THE ANATOMY OF A FUJOSHI: RETHINKING THE ROTTEN WOMAN THROUGH MEDIA AND MEDIATED PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the figure of the fujoshi in contemporary Japanese media and media fandom as both a greater entity within the media fan ecology and as individual parts of a collective. I take a two-part approach, examining first the affectionate portrayals of fujoshi in three fan-centric Japanese manga and their related adaptations, before moving onto analyzing the different strategies by which fujoshi involved in dōjinshi creation negotiate different states of being and belonging as they dually inhabit spaces as both fans and professionals. The particularly permeable nature of the fan/professional boundaries in Japanese manga/dōjinshi culture and the enduring quality of rotten imagination come together to enable continuities of fujoshi imaginations that in turn are subsumed into the collective feedback loop between readers and creators that sustains the perpetual motion apparatus that is fujoshi community.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Anh Thu Tran is a second-year master's student at Cornell's Asian Studies Department. They received their dual Bachelor of Arts in Asian-American Studies and East Asian Studies from the University of California, Davis in 2021 and are set to receive their Masters of the Arts from Cornell University in 2024. Their main interests pertain to Japanese media and fan culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Fujoshi, ah fujoshi. Oh, you rotten girls. Even amongst the many oddballs that make up media fandoms across the globe, this particular strain of fangirls brings with them quite the storied reputation. Although the term has since also gained traction in international fan communities, at its most basic it is a signifier of a specific type of female Japanese fan whose activities and engagement revolve around male/male relationships. These are fans who, purely by the virtue of their being (mostly) women whose fan activities revolve around the depictions of romance and sex between men, have gained a certain level of notoriety rivaled by few other groups within fandom. Depending on who you ask — whether involved in fandom or not — the answer can vary wildly. In some circles, the answer leans overwhelmingly negative: they're freaks, fetishizers, fujoshits — the worst kind of fans (or more specifically, the worst kinds of fangirls).[1] Those girls, they're crazy. To a certain degree, this sort of reaction is expected; after all, fujoshi had originally been a disparaging term used to insult such women in fandom, and the sentiment has clearly also found its way into the adoption of the term in online Anglosphere fandom vernacular. However, even such reactions, negative as they are, are a testament to the sheer presence that fujoshi are capable of commanding simply by existing as they do. Fujoshi are controversial not only because of their predilections for the homoerotic, but also because of the lengths they are willing to go to for that content. Even as they are disparaged, it remains a fact that the fujoshi passion for male/male relationships has far-reaching, long-lasting impacts. Gundam, the franchise — and the mecha genre in general — would not exist as it does currently if not for the ardent support from women fans whose desire to see the male

[1] For more information, see Samantha Aburime, "The influence of transphobia, homonationalism, and anti-Asian prejudice: Anti-BL attitudes in English-speaking fandoms" (2023) along with their database of 800+ instances of such attitudes.

characters kiss ensured the survival of the series in its earliest days.[2] Fujoshi make up some of the most active, productive members of Japanese media fandom, having dominated attendance to the illustrious Comic Market in its earlier years and even now providing huge swarths of fan-generated comics, art, and written fiction purely out of their desire to see more out of their favorites.

There are a quite scant few other figures in Japanese media fandom capable of commanding the same frenzied intensity or creative fervor, much less over even the slightest hint of a suggestion, in the same capacity as do fujoshi on the regular. In a hierarchical overview of Japanese media fandom — particularly of anime, manga, or video game fandom — the humble masses of fujoshi make their home at the bottommost strata, having cultivated communities centering practices and a culture particularly befitting of their titles as "rotten women." While you could argue that they pull from the same material as their fellow fans, fujoshi imaginations and interpretations are qualitatively different in both form and application compared to how other fans engage with the same originating text. No one reads more deeply into the text than a fujoshi on the hunt for fantasy material; and yet at the same time, there is perhaps no one who cares less about the canon than she. Moreover, it may true that fujoshi place themselves at the bottom of the fan hierarchy by choice — cognizant of both the non-normative nature of their interests and how those passions reflect upon themselves in contexts located both inside and outside of fandom — but the role that they play in such fan ecologies is by no means insignificant. The "rot" in "rotten woman" is not just an indication of the scorn that fujoshi face from other fans and the outside world. It also signifies the meaning making processes undertaken within fujoshi communities, a "rotting" of the original text that thus produces the necessary

[2] Gundam's creator Tomino Yoshiyuki credits fujoshi specifically and female fans in general for their continued support from the earliest days of the first anime series in a 1998 interview.

setting from which fantasies are cultivated — and much like mycelium, fujoshi fantasies and other forms of meaning making are not bound to any singular source of rot.

