namely eliciting a response or generating attention based on sexual appeal, something that opens up a potential space for further considerations of *moe* and affect and how they relate to the body and digital image within fandom.

This chapter discusses the ways in which cosplay fans respond to eroticized performances, and how this relates to community concepts of fandom and authenticity. It examines how similarities between erotic/pornographic video game cosplay and the *hentai dōjinshi* covered in Chapter 3 demonstrate the postmodern web of intertextuality between different practices in *FFVII* fandoms. It then returns to theories of affect, attempting to demonstrate that the affective responses made possible through

pornographic cosplay performances might enable us to find new perspectives on the much-debated topic of gender and pornography, although erotic cosplay images do initially invoke the stereotypical figure of woman as sexualized object seen in *hentai dōjinshi*. This chapter suggests that the concept of the social decreases in importance as the cosplay performance becomes more sexually explicit and generates a more physically engaged affective response. Further, the consumption of this type of "sexualized" digital cosplay image complicates the binary concept of subject-object, in terms of men as subject and women as object, and human fan as subject and character image as object; this will be revisited in the discussion of gameplay in Chapter 7.

## 6.2 Sexualization and "sexy" cosplay

The terms "sexy", "erotic" or "pornographic" suggest that issues of sexuality will be pertinent when dealing with this type of cosplay in an English-speaking context. Indeed, the word "sexualization" is sometimes used interchangeably with "eroticization" by fans in online discussions of such cosplay, as well as "sexiness" and "sexuality". Clearly, in fan commentary at least, sexuality is a theme of interest. Narrowing English-language fandoms further (insofar as this is possible in a largely computer-mediated age) to a UK context, it can be seen that the issue of "sexualization" and its problematization has become similarly high-profile there in recent years.

There does not appear to be much contention from scholars about the supposition that sexual imagery is on the increase in the UK. Evans, Ripley and Shankar state that in 'Britain, this mainstreaming of sexual explicitness…has been a defining aspect of culture

in the early part of the millennium' (Evans, Ripley & Shankar, 2010, 114). Other scholars agree:

> …we do think 'sexualization' (in scare quotes) is useful for signalling the changing nature of sexual representations, particularly the normalization of explicit content in everyday contexts, often related to the normalization of pornography.
> (Ringrose & Eriksson Baraja, 2011, 124)

Lambiase suggests that 'mainstream sites…tap into a reservoir of sexual connotations familiar to Web users who access pornographic sites' (Lambiase, 2003, 61) in a process that has become known as "pornification" (Ringrose & Eriksson Baraja, 2011, 134). It could be argued, therefore, that the presence of eroticized (though not necessarily explicitly pornographic) cosplay at conventions and online may be due partly to tropes of highly visible sexuality that have been normalized through mainstream media images outside the cosplay community. Such sexualized images, which have become widely available through the Internet, may be familiar to some cosplayers; cosplay also spread internationally in large part due to the Internet, as mentioned in Chapter 5, and cosplayers today use online resources extensively. Many would therefore have encountered the ways in which people can access porn privately and freely online, even if they do not use those avenues themselves.

The concept of sexualization in general not only raises questions of sexuality but also of gender, in that the sexualized images provided in UK media are overwhelmingly related to women, and display a change from an older stereotype of passive heterosexual femininity 'towards a more active, confident and autoerotic sexuality' (Evans, Ripley & Shankar, 2010, 115). There appear to be two basic stances on this gendered sexualization:

one viewing it as positive, in that passivity is no longer a valued characteristic of femininity (114), and the other troubled by the view that such female subjectivities simply re-enact the male-gaze ideal and objectification of women (116). It has also been argued that this excludes 'those who are not young, white, heterosexual or otherwise conforming to a narrow, globalized homogenizing conceptualization of female beauty' (115).

The latter issue can be seen to a certain extent within cosplay fandoms. Commentary on online forums includes fans who view the high acclaim given to "sexy" or eroticized cosplayers problematically, as promoting a particular ideal of femininity and thus marginalizing or illegitimizing bodies that do not fit this ideal, detracting from the idea that cosplay is for everyone. Okabe mentions that even his female cosplayer respondents 'made comments such as "I want cute girls to cosplay" and "To be honest, I don't want unattractive girls to cosplay"' (Okabe, 2012, 242). Other fans disapprove of this stance: one, in an online forum discussion on whether sexy cosplay is "ruining" the fandom, comments that such cosplays lead to "fat shaming", or insulting a cosplayer because they 'don't have a perfect body' (D.L in Cute Lush, 2014; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). On the other hand, many other fans appear to support the idealized bodies of eroticized cosplay, with comments such as 'only hot chicks should cosplay' (SimplyAlex, 2013; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). These fans frequently identify as male.

This gender-specific conception of sexualization is interesting in the context of cosplay, not least because the vast majority of eroticized or pornographic cosplay performances are enacted by female cosplayers; fan commentary on the subject also deals almost exclusively with women. With this increasingly prominent rhetoric of gendered sexualization in the UK as a backdrop, this section will now go on to examine the "bodily

display" of cosplayers performing eroticized or "sexy" cosplay in both amateur and professional roles, and how online fan commentary responds to such performances.

Both at live conventions and online, we can observe cosplay performances that are labelled by other fans as "sexy" or eroticized. These appellations generally point to certain shared features, including clothing that reveals a lot of skin, and prominent display of cleavage, buttocks and other typically sexualized body parts within the rules of the particular convention or website. It may also refer to certain poses or behaviour that, outside the cosplay community (and possibly derived from pornographic visual conventions that have become familiarized through the "pornification" of culture), tend to be read as sexually suggestive. Some of these cosplayers are amateur performers, while others have carved out careers as cosplay "models", working professionally either for themselves or as representatives of companies and events in the ACG (anime-comic-game) world (often known as "booth babes"). If they all have one thing in common, however, it is that they identify and perform as female.

Fan commentary on such cosplay also deals almost exclusively with female cosplayers, as these are most visible in cosplay media. This may reflect the claims by Evans, Ripley and Shankar (2010, 114) that articulation of the sexualization of culture is focused on a particular *female* subjectivity, which also holds true in Japan, according to Kinsella, where various kinds of media 'featuring girls dominate the content of contemporary Japanese culture' (Kinsella, 2006, 68). The type of sexual subjectivity in Japan may vary from that articulated in UK discourse, being centred on the figure of the teenage girl rather than women in their 20s; still, 'material about girls has rarely excluded a dosage of visceral titillation' (66). It is thus unsurprising that English-speaking fans of Japanese pop culture texts and practices would see issues of sexuality in cosplay as

pertaining particularly to female cosplayers, with a double discourse of female sexualization coming at them from both their own cultural context and that of their chosen fandom.

The body of fan commentary on eroticized cosplay shows a split between fans who criticise it as distancing the cosplayer in question from an "authentic" fan position, and fans who applaud it, either as a postfeminist performance of active female sexuality or as a source of sexual stimulation. This chapter examines these various fan positions using the example of American cosplay "model" Jessica Nigri (Nigri, n.d.), who was at the time of writing the most frequently discussed practitioner of eroticized cosplay in English-language online cosplay communities.

Jessica Nigri has become known as a successful professional cosplayer in the English-speaking ACG community, in that cosplay is how she earns her living. Self-identifying as a gamer, anime fan and cosplayer, Nigri attends ACG events in the USA, UK and other international locations, participating in cosplay panels and featured booths (for example at London's MCM Expo[1]) and working for hire at conventions as a spokeswoman or model for various ACG-related products and companies. She has a strong online presence, not just in terms of fan discussion and dissemination of her images but also through running her own Facebook page, YouTube channel and being active on SNS like Twitter. Although her Facebook page is full of her own fannish commentary on anime and games and the processes of her costume construction, Nigri has become best known for her commercial "sexy" or eroticized cosplay images. As forum poster "Cute Lush" comments, 'you can't bring up "sexy cosplay"' and not mention Jessica Nigri'

[1]http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/mcm-expo-london-jessica-nigri-invite-jessica-nigri-to-mcm-expo-london This petition website shows that Nigri was requested by over 700 people to attend the Expo, and suggests, from the 'UK-based fans' comment, that these people are fans of *her*, the cosplayer, not just the characters she enacts. Accessed August 21, 2014.

(Cute Lush, 2014; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). It is this sexualized aspect of her practices that has generated such large amounts of fan commentary that relate to the wider issues of fandom and authenticity.

First, there is a body of commentary that applauds eroticized performances by female cosplayers on the basis that such performances contribute to a postfeminist kind of "freedom", a neo-liberalist active female subjectivity. It argues that, as cosplay is supposed to be all-inclusive, it should allow for the freedom of expression of any identity. As "Cute Lush" puts it, people have the right 'to show as little or as much…as they want', arguing that there is no "right" way to cosplay. On another forum thread, one commenter "AryaO" says of Nigri, 'more power to her' because she does what she wants (AryaO in SolveoTabete, 2013; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity), suggesting that the ability to choose the sexuality one performs is a form of power in itself.

A second, larger body of fan commentary is opposed to Nigri's performance, arguing that such eroticized cosplay conversely makes too much of sexuality, detracting from the prime objective of cosplay, which is seen as "authentic" costumes and fidelity to the initial character. Such commenters argue that this is what demonstrates one's fan status, as an accurate costume shows the cosplayer is familiar with, and respectful of, the initial character and text (Rahman, Wing-Sun & Hei-man Cheung, 2012). Part of this criticism is of her costume choices in general, even when the initial character dresses revealingly. This type of comment appears to be concerned about the way such cosplay could impact negatively on outsiders' impressions, casting an unwanted pall of sexuality across the cosplay fandom as a whole: "AryaO", while supportive of Nigri's right to perform whatever sexuality she chooses, qualifies this by commenting that she does not altogether agree with mainstream ideas about cosplay being 'something to be sexualized'

(AryaO in SolveoTabete, 2013; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). This opinion is echoed by a female cosplayer and member of the video game industry, who, in an article on the Japanese pop culture magazine site Kotaku.com about female sexualization in cosplay, says:

> There seems to be an impression from those external to the cosplay community that the hobby is sexual at its core. Can cosplay be sexy? Absolutely. To assume that sexy is the endgame for all who participate, though, is very misguided…
> (Marie, 2013)

Because cosplayers like Nigri generate income from cosplay through photo sales and paid work at conventions, etc., they are particularly concerned with disseminating their images as widely as possible, which may make them visible to a larger audience of non-cosplayers than amateur cosplayers, who only share their images on specialist sites like Cosplay.com. Cosplay fans like those above thus see eroticized cosplay as having become the unfortunate image of the fandom for outsiders, because it is specifically through eroticization that cosplayers like Nigri manage to reach audiences outside the fandom. Forum user "Hedgehog" brings a gendered dimension to this argument, explaining that:

> I object to the assumption made in our culture that sexy cosplay is mainly for women, or the assumption that, when observing a woman in cosplay who happens to appear physically attractive, it is meant to be sexy. To put it another way, it's this obsession with sexuality, the linking of sexiness to women while excluding other qualities (like the standard of the cosplay) that I have a problem with.
> (Hedgehog in Ravenclaw, 2012; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity)

This shows that the commenter is not only worried about detraction from the importance of authentic costuming but also about the gendered aspect of sexualization discussed earlier.

One of the possible reasons why "inauthentic" cosplays are derided by critics of eroticized cosplay and their performers regarded as "un-fannish" can be located in Galbraith's conceptualization of *moe* as 'a word to express affect, or to identify a form that resonates and can trigger an intensity' (Galbraith, 2009). As he explains, 'costumes and people inspire *moe* because they are associated with fantasy characters' (2009). Some fans may not be able to experience the pleasurable response of *moe*, therefore, without an accurate costume that conforms to the initial character image; this may lead to the low evaluation of such cosplay as 'an insult to the source material' (Trees in SolveoTabete, 2013; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity), because the observer is unable to be inspired with the response they might feel when looking at the initial character.

This type of criticism appears to be especially marked when the cosplayer eroticizes a character outfit that did not originally display any markers of overt sexuality, as in the case of some gender-bend MtF costumes or eroticized cosplay of childish, nonhuman or non-gender-specific characters. A look at Nigri's commercial sales site, Nigri Please (Nigri, 2016), on which she sells signed prints of her cosplay images, shows numerous examples of such alterations. While some, such as her Rikku from *Final Fantasy X-2* (Square Enix, 2003), are fairly faithful to the initial character design, others depart from the initial designs quite dramatically. Nigri's gender-bend cosplay of male character Link from the Japanese RPG series *Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1985-2013) features a figure-hugging short dress and tights that accentuate her hyper-feminine body shape, while her

cosplay of one Pokémon (Nintendo, 1996-2013) character, whose initial design is not remotely human, displays an even more radical departure in the form of cleavage-enhancing bikini and skin-tight dress (much as a Playboy Bunny bears minimal resemblance to a real rabbit). Fan responses to these cosplays vary, but a considerable number take issue with Nigri for over-sexualizing the characters she performs. Cosplayer and male-identified blogger "Birch", in an article titled "Jessica Nigri: Cosplaying Controversy", complains that she'over-sexualizes' some of her cosplays, and that he does not like it when she 'sexualize[s] young characters' or creates a sexy cosplay costume from a media text where sexiness seems incongruous, like a children's anime (Birch, 2013; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). It seems that cosplaying with a costume or performance that does not reflect the initial character's represented level of sexuality is objectionable here: it does not "make sense" in terms of the text it was taken from, and may therefore hint that the cosplayers in question are not that knowledgeable about the anime/game they are cosplaying and 'are just doing it to show off' (IceToast in SolveoTabete, 2013; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). In a community where knowledge of one's chosen media text carries a certain status and value, straying from the initial character, particularly through sexualization, can clearly diminish one's fan status.

However, Galbraith's analysis of *moe* and sexuality (2009) suggests that eroticized cosplay images of non-sexualized initial characters may not point to lack of knowledge or fannish-ness at all but rather reflect the *moe* response that allows a double reading of characters as simultaneously non-sexual and erotic. This is possible, explains Galbraith, due to the postmodern characteristics of Japanese pop culture fandoms, particularly Azuma's (2009) database of *moe*-elements, which includes the exclusion of a need for

narrative coherency. Such a conceptualization renders the concept of "authenticity" somewhat redundant: both initial text and fan-created images are simulacra, so it is rather "imaginings" of authenticity, much like Iwabuchi's (2002) imaginings of Japaneseness, to which cosplay fans attach value. Therefore, '*moe* can be both pure and perverse because there is no grand narrative connecting moments of pleasure endlessly reproduced as simulacra'; so a 'pure character can be approached as erotic, or vice versa' (Galbraith, 2009). In this theorization, both sexual and non-sexual responses to a character image are valid and "fannish". It cannot be categorically stated that Nigri's choices of costume are based purely on an affective *moe* response of unconscious attraction to the initial characters; cosplay is, after all, her source of income, and 'the conventional wisdom that sex sells and attracts attention has been used since the late 1800s in Western societies' (Lambiase, 2003, 60); thus her particular mode is at least partially a conscious business decision. However, neither can we say that there is not an element of affective response in her erotic cosplay choices and performances, because she is clearly aware of the potential for eroticism in the characters she selects; or, if the affective response is not present in Nigri herself, it certainly is in a considerable proportion of her fans and supporters.

This leads us to the third type of fan commentary surrounding Nigri and other "sexy" or erotic cosplayers. This positive response suggests that one of the affective responses to cosplay has a very definite sexual element for some fans, who do not see fidelity to the initial character image as the zenith of "good" or legitimate cosplay. These fans value deliberately eroticized cosplay highly as having a sexual function of masturbatory gratification, which they do not appear to rate lower than costuming skills and accuracy or knowledge of the initial text. Commenter "SimplyAlex" gives a straightforward

account of the response generated by erotic cosplay, writing that he or she[2] openly admits to liking hot cosplayers because they provide 'good fap [masturbation] material' (SimplyAlex in in SolveoTabete, 2013; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). Another forum user on the same page articulates the stance that both fidelity to costume and eroticization can carry value for some cosplay fans: All that matters in cosplay is a) if the costume and person suit the character or b) if it's a real 'hot babe'. According to this user Nigri falls into the second category, and is therefore 'making cosplay better' (Ragex in SolveoTabete, 2013; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity).

Galbraith also accords eroticized interpretations of characters that inspire *moe* with legitimacy through his above theorization of pure/erotic doubling in affective *moe* response, and also with his statement that the 'pleasure derived from *moe* characters is not always physical, but is masturbatory because, even when emotional, the pleasure is derived by and for the individual' (Galbraith, 2009). Neither emotional masturbatory pleasure (non-sexual affective fannish pleasure acknowledged by the majority of cosplayers as legitimate when responding to character images) nor physical is set up as more "appropriate" or authentic than the other; they are both affective pleasures in the sense that they create potential in the affected body for action (though these differ according to whether it is emotional pleasure, which leads to cosplay, or physical, which can prompt actual masturbation), existing along a spectrum that spans the non-sexual, the erotic and the explicitly sexual images present in online cosplay media. This calls into question the prevailing view in cosplay that fandom equals knowledge of a media text

[2] While SimplyAlex could be female (as indeed could any of these commenters, even those who identify themselves as male online), the word "fap" as a term for masturbation tends to be used by people who identify as American males more than females in popular culture and online discussions.

and that the prime motive of cosplay should be to enact and consume 'cosplay as a respectful and authentic form of (re)presentation' (Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 335).

## 6.3 Authenticity and subjectivity in pornographic cosplay

Much as the enactment of eroticized cosplay is performed largely by female cosplayers, so the physical masturbatory response to such cosplay appears to be mainly from users who identify as male (although, of course, one of the defining characteristics of online fandom is a high level of anonymity and choice of what identity to perform in a particular online space). This once again draws issues of gender into the field of sexuality in cosplay. This section explores the gendered sexual response to eroticized video game cosplay images in terms of affect and the question of subject and identification, using four free and commercial websites that feature professional cosplay ranging from "sexy" to fully pornographic, and two amateur cosplay videos uploaded to free video hosting sites. This discussion will include both the response of the cosplayers themselves and of their viewers.

The four main example sites offer erotic/sexual images described as "cosplay", and purport, to different extents, to provide cosplay models who are also "fans". Three of the sites, NSFW Gamer (n.d.a), Cosplay Deviants (2007) and Cosplay Erotica (n.d.), are also connected through advertising. The fourth, JCosPlay.com (n.d.), offers the highest level of explicitness in its pornography, as well as being the only site to feature exclusively "Asian" models and also male performers. The latter three sites are commercial or "paysites", while NSFW Gamer offers free content but displays prominent links to

Cosplay Deviants and Cosplay Erotica. These three linked sites all offer video game cosplay, including the Final Fantasy series. The fourth, as will be shown, is far broader in its definition of cosplay. These sites demonstrate that, just as a whole spectrum of experience exists between social signification and affect, there are also various levels of sexual explicitness; and, connected to this, is another spectrum of "fannish-ness". This section argues that, as levels of explicitness increase and the type of affect shifts from emotional to physical masturbatory response (Galbraith, 2009), the display of fannish knowledge decreases. It also uses two amateur cosplay videos, which are eroticized performances of the character Tifa from *FFVII*, to augment this argument, and also to discuss the possibilities of movement-vision, or the ways video technology enable humans to view their own moving bodies in their entirety from the same visual perspective as another person (Massumi, 2002, 50-51) for complicating the subject/object binary.

The two user-uploaded Tifa cosplay videos on free access sites YouTube and Xvideos.com proclaim their performers' connection of the cosplay with fan knowledge by use, in the first video, of background music from *FFVII*, and in the second by the cosplayer displaying a Final Fantasy poster on the wall of her bedroom, beneath which she shows herself masturbating, operating the camera herself. NSFW Gamer, in addition to posting erotic cosplay images, also publishes interviews with featured female cosplayers alongside their images, which fall into the "sexy"/erotic category. These interviews function to highlight the cosplayer's fan knowledge. For example, an interview with an erotic Tifa cosplayer (DarkTifa in Cosplay Spotlight, 2014; username altered for anonymity) states that not only is she a cosplayer and game fan but also a journalist in the anime/gaming world, thus displaying status through a presumably high level of otaku

knowledge in both her work and private life. DarkTifa locates herself as a *FFVII* fan, citing it as her top video game and Tifa as one of the characters that "inspires" her, as can be seen by her chosen handle on her deviantART page (2006). NSFW Gamer makes a strong effort to portray itself as a site created with fans, by fans and for fans, while in cosplay terms its images remain in the non-hardcore "sexy"/erotic categories. Cosplay Deviants, likewise, does not stray into pornographic cosplay territory, and also publicizes its models' fan status, linking the cosplayers to the users of the site with statements like '[a]ll of the Cosplay Deviants are cosplayers / gamers / comic & sci-fi just like you' (Tour at…, 2007) and 'are cosplayers, geeks, fans, or nerds in some way…we do not accept the 'random chick in a costume' as Deviant material' (FAQ at…, 2013). The cosplay images on this site shows partial and full nudity with recognizable character costumes, which enable the possibility of an emotional *moe* response to the characters.

Cosplay Erotica raises the level of explicitness to include solo and female-female sex acts, and, like the previous two sites, offers recognizable character cosplays from both Japanese and Western initial texts. It also provides links to blog pages ostensibly run by its professional models, such as "Lea" (LeaLee, n.d.; username altered for anonymity). Lea's page contains official Cosplay Erotica photos in the central panel, and, in a smaller side panel, content that might demonstrate fannish-ness, such as initial character images she would like to cosplay, and photographs of her early, non-erotic amateur cosplays. The insistence on the fan status of the models, however, is not so pronounced as on Cosplay Deviants. There is also a distinct lack of promotion of "Japaneseness", which, in the absence of fannish-ness on the site, might be considered another trigger for a *moe* response in some pop culture fans who grant imagined Japaneseness high, almost fetishistic, cultural capital (Iwabuchi, 2002). Indeed, the site conversely promises

'EXCLUSIVE European Models' (Cosplay Erotica, n.d.), thereby distancing itself from the intersection of cosplay and Japanese pop culture fandoms.

The final site, JCosPlay, returns to the privileging of Japaneseness by calling itself 'Japanese Cosplay' (JCosPlay.com, n.d.). However, its promotion of "Japanese" elements (apparently interchangeable with "Asian" in the site's text) rather comes across as a subgenre of pornography one might find on generic porn video upload sites Xvideos (XVIDEOS.COM, n.d.) than as an appeal to specifically Japanese pop culture fans. The only site featuring hardcore pornography, it is also the loosest in its definition of "cosplay". Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung point out that lately, cosplay's 'meaning has expanded to include almost any type of dressing up' (2012, 318), and this is clearly how JCosPlay is using the term: the site includes very few recognizable characters, and is mainly populated with non-specific schoolgirl sailor uniforms, maid costumes, women in Japanese yukata, and older housewives or "office ladies" in their thirties and forties. Compared to the way the previous three sites define cosplay, it is extremely broad, the word being used more as an indicator of general sexual role-play, which is distinct from most fan understandings of cosplay. The text beside the images also mentions the performers by their industry names, but does not state any character names; this clearly points to the focus of desire being the model, and not the character fantasy, which is what *moe* derives from (Galbraith, 2009). It could be argued that this site's more explicit sexual content is calculated to encourage the most direct sexual response in its users, with the height of the affective experience as the moment of masturbatory orgasm rather than the emotional "masturbation" of the fannish *moe* response.

For Hardy (2004) and Rounthwaite (2011), pornography is the media form with the strongest potential to cause a response in the user (though other visual genres like horror

or some comedy are also geared to cause a visceral response). Hardy states that 'no other representational genre requisitions the emotional disposition of its audience in such a direct way' (2004, 13). Rounthwaite, further, insists that the potential of pornography to create a response goes beyond the spheres of representation and emotion, both of which are part of the realm of social signification. Porn is significant, he believes, because of its affective possibilities; more than this, its affective *necessity*: after all, porn 'needs a certain kind of affect: without the ability to generate erotic pleasure, it is fundamentally unsuccessful' (Rounthwaite, 2011, 64). Thinking of pornography in this way, he argues – as 'a form of performance documentation that is designed to create a new performance…in the viewer' (63) – enables us to look at the genre in a new way, 'shifting away from questions of censorship, freedom of expression, and identity…toward a consideration of how porn records and produces affect' (63-4). Rounthwaite's argument suggests that, in the recorded document of pornography, the affective pleasure and response seems to be weighted on the side of the viewer rather than the cosplayer. However, as we will return to later, we must not ignore the affective responses of the performers themselves.

The terms "sexy", "erotic" and "pornographic" appear to describe different levels of sexual explicitness for online users, and also appear to operate somewhat in connection with the level of fannishness displayed in the performances they are used to describe, as suggested above. "Sexy" tends to refer to cosplay like Nigri's, which includes faithful mimicry of an already skimpy character costume or which eroticizes an initial costume but remains within the boundaries of acceptance in the semi-public space of many conventions: short dresses and cleavage-enhancing bikinis, but no full or partial nudity. "Erotic" spans the gap between this sort of cosplay, which can be seen at live events and

on dedicated cosplay websites, and cosplay that includes partial/full nudity and "softcore" pornography (one or more female participants and no penetration), which can online only be found on websites targeted at adults for the purpose of sexual stimulation. "Pornographic" cosplay includes both softcore and "hardcore" pornography (with penetration and male participants as well as female), and can also only be found on adult-oriented websites. The cosplay images under discussion here, then, could be classified as "erotic" or "pornographic", and differ from the cosplay of performers like Nigri in that they exist in a different sphere, where it is acknowledged that the prime motivation of creating and disseminating such images is to provide sexual gratification material to the user. This may lessen the expectations from users that the images and performers display "fannish" knowledge of the initial media text. As forum user "monk" states, 'it's just another flavor of porn so porn rules apply' (monk in Hufflepuff, 2012), indicating that it is acceptable to have different expectations of erotic cosplay, and that it may serve a different purpose than mainstream cosplay. Another commenter justifies sexual content in cosplay by situating it in a Japanese pop culture context: pornographic cosplay, as well as "sexy" cosplay is an important part of Japanese otaku/gaming cultures, and does not damage the fandom (Philip in Cute Lush, 2014; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). In this way, users of erotic and pornographic cosplay distance it from regular cosplay by assigning it a place within a wider pornographic media context, and at the same time maintain a link to the concept of fandom by locating it within otaku culture.

Intertextual connections between pornographic cosplay and other Japanese pop culture fan media can be observed in the various visual and narrative (or absence-of-narrative) conventions shared by these cosplay performances, the *FFVII hentai dōjinshi*

discussed in an earlier chapter, and even some initial digital character images. Aside from having a primary aim of sexual stimulation, media related to erotic/pornographic cosplay of female video game characters shares with *hentai dōjinshi* a tendency to dislocate those characters from the initial narrative context of the game and portray them as purely sexual beings. Kinsella locates this tendency not only within fan media but also in commercial animated material, which, '[h]aving brought into being the image of powerful female bodies, frequently armed with weapons or magic…has tended at certain points to humiliate and quite literally attack its creations' (Kinsella, 2006, 77). In terms of *FFVII* pornographic cosplay and *hentai* images, this takes the form of removing any traits of physical or magical power from playable female characters and placing them in a setting of sexual desire: desire for the character by the user of the image, and desire solely for sexual pleasure by the character herself.

Website NSFW Gamer, which mixes fan media by providing both *hentai* and cosplay images of 'hot video game babes' (NSFW Gamer, n.d.) for free, runs a regular feature titled "Gamer Catfight!", which hypothetically compares one female character with another, often from the same game series, and asks site users to vote on who should "win". Use of the term "catfight" itself suggests a particular type of bitchy conflict, immediately setting up the contests in a gendered way and inviting a reading of somewhat "petty" femininity. The site ran a *FFVII* version of this feature with characters Tifa and Aerith (NSFW Catfight, 2010), who are also the most popular female *FFVII* characters appearing in *hentai dōjinshi*. In the game, both these characters are playable and can be used in combat, and have considerable strength and magical power. Rather than NSFW Gamer's contest between the characters being based on their in-game abilities, however, the article displays pornographic fan art images of Tifa and Aerith and asks, 'who do we

think is the hottest?', thereby turning attention away from their powerful/martial aspects and transforming the contest to one of sex appeal. The article briefly refers to their roles within the game. Largely, though, we are encouraged to view the characters here as elements that have been extracted from the "database" of initial and other fan texts, their main function now to prompt an erotic, physical response. The article calls on its readers to consume the images and make a judgment on the characters based on their ability to stimulate sexual desire, asking, 'Tifa has the boobs and Aerith has the heart. Which one would you rather stick your penis in?' Perhaps unsurprisingly, this fleeting reference to Aerith's kind and caring in-game persona did not carry much weight with the site users (who are clearly addressed as male), as the hyper-feminine images of Tifa made her the winner of the "catfight" by a wide margin.

The paysites Cosplay Deviants and Cosplay Erotica, which feature heavily on NSFW's pages, also extract female characters from their initial contexts, engaging them with an erotic aim for which only the physical character elements appear to be necessary. Cosplay Erotica, like NSFW Gamer, also features images (photosets and videos) in which two female characters appear together, although they are exclusively cosplay rather than mixed with fan art *hentai* images. These cosplay images of two women often show them engaging in acts such as cunnilingus in a performance of same-sex sexuality; in this sense, the content differs slightly from *hentai dōjinshi* images, in which such performances are rather more unusual. The main reason for the use of same-sex performance on the Cosplay Erotica site is that it only offers "softcore" porn: there is little to no penetration, and therefore, apparently, no need for male participants. This type of performance, although unlikely to be specifically advocating female same-sex sexuality over the normative heterosexuality that fuels a large portion of *hentai dōjinshi* and similar cosplay, might

however offer a space for readings that contradict the source of female pleasure in mainstream pornography, in which '[h]yper-penetration is celebrated…as women's only way to climax' (Hirdman, 2007, 165). Yet this clearly does not apply to all pornographic cosplay images, with the penis and other phallic objects reappearing as the content changes from "softcore" to "hardcore".

The absence or lack of focus on male bodies is something that is common to "sexy" cosplay, pornographic cosplay and *hentai dōjinshi*, as discussed extensively in Chapter 3. While the male body in *FFVII* pornographic images can be argued to have an important (and problematic) penetrative function, beyond the erect penis it appears of small consequence in visual terms when compared with the centralization of the female body; as Hardy points out, the male figure 'is left largely un-drawn by the text… He is simply a phallic apparatus' (Hardy, 2004, 13).

On the Cosplay Deviants site, which features only erotic cosplay and explicitly instructs its models that 'the nudity be tasteful and not pornographic' (Cosplay Deviants, n.d.), and on Cosplay Erotica, images displaying penetration are not featured and the male body is entirely absent. It is also absent in the two Tifa cosplay videos, both of which feature a single female cosplayer and, unlike the above-mentioned two sites, are non-commercial, meaning that the cosplayer receives no direct financial compensation for her performance. The first video, "Hot Cosplay - Tifa", hosted on YouTube with an age restriction setting (DanteLanza, 2010), would be classed more as erotic than pornographic cosplay, as it features no nudity, with the cosplayer caressing herself over her costume. The second, uploaded to Xvideos (Yuffie Jess, n.d.), a site that hosts various genres of user-uploaded pornographic video including *hentai* anime, shows the cosplayer removing her costume in a strip-tease and then bringing herself to orgasm; while her use of a penis-

shaped sex toy introduces a phallic element to her performance, there is no male body involved. On JCosPlay, which provides hardcore pornography, male performers are present in most of the videos; unlike the female participants, however, they are not named in the video descriptions, shown in costume as character cosplayers or given space in the centre of the images: they are located on the peripheries, as mute providers of the penis. In this way, deliberately or not, pornographic cosplay images echo the drawn or CGI art of the *hentai dōjinshi* genre, displaying the picking-up of *moe*-inducing costume elements (Azuma, 2009) that remove the character from her initial setting as well as shared gendered visual tropes.

NSFW Gamer creates a clear link between fan media genres by posting female character images from initial game artwork, *hentai* fan art (which may or may not have been a physical *dōjinshi* originally) and erotic/pornographic cosplay (performed "in the flesh" and mediated by a digital camera), all of which are rendered in two dimensions in their online environment. Sites like Cosplay Erotica go even further to blur boundaries between physical human performer and digital bodies through their editing process, which involves use of CGI to make the photographed or filmed cosplayers look more like 3D animated characters, to the point where it can be difficult to distinguish between the cosplay of a game character and an initial character image. Azuma states that even the initial text of a game or animation can be classed as simulacra, as can the fan-created image (2009, 26), while popular fan opinion still holds that the initial text is to be thought of as the "original" (Rahman, Wing-Sun and Hei-man Cheung, 2012, 329). By manipulating the image of the cosplayer to more closely mimic said "original", the Cosplay Erotica site would in fact seem to be erasing the embodied human aspects of the performer and privileging the digital, simulated human body (of which the cosplay itself

is a simulacrum) as the catalyst for sexual desire, creating a tangle of simulacra in which the prospect of locating an "original" disappears altogether.

CGI manipulation is also a common practice in non-erotic or regular cosplay. Here, however, it is imbued with a particular sexual nuance, suggesting that the site's users will be more likely to be sexually affected if viewing bodies that display the aesthetic traits of animated characters. Galbraith states that cosplay 'is not mere eroticism, but rather a desire for the two-dimensional, the image' (2009); the photo manipulation on Cosplay Erotica takes this idea almost as far as it can go, clearly recognising that, for certain users, it is 'precisely because the cosplayer becomes an image that the *moe* response is possible' (2009). In doing so, this site demonstrates not only that the practices of pornographic cosplay create a network of links between video game fan media genres, but also that they question the concepts of authenticity, original and copy.

For Galbraith (2009), the *moe* response, whether in "emotional" or sexual physical form, is located within a context of pop culture fandom, implying that the concept of "fannish" knowledge may retain value even among pornographic cosplay users, for whom, as was demonstrated earlier, less emphasis is placed on fidelity to the initial character costume. The websites under discussion here attempt to display varying levels of fannishness on the part of their cosplayers; and these levels tend to decrease as the sexual explicitness increases. This suggests that affective response of one kind or another is central to the pleasures of erotic/pornographic cosplay, but that that response may move along a continuum that runs from very culturally fan-specific *moe* to the purely physical sexual response leading to orgasm.

Thinking about pornography as a genre designed specifically to produce affect, where affect is defined as forces 'generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces

insisting beyond emotion' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 1) which cause the potential for bodily action, grants it another tie to cosplay, in the study of which the idea of social signification and affect operating across a spectrum has been a useful theoretical tool. It also dovetails with Galbraith's view on *moe*, which draws on Azuma's (2009) discussion of the concept, allowing us to theorize a continuum of fannish-ness that would appear to run almost parallel to that of the meaning and affect spectrum utilised in the previous chapter, as well as levels of explicitness. In the scenario presented by the aforementioned websites, the importance the user of cosplay images attaches to "meaning" (here fan knowledge as status, Japanese cultural capital, and so on) appears to decrease as the images increase in explicitness through non-eroticized ("regular" cosplay), "sexy", erotic and pornographic levels. At the same time, the type of affect that occurs could be said to shift from emotional *moe*, through the eroticized and sexual (but still fannish) *moe* response to "sexy" and erotic/softcore cosplay, to the most full-blown physical affect of sexual arousal and orgasm caused by hardcore images, which, as we have seen, display the least fannish-ness or connection with cosplay culture. This shows that, as Massumi (1995) reminds us, we should not try to separate signification and affect completely: affect is always possible in these fan practices; instead, an examination of the different levels and forms of affect and the way it intertwines with signification gives us a new way in which to look at cosplay and sexuality, without subscribing to the notion that the sexualization of cosplay is detrimental to the fandom.

Affect theory may also come into play when considering erotic/pornographic cosplay in terms of negotiating the concepts of subject and object. To finish this chapter, we will return to the work of Massumi (1995, 2002), among others, to discuss how erotic/pornographic cosplay might circumvent traditional arguments about the male gaze

and female objectification.

## 6.4 A moving performance: Live-action pornography and identification

Hardy outlines what have become the typical positions of subject and object in much writing on pornography, beginning with his definition of the terms: 'the subject is the one who looks, interprets, defines, desires and the object is the one who is viewed, interpreted, defined, desired' (2004, 14). As discussed previously, in cosplay performance these definitions are by no means so clear-cut; nevertheless, they are often still used in this way. In mainstream porn, Hardy continues, the object is set up as the female performer and the subject as male; there are in fact two male subjects, the user 'who views the text' and the male performer who is 'the subject…of the action taking place in the text' (14). This, he says, is the essence of the 'feminist critique of pornography…that both subjects are male and that the women portrayed are thus doubly objectified' (14), and, as covered in the chapter on *hentai dōjinshi*, it is this simplistic concept that writers on porn like Williams (1990) are trying to move beyond.

It is true that sites like NSFW Gamer, addressing its users with terms like "your penis", clearly anticipate that the majority of the erotic/pornographic cosplay audience will identify as male. However, this conceptualization of the pornographic subject and object – of the subject's male gaze objectifying the female – cannot be accepted unproblematically in cosplay. First, returning to the sexualization of culture in the twenty-first century, Evans, Ripley and Shankar state that it has made the idea of the male gaze more complex (2010, 116), and that further, women now, 'in the context of a neo-liberal 'pleasing themselves' discourse, are instead being subjectified' (121). It could be argued

that female cosplayers such as the Tifa in the non-commercial Xvideos video, who are shown pleasuring themselves and achieving orgasm without the need for a male performer, do not occupy a straightforward object position. In this video, particularly, we can also see that the cosplayer herself is operating the camera, choosing what to show and how to show it, thus controlling what the viewing "subject" is permitted to see without the intervention of a male performer or camera crew. In this she is an active agent; on the other hand, it could also be argued that she is inviting objectification by displaying her body to the gazes of online users. Perhaps, instead, performers like this do not fit neatly into either subject or object position but occupy a liminal space between the two, as they create and disseminate material that acts on its users, provoking an affective response (Rounthwaite, 2011).

Also, although NSFW Gamer indicates that it expects the users of these sites to be male, the anonymity of the Internet means it is impossible to state that this is the case categorically. Rounthwaite points out that 'changes in the dissemination of porn', as well as 'changes in social attitudes and production styles…have made porn more accessible to women' (2011, 70). The availability of online pornography and the ease with which it can be accessed anonymously have contributed materially to these developments, and these days viewers of porn online are not necessarily all male. Even cosplay fan commentary supports this supposition, with one forum user cautioning that we should not assume that these cosplayers 'are dressing for the male gaze' (Lillian in Ravenclaw, 2012; usernames altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity). We cannot assume, then, that the double male subject Hardy describes is applicable in all pornographic cosplay: its users may well be female, and the images themselves, such as the two Tifa videos and the photosets on erotic/softcore sites, contain no male performer.