What makes a fujoshi? To answer that question, one must first start from the context in which fujoshi culture first emerged. Starting from the 1970s, a new culture of media consumption and fannish practice began to develop in Japan, and by the 1980s, these fans had begun to refer to themselves and be referred to as "otaku." Originally a second-person pronoun referring to another's home or family, the term eventually came to refer to an entire subculture of intensely devoted fans and their related consumption and engagement practices — especially those associated with Japanese popular culture and media. While in Japan the term still has a generally broader set of applications so long as certain key aspects of consumption and engagement practices are kept intact, its usage overseas is largely confined to the realm of media fandom. The subculture gained notoriety with the coming of the 1990s through the widely publicized "Otaku Murders" and subsequent moral panic, wherein a link was drawn between the perpetrator's geekish media consumption[3] and a string of abductions and murders of young elementary school girls. The literature on otaku, consequently, also started to emerge at around this time partially in reaction to both the moral panic and the subsequent hypervisibility of otaku during the period. However, both the general coverage of otaku and otaku culture, as well as the emerging field of otaku studies, left much to be desired when it came to the biases in their coverage — whether consciously or not, the image of the otaku that arose from these works was one overwhelmingly male. Perhaps it could be argued it is only

[3] It is important to note that while the infamous pictures of the perpetrator's VHS and manga-littered room spread by Japanese mass media at the time are suspected of being staged, those photographs nevertheless cemented a certain association between not only conspicuous consumption practices and the otaku, but also the manifestation of such consumption in the space of a room or house. For further information on this association, see Patrick Galbraith's Otaku Spaces (2012).

natural that largely male group of writers and thinkers might not have in them to consider the importance of looking beyond perspectives of the (sub) cultural center of the male otaku.

In the mainstream of otaku studies, the most popularly cited foundational books are ones that only barely touch upon the existence of other fans or modes of fan engagement outside of the assumed (non)normative male spaces. Cultural critic, theorist, and manga creator Ōtsuka Eiji goes into little detail in his references to the existence of women in otaku spaces or their fan work driven practices and communities in his 1989 book *A Theory of Narrative Consumption* (物語消費論 *Monogatari Shōhiron*). One of the field's foundational texts, *A Theory of Narrative Consumption* establishes that media consumption at the time, especially among otaku, was predicated on an assumed relationship between multiple fragments ("small narratives") of a much larger grand worldview. Since the creation of fan works are in essence one way of engaging with "small narratives" in the context of a greater setting, fujoshi and their alternative fantasies have as much a claim validity in the context of the greater worldview as any other iteration of the "small narrative." Following Ōtsuka's lead, critic and philosopher Azuma Hiroki goes on to elaborate the changing landscape of media consumption in otaku culture going into the 1990s and early 2000s, where he emphasizes a shift to a more detached mode of consumption that forgoes the structure of the "grand narrative" altogether in favor of maintaining databases or repositories of specific story and character elements (2001). Contemporary society is becoming animalized through their growing dependence on consumer habits to achieve immediate satisfaction, and otaku are a symptom of such animalization. However, throughout his argument Azuma all but overlooks the possibilities of adjacent — or even altogether separate — otaku cultures spearheaded by and for women and others excluded from the "mainstream" iterations of otaku

communities. The otaku that Azuma speaks of, as is the case with many of his predecessors and contemporaries, are a largely male bunch whose primary mode of media engagement is deeply tied to consumption.

Just around the same time that otaku studies had begun to make a name for itself through critics such as Ōtsuka and his fellow writers, niche fan cultures centering girls' and women's manga also began to emerge in the spotlight. In particular, the growing community based in shōjo (girls') manga and novels that centered homoerotic desires and connections between male characters, found primarily in shōjo magazines and specialty publications such as *JUNE* (1978-1995), found themselves subjected to a deluge of attention of all varieties. In the 1990s, the idea of "someone swept away by relations between men" was almost entirely pigeonholed into an image of young women whose position in society — transient by nature and subject to multiple intersecting pressures — made them uniquely susceptible to the allures of homoerotic love, or at least was so commonly thought. Although there may indeed have been a shadow of the truth in such reasonings, especially given the genre's roots in shōjo media culture, to claim that only young women are able to find enjoyment in male homoeroticism, or that there must be something wrong with them in for them to do so, is surely reductive. Nevertheless, such an image persisted not only because the topic in question involved young women, but also because it touched upon non-normative themes like homosexuality — people wanted to know why girls would flock to such content.

Cultural critic, writer, and *JUNE* author (under pseudonym Kurimoto Kaori) Nakajima Azusa describes her compatriots as "maniacs" in her 1991 book *Communication Deficiency Syndrome* (コミュニケーション不全症候群 *Komyunikēshon Fuzen Shōkogun*), drawing a connection between the circumstances that would cause a girl to develop an eating disorder to the kind that would have her

drawn to romance between men. The pressures and expectations placed on young women leave them without similar means of escape that young men in equivalent situations are able to access; thus, they turn to methods of denying the self, such as dieting or homoerotic stories — in other words, stories without women — in order to cope with their inability to completely escape from their lived reality (Nakajima, 1991:111-112, 190). Much of the early writing on the phenomenon of the popularity of male/male homoeroticism is tinged with elements of gender dysphoria, which in turn was used to rationalize the attraction many such young women felt towards narratives of male homoeroticism. Although likely unintended, the notions of self-denial (particularly of the gendered variety) and self-rejection found in the works of Nakajima and her contemporaries such as Midori Matsui (1993) and Tanigawa Tamae (1993) lend themselves quite fittingly to dysphoric readings of gendered self-identification in terms of engagement with such stories. Other writers such as Sakakibara Shihomi (1998) and Fujimoto Yukari (1998, 2015) have also raised similar points on how gendered and sexual identities can be queered through engagement with these types of homoerotic fictions.

To this point, much of what was written about the newly visible, increasingly emergent subculture was decidedly more concerned with pathologizing the people involved than it was about actually looking further into the implications of the growing sphere influence that these fans were cultivating. Writers coming from positions both within and outside of the "maniacs" that Nakajima describes took up the mantle of either digging further into the mystery of why women were so inexplicably drawn to narratives of homoerotic decadence — or defending themselves and their own engagement with such stories and the communities built from them. Much of the latter were taken up as part of the *yaoi ronsō* debates that occured during the 1990s in reaction to an essay by gay critic Satō Masaki that criticized female fans

of homoerotic stories of contributing to discrimination against gay men while profiting off the fetishization of their image.[4] Discussions of the genre of Japanese male/male homoerotic fiction, its tropes and conventions, and its evolutionary progression especially through the turn of the century continue to devote a great deal of attention to the motivations of its readers and creators even as they branch out into new frontiers beyond the confines of prescribed genre conventions. It is no exaggeration to say, for example, that the present state of Boy's Love media has already become a completely different landscape compared to twenty, ten, or even just five years prior.

The term "fujoshi" (腐女子; lit. rotten girl, although the majority of those active in fandom and self-identify as such are grown women) would come into popular usage near the turn of the century, when the spread of the internet facilitated new venues through which otaku and Nakajima's so-called "maniacs" could not only connect with like-minded individuals, but also have more opportunities to come into contact with each other — for better or worse. Although the specifics of this trajectory are up for debate, the general consensus around the term's first usage points to male-majority forums, where it was originally used as a derogatory insult before its eventual reclamation and adoption as a term of self-identification by the women it was originally used to demean. In its current form, the term fujoshi is most accurately used in reference to women who engage with and create stories about love and sex between men. However, it is also occasionally use as an umbrella term under which all female otaku — irrespective of their actual preferences or practices regarding homoerotic male relationships — are grouped together under. Even as the scope of what makes a "female fan" or a "female otaku" continues to widen, there has yet to come any new Japanese term to reference the fan girl specifically. Fujoshi, counting among the most

[4] For more, see Ishida Hitoshi's "Representational Appropriation and the Autonomy of Desire in Yaoi/BL" chapter in Boy's Love Manga and Beyond (2015).

notable and “zany” of the various “female otaku” categories, has in some ways been adopted as the representative of non-normative girl fans. At the same time, while the term “otaku” still carries with it an overwhelmingly male connotation, pointing to specific types of media engagement and conspicuous consumption practices, that image is beginning to loosen up.