This consideration of the viewer of the erotic/pornographic cosplay image returns us to the issue raised in the introductory chapter, in the theoretical perspectives section: of what happens when the cosplayer views her (in the present context it is almost always "her") own image, and how this may further complicate notions of a singular gaze. Wilkinson states that 'the net…opens up new possibilities for people to circulate their own pornographic imagery' (2011, 498). Amateur cosplayers like the Xvideos Tifa, who do not appear to have any technical assistance but perform, film, edit and upload their own videos, consume moving images of their own sexual performance in the process, forcing a reconsideration of their subject/object position: perhaps they are in a certain object position while their images are being observed online by anonymous users; but they themselves also become observers, potentially taking on a subject position. This can also be seen on Cosplay Deviants, which does not photograph or film its models itself but requires them to organize their own photoshoots, select the best 75 images and send them to the site. Cosplayers are also allowed to edit their own images. This encourages, if not demands, that the cosplayer consume their own images. In this way the performers of erotic/pornographic cosplay could be said to occupy both subject and object positions at the same time, or a position between the two; and it is this "in-between-ness" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010,1), conjured in the viewing of one's own image and so key to the concept of affect, that enables us to return finally to Massumi and his theorization of movement-vision.

The modes of seeing oneself that Massumi (2002) posits are "mirror-vision" and "movement-vision". Mirror-vision could be considered similar to Lacan's mirror stage of human development, in which recognizing (or mis-recognizing) oneself in one's reflection causes the formation of a split subject. Mirror-vision, says Massumi, offers only

a limited view of one's own body (2002, 50). Movement-vision, on the other hand, is possible due to technologies that allow the recording of one's body in movement, and happens when a person is able to view their body in movement from different perspectives and angles, as others see them. As Massumi explains, '[s]eeing oneself as others see one in fact means occupying an axis of vision on a tangent to self and other' (2002, 51). The performer cannot fully identify with the image as self (as in mirror-vision), but neither is the image fully other; and, through the process of observing one's own body and having that digitized body simultaneously be observed, the lack of coherence of self/other and subject/object renders the split between those binary elements meaningless.

This can occur in erotic and pornographic cosplay (as well as regular, non-eroticized cosplay practices) when a performer views or edits her own video, and it has an interesting implication for Rounthwaite's (2011) theorization of porn as an affective document. The Tifa of the Xvideos video, who records and then views (for the purpose of editing/uploading) her own performance of sexual pleasure, has produced a document that may induce a pleasurable affective response in its viewers; but, in the act of watching her video, she also becomes a viewer, and thus raises the possibility that the document of her sexual pleasure could generate a second "round" of pleasure in herself as well. This, says Rounthwaite, is how affect creates an interface between image and the embodied human in pornographic images: 'viewers of the documentation of past performance become performers themselves, creating a constellation between document and body in which the document…incites the production of new, live affects' (2011, 65). In this case, the connection is not only between digitized body and anonymous online viewer, but also, potentially, between the fleshly cosplayer and her own digital form.

The YouTube Tifa video, while more erotic than pornographic, also displays

interesting interstices of vision. In this video, the cosplayer is filmed by a camera operator, enabling more cuts and angles than the Xvideos Tifa's performance but also removing some of the control that the cosplayer in that video holds. She is shown in various positions around a room, such as on a bed and also in front of a full-length mirror. During the performance she both looks at her reflection in the mirror and uses the mirror to look at the camera, thus meeting the gaze of the viewer. In looking at herself in this way during her performance she takes part in mirror-vision; while limited, this is still an active gaze, as is meeting the gaze of the viewer through the camera. If this cosplayer was also to view her own recorded performance she would, through the process of making the video, be able to experience both mirror-vision and movement-vision; on top of this, because the action leading to her experience of mirror-vision has become part of the recorded document, she will, through engaging in an act that allows movement-vision, also be able to *view* the act of her own mirror-vision from outside.

These various modes of vision, fragmented both temporally and in terms of who is viewing whom and in what kind of embodied/digital form, makes it virtually impossible for the cosplayer to take a firm position on the self/other, subject/object axis (Massumi, 2002, 51), and indeed renders the identification process a game to which there can be no fixed or definitive end (this is, however, a temporary state; but one which may be repeated often). Through the practices of amateur erotic/pornographic cosplay video production and consumption, these solo female performers open up many possibilities for affect to destabilize the structures of subject and object, and suggest new ways of engaging with pornography without relying on issues of social signification.

This chapter has examined gender and sexuality in eroticized and pornographic cosplay

practices; it demonstrated that the theoretical notion of the spectrum between social signification and affect is particularly relevant when considering embodied performance, digital image and sexual pleasure; and also that alongside this spectrum runs another, which incorporates pop culture-specific concepts of fandom and authenticity. These impact on and complicate one another, and ultimately show that, while social signification or "meaning" is still important because of the values attached to it by different groups in different contexts, it is constantly played with and troubled by the visceral and insistent experiences of affect.

The next chapter of this dissertation engages again with affect theory, to consider the set of fan practices that make video game fandoms unique among other forms of Japanese popular culture: the practices of gameplay. Engaging with the new, but rapidly increasing, body of video game theory, it demonstrates the connections between gameplay and fan practices like cosplay that affect theory makes possible in its discussion of the relationships between the embodied human and the postmodern network of electronic media. It considers *FFVII* specifically as a representative of Japanese RPGs, showing how the particular modes of gameplay possible within it encourage new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality, or even of moving away from identity binaries altogether.

# 7. Return to the "Original": Identity and gameplay



## 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter moved from the largely digital fan practices of machinima videos and *dōjinshi* scanlation to examine gender and sexuality in cosplay, in which online and offline practices are equally important and which raises questions of where the body of the fan is located in the postmodern web of Japanese pop culture fandoms. The consideration of embodiment and its imbrications with the digital proved a ripe area for the introduction of affect theory, with its potential for intense bodily reactions that cannot be explained fully by traditional social signification or "meaning-making" through representation, and demonstrated that affective response serves to heighten the playfulness of fan articulations of gender and sexuality, at times offering the potential to disengage with identity categories altogether during the moment of affect.

This chapter continues the exploration of connections between the body and the digital through considering play in the *FFVII* fandom in its most overt form: the video game itself. While it may appear somewhat counter-intuitive to place the discussion of gameplay, the most distinctive aspect of the initial game texts, *after* the chapters about various fan media connected with them, the placement of this chapter and its content reiterate the stance of this dissertation that the initial texts of postmodern fandoms should not be regarded as privileged "originals" but as one layer in a database of elements formed

by industry-level and fan-level media, which demands a holistic study of their various aspects. This chapter also takes up the social signification-affect relationship posited in the previous cosplay chapters, as it is arguably the video game that, to a unique extent beyond any other form of media, requires the active participation of the player's body in order to function as a media text.

This chapter argues that gameplay itself involves a complex in-between-ness in the relationships between gameplayer and avatar, the human-console interface, and the physical-digital realm of the virtual enabled by affect. In this way, some practices of video gameplay, perhaps to a higher degree than the other fan practices and transformative works covered in this study, offer a site in which identity categories can be rendered temporarily irrelevant through the experience of intense play.

## 7.2 Playing by the Rules: Modifications and gameplay

The fan practices directly linked to game footage, such as the machinima videos covered in Chapter 2, are seen in fan studies as some of the most creative engagements with and use of initial game material, perhaps because they produce a tangible media text of their own in the form of video. However, the various practices of gameplay itself, while more ephemeral and difficult to document or pin down than machinima, can also be considered creative and playful. This section examines how gameplay elements and user interactions with the system and rules of the *FFVII* games can contribute to the idea of postmodern fandoms as providing a uniquely playful approach to issues of gender and sexuality; though perhaps not, in this fandom at least, offering as much discussion of alternatives to cultural norms as other fan practices such as cosplay.

When released in Japan in 1997, *FFVII* was seen as a milestone in the development of RPGs in terms of visuals, with its use of 3D GCI and cinematic or cut-scenes. However, points out Poole, 'it is still based on a remarkably old-hat "turn-based" system of combat, with roots clearly in the dice-throwing game' (2004, 77), in which each playable character attacks in turn and must wait for their opponent to attack before getting another turn. This points once again to the links between video RPGs and earlier table-top role playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons*, and suggests that, while it is considered a "classic" and has one of the largest fanbases among Japanese RPGs, *FFVII* and its later spin-offs are not necessarily the most innovative in terms of either play or technology. Since the first *FFVII* was released in Japan, the Internet and the development of haptic or sense-of-touch technologies have enabled major changes in how people can play games, both socially and physically (for example, people can now play collaboratively with people on the other side of the world in online games like *FFXIV*, and, though controllers that sense the player's movement and relay it to the game machine, can play games that require the vigorous action of the whole body, such as Wii Sports (Nintendo, 2006)). Nevertheless, there are still various modes of play available to fans, as well as unofficial changes fans can make to transform their play experience.

To begin with *FFVII* gameplay in its simplest iteration, let us consider how individual primary gameplayers can use the initial, unmodified games. The first *FFVII* game is a typical fantasy RPG; the *Dirge of Cerberus (DoC)* and *Crisis Core (CC)* spin-offs also contain strong elements of this genre, although they are generally classified as shooter and action games, respectively. These three genres all involve both ludus and paidia rules outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.4.2, in which ludus rules 'describe a winning situation' and paidia 'are rules that define or restrict the process of playing' (Eskelinen &

Tronstad, 2003, 203). In other words, ludus rules are concerned with goals and paidia with processes; one incorporates a clear finish to a game or section of a game, while the other is more open-ended.

Frasca suggests that games in the 1990s and early 2000s had 'trouble in trying to escape from the fantasy and science-fiction realms' (2003, 230) because of the prevalence of ludus rule systems at the time, which worked well 'within worlds built around dichotomies' (230); ludus rules, defining a clear winner, are served by the presence in the game fiction of such dichotomies, such as good and evil. In the *FFVII* games these dichotomies are, at the beginning of the story, somewhat unclear, but come into focus as each separate mission is completed and the gameplayer's progress allows the narrative elements to unfold and provide further information about who is the enemy and why. As well as a series of ludus-based goals, the games also contain various possibilities for paidia play, the rules of which tell the player what they may and may not do, but not what they *must* do. Such rules enable, for example, exploration of the game world not directly related to a mission, optional missions that do not affect the progress of the story, equipping characters with magic and weapons, and so on.

Many of the rules in these games are not explicitly stated or obvious; they may not be discovered until the gameplayer attempts a new action, or they may never be noticed at all. Nevertheless, Juul states that 'the game activity still requires that the player *respect* the rules…the player accepts the rules because they make the game activity possible' (2011, 38). We shall see presently that the question of respect for rules in video gameplay is open to debate; however, for gameplayers who do not engage in modification of the rules, it is true that their actions are to some extent governed by those rules. Thus, 'technology, far from being liberating, actually circumscribes the possibilities of action'

(Poole, 2004, 107). Shinkle is also critical of the amount of freedom or choice the gameplayer is offered for abiding by the designer's rules in most games, saying that, '[i]f this is the "freedom of the virtual" that postmodernity promised, digital games present it as little more than freedom from real responsibility and choice' (2005, 31).

Given the premise that rules are to be accepted, what implications can this have for gender? Frasca outlines three different levels in unmodified game simulations that can convey ideology (the fourth level covers unofficial modifications): the first level includes the fictional aspect of games dealt with earlier, the storyline, relationships between characters, and character designs, that which 'deals with representation…This includes objects and characters, backgrounds, settings, and cut scenes' (2003, 232); the second level is that of "manipulation" or paidia rules, or what the player *can* do within the game's structure; and the third is goal or ludus rules, or 'what the player must do in order to win' (232).

In terms of ideological readings that can be made from paidia rules in the *FFVII* games, the gameplayer is sometimes limited in which characters can be selected to be part of a playable party (which will participate in combat); an all-female party, for example, is not usually possible. Further, no matter which characters are members of the party, the character avatar displayed on the screen will be that specified by the game system, although the choice of character displayed has no impact on the progress of the gameplayer towards the goal (the gameplayer would be able to progress in the same way and at the same rate regardless of which avatar is displayed). Unlike the MMORPGs *FFXI* and *FFXIV*, in the *FFVII* games the gameplayer cannot generally select their representative onscreen character but is limited to one of the central male characters (Cloud, Zack or Vincent). The relationship between gameplayer and avatar will be

discussed further in the next section on identification and affect, but it is the case that users of the unmodified *FFVII* games are restricted to being represented by a male character image[1].

Ludus rules, or the goals set up by the game's producers, can also convey particular articulations of gender/sexual ideals through their link with the games' representational aspects. As discussed in Chapter 2 on game fiction, Section 2.3.1, Consalvo describes the FF series as promoting heteronormativity through the use of the "erotic triangle", while non-normative interactions 'are made to appear deviant' (2003, 172). The ludus rules, which guide the gameplayer along the path that will lead to them attaining the ultimate goal (completing the game) ensure that they will also encounter these heteronormative narrative elements, such as Zack's romancing of Aerith and the increasing closeness between Tifa and Cloud. In this way, the simulation-based functions of the game intersect with its narrative or representation-based aspects to steer the gameplayer towards goals which carry implicit normative statements. According to Frasca (2003), the goals of ludus games like *FFVII* are more modern than postmodern, based on certitudes. Juul suggests that, even if gameplayers do not personally agree with the ideologies being expressed, the fact that these *are* games lets us 'work toward goals that we fundamentally consider abhorrent…such goals can be exciting in video game form' (2013, 94). If the gameplayer does accept the ludus rules within gameplay itself, then, one might imagine that it is only in the produsage of transformative fan works like boys' love *dōjinshi* that this heterosexual imperative can be reimagined.

However, there are ways for gameplayers to circumvent and avoid, at least

[1] It should be pointed out that this is of course not always the case in all RPGs: *FFXIII*, for example, has a female main character. However, in many traditional single-player JRPGs the main character is still male.

temporarily, the games' ludus goals without actually breaking any rules. This involves engaging with the paidia elements of the game while ignoring the ludus elements, and could be said to reflect Baudrillard's idea of postmodern users declining to engage with simulations of meaning (in this case, of heteronormativity) by interpretative structures (the commercial game industry, Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011), their 'intertia and refusal to participate' (Grace, 2000, 102) one of the only challenges that can be made to hegemonic systems in a hyperreality. The worlds of the FF series are so extensive, with whole continents to be explored, and contain so many side missions, that it is possible to play for many hours without getting anywhere near the main missions or story; gameplayers can spend time exploring towns, shopping, fighting, collecting magic and other items, and even, in *FFVII*, breeding and racing large ostrich-like birds known as "chocobos". Gameplayers who engage in this kind of play divert from being *gamers*, who aim directly for the ludus goals, acting instead as *players* in a limited but self-defined paidia play space (Perron, 2003, 251).

Juul states that, though the inbuilt overarching goals of the game are always present, 'it is also possible for us to incorporate additional personal goals in a game' (2013, 86); and one of these might indeed be to evade the official goals. Players may also choose to play *badly*, 'in order to avoid the social consequences of succeeding…to explore other aspects of a game…to play for a goal other than the nominal goal' (2013, 50). Juul does not explicitly mention that players employ these techniques because they have a conscious problem with the ideologies being promoted by the official goals; nevertheless, deliberate or unconscious avoidance of this ludus-controlled path demonstrates that there is room within the game's rules to move away from its heteronormative stance[2].

[2] I recall, in particular, playing *FFVIII* as a teenager and employing these same avoidance

These practices of bending (without breaking) the game rules have been aided greatly, since the 1990s, by the spread of fan networks on the Internet and the dissemination of knowledge within those online communities. This is particularly pertinent when it comes to technological competence: just as the ripping (recording) and uploading of cut-scenes by fans with the appropriate software and skills allows other fans to easily download and transform them with simple editing programmes into videos, so the knowledge of programming and the underlying structure of games possessed by some *FFVII* users enables other, less technology-oriented players to achieve their preferred outcomes to certain game events without actually breaking the rules.

As an example, let us return to the in-game episode discussed in Chapter 2 on the *FFVII* story and characters, in which Cloud dates another character at the Gold Saucer amusement park. This episode, as mentioned before, pairs Cloud with either Tifa, Aerith, Yuffie or Barret, based on decisions the gameplayer has made earlier in the game (the

---

techniques; for me, paidia play was the only way within gameplay itself of bending the fictional aspects to suit my preferred articulations of sexuality. I was playing the game concurrently with my younger sister; she, being a more proficient gamer than me, completed the game first. Acting during her periods of gameplay as secondary gameplayer (about which more to follow), I was able to watch the final cut-scene of the game (which depicted the main male character waltzing romantically at a ball with one of the female characters, who I disliked intensely for being "weak") without having personally played my way to it. I was not pleased with what I saw as this overly sentimental and stereotypical "straight" ending. I thus chose to avoid it for as long as I possibly could (aided by my general incompetence), and instead spent time exploring the early stages of the game world, when the player is able to put main male Squall in a party with his male antagonist, Seifer; these two were my preferred pairing (I saw the female character Rinoa, who Seifer liked and Squall hated, as the unnecessary third corner of an "erotic triangle"), and I preferred to reinterpret their inconsequential interactions as a romantic relationship than to pursue the ludus goals of the game, which I knew would end in a way distasteful to me. Such roundabout practices suggest that, even without resorting to a direct challenge to the broadly normative goals of the FF games, there is still room for more "play" than one might expect in terms of reimagining in-game character interactions as alternative performances of sexuality.

gameplayers, unless they are already aware that the Gold Saucer Date will take place and have looked up the decisions required to achieve a particular pairing of characters online, would not know that the decisions they are making will directly affect what couple goes on the date). The way the game mechanics calculate these decisions and allocate a date for Cloud has become known as the "affection system", thanks to an analysis of its workings by a fan, "Terence Fergusson". In 1999, this user uploaded an explanation of the *FFVII* "date" mechanics (TFergusson, 2012) on the site GameFAQs.com, showing how the character chosen for the date is based on which of the four possible characters has the highest "affection value". At the beginning of the game, he explains, Aerith has the highest value with 50 points, followed by Tifa with 30, Yuffie with 10, and Barret, the only male character, with a stark zero. The choices the gameplayer makes through the game up to the point of the date either add or subtract points from each character. The online explanation lists every individual decision, the points scored by each character, how to ensure Yuffie or Barret are chosen, and how to use "hack" codes on the PSX and PC platforms to ascertain each character's current value. The player can thus, if they wish, manipulate the (officially) hidden rules as they move through the game in order to arrive at the pairing of their choice (male-female or male-male), which has no bearing on the course of the main game story but which may have value to fans of certain characters or pairings in ensuring their preferred performance. Online fan communities and forums also disseminate the knowledge that such a rule system exists in the first place, making it known to the gameplayer that they do indeed have a choice in the matter.

The mention of "hack" codes moves us from simply accepting the in-game rules, and working with them in the players' production of gendered or sexual performances, to the concept of rule-breaking. This involves actually altering, manipulating or making

additions to the game code, and therefore requires a higher level of technical proficiency and knowledge than does choosing to engage in paidia rather than ludus play in the initial game (Frasca, 2003, 232). Hjorth links this practice to machinima through the activity of hacking (Hjorth, 2011, 38), while Jones explains that in the 'derivative subculture of modding…the games become entirely new games' (Jones in Jenkins, Jones & Stein, 2007). For *FFVII*, which has been an extremely popular choice for modders since its original release, there are mods to improve the quality of the visuals and gameplay, add weapons, change menus, swap playable characters, and so on. Modders go further than machinima creators, who simply post their videos to sites like YouTube, also sharing the altered code itself in online fan forums (such as Qhimm.com, the same site that hosts the *FFVII* re-localization project "The Reunion" discussed in Chapter 2, which is actually an ambitious series of mods), enabling other gameplayers to apply it to their game system (generally the PC version) as a "patch" (it is "patched into" the game code) and use it in a variety of ways in their own gameplay and in creating their new fan texts. Modders also share tutorials on how to apply their mods, and there are even management programmes for users who wish to apply multiple mods at once.