The process of reclaiming “fujoshi” as a term of self-identification showcases one unique aspect shared among the rotten girl populace: their unique brand of self-deprecating humor serving as both sword and shield against naysayers. Other than these playful acts of putting themselves down and a common love for the love between men, there are few traits that could be considered applicable to all fujoshi — even as their non-normative interests indicate a stronger sense of community and comradery, there are still fundamental differences that distinguish certain types of rot from one another. At the most basic level, fujoshi can be categorized by the approaches to male/male homoeroticism they engage with the most: BL or yaoi. BL, or boy’s love, denotes a more mainstream take to male/male homoerotic media and is more likely to have casual engagement from wider audiences. Yaoi, on the other hand, refers to a specific set of fandom related genre and media engagement strategies that lean heavily towards transformative interpretation. This approach that I take to conceptualizing the fujoshi builds off Azuma Sonoko’s work on female homosociality in fandom spaces revolving around male and female homoeroticism. Yaoi and yaoi-type fujoshi are those whose fandom participation centers consistently active engagement with secondary derivative fantasies based off ‘official’ texts (Azuma S., 2010). At the heart of the yaoi-type fujoshi, and thus yaoi-type media engagement, is a roguish sort of playfulness capable of making yaoi fantasies from next to nothing — a constant state of drawing in inspiration for new fantasies regardless of what needs to be bent or broken down to make things fit. In comparison, the BL-type fujoshi has a

much easier path to getting what she craves, given that her rot of choice places the homoerotic elements front and center — accordingly, although in no less active a manner, BL-type engagement manifests quite differently. Rather than turning the lines of pre-established characterizations and plot lines into your own sandbox, the main mechanism of BL-type engagement centers the continuous creation, dissemination, and collection of original works. In some ways, the mechanics of BL-type consumption and more widely acknowledged patterns of otaku consumption are not so distantly related. Moreover, while these are indeed two distinct forms of rotten engagement, they are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, there can and will be overlaps between the two as many fujoshi practice a mix of both types in varying ratios.

Now nearly ubiquitous in conversations regarding Japanese media and media fandoms in Japan, the fujoshi's presence is one that is still endlessly complicated by her positionality in relation to the largely patriarchal, heteronormative society in which she is still very much a participant. Although the past decade has brought with it a new (or perhaps, renewed) consciousness of the sheer potentiality that lies within women as creators and consumers, as well as a greater general recognition of the significance of female audiences, it is still difficult to say whether the image of the fan — of the (female) otaku, the fujoshi, the fangirl, etc. — has truly succeeded in its rehabilitation. Dedicated female fans more broadly — and fujoshi in particular — have long been subject to ridicule for daring to love loudly and visibly, channeling their passions into the niche and the non-normative through forms of labor that those around them are inclined to find unproductive. This brings us back to the question: what exactly makes a fujoshi?

Fujoshi in fiction is the central theme of the first chapter, which examines how the portrayals of fujoshi in contemporary Japanese media has evolved and the

specifics of that evolution. Through the analysis of three prominent fujoshi-led manga series and their related media mix adaptations, this first chapter aims to illustrate aspects of the contemporary fujoshi that have thus far been neglected or otherwise overlooked. By exploring the question of fujoshi through media in which they are leading roles rather than side characters, I hope to provide a different perspective on how fujoshi see themselves positioned within the greater otaku ecology. They may be idealized versions of reality, but that does not make the writing of these fujoshi-led narratives any less self-reflexive. Focusing on these narratives first further serves as an acknowledgment of the changing media landscape in which fans are increasingly able to take the reins and become cultural producers. Each of the three manga series — Fujita's *Love is Hard for Otaku*, Tsurutani Kaori's *BL Metamorphosis*, and Shiono Honami's *I Want to be a Wall* — featured in the chapter are explored through questions of the zany, of community, femininity, and the capability of reaching beyond mediums; feminized affects placed as central not only to a faithful characterization of individual fans, but also the collective fandom experience. The women on the page are as much vessels for the audience as they are comrades and contemporaries — an extension of community that disregards the boundaries of the page or screen.

The second chapter of this thesis continues in examining the boundary-crossing capabilities inherent to the fujoshi ethos of freedom in fantasy — this time through the subject of professional-amateur and reader-writer dichotomies and how little such distinctions mean within real-life fujoshi spaces. By exploring the career trajectories and self-published manga (dōjinshi) works of well-known manga creators Yoshinaga Fumi and CLAMP, as well as popular practices among newer generations of BL manga creators as they navigate their way between traditional publishing and dōjinshi spaces, this chapter demonstrates the necessity of having multiple strategies

for negotiating a multifaceted identity as participants in multiple spaces. Debuting as a professional mangaka is rarely ever the end of your participation in fandom spaces, especially as a fujoshi whose community modus operandi centers the ever-revolving cycles of fantasy creation and distribution.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER: ON MEDIATIZING FUJOSHI AND COMMUNITY THROUGH LAYERS

Rarely is it taken as a given that a woman's hobbies and her passion for them can in fact be her strength; more often than not the notion of a girl, much less a woman, pouring too much fervor into her interests would at best be considered a character flaw. Regardless of whether in the confines of mainstream society, or in the company of their fellow fans, the fan girl finds herself faced with a much more grueling uphill battle in order to gain recognition for her efforts and affirmation for her passions. Female fannish engagement often manifests itself in ways that even fellow male fans of the same thing might consider "too affective, too invested, or too communal" (Busse, 2015:190) — much less anyone else not so plugged into the ins and outs of fan culture. Even so, to love is to persevere — and unlike overseas where the early fanfiction scenes went increasingly underground due to the threat of copyright litigation, Japanese fujoshi were blessed with a much more permissive environment. In particular, the ability to openly share derivative works (and even exchange money for them, completely unlike the situation in Anglophone fandom) facilitated a much more open fan culture both online and offline.

The thriving dōjinshi scene in Japan has in turn led to a manga publishing culture where the distinctions between amateur and professional, fan and author, are by default somewhat nebulous. Growing usage of social media and specialized art-sharing platforms have further blurred those lines with their ability to spread creations far beyond the reaches of what insular otaku communities and physical distribution could have achieved previously, opening up an entirely new realm of possibilities. The permissive attitude with which major Japanese publishers and other media companies have treated fan economies based on their intellectual properties have in turn fostered,

and indeed do continue to foster, fans' potentials to take on roles beyond that of audience and consumer. If anything, the current media landscape is one crafted by the hands of people who had once been, and may continue to be, fans themselves. For such people, whose numbers only continue to grow as younger generations find in the current stories things that inspire them, the transition between fan and professional is a process of negotiating different engagement strategies that position them accordingly within or outside of the spaces they used to frequent. For some, the transition from amateur fan to professional creator is a clean break from one's past, while for others, keeping a foot in both is absolutely essential within the creative process. It is this second group of creators whose relative lack of distance from their identities as fans embedded in thriving communities has led, almost quite naturally, to a surge in media works about fans, by fans, for fans. The gradual increase in otaku-led media has in turn also created an opportunity for fujoshi- and other women fan-centered stories to find the spotlight.

Texts and the Relatable Zany

Fujita's *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku* (ヲタクに恋は難しい *Wotaku ni Koi ha Muzukashī*) is perhaps one of the most recognizable otaku/fujoshi centered media mixes of the past decade. Having started as an amateur web manga on art-sharing website Pixiv in 2014, the surge in popularity led to an eventual magazine serial spanning six years and eleven bound volumes, spawning both a twelve-episode anime and a live action feature length film. The main cast of characters are working adults, each of whom represents a different substrate of otaku culture and practice. Wotakoi's defining feature as a vanguard of the new generation of fan-centered media is the clear level of care and affection with which these characters, in all their otaku glory, are portrayed — a far cry from previous incarnations of the otaku-based narrative that relied at least partially on an assumed disconnect between audiences (of

presumably more normative mindsets) and the otaku characters. Sianne Ngai writes of zaniness that there is a quality to it that is "strained, desperate, and precarious… [something about it] that immediately activates the spectator's desire for distance" (Ngai, 2015:8). In the case of older otaku-centric works, zaniness would have no doubt manifested in the caricatures of otaku and fujoshi that populated the screen or page, each iteration more extraordinarily off putting than the last. Just as non-otaku ("normies") would have been put off by the sheer magnitude of departure from socially accepted standards of appearance, behavior, and interpersonal interaction commonly found in these media depictions of otaku, so too would actual otaku find themselves incapable of reconciling their own experiences (or their own perception of their experiences) with the images present before them. The potential for harm borne from these works is very rarely physical in nature — more often than not it is a potential for harm of the psychic nature, eliciting reactions of shame, embarrassment, anger, or even fear at the prospect of being associated with such stereotypes.