In some cases the modified gameplay is recorded and uploaded as machinima videos; either to showcase the graphical and other improvements to the game, or to present a reimagining of a fictional element through mods that alter character and dialogue. These videos are generally simpler than the smartly edited and soundtracked machinima examined earlier, but provide fan viewers with many alternatives to the narrative elements of the unmodified games. A popular example is, once again, the Gold Saucer date scene in *FFVII*. The use of patches that swap either Cloud or one of his four official date choices with another character and enable the modder to add their own

dialogue in the onscreen boxes has resulted in a number of videos being uploaded to YouTube featuring pairings not permitted in the initial game, thereby extending and reinterpreting the game's fictional elements.

The list of different pairings is extensive, but the two most-viewed videos are for the same-sex Zack/Cloud and Aerith/Tifa pairings. As with the *FFVII* AMVs, these mod videos do not display a particular leaning in terms of opposite-sex or same-sex pairings, but offer a range of possibilities in terms of sexuality. However, like machinima and various other fan media dealt with in this dissertation, the different sexualities presented are not all approached in the same way. Similar to the earlier Machinima channel videos, the Zack/Cloud scene (Scorpicus, 2008) is set up as a comedy, with in-game references and sexual innuendo; unlike those videos, though, the possibility of the homoerotic is not used as an accusation or insult to shore up heteronormativity. Comments on this scene mainly respond to its comedy aspect, repeating the most amusing lines of dialogue and so on, although some also make an assumption about the type of fan this pairing might appeal to: 'I can hear all the…yaoi fangirls watching this' (Flyinghope in Scorpicus, 2008; username altered and comments paraphrased for anonymity); however, there are few BL-type fannish comments to support this supposition. The Aerith/Tifa date scene (Scorpicus, 2007), by the same YouTube user, is described by its creator as 'pure fan boy service', with 'Barret/Cloud and Cid/Vicent to keep the fan girls happy'. References in the scene's dialogue to both slash fanfiction and to Cloud's cross-dressing episode show the creator is familiar with English-language BL communities; the dialogue is humorous, again, and strongly implies that both the male-male and female-female pairings are in sexual relationships. The comments here, too, mostly address the video's humour rather than analyzing the relationships depicted. This differs from the extensive discussion of

male-male pairings in specifically BL communities, and shows that, while mods can certainly be used to create performances of sexualities that are absent (female-female) or illegitimized (male-male) in the initial game, their dissemination is not necessarily taken as a signal to engage in either fannish appreciation of eroticized pairings or the discussion of gender/sexuality that occurs in trans cosplay and some crossplay communities.

Modifying the underlying game structure, then, has the potential to provide a space, within simulation (gameplay) and representation (online through machinima), in which to depart from the heteronormative goals of the unmodified games' fiction, and from other aspects of the ludus rules that the player might find restrictive, in order to better align with their own ideals of gender and sexuality. This type of activity, says Juul, falls into the category of "emergent gameplay": 'situations where a game is played in a way that the game designer did not predict' (2011, 76). This type of gameplay is, in one sense, highly creative, and includes finding loopholes in programming or glitches that can be exploited to do things the designer did not intend one to do, or generally playing in a way other than what was intended. For the single-player RPG games of *FFVII*, this might also include the involvement of non-primary gameplayers. The next section looks at how different types of gameplayer interact with the games in different circumstances, and how this can impact the concept of immersion or engagement.

## 7.3 Gameplayers and variations in engagement

Garrelts tells us that a game 'changes depending on who is doing the playing' (2005, 3): as with any other media form, its content will be experienced and interpreted differently depending on the user; and, further, because game content itself is enabled by the user's

input, that content may also differ. This rests partly on the gameplayer's demographic, cultural context, and so on, as the performances produced by the gameplayer through playing the game 'will be shaped and informed not only by the nature of the game but also by the gamer's "out-of-game" social identity' (Crawford & Rutter, 2007, 277); and also on their ability, , the role in which they interact with the game, and their play mode[3].

*FFVII* and its spin-off games are designed mainly to be played by a single user, like many of the more traditional RPGs. Eskelinen and Tronstad go so far as to say that video games are "audienceless" (2003, 200), suggesting that the only person/s involved are the primary gameplayer (or gameplayers if it is a multiplayer game), and that if there is an audience, it is those same gameplayers. However, although a lot of video game scholarship still speaks of gamers 'as individual players' (Crawford & Rutter, 2007, 273), this fails to take into account the varied ways in which users actually engage with video games. Quite apart from the concept of a remote, after-the-fact audience for online gameplay walkthrough videos, even single-player RPGs often have people other than the primary gameplayer participating; in fact, having other people involved with gameplay, either as observers or active participants, can be an important part of the play experience (Bowman, Weber, Tamborini and Sherry, 2013, 41). Of course, this is more the case with beat-em-ups and other competitive games of short duration which may have other users playing simultaneously or waiting for their turn. Still, games such as the FF series, particularly those played on PS consoles connected to a TV screen, sometimes have someone observing or assisting with primary gameplay; this user can be labelled the

[3] Gamer, player, or gameplayer. As discussed in the Introduction chapter, a gamer plays according to ludus rules and goals, with the aim of winning or completing the game. A player is less concerned with finishing or winning, and focuses more on other aspects of the game like exploration. A gameplayer may ignore the ludus goals and rules for a while to explore the game world or put off the ending, but will eventually try to complete the game.

secondary gameplayer.

From the outset, it is apparent that the secondary gameplayer interacts with the game in a different way from the primary, if for no other reason than that they are not holding the controller. This means that they are not part of the physical interface that connects user and game, which is often pointed to as one of the most distinctive aspects of video gaming (Kennedy, 2007). Still, enjoyment of games 'does not simply flow through the lead of a joystick' (Newman, 2002), and secondary gameplayers can still be actively involved in the game; they are both observer and participant, and are:

> …interested, engaged with the action, but not actually exerting direct control through the interface, perform tasks like map-reading, puzzle-solving and looking out for all the things the principal player doesn't have time for.
> (Newman, 2002)

Secondary gameplayers advise the primary gameplayer at crucial moments (much like the typical "backseat driver" and often to the annoyance of the primary); not having the responsibility of actually directing the avatars or having to react to onscreen action, they are also less physically affected by the gameplay, and may engage in other activities or indeed leave the site of gameplay entirely without the game stopping, as it would for the primary gameplayer.

Because their level of immersion is not as intense or extended as the primary's is reputed to be, their focus may be quite different. Newman points out that 'the audio-visual richness of the gameworld potentially serves the secondary-player' (2002); this suggests that the representational or fictional aspects of the game may be easier for the secondary gameplayer to engage with than its ludic aspects, thereby making it easier to analyse and

make judgements about the story and characters[4]. While the primary gameplayer has to deal with the difficulties of both following the story and making it unfold through gameplay, the secondary has the leisure to consider and reinterpret. Their commentary on the fictional aspects of the game can affect the primary gameplayer's experience, as 'video gaming has a substantial social component' (Bowman et al., 2013, 41) and the primary gameplayer is not playing in a vacuum but interacting with (or having interaction thrust upon them by) the secondary. The secondary gameplayer clearly demonstrates one way in which gameplayers engage differently with the same game. But it is also possible to make distinctions between primary gameplayers based on the platform the game is played on, their purpose for playing, and the various degrees of immersion this entails. The following paragraphs explore these distinctions in primary gameplayers.

In recent years, our potential for immersion in video games, our sense of being surrounded or subsumed in another reality (McMahan, 2003, 68), has been heightened by the development of gaming technologies that involve senses other than the audio-visual, such as haptic or touch-related controllers. We now need, Hjorth stresses, 'to address the diversity of the senses' (2011, 130) in game studies. The Nintendo Wii, in particular, has been the focus of media attention on the inclusion of the whole body in games like the JRPG series *Legend of Zelda* (1986-2014), with the PlayStation 4 making use of similar technologies. The first *FFVII* game had no such capabilities, the interface being either a standard PS controller or a PC keyboard; *Dirge of Cerberus*, however, was released on

[4] My own experience as secondary gameplayer of *FFVII* mainly took the form of criticizing the English localization (not based on any profound knowledge of the Japanese version but on the rudimentary English grammar errors that SquareSoft's out-sourced localization of the period had produced) rather than critiquing any heteronormative tendencies; but there were certainly elements I picked up on that the primary gameplayer, who had reached a state of at least partial immersion, did not. By the time we played *FFVIII* (some time after it was first released), I had become an avid user of English boys' love fanfiction and *dōjinshi* scans online, so my secondary gameplay experience was mediated by my participation in that fandom; and my focus on the fictional elements of the game involved a constant reinterpretation of the story and character relationships being presented.

the PS2, which is equipped with a controller that vibrates when particular actions are taking place onscreen, such as an impact during combat. This haptic function has the potential to act as another link between user and machine and between gameplayer and avatar, as what is happening on the screen is signalled to the gameplayer by touch as well as by sight and sound.

Other than in *DoC*, though, the *FFVII* games cannot be said to offer any particularly innovative use of senses other than the traditional audio-visual. However, the platform used can impact upon immersion and engagement in other ways. Games on handheld consoles, such as *Crisis Core* on the PSP, are less likely to involve a secondary gameplayer than those played using a TV screen; the interface in general is on a much smaller scale, with a tiny screen, but the gameplayer is therefore much closer to the onscreen action, their field of vision narrowed to a square a few inches across, a short distance from their face. One user reports they were 'as immersed in the PSP as on the PS1…and was just as easy to concentrate' ("Abbyg17", personal communication, September 9, 2014). Because the PSP is a handheld console, the gameplayer can take it out of the home and use it in public, which often involves the use of headphones, which another user says 'helps with the immersion', although the console's portable nature means there is a 'constant niggling in the back of your mind on a handheld that the battery will run out and you'll lose hours of play' ("one_rock_fury", personal communication, September 11, 2014). So, although there may be many more people present at the site of gameplay than for a TV console in the gameplayer's home, the gameplayer is cut off from them by their narrow field of vision and headphones; it does not involve the social component of the secondary gameplayer/observer (Bowman et al., 2013).

On the other hand, mobile gaming, with a cell phone or handheld console, has

altered the type and rhythm of immersion in gameplay: because it takes place in public or semi-public spaces, there is always the possibility of distraction from the outside world: reacting to people approaching us, checking cell phone messages or the Internet, getting on or off trains, and so on. This is aided in *CC* by its genre mix of RPG and action; the action elements, designed specifically for a handheld console, involve shorter missions that allow for less extended periods of gameplay. TV-connected consoles like the PS, on the other hand, are often also used for things other than gameplay and by other members of a household, so some gameplayers 'would only really put it on if I knew I was going to have a long session' ("Abbyg17", personal communication, September 9, 2014), in other words uninterrupted gameplay. Now, however, says Hjorth, 'immersion and distraction have become an integral part of contemporary everyday life', where 'perception is divided between the 'here' and 'there', such that we can *know* different times and spaces simultaneously' (2011, 132); the in-betweenness of the gaming interface, it seems, is extending to our everyday lives, as though constantly negotiating the space between game and non-game through interruptions, or between one device and another. While there is a certain level of this immersion/distraction back-and-forth in all gaming, it is more pointed with games that can be played in public spaces.

It is not only the device on which a game is played, or the space in which people play it, that can have an impact on how we engage with it or become immersed in it; our reasons for playing and level of experience can also be significant in terms of how drawn in we are by the game, how deeply users feel they are part of the game world and thus how likely they are to uncritically accept its representational aspects.

Accomplished fans will often play the game first as *gamers*, seeking to complete it in the quickest possible time, sometimes in a race with other gaming friends and

acquaintances. This generally involves extremely extended periods of gameplay, and the practice can be said to belong to the realm of traditional "hardcore" gamers. This type of gameplay may entail the greatest engagement for the primary gamer; McMahan refers to it as 'deep play' (2003, 69): there is an intensity to it, a sense of consequence to each action as the gamer moves as fast as possible along the ludus path to the climactic goal. Some of these games or missions within the games are timed or "against the clock"; others are not, but some gamers play in informal competition with friends or people online, and there is a sense of status in completing the game more quickly than other people.

Hardcore gamers, having completed the game once, may then go back and play it again, this time focusing on doing every side mission, finding every hidden item and taking in every piece of fiction- or system-based information. The reviewer of *FFVII* on the UK-based site Final Fantasy World, run by three female UK-based fans, enthuses over its replayability, stating that 'you'll probably play over 5 separate games and still want to play more!' (FFFreak, 2011). This is more the case for full-length RPGs like the first *FFVII*, which can take well over 50 hours to complete without all the side missions, than for *CC*, which only takes between 10 and 15 hours including all the extras. Some hardcore gameplayers play in this comprehensive way the first time, as 'rpgs are so long compared to shooters etc, that I may never have the time to play it a second time and explore things I've missed' ("one_rock_fury", personal communication, September 11, 2014). Other gameplayers also often play this way, with the assistance of semi-official printed game guides or, increasingly, online fan communities, which build up and share a body of knowledge about the game world. Editable databases such as the Final Fantasy Wiki (n.d.) offer an encyclopaedia of every aspect of the game worlds, while fan sites like the above-mentioned Final Fantasy World or The Final Fantasy VII Citadel (1998) (which has been

in operation since the first game's release) contain tutorials on how to play the game, as well as game information, reviews, and transformative works like fanart, fanfiction and cosplay.

Replaying a game offers a different immersive experience: the gameplayer has completed the game once, and thus plays without the same sense of urgency as the gamer; 'it's never as intense as the 1st time as I know the story/plot twists/surprise fights etc already' ("one_rock_fury", personal communication, September 11, 2014). Such users are rather seeking to enrich their experience and fan knowledge. Experienced players in this mode, explains Grodal, may 'shift more often between experiencing the game as an interactive world and reasoning about the possible intentions laid down by the producers' (2003, 144). While this may not involve as intense a sensation of being "in" the game world (particularly if the gameplayer is also switching between devices while referring to online tutorials or a printed game guide) as the first play-through, it allows the gameplayer to pay more intention to the characters and fictional elements, as well as evaluate the game's rule systems.

The gamers described above play the game to reach the ludus goal; the gameplayers doing replays may be setting themselves additional goals of locating every extra element the game offers, extending their own fan knowledge to participate in fan communities, or avoiding the ludus path for ideological or other reasons. There are also other motives for gameplay that decrease the likelihood of immersion in the game; for example, playing in order to record onscreen action to create a transformative work such as a machinima video. Playing in order to record a specific sequence for manipulation does not involve the same goals or engagement with the game; the goal here is not to become absorbed in the pleasure of play or story, but to produce and capture a specific sequence of movement.

This is play for the primary purpose of reinterpretation and transformation, and engagement with the fiction and rules of the game takes a back seat to the new performance the machinima artist is planning to create.

Ryan suggests that gameplayers interact with video games in two basic ways: external and internal. In external interaction, the gameplayer 'situates himself outside the virtual world. He either plays the role of a god who controls the fictional world from above, or he conceptualizes his activity as navigating a database' (2001). Ignoring the gendered tone of this statement, this conceptualization of external interaction sees the gameplayer as removed from the possibility of immersion, and could be said to apply partially to the practices of replaying or of playing to record footage for machinima, in which the gameplayer is seeking particular elements to be picked up for their own fan use. In internal interaction, on the other hand, 'the user projects himself as a member of the fictional world', possibly 'by identifying with an avatar' (2001). This tends to occur more, perhaps, in the initial play-through, when play intensity is at its height.

This section has shown that the practices of gameplay itself offer a number of ways in which gameplayers can interact with the identity-related fictions set up by the *FFVII* games' rule systems: either accepting, challenging or ignoring them through the role in which they approach gameplay, their attitude to rules and rule-breaking, use of unofficial modifications, manipulation of modded game material to create transformative works, and level of immersion.

In video game studies, the question of immersion and the connection between gameplayer and avatar introduced above has also been extensively explored in terms of identity. The final section of this chapter examines subjectivity, identification and gameplayer/avatar interaction in the *FFVII* games based on the previous literature,

connecting these to the crucial concept of embodiment in the interface between digital game and human user, and thence to the potential for and significance of affect in gameplay. It demonstrates how gameplay affect intersects with that of other fan practices like cosplay, and how it provides another space within the somewhat heteronormative initial game texts for fans to render the performance of gender and sexuality playful.

## 7.4 In between identity: Gameplayer connections with avatars

The previous section touched on the significance that video game characters can hold for fans, both during gameplay and in the creation of transformative works from in-game footage; indeed, as Azuma (2009) posits, characters, and particularly the *moe*-elements of which they are comprised, are the prime focus of fans in their produsage of media texts. Video game and online fan studies have often narrowed down this focus further to the avatar, the 'personal representations used by individuals in digital environments' (Hjorth, 2011, 71) or more specifically the playable character displayed onscreen, as a site of interest for the theorization of identification, agency, embodiment, performativity, identity issues, and so on. Unsurprisingly, such studies often touch on gender, especially with the rise of interest in women and girls gaming (Kennedy, 2007).

This section first discusses the connections between gameplayer and avatar (avatar as game character, but also avatar as online user representation), and how they intersect with the concepts of embodiment and digital through a cyborgian interface between game and user. It goes on to argue that, within the complex identifications and connections between the human and electronic enabled by the gameplayer-avatar and console-user interactions in the *FFVII* games, there is potential for affective response similar to and

yet distinct from those found in cosplay practices. It also suggests that, in terms of providing a site for different kinds of identity play through the continuum of social signification and affect, video games can indeed be seen as a unique media form, although gameplay and the manipulation of game footage is not used as much as some of the other practices in JRPG fandoms to advocate non-normative performances of gender and sexuality.

Several scholars have done work on the significance of the avatar in both video games and in a broader online space. Hjorth states that it is '[o]ne of the dominant repositories for the negotiation of the personal and political in online spaces' (2011, 69), while Rehak suggests that avatars 'enable players to think through questions of agency and existence, exploring in fantasy form aspects of their own materiality' (2003, 123). Others are even more enthusiastic, arguing that, as 'a longed-for chance of expressing ourselves beyond physical limitations, they are a postmodern dream being materialized' (Filiciak, 2003, 100). The importance of the avatar in video games is stressed in such studies, with the 'crucial relationship…not between avatar and environment or even between protagonist and antagonist, but between the human player and the image of him- or herself encountered onscreen' (Rehak, 2003, 104); this is reiterated by Hansen, stating that 'the crucial image is neither image nor body alone, but the dynamical interaction between them' (2003, 208). It is clear that avatars are often held in high regard by both gameplaying fans and scholars; but for what reason?

Hjorth explains that, for both designers and gameplayers, the avatars are 'the most accessible and common form of character design' (2011, 71). Actually, the avatar need not be a "character" at all; in the earliest commercial video games such as *Pong* (1972), for instance, the avatar or repository of the gameplayer's activity was a simple cursor or

geometrical shape. However, developing technologies along with the postmodern media user's focus on characters has now made games with recognizable characters the norm. Indeed, '[s]ome avatars have inspired enough devotion to achieve an independent cult status' (McMahan, 2003, 75), either in a very broad context (for example, Mario or Lara Croft) or within the narrower worlds of gaming or Japanese pop culture (like Cloud and some other FF characters).

The character avatar holds significance for fan gameplayers partly because it *is* a character, and thus shares all the attributes of characters in other media such as anime or film to which fans become attached; but there is another aspect that is arguably unique to the playable video game character (though, as is the case with *FFVII*, these often cross over into other, more traditional media forms): it is the means by which the gameplayer's input is actualized in the game itself. It is, 'in a very concrete sense, the external object into which the player is absorbed, which receives the player's will to activity' (Wolf, 2003, 60). The use of this term "absorption" echoes the concept of immersion introduced in the previous section; and it could be argued that immersion, for some gameplayers, might be aided by their connection with the game's avatar. These connections and the question of identification with the avatar are, for some scholars, central to the study of gaming as a site for identity performance, as it 'can involve significant elements of performativity' (Crawford & Rutter, 2007, 276).

Consalvo suggests that it is the aim of some game designers that identification take place; for this reason, avatars are left somewhat stylised to make it easier for the player to 'insert' themselves in the role and identify with the character (2003). This could certainly be said to apply to Cloud and other playable characters in the first *FFVII* game; though whether this was a deliberate move by designers to encourage gameplayer

identification or due to other factors is hard to say; as stated before, the limitations of the early 3D graphics would only allow for blocky in-game characters, which were far more simplistic during actual gameplay than in cut-scenes and official artwork. Still, while the huge advances in graphics and the concomitant progression of character design in the FF series have created far more "realistic"-looking avatars since that time, during gameplay they are still undeniably stylised, an assemblage of *moe*-elements (Galbraith, 2009) geared to attracting postmodern users. Identification with the avatar, which is aided by (and aids) immersion, says Lahti, 'remains compelling, even addictive, because our surrogate body on the screen mirrors our desires and bodily experiences; it represents us' (Lahti, 2003, 163). However, the potential for identification with the avatars in the fairly traditional *FFVII* games, and how far they can be said to "represent" certain gameplayers, may not be as apparent as in other genres.

The point often made about avatars in the frequently studied MMORPG, as well as online in fan forums, etc., is that the user has choice: they can select or build the avatar that they feel best represents the identity they wish to perform in that particular space at that time; often, Hjorth explains, 'people have multiple avatars that reflect different parts of their personality' (2011, 71). It could therefore be argued that users more readily identify with these *chosen* character avatars than with the avatars of *FFVII* and its spin-offs, in which, as mentioned previously, the gameplayer has very little choice and is generally assigned a male character as their onscreen representative. Of course, this is not to say that female gameplayers will not identify with a male character (particularly given the earlier discussion of the perceived "feminine" gender attributes of Cloud and co.) or that male gameplayers will. It has been suggested, in fact, that gameplaying as an avatar with different gender attributes from the everyday identities we perform can expand the

range of our performances to enact genders we would not normally experience, as 'when conflicting gender cues between the player and avatar are present, in-game behavior is more likely to be performed according to the avatar's gender' (Poels, De Cock & Malliet, 2012, 637). But, as Krzywinska reminds us, like trans cosplayers 'many players use role-playing…as a way of expressing their real-life identity' (2007, 116), particularly in situations in which other users or observers are present; and not being able to choose or create an avatar with which to do this means that traditional single-player games are in a sense limited compared with the newer forms of online multi-player game when it comes to identification based on perceived shared attributes.

Some theorists do suggest, however, that not all identification is based on a sense of recognition between gameplayer and avatar, but that there is also 'evidence for some degree of escape from real-world identities' (Märyä, 2008, 136); this kind of escapist play is also seen in some crossplay practices, and Märyä cites "gender-blending" as a specific example of how 'the lives of virtual characters and their real-life counterparts are intertwined in multiple and complex ways' (136). Yet he also reminds us that this type of play is always at least partially socially determined, returning us to Butler's idea that, 'while gender is viewed as a construction, this does not mean that one's own gender performativity can be whatever one desires' (Hjorth, 2011, 73). Our choice of avatar, or, in the more limited world of *FFVII*, 'our willingness to buy into certain commercial fantasies, is…embedded in our sense of who we are' (Krzywinska, 2007, 116). In this sense, the way gameplayers direct their avatars to perform, within the limits of the game structure or their own technological abilities for applying mods, etc., can have an impact on that character's gendered performance based on 'the process of socialization' (Poels, De Cock & Malliet, 2012, 634) they undergo in the world outside gaming and fan

communities.

Of course, this is much more apparent in MMORPGs where the players are engaged more in paidia play and can input their own dialogue, and also in the social space of online fan communities, where the 'performativity of the avatar is shaped not only by the user's offline identities…but is also informed by the sociocultural fabric of the online world it inhabits' (Hjorth, 2011, 73). Some *FFVII* fans, given the more limited potential for directing the story and character interactions in the games, use the online world to extend their play as well as to 'meet social needs' (Bowman et al., 2013, 41) in the form of text-based (meaning written rather than visual) role-playing on fan communities and forums like Reddit, LiveJournal and Gaia Online, in which they can more freely select the game character they wish to role-play and control how that avatar interacts with those of other players. Some of these role-plays intersect with other fan practices, for example the *FFVII* BL/*yaoi* murder-mystery role-play "Murderous Romance" on the Gaia forum (X--KAMI—korosu, n.d.). These online unofficial extensions and reinterpretations of the initial games are also quite structured, again with rules on which characters are available and how one can play, though these are put in place by the fan community itself; but their open-ended, more paidia nature does allow players greater license in expression, while being wholly created by interpretative communities rather than commercial structures means that there is a wide variety available to match 'the user's offline identity and techno-cultural context' (Hjorth, 2011, 67); and, if there is not a role-play which meets a user's needs already in existence, they are free to create or request one.

The issue of identification with a game avatar based on gender or other constructed identity categories, as can been seen from the many scholars dealing with it above, is of great interest in game and fan studies (Rehak, 2003, Kennedy, 2007, Krzywinska, 2007).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that, in some cases, identification is not a priority for gameplayers and may not be experienced to any great extent. MacCallum-Stewart discusses gender-blending or "transgendered" gameplay with reference to MMORPGs, and particularly to male-identified gameplayers with female avatars:

> By the time of MMORPGs, the adoption of a female form was such a naturalised action that many players now choose to move across gender for aesthetic pleasure, rather than from a need to experience a new form of being.
> (2008)

This could also be said to apply to the later FF games, including *DoC* and *CC*, in which playing with a male avatar had become so naturalised that female gameplayers do not experience any sense of disconnect or non-identification, or of experimenting with a new gender identity. Rather than seeking to identify with a character similar to themselves or to experiment with alternative performances of identity, gameplayers in the advanced gaming community, like many crossplayers, may approach the avatar based on aesthetic considerations or fannish affection for the character as a *moe* figure.

There are also gameplayers for whom a relationship with the character, identification-based or not, is simply not a priority; such gameplayers are more concerned with the ludic aspects of a video game than the fictional, and the RPG avatar is merely a tool with which to explore those play aspects. This type is more likely to approach the game world in a mode of "external interaction" (Ryan, 2001), experiencing the game from above or outside it. For such gameplayers, ''roleplay' itself is a minority occupation, and gameplay where the realisation of self as a characterised entity is not really possible supersedes this action' (MacCallum-Stewart, 2008). As touched on earlier, gameplayers

often shift between degree of immersion and modes of interaction depending on whether they are playing a timed game in which they wish to finish in the shortest possible time, a first main play-through or a replay; one FF user states that, while the first play-through is often an immersive experience, 'the 2nd time through, I'm not really immersed in the world or its story at all - it's all about the gameplay change' ("one_rock_fury", personal communication, September 11, 2014). Such commentary supports the idea that levels and modes of identification can also be multiple and shifting for one gameplayer within one game world. Further, identification between the gameplayer and avatar may be perceived by other users, even if the primary gameplayer is not experiencing or is not conscious of experiencing it[5]. As McCallum-Stewart assures us, gameplayer responses to their avatars cover a whole spectrum of connections and approaches: 'playful, self-aware, unselfconscious, deviant' (2008), the possibilities for identification or reasons for lack of it are as varied as gameplayers themselves.

This multiplicity, argue some scholars, is precisely what makes video games, and online communities more broadly, typical of postmodernity, as well as being sites of potential for the troubling of hegemonic identity norms such as heteronormativity and essentialist gender binaries. Filiciak states that postmodern life is characterized by 'lack of cohesion; it is fragmented…We receive no implied form of our "self", but, instead, we

[5] To return to my own gaming practices, as secondary gameplayer of *FFVII* and *FFVIII*, any sense of a dividing line between the primary gameplayer and the avatar onscreen would vanish during particularly crucial or hectic periods of gameplay (generally during difficult combat or a timed mission), when it could be said that both I and the primary were to a certain extent immersed or engaged in the game; at such times I would shout (advice and abuse) indiscriminately at both avatar and primary gameplayer as if they were one entity. On my part, I therefore conferred identification upon the gameplayer-avatar connection. It is also common for the primary gameplayer to switch between the use of "I" and "you" when speaking about action within the game. For example, when talking to me in my role as secondary gameplayer or observer, the primary might explain that the avatar has lost a life in the game by saying "I just died!", which appears to express identification with that avatar; then again, she might address the avatar directly ("Come on, you bastard!" being a regular exclamation in much FF gameplay), suggesting that the avatar can also be viewed as a separate entity.

construct it incessantly' (2003, 94). The different modes of engaging with gameplay and with online communities through avatars and temporarily adopted identities we display in the context of the virtual create opportunities for a myriad of gender performances – some reiterations of the hegemonic constructs of our cultural context, no doubt, but others presenting alternative articulations. Thus, argues Filiciak optimistically, digital media 'enable us – for the first time in history on such a scale – to manipulate our "selves" and to multiply them indefinitely' (88). In video games, he goes on to say, this is because, while something like identification does take place, total convergence does not occur: the 'player's identity ends in disintegration' (91) during gameplay or at moments of transferring between gameplay and other activities, but they do not wholly "become" the avatar, or vice versa. This disintegration results in the potential for performances of multiple identities in the space between the embodied gameplayer and digital avatar.

The final section builds on these connections between gameplayer and character to explore the relationships between the body and technology: the gameplayer and machine interface. Like the gameplayer/avatar connections, in some ways this can be said to echo the issues raised in the cosplay chapter of subject and object, and the possibility of moving beyond such a binary.

## 7.5 (Wo)man or machine: Gameplay, cyborgs and affect

Video games, says Grodal, are perhaps even closer as a medium than cosplay to 'basic embodied experience, because eye and ear are not only stimulated (as in cinema), but are also linked to actual muscle activation that can influence spaces and objects on the screen' (2003, 139). Mediated by an interface of screen and controllers or keyboard, the

interactivity between gameplayer and technology has reached a level unprecedented in older media, in a similar, but even more intense, way to the interactivity between cosplayers and the devices that manipulate, display and disseminate their digital images online. Lupton argues that we come to "know" our digital devices intimately; as she puts it, 'I am face to face with my computer for far longer than I look into any human face' (1995, 97). Because the interactivity between device and user means that we can influence what happens on the screen and, conversely, that the interface and the content it displays can have a mental and physical effect on us, Lupton posits, we tend to anthropomorphise computers and consoles, forming a psychological as well as embodied connection to them. The latter, says Lahti, is particularly important when speaking of interactivity in games, which 'actually anchor our experience and subjectivity…in an ambiguous boundary between the body and technology' (2003, 158). It is the boundary between the two, and the way it is blurred in the interface, that proves one of the most potentially fruitful areas for alternative identity performance in gameplay practices.

The deep levels of interaction possible through gameplay has been described as creating a "cyborg" subject of the gameplayer, who becomes a human interfacing with a machine (Boulter, 2005, 53) that appears to speak to its users and direct their input, extending the human faculties through the use of controllers and keyboard: a cybernetic orgamism (Haraway, 2000, 291). Haraway's cyborg 'is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities' (295); it is never complete, whole or singular, and ideally could inhabit a world in which people are not afraid of acknowledging the connections between human and animal, human and machine. Using the figure of the cyborg further opens up the field of postmodern identity play in the embodied connection between gameplayer and device.

Lupton, too, suggests that computers offer users 'the opportunity to achieve a cyborgian seamlessness' (1995, 111), although for her this takes the form of a 'utopian freedom from the flesh' (111) instead of being rooted in embodiment. Lupton is referring more to the use of online devices and the potential of cyberspace for performing a variety of identities than to the gameplay of single-player RPGs, but the "seamlessness" she refers to could also be said to refer to intense gameplay characterized by a state of immersion in the game. When in a state of immersion, gameplayers are more likely to be caught up in performing as a particular character or avatar, which may mean performing an alternative gender or sexual identity to that which they generally enact in everyday life outside the game world.

Whether the above-mentioned "cyborgian seamlessness" is psychological or physical, however, it is crucial to remember that immersion, and gameplay more generally, is a temporary state, and that the same therefore holds true for any in-game identity performances. For Lupton, who focuses on psychological immersion, while a person 'may successfully pretend to be a different age or gender…she or he will always have to return to the embodied reality of an empty stomach, stiff neck, aching hands…caused by many hours in front of a computer' (1995, 97), when any immersive state will be interrupted.

An understanding of the temporary nature of immersion as a simulation, says Boulter (2005, 57), is part of what "being-cyborg" is all about. Perhaps because of this, some theorists have argued that, while games do seem to facilitate 'transformatory experiences' (Krzywinska, 2007, 117), the temporary space for identity play offered by video games does not necessarily promote fundamental changes in how one self-identifies. Boulter (2005) agrees with this statement. However, he also argues that this is not really

the point of video games; referring to the structural and rule-based systems that make them unique, he suggests that the "seduction" of connecting with a video game in a cyborgian fashion is found in its temporary and limited nature:

> What is crucial about the cyborg-as-gamer/gamer-as-cyborg trope is *precisely* its temporally and ideologically limited structure: its limitations are precisely central to its seductive, almost sublime appeal. A game that would allow for a radical and permanent transformation of systems of power would not be a game at all…
> (2005, 57)

In this way, the gameplayer's temporary connection with the video game resonates with Baudrillard's concept of seduction, its capacity 'to deny things their truth and turn it into a game, the pure play of appearances, and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning with a mere turn of the hand' (Baudrillard, 1990, 8). For Baudrillard, this surface play is the only way to challenge normative gender discourses, by a refusal to engage earnestly using 'strong signs or powers' (83). The multiplicity of identity performances involved in engaging and disengaging from a cyborg state, in the various levels of identifying as gameplayer and as different characters, and in extra-gameplay online practices are, like cosplay performances, temporary and therefore possibly limited when it comes to altering the identities we perform in everyday life or to directly changing hegemonic gender and sexual binaries.

Nevertheless, Shinkle argues that such a cyborg connection between gameplayer and machine makes video games capable of bringing about political change, 'in the way that they open up a space for the emergence of new relations between body, mind, and technology' (2005, 33). So perhaps it is more in the ludic aspect of *FFVII*, rather than in fan practices based around its fictional aspects, that the potential to disrupt normative

gender/sexual discourses can be found.

Gameplay also suggests a connection with the cyborg through 'the endless recirculation of simulated Being' that is 'the narrative of the cyborg's life' (Boulter, 2005, 62), which is reminiscent of the mechanics of character life and death in video games. Certainly, death as a finality does occur in the pre-written narrative elements of many games, most often in the irreversible, unalterable (in-game, at least) medium of the cut-scene; for example the death of Aerith in *FFVII*, which is 'often cited as an example of videogames' power to induce emotional reactions' (Poole, 2004, 179), or of Zack in *CC*. These characters, even if they were playable before, can no longer be used by the gameplayer after their onscreen death; within the game, it is final. But for the avatar, and by extension the gameplayer in their complex connection, death is rather arbitrary and life simply a matter of resetting or rebooting the game. This is most apparent in beat-em-up games, in which the losing avatar inevitably dies at the end of each match, only to be respawned a moment later for another round; but it is also the case for RPGs like *FFVII*. First, the avatar's "life" is constantly being suspended in the stop and start of gameplay sessions (as the game takes many hours to complete); then, if Cloud or another playable character in his party dies during combat, they can either be revived by magic or, if the whole party is killed, the gameplayer simply loads 'a *save game* in order to continue just before he or she died' (Juul, 2011, 6). The *FFVII* game world is littered with "save points" for this purpose (points on the screen which the gameplayer can travel to and save the game; if their characters are then killed, they can restart the game at the point they saved it, without having to begin all over again); the gameplayer can also save at any time by entering the world map screen. Like the cyborg, it only takes a little electronic manipulation to revive the dead avatar and resurrect the human-machine hybrid of the

gameplayer-game interface. Depending on the gameplayer's skill and the characters' levels, this rearticulation of cyborgian regeneration may recur again and again in the course of the game. This "rebirth" of the characters is of course available to gameplayers of all sexes and genders, perhaps temporarily lessening women's role (or duty) as the bearers or creators of new life, even if it is a digital life.

In Kennedy's (2007) direct linkage of the gameplayer/game interface with the figure of the cyborg, it is this fusion between gameplayer and game world (which includes the avatar) that constitutes the playing subject; it is not sufficient to have either user or game: like the unfolding of the in-game action and narrative themselves, the activity of both are required, and it is the interface of controller, wire, buttons, fingers and brain connecting the two that brings the cyborg subject into being; a subject that is at the same time an "other", 'multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial' (Haraway, 2000, 313). It is this entity, proclaims Haraway, that might provide one of the greatest challenges to binary hegemonic structures in the postmodern West (although it also has potential to be oppressive, for example in the case of augmented human research used in war; Thweatt-Bates, 2012), precisely because it cannot have, or even desire, "an identity": 'it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end' (2000, 315), but instead advocates the same fractured multiplicity generated, according to the argument outlined above, in the relationship between gameplayer and avatar.

The crucial inclusion of the human body in the concept of cyborg leads us back, finally, to the concept of affect covered in the cosplay chapter, which, in video games, can also be connected with immersion and embodiment. Affect, Shouse reminds us, is 'a non-conscious experience of intensity' that is 'the body's way of preparing itself for action' (2005, paragraph 5). It enables the potential for action through its transmission between

two bodies (the gameplayer and the avatar or game): the gameplayer is affected by seeing what is happening to their avatar on the screen and responds physically, moving the electronic body in its turn. Affect, thus, 'fills the interval between perception and action' (Hansen, 2004, 210).

It is hard, after a gameplay session, for gameplayers to describe the experience; they can narrate the sequence of events, but this is not everything. Even when a gameplayer spends hours in a state of immersion (or perhaps due to being in such a state), says Märyä, it is difficult to for a gameplayer to describe what the game actually meant to them (2008, 14). This difficulty may be explained by the affective nature of gameplay in which users are intensely engaged; particularly when in combat mode, 'loaded with action to be handled with quick reactions and excellent hand-eye-coordination' (Eskelinen, 2001), the gameplayer reacts to the onscreen action at the level of bodily response rather than conscious thought. Such responses, especially when in an immersive state, are not easy to explain in terms of "meaning".