As it so happens, the premise of Wotakoi is built off one such situation, the series protagonist Momose Narumi having just switched jobs after her outing as a fujoshi cost her relationship. Reuniting with her childhood friend Nifuji Hirotaka leads to a spontaneous change in the pair's relationship, as well as free labor for Narumi in the form of Hirotaka working as a booth assistant for the upcoming Comiket. Wotakoi's roster of otaku characters further expands with the addition of their colleagues and seniors at work: Kabakura Tarō and Koyonagi Hanako. The working adult otaku quartet just so happens to be split evenly and firmly into two camps: Hirotaka and Hanako have very few qualms about being out in the open with their hobbies no matter the content, while both Narumi and Tarō are vehemently opposed to integrating their personal and professional personas in such a manner, making extra sure that no one outside of their friends can catch on to the truth of their hobbies.

Although similarly self-deprecating at parts, Wotakoi does not lean on incredibly exaggerated stereotypes of otaku anti-sociality or unattractive fujoshi to set up humorous scenes. Narumi's zaniness as a character is built not off shock value or intentionally disgusting scenes, but rather the sheer volume of labor through which she puts herself — and occasionally others — through with each dōjinshi event cycle. Although Ngai writes that "zanies are not persons we imagine befriending" (Ngai, 2015:9), that line between "us" and the "zany" — in other words, the line between the normative reader and the active event participant and creator fujoshi — is anything but obvious or clear cut. There may not even be a line. Wotakoi's charm lies in how it assumes that its audience is just as deep in the swamps of media fandom as its own characters are.

So how does one enter those swamps, so to speak? Wotakoi's characters have already experienced their adolescent periods both as members of society and as media fans; in particular, Narumi and Hanako are not only quite adept at navigating the ins and outs of fujoshi spaces both online and offline but are also well known fans within their respective communities. However, as previously stated, even otaku go through a growth process and require a certain level of experience to really develop. Tsurutani Kaori's *BL Metamorphosis* (メタモルフォーゼの縁側 *Metamorufōze no Engawa*) explores a different sort of relationality to and through Boy' Love manga, centering the interactions between septuagenarian Ichinoi Yuki and awkward teenage fujoshi Sayama Urara as they embark together into the most unfamiliar territory of offline fandom events. BL Metamorphosis was digitally serialized through the Comic Newtype Magazine website from 2017 through 2020, during which it secured two nominations for the prestigious Manga Taishō Award and the New Face Award at the 22nd Media Arts Festival Awards. The series has also since been adapted into a live action feature-length film with a related spin-off Hulu miniseries. Capturing the

moments in time between a pair of vastly different stages in their lives, BL Metamorphosis is both a story of aging and a coming-of-age story that prepares for its characters equal ground upon which they can stand together in their unlikely friendship.

Although a much more muted example — neither Yuki nor Urara are prone to the overt displays of emotion nor the frenetic energy characterizing Wotakoi's Narumi and Hanako and their camaraderie — there nevertheless also exists a sort of expectation of strain on part of the audience as they follow these two budding fujoshi. What Yuki and Urara lack in experience and connections, they make up for through the sheer potentiality of their status as newcomers. If the core of zaniness, as Ngai writes, is that of "an aesthetic ultimately or at the deepest level about work" (Ngai, 2015:27), then it should apply to works-in-progress and unfinished works as well. Moreover, the perpetual nature of something yet to be completed also aligns with the aesthetics of the interesting, "an experience of something both stable and changing, predictable and unpredictable" (Ngai, 2015:25). Yuki is a complete beginner, having stumbled upon BL by accident, while Urara has had only the barest amount of exposure to the workings of fandom events, having only the means to build up her personal library and not much else given her awkward personality. Given that the default mode of engagement for fandom — especially BL fandom — is highly participatory and community-based, it becomes ever more significant that the narrative of BL Metamorphosis is one centering a journey of growth and finding one's place in the community.

For all that their fan activities center inter-community interactions, fujoshi are still very much part of society, and thus other fujoshi are not the only people they have to face about their hobbies. A fujoshi's position in spaces outside of her hobbies is a particularly precarious one, complicated by the negative associations an outsider or

"normie" might have about her interests. The protagonist of Shiono Honami's *I Want to Be a Wall* (私は壁になりたい *Watashi ha Kabe ni Naritai*) provides a very different perspective on what it means to engage with the non-normative aspects of BL as someone who is herself queer, and how that influences her interactions with those around her. Moreover, she also has much higher hurdles to overcome than most when it comes to navigating her spouse's interest in her BL collection. *I Want to Be a Wall* ran in the *B's Log Cheek* magazine from 2019 through 2023, culminating in three volumes. Hanazono Yuriko (née Sonoda) is an ardent fujoshi as well as aromantic and asexual; her husband Hanazono Gakurōta is gay and caught in a years-long unrequited love directed at his childhood friend. The specifics of their life together as a married couple do not exactly live up to the images of normative, conjugal bliss that those around them assume is the case, but Yuriko and Gakurōta are nevertheless striving to build kinship ties between them in a manner that best suits their situation. Wall is the most overtly queer story out of the three featured in this chapter, exploring not only queer characters but also queer ways of forming and maintaining bonds between people.