Games, even more clearly than cosplay or other fan media because of the very direct back-and-forth between human and digital body, 'can cause physiological arousal' (Chumbley & Griffiths, 2006, 309) in their users, foregrounding the human body in the experience of play. The highly active participation of some gameplayers in the gameplay experience is intense enough to change the bodily position of the gameplayer 'from the lean backward position of narratives to the lean forward position of games' (Juul, 2001). While this type of movement is not unique to gaming (for example, people deeply engaged in watching a TV drama or sporting event do a similar thing), in gaming the player's tension and movement comes partly from knowing that their input is (somewhat) responsible for what is happening on the screen. This explanation suggests that the

experience of gameplay is one of intensity, which makes us sit up and lean forward. The embodied aspect of gaming suggests that 'audiovisual theories that have regularly articulated media spectatorship as a passive process that dematerializes the body and foregrounds a psychic or cognitive experience' need reconsidering in the context of video games and elsewhere (Lahti, 2003, 169). There can be no denying that cognitive or emotional experience is a significant part of some game genres, particularly RPGs like *FFVII* in which there are many periods of narrative exposition and non-playable cut-scenes. According to Lahti, though, it is rather the bodily pleasures of gaming that are being most actively developed and desired (2003, 169), through newer console systems like the Nintendo Wii and PlayStation 4, which include systems for engaging the whole body and controllers with haptic facilities:

> This delirium of virtual mobility, sensory feedback, and the incorporation of the player into a larger system thus tie the body into a cybernetic loop with the computer, where its affective thrills can spill over into the player's space…
> (163)

This description echoes the previously discussed conception of gameplayer as cyborg, and suggests that the affective dimension of gameplay serves to heighten the interactivity between gameplayer and gaming device.

This allow us to return to the discussion, raised in the cosplay chapter, of how far affect can be used to dismantle binary categories such as subject and object. Huizinga, one of the early authorities on games and play more generally, reminds us that play is not real life; '[i]t is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own' (1949, 8), which in video gameplay consists of the intersecting

connections between gameplayer and avatar, human and machine. Juul describes this sphere as a 'twilight zone where he/she [the player] is both an empirical subject outside the game *and* undertakes a role inside the game' (2001). This idea of a space that is neither one thing nor another is reflected in the slogan for Sony's PlayStation 2, the platform for a number of FF titles, in the advertising around its release: it called itself "The Third Place"[6]. This describes the gaming environment provided by the console. McGuire posits that this is a space 'in which identities are as uncertain and malleable as the environment they inhabit' (2003, 2), given modern game consoles' connectivity with the Internet and the possibilities they offer for remote play and socialization with other gameplayers; in this definition, the "Third Place" describes a virtual community. But it could also be interpreted as referring to a space that is neither "real" life nor wholly imaginary, one between the embodied gameplayer and digital avatar.

The period of gameplay, in this "twilight zone" or in-between space, could be seen as a site in which users can play with identities in a risk-free environment; in a way similar to Baudrillard's characterization of the Rule in games as something outside the context of our everyday lives to which we are happy to adhere because it is 'arbitrary and ungrounded' in a moral context that carries any significance outside the game space (Baudrillard, 1990, 136), so Consalvo describes gameplay as:

> …a period of liminality, where the player is *between* her "real" life and the life of the character on the screen. As the rules of real life are temporarily lifted, so are social expectations…
> (2003, 180)

[6] For example at the end of this short advert for the PS2 by surrealist American director David Lynch and shown in cinemas around Europe: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFnNRibEYxc Accessed August 21, 2014.

As such, the liminal period of gameplay does not require the gameplayer to adhere to the norms and standards specified by their particular cultural context, or to make a gendered/sexual statement by identifying with the character avatar whose action and performance they are enabling. In periods of intense or immersive gameplay, particularly, the user occupies a place between gameplayer and avatar, where the 'player's body is next to the computer screen or television monitor, but her avatar, the "I"…is travelling through and in the virtual space of the game opening behind the monitor' (Lahti, 2003, 166).

The doubling or multiplication of selves suggested by the multiple positions the user inhabits during gameplay can be connected to the concept of movement-vision, which was used in the cosplay chapter to explain how cosplayers, in consuming and manipulating their own moving digital images, have the potential to confuse traditional subject/object, active/passive binaries. Massumi explains that '[t]he elementary unit of the space of movement-vision is not a generalizing subject coupled with an object' (2002, 50); instead, by viewing themselves as an "other" or outsider would, the subject 'departs from itself' (50), simultaneously occupying both subject and object space in a state of in-between-ness. The video game avatar, regardless of any identification based specifically on gender or sexuality, etc., serves to enable movement-vision:

> The avatar does double duty as self and other, symbol and index. As *self*, its behaviour is tied to the player's through an interface…its literal motion, as well as its figurative triumphs and defeats, result from the player's actions. At the same time, avatars are unequivocally *other*. Both limited and freed by difference from the player, they can accomplish more than the player alone…
> (Rehak, 2003, 106)

The avatar, in a different way to a video recording, allows the gameplayer to experience

both self and other; perhaps even more than video, because the action of gameplayer and avatar are more nearly simultaneous, whereas video is usually watched after recording has finished and the movement of the user's body has ceased. This sets up gameplay as a practice and space in which the avatar, because it does not usually *look* like the user, is both more "other" than a video of oneself, and more "self" because its actions are more closely linked to the user's input. In such a state of movement-vision, even when the gameplayer has not personally selected or created the character that is to represent them as in *FFVII*, the ability to clearly delineate between subject and object becomes doubtful. The avatar, in this scenario, has the potential to disrupt the artificial yet long-dominant construction of identity as binary (self/other, subject/object) in a way that does not depend on categories such as male and female, masculine and feminine (the fictional or representational). It is rather through the action of play itself, '*meaning-making through playful interaction (ludosis)*, as contrasted with meaning-making as decoding of messages or media representations *(semiosis)*' (Märyä, 2008, 19); the way in which the avatar both prompts the user to respond and becomes an extension of the action that the response entails, as 'ergodic involvement [effort required on the part of the user to traverse the text] is crucially a matter of bodily (and partly automatized) interaction. When you play with the machine, it is *as if*, by analogy, you are a body in a world' (Klevjer, 2002, 200). It is unclear, here, what is subject and what is object, which is active and which passive. Affect and movement-vision are at play in the same gaming environment that enables the gameplayer to take on cyborg characteristics.

Affect, like the cyborg, is intimately concerned with liminality and physicality, being defined by 'open-ended in-between-ness' (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, 3). The idea of a body being both "outside" and in itself echoes the complex subjectivity (or, indeed,

objectivity) of the gameplayer in their interaction with the avatar during gameplay, and even that of the avatar itself; for, as Massumi is careful to note, affect is not limited to human, physical bodies but can also operate upon, and be caused by, "mental" or "ideal" bodies (1995, x). Perhaps even more distinctly than in the practices of cosplay, where cosplayers manipulate and consume their own digital images, the avatar can be seen as both an affected body (it responds to the gameplayer's physical body, their manipulation of the controller, with the movement of its own digital body) and an affective one (as the action of the avatar at least partly prompts the gameplayer's physical response), in an endless cycle of response and action.

Shinkle restates the important point that affect occurs below or prior to conscious thought, and relies on the embodiment of the gameplayer to provide part of the integral experience of video games:

> ...the rush you get from a good game is not confined to the space of a screen, it is a subrational, bodily thing as well, involving phenomenological or *affective* dimensions which cannot be programmed into a game, but which are nonetheless vital to gameplay…
> (2005, 22)

The pleasurable "rush" of which Shinkle speaks corresponds to the intensity of affect. In gaming, immediate physical response is often required, especially in combat or racing scenarios; during intense engagement, the urgency of this response is not thought out by the gameplayer but is (especially for experienced gameplayers) sheer reflex, occurring below the level of conscious decision-making and thought. According to Shinkle, such affect is foregrounded best in action and first-person shooter (FPS) games like *CC* and *DoC*, rather than lengthy RPGs. This, he suggests, is because the pace of the former two

genres is generally faster than the latter, with more combat in which timing is crucial and less of the world exploration, narrative unfolding and general wandering about that is characteristic of long RPGs. The intensity and level of immersion that comes with high-input gameplay (even more so with the recent consoles that require movement of the gameplayer's whole body) is more conducive to affect that causes an immediate bodily reaction, more physical than the "emotional" pleasure by which Galbraith (2009) defines the affective response of some fans to *moe* images of anime or game characters (as distinct from the "physical" pleasure of sexual arousal and masturbation discussed in the cosplay chapter). Even in the first *FFVII* game, which does include periods of intense and urgent gameplay (such as battles with "bosses" or major opponents like Sephiroth), then, it could be argued that affect is more immediate and makes a greater demand for the body to act than in fan use of other, purely image-based official media or transformative works in which the user's active response is not so immediately crucial.

The proponents of affect theory thus caution against too great a stress on approaches that analyse peoples' perception of images based on social signification and meaning-making alone, because this devalues, or even forgets altogether, the significance of the "event" or the "moment" in which something happens or changes, in which affect takes place. Shinkle argues that the 'experience of image perception as an 'event' is what is lost in the *structural* or *semiotic* approaches' (2005), which do not take the body into account in the same way affect theory does. In terms of troubling the long-standing structures of Western hegemony, this is an important point. Massumi highlights the potential of the event for this, saying '[n]othing is prefigured in the event. It is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, of rules into paradox' (Massumi, 1996, 5). The moments of intense gameplay experience (the breathlessly urgent, even panicked

manipulation of the controller to strike a blow, to evade an attack, etc.) could in this way offer a potential space to sidestep the rules of the game (both ludus and paidia) and their previously-discussed ideological implications in the giddiness of movement and the adrenaline rush.

It is these meetings of human and machine, physical and digital, affect and meaning, that make video games so suited to thinking through new ways of being and perception; 'it is by engaging this field of possibility, rather than simply furnishing ideological content, that digital games can be potentially compelling' (Shinkle, 2005, 23). Hansen concurs, suggesting that, if we seek out and allow this affective dimension, welcoming it as embodied users, 'our communication and our coevolution with the computer – and along with it visual culture more generally – will enter a truly new, 'post-imagistic' phase' (2003, 208). The relationships in these games between gameplayer and avatar, the human-machine interface, and the liminality within those relationships enabled by affect involve complex experiences of in-between-ness. This tendency was also seen to some extent in Chapter 6, in some pornographic cosplay; and it seems to be in these experiences of intensity and liminality that the importance of fandom (in terms of "good" or "authentic" practice) and Japaneseness decreases for the users involved. Thus, some gameplay practices, perhaps even more than cosplay, offer greater potential than the mainly digital media of scanned *dōjinshi* and machinima videos when it comes to providing sites in which identity categories can be rendered temporarily irrelevant through the experience of intense play.

# 8. Conclusion

Chapter 2 of this dissertation began by contextualizing *FFVII* within some of the major genres in the contemporary gaming world, before introducing the ways in which fans privilege Japaneseness through discussing the tensions that arise between industry and fans in the process of game localization into English. Reinforcing Iwabuchi's concept of Japaneseness as a shifting social construct, it highlighted the importance of fan imaginings of Japaneseness to articulations of gender and sexuality. It then analyzed the fictional elements of the officially released *FFVII* games: the in-game story, character relationships and designs, arguing that these promote an idea of masculinity that is interpreted by fans as both distinctly Japanese and androgynous. In the commercially released game materials, this androgynous Japanese masculinity is set up as strictly heterosexual, with other sexualities delegitimized through derogatory humour. In the final section of the chapter, the focus shifted to visual fan commentaries on in-game articulations of gender and sexuality, in the shape of machinima, videos that re-use and transform game footage. An analysis of these machinima suggested that their (primarily male) creators and viewers also valorise heteronormativity though derogatory images of non-straight male characters, at the same time dismissing the importance and agency of female characters. Here, however, the androgynous masculinity that is linked with heterosexuality in the game text is refigured as both Japanese and homosexual, in a way that is normative and arguably Orientalist. Thus, while the game character designs do offer an alternative to dominant images of hegemonic "macho" masculinity found in Western video games, the game story and the use of in-game footage in machinima serve to uphold norms of heterosexuality and phallocentricity.

Chapter 3 continued the trajectory of transformative works that privilege heteronormative masculinity, looking at *hentai dōjinshi*. Translated and disseminated online, these *dōjinshi* do contain a few non-normative articulations of sexuality, most notably the *futanari*, a female body with both male and female genitalia. However, the context in which these characters are situated and their minority status amid a swathe of hyper-feminine and powerless female characters arguably undermines any potential they may have to provide a legitimized alternative to traditional binaries of male and female. Focusing on the phallocentricity at work in Western online pornography, the chapter demonstrated that English-translated *dōjinshi* also privilege the phallus, to the detriment of women, and also of male users in terms of denying them vulnerability and limiting male erotic pleasure to the penis. Further, the visual centrality and physical exaggeration of the female characters sets women up as passive, hyper-feminine, sexualized objects. The chapter concluded that, although this genre of transformative works allows fans to rearticulate game elements in a postmodern way according to Azuma's (2009) database of media simulacra, with their own imaginings of Japaneseness informing their interpretations of translated *dōjinshi*, recurring articulations of heterosexual male dominance and female powerlessness suggest that it conforms as much as machinima to Western gender and sexual norms.

Chapter 4 continued the discussion of fan comics with an exploration of boys' love *dōjinshi* and the fan practices involved in their translation and dissemination. It argued that BL texts, the practices of their transformation of the game texts and their transnational online use offer spaces in which fans may play with alternative ideals of gender and sexuality, although it must be admitted that these alternatives, like machinima and *hentai*, tend to reinforce the centrality of man as legitimate subject. BL shares some

traits with *hentai dōjinshi* in terms of transformation and dissemination practices. It also has the same tendency of over-simplifying female characters and denying them agency, although in BL these characters are generally removed from the story and visual frame entirely rather than objectified. Like the in-game story of *FFVII*, BL instead prioritizes male-male relationships between androgynous characters, although the relationships here are explicitly sexual, providing an alternative to heteronormativity by legitimizing same-sex relationships through fan affection for the characters. As shown in the second chapter, the majority of heterosexual Final Fantasy *hentai* does tend to be supportive of, or at least not opposed to, hegemonic norms of gender that have been in place for a very long time in a Western context. The fantasies provided by those texts, apart from raising and reflecting some male users' anxieties regarding the instabilities inescapably present in phallocentric masculinity, serve largely to affirm an existing 'largely gendered, heteronormative reality in which men remain in control' (Garlick, 2011, 235-6). Users of *hentai dōjinshi* are not presented with depictions of gender or sexuality that threaten this, and hence are not often prompted to consider alternative articulations or the possibility and need for social change. On the other hand, boys' love, while containing certain articulations of gender that place male bodies and masculinity squarely in the centre of subjectivity, nevertheless do provide a variety of masculinities and some alternative sites of gender and sexuality to hegemonic normativity, which may suggest to users that the current hegemonic system is flawed and inadequate. This, in turn, could promote the need for social change and the concept of undoing normative constructions of gender and heteronormativity. We must bear in mind, however, that '[o]ur ability to conceptualize their undoing is limited to the extent that our sense of ourselves has been constructed within a heterosexual, patriarchal social order' (Jackson, 1999, 181). Further, fan support

of this idea of social change in a traditional activist sense requires considerably more work from BL users than is required by *hentai* fans, who are largely consuming articulations of the status quo; and the playful users of the postmodern media databases may be unwilling or unable to take such an overtly political step.

Chapter 5 moved to look at practices and media involving cosplay, and it is here that affect theory is introduced, as the focus shifts from primarily digital transformative works to a genre in which the embodied user is central to articulations of gender and sexuality, their bodily experience of performing cosplay complicating the digital images they produce and the use of those images by other fans. It examined cosplay primarily through online fan media and commentary, which sees Japan as something of a privileged "centre" of cosplay. It also included, as an integral part of the discussion, the ways in which the bodies of cosplaying fans and their audiences interact with the digital as well as with one another. It argued that the gendered cosplay practices of crossplay and trans cosplay contain the potential for both affective and social dimensions; cosplay can thus encompass the apolitical, "fannish" gender play associated with the *dōjinshi* genre, and at the same time make deliberate and even activist identity statements, though it must be said that such statements often sadly go unheard due to trans cosplay's marginal status in the cosplay world.

Chapter 6 continued to investigate cosplay practices through eroticized and pornographic cosplay performances and media, which do share some similar normative themes and imagery with *hentai dōjinshi* in their articulations of femininity. It showed how the intersection of social signification and affect can impact not only the clarity of the relationship between "original" and "copy" but also that between "subject" and "object", constructs that have long been considered key to gender studies, in the sense

that subjecthood entails activeness, the right to speak, and centrality, while objects are traditionally condemned to passivity, silence and marginalization. It was found that the use of some types of "sexualized" digital cosplay image complicates the binary concept of human fan as subject and character image as object, particularly in amateur films in which female cosplayers film themselves and manipulate their own images for use by other fans. Thus, cosplay conforms in some ways to hegemonic gender and sexual norms found in other Final Fantasy fan media. At the same time, the connection between embodied cosplayer and character image through affective response serves to heighten the variety of fan articulations of gender and sexuality, and even offers the potential to disengage with identity categories altogether during moments of affect and movement-vision.

Chapter 7 returned to the *FFVII* games themselves, and it is here that the importance to fans of "Japaneseness" appears to be subsumed to an extent during the intensity of gameplay, which is some cases is so intense it may no longer be experienced as "play". In the world of game fandoms, the main practices absolutely requiring the interaction of both the body and the digital are cosplay and gameplay (and, given the remarks by scholars of the postmodern such as Baudrillard and Darley on the playful and non-serious attitudes of users towards media, the terms given to these fan practices are not insignificant). This analysis engaged with questions of embodiment in performance, the interface between the body and the electronic worlds of game and Internet, and the myriad complications to be found in the concepts of "original" and "copy" born through the material fan involvement with an already ambiguous animated character image. This chapter argued that the relationships between gameplayer and character, the human-console interface, and the physical-digital realm of the virtual generate complex

experiences of in-between-ness. Thus, some gameplay practices, like those of cosplay, offer more potential than the mainly digital media of scanned *dōjinshi* and machinima when it comes to providing sites in which identity categories can be rendered temporarily irrelevant through the experience of intense play.

The cosplay chapters demonstrated that fan practices depending on an embodied user have the potential to engender various types of affect, from the "emotional" masturbatory pleasure defined by Galbraith (2009), which prompts users to cosplay based on affective attraction to a character image, to the explicitly physical masturbatory affect in erotic and pornographic cosplay, which culminates in orgasm. Orgasim is one of the most primary manifestations of affect next to panic, which can indeed be triggered by some video games. Like pornographic cosplay, the game can make us react physically and physiologically. We also saw that cosplayers are not only affected bodies, but become affective themselves when their digital bodies are consumed by other fans as images. It could be argued that, in terms of acting on the *initial* digital image, gameplay enables the fan body to be affective to a greater degree than cosplay (in which we cannot cause such a response; we can reimagine and create new images of initial characters, but we cannot make the first affective image *do* anything), because of the unique cycle of action and response between gameplayer and avatar. Affect in gameplay is not unilateral, from digital body to physical, but multidirectional.

Reintroducing the spectrum of social signification and affect discussed in the previous chapters, it can be said that the *FFVII* games, like the various cosplay practices that stem from them, are sites of meaning-making and social signification (in their fictional aspects, particularly) but also of strong affective experience; and, thanks to their

different users and those users' varying modes of engagement with the games at different times and in different situations, are situated at a wide variety of points along the spectrum. There are gamers who take no fannish interest in the characters or fiction, revelling only in gameplay and experiencing the text *as a game*; there are fans such as some *dōjinshi* artists who only play the game once or twice but engage actively in produsing transformative works for years afterwards; and a multiplicity of variations in between.

The affective intensity that emerges from some cosplay practices and which video games prompt and encourage through their various modes of immersive gameplay, as well as the other, largely digital, transformations of the *FFVII* games' fictional elements by fans, show the myriad ways in which the initial game texts can be used to engage with issues of identity. The willingness, even eagerness, of fans to manipulate the privileged "original" signals a playfulness characteristic of the postmodern user (Azuma, 2009), where fans approach the transformation of texts with the same spirit in which they engage with the video game itself (Stein in Jenkins, Jones & Stein, 2007): available for play, with their own sets of rules to be kept, bent or broken.