One could assume that such a character setting would set Yuriko apart in terms of zaniness, as her queerness is an immediate focal point by which one might judge her uniqueness and thus distance from the audience. However, the true measure of zaniness present within Yuriko's situation has little to do with herself, and almost everything to do with her marriage and relationship to her new husband — namely, her continued efforts fighting him off from getting into the more explicit works. For many a fujoshi, the prospect of having a relative, partner, or other relatively "normal" (in the sense of not being a fan or fan adjacent) person expressing interest in one's BL collection is tantamount to a public execution. As is evidenced by the title — which itself is taken from a phrase commonly heard among Japanese fujoshi — a key aspect

of the fujoshi experience is an enjoyment that essentially removes the sense of the self from engagement with different stories and mediums. Yuriko is zany not because she possesses traits that are different, but rather because of the effort she expends to deal with a situation just about any fujoshi would be afraid of. The fujoshi audience can immediately identify with her and can imagine how she feels about the all-too-innocent Gakurōta browsing her not-so-innocent books; those emotions and their potential for resonance are exactly what constitutes Yuriko's zaniness.

Community Symbiosis and the Management of "Spores

Relationships lie at the core of the fujoshi experience, both in terms of how these women see and enjoy the world and themselves, as well as in terms of the highly communal nature of fujoshi fandom participation. One of the defining characteristics of the fujoshi is her ability to zero in on even the slightest hint of homoeroticism (sometimes just manifesting such interpretations out of thin air) within the space between characters or objects, with or without any significant interaction — a mode of engagement that Azuma Sonoko describes as "relationship chart consumption [相関図消費 *sōkanzu shōhi*]" (Azuma S., 2010:253), following the lead of Ōtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki. Sometimes, as is especially the case with Narumi and Urara, this predilection towards character relationships serves as the creative foundation for the development of new works, be they yaoi-type secondary derivative works or original stories. In other cases, as is the case with Yuki and Yuriko, the simple act of fantasizing in and of itself is plenty fulfilling. Regardless, the emphasis of emotional involvement is placed on a dynamic between two or possibly more parties rather than any singular character while also ensuring that the reader/viewer is *not* one of the involved.

Wotakoi's Narumi is an active fujoshi in many meanings of the word, the most significant being her active participation in and contributions to the fan economy as a

dōjinka and consumer despite her notorious procrastination habit. Fan labor — particularly that of female fans — is contentious, both for the actual work that it is and for the various emotional, physical, and financial investments that such labor signifies on part of those who participate in such practices. It is no coincidence that Narumi and Hanako, who are both not only fujoshi but also incredibly involved in otaku activities, are heavily invested in creative fannish practices such as dōjinshi creation or cosplay; in stark contrast, neither Hirotaka nor Tarō who are their respective partners seek to take part in such activities on their own initiatives. Although much less so than in other geocultural fan contexts, it is still not as common for male fans to participate in the creation and distribution of secondary works in offline settings, especially if those works involve exactly the type of transformative reinterpretations of the original text commonplace in female-coded fan spaces.

As such, this makes it all the more significant in the cases of those who do participate, especially when they do so in spaces that generally do not tend to see such participation. In this context, Hirotaka's initial offer and his later commitment to serving as his girlfriend's assistant during both the creation and offline distribution periods of her dōjinshi are thus more compelling for their functions as expressions of care. Narumi acknowledges both the perceived gender divide and the significance of Hirotaka's aid during one such creation period, her countenance disheveled and tears running down her face as she simultaneously apologizes and speeds through her manuscript: "For asking you, a guy, to help me with this. I'm the worst woman…Hirotaka, you're a godsend! You're such a good helper!" (Fujita, Vol. 1:51). In the same vein, Yuki's unwavering support of Urara's first original dōjinshi similarly highlights the weight of support in the creative process and afterwards as an integral aspect of interpersonal networks within fujoshi circles. Participating together in an activity is a vital part of strengthening bonds in any relationship, never mind

ones built in the margins such as fan communities where even just "sharing the fantas[ies are] productive of human relationships between fujoshi" (Galbraith, 2015:161). Oftentimes, the scope of these fantasies can even extend themselves beyond the confines of the two-dimensional, bleeding into one's surroundings through mechanisms such as cosplay or staged reenactments of specific scenes or tropes, as is semi-regularly done by the men of *Wotakoi*.