While the rules of the *FFVII* games are often evaded, broken or modified during gameplay, however, there is limited evidence in either machinima or *hentai dōjinshi* fandoms that the heteronormative and masculinist goals of the games are being challenged or that alternatives are being promoted by fans in the same way as in BL and trans cosplay fandoms, although non-normative articulations of masculinity based on fan imaginings of Japaneseness are fairly prominent (and interpreted both negatively and positively). Even in those transformative works and practices that do engage with alternatives to norms of gender and sexuality, there is little evidence that fans are seeking to move beyond the constructed binaries that shape our ideals of gender and sexuality in

our everyday lives.

Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that it is rather in the highly embodied aspects of cosplay and of gameplay itself (where imaginings of Japaneseness actually seem be of least significance), and particularly the in-between-ness of the subjectification and relationships between fan body and digital character, the human-and-console cyborg, and the physical and digital interstices of affect, that an arena of experience is opened up in which the concepts of either upholding or challenging normative identity performance become are subsumed in the setting aside, in the affective moment, of the possibility of "identity" altogether. It must be remembered, however, that the social is not lost completely; it is always potentially present, and affective moments are preceded and followed by the making of meaning. It is here that our education, cultural context, and critical thought can determine whether these affective moments prompt us to action that supports or undermines hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality. Thus, the connections between social and affect might be of great importance for making changes to our lives outside fandom, and this should be examined more deeply in future research.

A limitation of the current study is that it focuses on fan practices and experiences within the fandom, the interactions among fans and their media. In future research it will be useful to examine what fans are doing outside the fandom, in their everyday activities, and whether their fan experiences have a wider effect on their thought and action regarding gender and sexuality. Connecting fandom with other aspects of fans' lives would also enable a study of fandom and gender within the larger political, social and consumer economy.

There was insufficient space in this study to explore every single type of

transformative work and fan practice associated with video games, and this could be considered a gap, given that this dissertation stressed the importance of conducting a holistic study when investigating articulations of identity within a fandom; unfortunately, it was simply impractical, given the limitations of the doctoral dissertation format (and the patience of the reader). Future research could build on this project in a number of different ways.

As stated early in the dissertation, the *FFVII* games under examination here are no longer particularly innovative in terms of technology, although at the time of its release the first game was seminal. It would perhaps enrich the discussion of various connections between human body and game to examine different genres of video game on more advanced consoles and platforms, to see what these new technologies can add to theorizations of gameplay modes, cyborg interfaces and the working of affect on identity. Similarly, a study of games that explicitly involve interaction between different gameplayers, such as MMORPGs or social mobile games, could provide new insights into the relationships between the social and the human body.

There are also further connections that can be made between the embodied practices of cosplay and gameplay, in a highly sexual subgenre of fan-created games that also draws heavily on traditions from *hentai dōjinshi* fandoms. These are pornographic games, or *dōjin*-soft, based on existing (usually female) game characters. Hardy says of pornographic performance that 'no other representational genre requisitions the emotional disposition of its audience in such a direct way' (2004, 13); and games are not only a representational genre but a simulative one as well (Frasca, 2003). While there was not enough room in this dissertation to investigate these pornographic fan games, it would be interesting to consider whether some such games might enable a kind of simultaneous

"double" experience of affect from the intensity triggered by both gameplay and sexual arousal, and perhaps have even more potential to depart from the realm of social signification during the period of gameplay, in spite of the highly heteronormative and essentialist qualities of much of their content.

In terms of its fictional elements, Final Fantasy is also by no means forward-thinking or challenging to norms of gender and sexuality. However, there are many other games, including games produced in a different cultural context, that could provide more non-normative articulations in their content (although they are unlikely to have the huge user numbers and demographic as Final Fantasy), and it may be that such games, through both content and gameplay, could offer really fascinating sites for playing with (and without) identity.

Other useful extensions to this research could include exploring the intersections between fan media/practices and other bodily and social aspects that shape the way people live their lives. This dissertation focused on gender and sexuality, but all the media and practices could reveal important new ways to think about race, class, disability, age, religion, warfare, and medicine, particularly in the exciting and troubling ways in which humans can be augmented by technology.

# References


Abramson, P. R., & Hayashi, H. (1984). Pornography in Japan: Cross-Cultural and Theoretical Considerations. In E. Donnerstein & N. M. Malamuth (Eds.), *Pornography and Sexual Aggression* (pp. 173–185). London: Academic Press, Ltd.

Akatsuka, N. K. (2010). Uttering the Absurd, Revaluing the Abject: Femininity and the Disavowal of Homosexuality in Transnational Boys' Love Manga. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 159–176). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Allison, A. (2006). The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture and Millenial Capitalism. In F. Lunning (Ed.), *Mechademia 1: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga* (pp. 11–21). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Aoyagi, H. (2005). *Islands of Eight Million Smiles: Idol Performances and Symbolic Production in Contemporary Japan*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asian Center.

Appadurai, A. (2010). Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. In P. James & I. Szeman (Eds.), *Global-Local Consumption* (pp. 45–63). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Arigatomina Doujinshi [Web log]. (n.d.). In *LiveJournal*. Retrieved August 9, 2010 from http://ari-scanlations.livejournal.com/

Ari_scanlations - Profile. (2009). In *LiveJournal*. Retrieved April 27, 2012 from http://ari-scanlations.livejournal.com/profile

Asakura, R. (2000). *Revolutionaries at Sony: The Making of the Sony PlayStation and the Visionaries who Conquered the World of Video Games*. New York: Mcgraw-Hill.

Assist Cosplay Shop FROM JAPAN. (2012). Retrieved December 4, 2014 from http://www.assistcosplay.com/

The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment. (2016). *UK Games Industry Fact Sheet 26 January 2016* (pp. 1–46).

Atkins, B., & Krzywinska, T. (2007). Introduction: Videogame, player, text. B. Atkins & T. Krzywinska (Eds.), *Videogame, Player, Text* (pp. 1–7). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

aubirdforce. (2006). *Final Fantasy VII 7: Golden saucer dating scene with Barret* [Video file]. Retrieved May 27, 2014 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQRUCZFpWQI

Azuma, H. (2009). *Otaku: Japan`s Database Animals*. (J. E. Abel & S. Kono, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

B2B - Final Fantasy 7 - English. (2009, February 20). In *FAKKU*. Retrieved March 7, 2013 from https://web.archive.org/web/20120511192900/http://www.fakku.net/doujinshi/b2b-english

Barthes, R. (1979). From Work to Text. In J. V. Harari (Ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Poststructuralist Criticism* (pp. 73–81). New York: Cornell University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1988). Simulacra and Simulations. In M. Poster (Ed.), *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings* (pp. 166–184). Cambridge and Stanford: Polity and Stanford University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1990). *Seduction*. (B. Singer, Trans.). Montreal: New World Perspectives.

Blair, M. . (2010). 'She Should Just Die in a Ditch': Fan Reactions to Female Characters in Boys' Love Manga'. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 110–125). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Bird, S. (1996). Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity. *Gender and Society*, *10*(2), 120–132.

BlackSKY Scans [Web log]. (n.d.). In *LiveJournal*. Retrieved April 29, 2010 from http://blacksky-scans.livejournal.com/

Blair, M. . (2010). "She Should Just Die in a Ditch": Fan Reactions to Female Characters in Boys' Love Manga". A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 110–125). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Bordo, S. (1999). *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Boulter, J. (2005). Virtual Bodies, or Cyborgs Are People Too. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *Digital Gameplay: Essays on the nexus of game and gamer* (pp. 52–68). Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Bowman, N. D., Weber, R., Tamborini, R., & Sherry, J. (2013). Facilitating Game Play: How Others Affect Performance at and Enjoyment of Video Games. *Media Psychology*, *16*, 39–64.

Bruns, A. (2006). Towards Produsage: Futures for User-Led Content Production. In F. Sudweeks, H. Hrachovec, & C. Ess (Eds.), (pp. 275–284). Presented at the Proceedings

Cultural Attitudes towards Comm unication and Technology 2006, Tartu, Estonia. Retrieved June 6, 2010 from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/4863/1/4863_1.pdf

Bryce, M., Barber, C., Kelly, J., Kunwar, S., & Plumb, A. (2010). Manga and Anime: Fluidity and Hybridity in Global Imagery. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, (1).

Buckley, S. (1991). 'Penguin in Bondage': A Graphic Tale of Japanese Comic Books. In C. Penley & A. Ross (Eds.), *Technoculture* (pp. 163–195). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Burke, D. L. . (2014, January 8). [FF7PC-98/Steam] Multiple mods - The Reunion (R04c) [Forum]. Retrieved May 14, 2014 from http://forums.qhimm.com/index.php?topic=14914.0

Busse, K., & Hellekson, K. (2006). Introduction: Work in progress. In K. Busse & K. Hellekson (Eds.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (pp. 1–25). London: McFarland & Co Inc.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1991). Imitation and Gender Subordination. D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (pp. 13–31). New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Carter, P. M. (2009). *Speaking Subjects: Language, Subject Formation, and the Crisis of Identity*. Duke University, Durham, NC. Retrieved April 16, 2012 from http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/1665/D_Carter_Phillip_a_200912.pdf?sequence=1

Checkpoint. (n.d.). In *Noire Sensus*. Retrieved April 27, 2012 from http://www.noiresensus.com/bookshelf/ff7/warning.html

Chen, J.-S. (2007). A Study of Fan Culture: Adolescent Experiences with Animé / Manga Doujinshi and Cosplay in Taiwan. *Visual Arts Research*, *33*(1(64)), 14–24.

Connell, R. ., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, *19*(6), 829–859.

Consalvo, M. (2003). Hot Dates and Fairy-Tale Romances: Studying Sexuality in Video Games. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 171–194). London: Routledge.

Cook, I. (2006). Western Heterosexual Masculinity, Anxiety, and Web Porn. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *14*(1), 47–63.

Cosplay.com - The World's Largest Cosplay Community. (2002). Retrieved April 12, from http://www.cosplay.com/

Cosplay.com Results. (2014, February 20). In *Cosplay.com*. Retrieved February 20, 2014 from http://www.cosplay.com/results.php?id=12751476&sort

CosplayDeviants.com. (2007). Retrieved September 3 from http://www.cosplaydeviants.com/tour/

CosplayErotica.com - Sexy Adult Cosplay. (n.d.). Retrieved September 2, 2014 from http://cosplayerotica.com/tour/index.php

Cosplay Spotlight – Carmenpilar Best Ormeño | NSFW Gamer. (2014, March 18). Retrieved August 12, 2014 from http://nsfwgamer.com/cosplay-spotlight-carmenpilar-best-ormeno/

Crawford, G., & Rutter, J. (2007). Playing the Game: Performance in Digital Game Audiences. In C. Sandvoss, C. L. Harrington, & J. Gray (Eds.), *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (pp. 271–281). London: New York University Press.

Cure WorldCosplay. (n.d.). Retrieved September 5, 2013 from https://worldcosplay.net/ja

Daliot-Bul, M. (2014). *License to Play: The Ludic in Japanese Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Darley, A. (2000). *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres*. London: Routledge.

Davis, J. E. (2003). The Commodification of Self. *The Hedgehog Review*, *5*(2), 41–49.

Deleuze, G. (1988). *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. (R. Hurley, translator). San Francisco: City Lights Books.

DEVELOPER'S TALK 「ドラッグ オン ドラグーン」のスタッフが再集結！PS3 と Xbox360 で異なる主人公を描いた「ニーア レプリカント／ニーア ゲシュタルト」に迫る (Developer's Talk:「Drag on Dragon」staff reunion! Different character designs in PS3 and Xbox360 versions of「NieR Replicant and NieR Gestalt」). (2010, May). Retrieved November 24, 2015 from http://www.inside-games.jp/article/2010/05/18/42090.html

Doujin-moe. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2010 from http://www.doujin-moe.us/

Dragonfly doujinshi scanlations. (n.d.). Retrieved May 20, 2012 from http://web.archive.org/web/20120506005216/http:/dragonfly.grey-space.net/

Eberwein, R. T. (2007). *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Egan, R. D., & Hawkes, G. L. (2008). Endangered Girls and Incendiary Objects: Unpacking the Discourse on Sexualization. *Sexuality & Culture*, *12*, 291–311.

EGG PLANT FFVII. (2011, June 3). In *FAKKU*. Retrieved April 24, 2013 from https://web.archive.org/web/20130411025417if_/http://ads2.contentabc.com/ads?spot_id=107661

Eskelinen, M. (2001). The Gaming Situation. *Game Studies*, *1*(1). Retrieved September 6, 2009 from http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen

Eskelinen, M., & Tronstad, R. (2003). Video Games and Configurative Performances. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 195–220). London: Routledge.

Evans, A., Ripley, S., & Shankar, A. (2010). Technologies of Sexiness: Theorizing Women's Engagement in the Sexualization of Culture. *Feminism & Psychology*, *20*(1), 114–131.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.

FAKKU - All About Hentai! (n.d.). Retrieved November 4, 2010 from https://www.fakku.net/

FAQ at CosplayDeviants.com. (2013, August 16). Retrieved February 21, 2014 from https://web.archive.org/web/20130816032747/http://www.cosplaydeviants.com/static/faq.html

Fergusson, T. (2012). Final Fantasy VII Gold Saucer Date Guide for PlayStation by TFergusson - GameFAQs. Retrieved September 12, 2015 from http://www.gamefaqs.com/ps/197341-final-fantasy-vii/faqs/2385

FF7MT - Masochist Tifa - Final Fantasy 7 - English. (2010, September 10). In *FAKKU*. Retrieved April 21, 2013 from https://web.archive.org/web/20130329225130/http://www.fakku.net/doujinshi/ff7mt-masochist-tifa-english

FFFreak. (2011). Final Fantasy World - Final Fantasy VII / 7 / FFVII - Playstation One. In *Final Fantasy World*. Retrieved June 13, 2012 from https://web.archive.org/web/20151002084327/http://www.finalfantasyworld.co.uk/ffvii/ffvii.php

Filiciak, M. (2003). Hyperidentities: Postmodern Identity Patterns in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 87–102). London: Routledge.

The Final Fantasy VII Citadel. (1998). Retrieved December 12, 2014 from http://www.ff7citadel.com/

Final Fantasy H - Free Final Fantasy Hentai FF6 - FF7 - FF8 - FF9 - FFX - FF10 - SEX. (n.d.). Retrieved April 21, 2010 from https://web.archive.org/web/20150317075201/http://ffantasyh.com/

Final Fantasy Wiki. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2014 from http://finalfantasy.wikia.com/wiki/Final_Fantasy_Wiki

Fiske, J. (1990). *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London: Routledge.

Flood, M. (2008). Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women. *Men and Masculinities*, *10*(3), 339–359.

Frasca, G. (2003). Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 221–236). London: Routledge.

Frasca, G. (2003a). Ludologists love stories, too: notes from a debate that never took place. Retrieved 16 October 2008, from http://www.ludology.org/articles/Frasca_LevelUp2003.pdf

Fuss, D. (1995). *Identification Papers*. New York: Routledge.

Galbraith, P. (2009). Moe: Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, *9*(3). Retrieved October 2, 2012 from http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html

Garlick, S. (2011). A New Sexual Revolution? Critical Theory, Pornography, and the Internet. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, *8*(3), 221–239.

Garrelts, N. (2005). Introduction: Negotiating the Digital Game/Gamer Intersection. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *Digital Gameplay: Essays on the nexus of game and gamer* (pp. 1–19). Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Gilbert, J. (2004). Signifying Nothing:「Culture,」「Discourse」and the Sociality of Affect. *Culture Machine*, *6*. Retrieved October 3, 2012 from http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/8/7

Glasspool, L. (2012). From Boys Next Door to Boys' Love: Gender Performance in Japanese Male Idol Media. P. Galbraith & J. G. Karlin (eds.), *Idols and celebrity in Japanese media culture* (pp. 113–130). Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gn, J. (2011). Queer Simulation: The practice, performance and pleasure of cosplay. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *25*(4), 583–593.

Gongaga Yaoi Doujinshi. (n.d.). Retrieved May 2, 2012 from http://web.archive.org/web/20111229181545/http:/www.gongaga.com/

Grace, V. (2000). *Baudrillard's Challenge: a feminist reading*. London: Routledge.

Graham, L. J. (2005). Discourse analysis and the critical use of Foucault (pp. 1–15). Presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education 2005 Annual Conference, Sydney.

Green, S., Jenkins, C., & Jenkins, H. (2006). 「Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking」: Selections from The Terra Nostra Underground and Strange Bedfellows. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (pp. 61–88). New York: New York University Press.

Gregg, M., & Seigworth, G. J. (2010). An Inventory of Shimmers. In M. Gregg & G. J. Seigworth (Eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (pp. 1–28). USA: Duke University Press.

Grodal, T. (2003). Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles: Video Games, Media, and Embodied Experiences. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 129–156). London: Routledge.

Gunter, B. (1999). *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact*. London: SAGE Publications.

Hancock, H. (2011). Machinima: Limited, Ghettoized, and Spectacularly Promising. *journal of visual culture*, *10*(1), 31–37.

Haraway, D. (2000). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century. In D. Bell & B. M. Kennedy (Eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader* (pp. 291–324). New York: Routledge. Retrieved April 14, 2014 from http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Haraway-CyborgManifesto-1.pdf

Haraway, D. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

Hardy, S. (2004). Reading Pornography. *Sex Education*, *4*(1), 3–18.

Harris, C. (1998). Introduction, Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity. In C. Harris & A. Alexander (Eds.), *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (pp. 1–8). Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

Harris, C., & Alexander, A. (1998). *Theorizing fandom: Fans, subculture, and identity*. Cresskill, N.J: Hampton Press.

Hemmings, C. (2005). Invoking Affect: Cultural theory and the ontological turn. *Cultural Studies*, *19*(5), 548–567.

Hirdman, A. (2007). (In)Visibility and the Display of Gendered Desire: Masculinity in Mainstream Soft- and Hardcore Pornography. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, *15*(2–3), 158–171.

Hjorth, L. (2011). *Games and Gaming: An Introduction to New Media*. Oxford: Berg.

Hoff, E., W. (2013). Digital Realities: Cosplayers' Online Communities - Global and Linguistic Dynamics. Presented at the Pariticipatory and Popular Culture 2013 Summer Conference, Nagoya, Japan.

Holland, W., Jenkins, H., & Squire, K. (2003). Theory by Design. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 25–46). London: Routledge.

Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Hutchins, S. J. (2014). Gyakuten Saiban: A Case Study in Japanese Film and Videogame Convergence. *Innovative Research in Japanese Studies*, *1*, 27–48.

Iida, Y. (2005). Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity': transforming patriarchy with the 'feminine' in contemporary Japanese youth culture. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *6*(1), 56–74.

Isola, M. J. (2010). Yaoi and Slash Fiction: Women Writing, Reading, and Getting Off? In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 84–98). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Ito, M. (2011). Machinima in a Fanvid Ecology. *Journal of Visual Culture*, *10*(1), 51–54.

Iwabuchi, K., Muecke, S., & Thomas, M. (2004). Introduction: Siting Asian Cultural Flows. In K. Iwabuchi, S. Muecke, & M. Thomas (Eds.), *Rogue Flows: Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic* (pp. 1–10). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Iwabuchi, K. (2002). *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Iwabuchi, K. (2006). Japanese popular culture and postcolonical desire for 'Asia'. In M. Allen & R. Sakamoto (Eds.), *Popular culture, globalization and Japan* (pp. 15–35). Oxon: Routledge.

Jackson, S. (1999). *Heterosexuality in Question*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Jameson, F. (1984). Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. *New Left Review*, *I*(146). Retrieved July 1, 2016 from http://newleftreview.org/I/146/fredric-jameson-postmodernism-or-the-cultural-logic-of-late-capitalism

JCosPlay.com. (n.d.). Retrieved May 17, 2014 from http://www.jcosplay.com/?nats=penisbot:discount:jcosplay,0,0,0,0

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Jones, R. (2006). From Shooting Monsters to Shooting Movies: Machinima and the Transformative Play of Video Game Fan Culture. In K. Busse & K. Hellekson (Eds.),

*Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (pp. 261–280). London: McFarland & Co Inc.

Juffer, J. (1998). *At Home With Pornography: Women, sex, and everyday life*. New York: New York University Press.

Juul, J. (2001). Games Telling Stories? A brief note on games and narratives. *Game Studies*, *1*(1). Retrieved November 23, 2009 from http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/

Juul, J. (2005). *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. London: MIT Press.

Kaplan, D. (2005). Public Intimacy: Dynamics of Seduction in Male Homosocial Interactions. *Symbolic Interaction*, *28*(4), 571–595.

Kelly, M. G. . (1998). *The Political Philosophy of Michelle Foucault*. New York: Routledge.

Kelts, R. (2006). *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kennedy, H. W. (2007). Female Quake Players and the politics of identity. In B. Atkins & T. Krzywinska (Eds.), *Videogame, Player, Text* (pp. 120–138). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Kiki website. (n.d.). In *FC2*. Retrieved May 2, 2012 from http://kikihype.web.fc2.com/

King, E. (2013). Girls Who are Boys Who like Girls to be Boys: BL and the Australian Cosplay Community. *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, (32). Retrieved August 20, 2014 from http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue32/king.htm

Kingsepp, E. (2007). Fighting Hyperreality With Hyperreality: History and Death in World War II Digital Games. *Games and Culture*, *2*, 366–375.

Kinsella, S. (2006). Minstrelized girls: male performers of Japan's Lolita complex. *Japan Forum*, *18*(1), 65–87.

Klevjer, R. (2002). In Defense of Cutscenes. In *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference* (pp. 191–202). Tampere University Press. Retrieved November 9, 2009 from http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/05164.50328.pdf

Koivunen, A. (2010). Yes We Can? The Promises of Affect for Queer Scholarship. *Lambda Nordica*, *15*(3–4), 40–64.

Krefting, R. (2014). *All Joking Aside: American Humor and Its Discontents*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Krzywinska, T. (2007). Being a determined agent in (the) World of Warcraft: text/play/identity. In B. Atkins & T. Krzywinska (Eds.), *Videogame, Player, Text* (pp. 101–119). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lackner, E., Lucas, B. L., & Reid, R. A. (2006). Cunning Linguists: The Bisexual Erotics of Words/Silence/Flesh. In K. Busse & K. Hellekson (Eds.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (pp. 189–206). London: McFarland & Co Inc.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

Lahti, M. (2003). As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasures in Video Games. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 157–170). London: Routledge.

Lambiase, J. (2003). Codes of Online Sexuality: Celebrity, gender and marketing on the Web. *Sexuality & Culture*, 57–78.

Lamerichs, N. (2011). Stranger than fiction: Fan identity in cosplay. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *7*.

Luckman, S., & Potanin, R. (2010). Machinima: Why think 'games' when thinking 'film'? In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *DIY media: creating, sharing and learning new technologies* (pp. 135–160). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Lunsing, W. (2001). *Beyond Common Sense: Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge.

Lupton, D. (1996). The Embodied Computer/User. In M. Featherstone & R. Burrows (Eds.), *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (pp. 97–112). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

MacCallum-Stewart, E. (2008). Real Boys Carry Girly Epics: Normalising Gender Bending in Online Games. *Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture*, *2*(1). Retrieved February 6, 2013 from http://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/view/vol2no1-5/51

Machinima. (n.d.). Retrieved April 13, 2015 from https://www.machinima.com/

Machinima. (2009). *Final Fantasy Machinima: Real Men (FF Machinima)* [Video file]. Retrieved April 21, 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHEj3XZqEmE

Machinima. (2009a). *Final Fantasy: The Final Fantasy (Parody)* [Video file]. Retrieved April 22, 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aATFMXEZwts

Machinima. (2010). *Final Fantasy Machinima: Tough Love (FF Machinima)* [Video file]. Retrieved April 21, 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHEj3XZqEmE

Magdalinski, T. (2009). *Sport, technology and the body: the nature of performance*. London; New York: Routledge.

Mangiron, C. H. (2007). Video Games Localisation: Posing new challenges to the translator. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, *14*(4), 305–323.

Mangiron, C. H., & O-Hagan, M. (2006). Game Localisation: Unleashing Imagination with 「Restricted」 Translation. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, (6). Retrieved November 30, 2009 from http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_ohagan.php

Marie, M. (2013, April 15). Why Do I Cosplay? Let Me Count The Ways [Web log]. Retrieved August 21, 2014 from http://kotaku.com/why-do-i-cosplay-let-me-count-the-ways-473057620

Märyä, F. (2008). *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Massumi, B. (1987). Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements. In G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (p. x). Minneapolis MN, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Massumi, B. (1995). The Autonomy of Affect. *Cultural Critique*, (31), 83-109.

Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. USA: Duke University Press.

McGuire, M. (2003). *PlayStation 2: Selling the Third Place*. University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. Retrieved March 2, 2013 from http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/McGuire.pdf

McHarry, M. (2010). Boys in Love in Boys' Love: Discourses East/West and the Abject in Subject Formation. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 177–189). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: a beginner's guide*. London; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

McLelland, M. (2000). *Male homosexuality in modern Japan : cultural myths and social realities*. Richmond: Curzon.

McLelland, M. (2003). Gay Men, masculinity and the media in Japan. In K. Louie & M. Low (Eds.), *Asian Masculinities: The meaning and practice of manhood in China and Japan* (pp. 59–78). Oxon: RoutledgeCurzon.

McLelland, M. (2005). The World of Yaoi: The Internet, Censorship and the Global "Boys' Love" Fandom. *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, *23*, 61–77.

McLelland, M. (2006). A Short History of 「Hentai」. *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, *12*. Retrieved May 24 2013 from http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/mclelland.html

McLelland, M., & Goggin, G. (2009). Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms. In *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms* (pp. 3–17). New York: Routledge.

Meyer, U. (2010). Hidden in Straight Sight: Trans*gressing Gender and Sexuality via BL. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 232–256). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Miller, L. (2006). *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics*. London: University of California Press.

Miller, L. (2011). Cute Masquerade and the Pimping of Japan. *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, *20*(1), 18–29.

Mori, N. (2010). *女はポルノを読む：女性の性欲とフェミニズム (Women Read Porn: Female sexual desire and feminism)*. Tokyo: Seikyūsha.

Napier, S. (2007). *From Impressionism to anime : Japan as fantasy and fan cult in the mind of the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Newman, J. (2002). The Myth of the Ergodic Videogame: Some thoughts on player-character relationships in videogames. *Game Studies*, *2*(1). Retrieved November 7, 2009 from http://www.gamestudies.org/0102/newman

Noire Sensus. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2010 from http://www.webring.org/l/rd?ring=seiferxsquall;id=2;url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Enoiresensus%2Ecom%2F

Nomura, T., & Nozue, T. (2008). *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

NSFW Catfight! Tifa VS Aerith | NSFW Gamer. (2010, March 12). Retrieved May 12, 2014 from http://nsfwgamer.com/nsfw-catfight-tifa-vs-aerith/

NSFW Gamer. (n.d.). Retrieved September 2, 2014 from https://www.facebook.com/pages/NSFW-Gamer/279235326589

NSFW Gamer - Porn for gamers. (n.d.a). Retrieved September 2, 2014 from http://nsfwgamer.com/

O'Hagan, M. (2007). Manga, Anime and Video Games: Globalizing Japanese Cultural Production. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, *14*(4), 242–247.

O'Hagan, M., & Mangiron, C. H. (2013). *Game Localization: Translating for the global digital entertainment industry*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Okabe, D. (2012). Cosplay, Learning, and Cultural Practice. In M. Ito, D. Okabe, & I. Tsuji (Eds.), *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World-view* (pp. 225–248). New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Ortega-Brena, M. (2009). Peek-a-boo, I See You: Watching Japanese Hard-core Animation. *Sexuality and Culture*, *13*, 17–31.

Pagliassotti, D. (2010). Better Than Romance? Japanese BL Manga and the Subgenre of Male/Male Romantic Fiction. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 59–83). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Pelletier-Gagnon, J. (2011). *Video Games and Japaneseness: An Analysis of Localization and Circulation of Japanese Video Games in North America* (MA dissertation). McGill University, Montreal.

Penley, C. (1992). Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. A. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural Studies* (pp. 479–500). London: Routledge.

Perper, T., & Cornog, M. (2002). Eroticism for the masses: Japanese manga comics and their assimilation into the U.S. *Sexuality and Culture*, *6*(1), 3–126.

Perron, B. (2003). From Gamers to Players and Gameplayers: The Example of Interactive Movies. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 237–258). London: Routledge.

Picard, M. (2013). The Foundation of Geemu: A Brief History of Early Japanese video games. *Game Studies*, *13*(2). Retrieved October 26, 2014 from http://gamestudies.org/1302/articles/picard

Poels, K., De Cock, N., & Malliet, S. (2012). The Female Player Does Not Exist: Gender Identity Relates to Differences in Player Motivations and Play Styles. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *15*(11), 634–638.

Poole, S. (2004). *Trigger Happy: Videogames and the entertainment revolution* (3rd ed.). New York: Arcade Publishing.

Rahman, O., Wing-sun, L., & Hei-man Cheung, B. (2012). "Cosplay": Imaginative Self and Performing Identity. *Fashion Theory*, *16*(3), 317–341.

Ranma 1-2. (2009, July 21). FAQ: 「What is CROSSPLAY」? and related word definitions - Page 6 - Cosplay.com. In *Cosplay.com*. Retrieved September 13, 2014 from http://www.cosplay.com/showthread.php?t=18966&page=6

Rehak, B. (2003). Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 103–128). London: Routledge.

Ringrose, J., & Eriksson Baraja, K. (2011). Gendered risks and opportunities? Exploring teen girls' digitized sexual identities in postfeminist media contexts. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, *7*(2), 21–138.

Robinett, W. (2003). Foreward. M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. vii–xix). London: Routledge.

Rounthwaite, A. (2011). From This Body to Yours: Porn, Affect, and Performance Art Documentation. *Camera Obscura*, *26*(3), 62–93.

Ryan, M.-L. (2001). Beyond Myth and Metaphor – The Case of Narrative in Digital Media. *Game Studies*, *1*(1). Retrieved October 13, 2009 from http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/ryan/

Ryan, M.-L. (2007). Beyond Ludus: Narrative, videogames and the split condition of digital textuality. In B. Atkins & T. Krzywinska (Eds.), *Videogame, Player, Text* (pp. 8–26). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Said, E. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.

Schodt, F. L. (1998). *Dreamland Japan: writings on modern manga*. Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press.

Scorpicus. (2007). *The Aeris/Tifa Gold Saucer Date Scene* [Video file]. Retrieved June 17, 2014 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpI23AldgGY

Scorpicus. (2008). *Final Fantasy VII: The Zack/Cloud Date Scene* [Video file]. Retrieved June 17, 2014 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIX3WeJWSeg

Sedgwick, E. K. (2009). ‘Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles’ from Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. In R. Warhol-Down & D. Price Herndl (Eds.), *Feminisms Redux: an anthology of literary theory and criticism* (pp. 198–205). Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Shamoon, D. (2004). Office Sluts and Rebel Flowers: The Pleasures of Japanese Pornographic Comics for Women. L. Williams (ed.), *Porn Studies* (pp. 77–103). Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Shibata, T. (2008). Undoing Sexual Objectification in the Japanese Socio-Juridical Context: The Human-Rights-Oriented Transmutation of the Conception of “Obscene” Material. *International Journal of Japanese Psychology*, *17*, 114–128.

Shinkle, E. (2005). Corporealis Ergo Sum: Affective Response in Digital Games. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *Digital Gameplay: Essays on the nexus of game and gamer* (pp. 21–35). Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Shouse, E. (2005). Feeling, Emotion, Affect. *M/C Journal*, *8*(6). Retrieved November 8, 2014 from http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php

Smith, G. M. (2002). Computer Games Have Words, Too: Dialogue Conventions in Final Fantasy VII. *Game Studies*, *2*(2).

Smosh Games. (2014). *FINAL FANTASY VII (Honest Game Trailers)* [Video file]. Retrieved October 8, 2014 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0hVwfD_s-g

Square. (1997). *Final Fantasy VII* [PlayStation]. UK: Sony Computer Entertainment Europe.

Square Enix Company. (2006). *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII* [PlayStation 2]. UK: Square Enix.

Square Enix. (n.d.). トランスレーター(日英) | 【ローカライズ】クリエイター職 ｜ 職種詳細 ｜ 株式会社スクウェア・エニックス (Translator (Japanese-English) [Localization] Creator; Job details; Square Enix). Retrieved September 30, 2014 from https://js01.jposting.net/square-enix/u/creator/job.phtml?job_code=349

Square Enix. (2006). *Dirge of Cerberus Lost Episode: Final Fantasy VII* [Video game]. USA: Square Enix.

Square Enix. (2008). *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* [Video game]. UK: Square Enix.

Square Enix Company. (2009). *Dissidia Final Fantasy* [Video game]. UK: Square Enix.

Square Enix. (2010). *NieR RepliCant* [Video game]. Japan: Square Enix.

Square Enix. (2010). *Nier* [Video game]. USA: Square Enix.

Standish, I. (2000). *Myth and masculinity in the Japanese cinema: Towards a political reading of the 「tragic hero」*. Richmond: Curzon.

Stanley, M. (2010). 101 Uses for Boys: Communing with the Reader in Yaoi and Slash. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (pp. 99–109). North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc.

Suzuki, K. (1998). Pornography or Therapy? Japanese Girls Creating the Yaoi Phenomenon. In S. Inness (Ed.), *Millennium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World* (pp. 243–267). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Szurawitzki, A. (2010). *Japanese Video Game Localization: A Case Study of Sony's Sairen Series* (MA dissertation). University of Helsinki, Helsinki.

Talbot, M. (2007). *Media Discourse: Representation and Interaction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Tanaka, T. (2009). コスプレという文化—消費でも生産でもあり (Cosplay Culture: Consumption and production). In H. Narumi (Ed.), *コスプレと社会： サブカルチャーの身体文化 (Cosplay Society: Subculture and body culture)* (pp. 24–55). Serika Shobou.

TFergusson. (2012, September 9). Final Fantasy VII Gold Saucer Date Guide for PlayStation by TFergusson - GameFAQs. In *GameFAQs*. Retrieved October 16, 2014 from http://www.gamefaqs.com/ps/197341-final-fantasy-vii/faqs/2385

TG-Cosplay on DeviantART. (2010). In *DeviantArt*. Retrieved September 20, 2014 from http://tg-cosplay.deviantart.com

Thorn, M. (2004). Girls and Women Getting Out of Hand: The Pleasure and Politics of Japan's Amateur Comics Community. In W. W. Kelly (Ed.), *Fanning the Flames: Fans*

*and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 169–186). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Thweatt-Bates, J. (2012). *Cyborg selves : a theological anthropology of the posthuman*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Tifa Delivery Service - Final Fantasy 7 - Japanese. (2008, December 11). In *FAKKU*. Retrieved April 17, 2013 from https://web.archive.org/web/20130907180349/http://www.fakku.net/doujinshi/tifa-delivery-service-japanese

Tour at Cosplay Deviants. (2007). Retrieved May 12, 2013 from http://www.cosplaydeviants.com/tour/

Trans-Cosplayers on DeviantART. (2010). Retrieved September 20, 2014 from http://trans-cosplayers.deviantart.com

Tsolidis, G. (2014). *Migration, Diaspora and Identity: Cross-National Experiences*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Valaskivi, K. (2013). A brand new future? Cool Japan and the social imaginary of the branded nation. *Japan Forum*, *25*(4), 485–504.

Vasterling, V. (2010). The Psyche and the Social: Judith Butler's Politicizing of Psychoanalytical Theory. In J. de Vleminck & E. Dorfman (Eds.), *Sexuality and Psychoanalysis: Philosophical Criticisms* (pp. 171–181). Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Waldby, C. (1995). Destruction: Boundary erotics and refigurations of the heterosexual male body. In E. Grosz & E. Probyn (Eds.), *Sexy Bodies: The strange carnalities of feminism* (pp. 266–277). London: Routledge.

Webster, A. (May 7, 2010). Masterpiece: Final Fantasy VII. Retrieved March 23, from http://arstechnica.com/gaming/news/2010/05/masterpiece-final-fantasy-vii.ars

Welker, J. (2006). Beautiful, Borrowed and Bent: "Boys` Love" as Girls` Love in Shojo Manga. *Signs*, *31*(3), 841–870.

What is the difference between Shounen Ai and Yaoi? - Anime Answers – Fanpop [Web log comment]. (n.d.). In *Fanpop*. Retrieved May 2, 2012 from http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/anime/answers/show/223026/what-difference-between-shounen-ai-yaoi

What is WCS? (n.d.). In *Aichi Television*. Retrieved September 14, 2013 from https://web.archive.org/web/20141025054546/http://www.tv-aichi.co.jp/wcs/what/

Wilkinson, E. (2011). Extreme pornography' and the contested spaces of virtual citizenship. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *12*(5), 493–508.

Williams, L. (1990). *Hard Core: Power, pleasure, and the 'frenzy of the visible'* (2nd ed.). London: Pandora Press.

Winge, T. (2006). Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay. In F. Lunning (Ed.), *Mechademia 1: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga* (pp. 65–76). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wolf, M. J. . (2003). Abstraction in the Video Game. In M. J. . Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 47–66). London: Routledge.

Wood, A. (2006). "Straight" Women, Queer Texts: Boy-Love Manga and the Rise of a Global Counterpublic. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *34*(1/2), 394–414.

The World Cosplay Summit Comes to Manchester this October! (2013, August 23). In *Hyper Japan*. Retrieved September 23, 2014 from https://web.archive.org/web/20130823034006/http:/hyperjapan.co.uk/component/content/article/84-whatson/1178-the-world-cosplay-summit-comes-to-manchester-this-october.html#.VyGoS3qpcbN

X--KAMI--korosu. (n.d.). Murderous Romance [ FFVII yaoi roleplay] o.&&a. | First Page | Forum | Gaia Online. Retrieved September 6, 2014 from http://www.gaiaonline.com/forum/series-related-miscellaneous-role-play/u-d-ous-o-c-ffvii-yaoi-roleplay-o-a/t.52121363/

Yashima, S. (2009). 性とコスプレ・コミュニケーション (Sex and Cosplay Communication). In O. Seki & T. Shida (Eds.), *挑発するセクシュアリティ:法・社会・思想へのアプローチ (Provocative Sexuality: Approaches towards law, society and ideology)* (pp. 259–292). Tokyo: Shinsensha.

Yuffie Jess. (n.d.). *my cosplay as tifa squirting on webcam - XVIDEOS.COM* [Video file]. Retrieved September 10, 2014 from http://www.xvideos.com/video2858504/my_cosplay_as_tifa_squirting_on_webcam

Žižek, S. (1998). From「Passionate Attachments」to Dis-Identification. *UMBR(a), Identity/Identification*, 3–16.