Sometimes care can also be expressed through the deceptively simple act of being open to another's interests. Hirotaka and Tarō may not hold back on getting in the occasional jabs regarding their girlfriends' fujoshi tastes, but their overall behavior in fact suggests a great deal of tolerance, or even indulgence. Tarō, for example, when asked about what makes him uncomfortable in fiction, replies "everyone has different tastes. I don't wanna look down on others' preferences but…BL is well…" (Fujita Vol.1:41) — and yet later comes around to the truth that at the very least some BL stories are ultimately not so different from his own preferred genre of shōjo manga. In what could be considered an even more salient example, one of the main points of tension between Yuriko and Gakurōta is his insistence on learning his wife's hobbies. While in most cases such an initiative would not necessarily be an altogether bad thing, Yuriko's hobby being Boy's Love and Gakurōta being both a normie and a gay man complicates the situation. During the period of the 1990s, when the term yaoi was still in vogue to describe what is now BL, the genre and its readers were subject to a great deal of both legitimate criticism and undeserved vitriol from gay writers, critics, and activists such as Satō Masaki (1992). Gakurōta himself learns of the strained relationship between BL and some parts of the Japanese gay community through Yuriko's friend.

Ironically, theirs is a relationship that came into being almost precisely because of Yuriko's hobby — or more specifically, a slip of the tongue that ended up being

about her hobby rather than her own queerness, in an attempt to comfort Gakurōta who had accidentally outed himself. This dynamic, when compounded with his complete inexperience with popular culture and related media and the fact that he often chances upon the more risqué books in her collection causes Yuriko no small amount of distress. Gakurōta's distance from all things fandom and niche media puts her own fervent attitudes towards her hobbies in stark contrast and thus highlights the gap in internalization between the two of them. Nevertheless, given its role in Yuriko's life as one of the main filters through which she experiences the world, it comes as no surprise that BL is then also one of the middle grounds in her relationship with Gakurōta. The very fact that so much of their relationship is predicated on her BL hobby, and that it continues to play such an important part in their lives together, serve as a testament to the significance of mutually reciprocal disclosure in relationships involving fujoshi. Rather than enforce unilateral divides between different modes of media engagement based on lines such as gender, sexuality, or even experience level, the relationships present in *Wotakoi* and *Wall* choose instead to celebrate communal modes of fan participation and cross-demographic exchanges as expressions of care.

Otaku interests are deeply personal, and this is especially true for fujoshi, whose fixations are not only relatively niche but also still quite non-normative when placed in relation to the mainstreams of niche fandom. It is not just that these fans are particularly passionate about fantasies of love and sex between men compared to other interests, but rather also a matter of how exactly they do so — the manner in which they are able to take even the slightest whiff of a relationship and expand that hint into an entire universe, sometimes in ways that some might even consider blasphemous takes on the original, is second to none. Much like how fanfiction writers in Anglosphere fandoms are reviled, for "one of the scariest things [to (male) geeks] about fanfiction is that they can pass for normal" (Busse, 2015:184), the perception of

fujoshi in Japanese fandom skews unfavorably due to their ability to work beyond the constraints of notions like common sense or real-life obligations. Patrick Galbraith, in quoting Saito Tamaki, writes that one of the key tools in a fujoshi's arsenal is her ability to layer "contexts one upon the other…playfully putting fiction into relation with reality" (Galbraith, 2015:156). Saito, and by extension Galbraith, utilize this notion of layering specifically within the context of yaoi-type fujoshi play — in other words, one application of the creative worldview Azuma Sonoko describes as relationship-chart consumption — but this framework can be applied more broadly to the many negotiations that a fujoshi must make in navigating between her fan, personal, and professional obligations.

In one such example of the complex layering of contexts that are present within fujoshi relationships, Yuki and Urara occupy multiple roles as friends and comrades, mentor and mentee, and creator and fan. Contrary to what first impressions of these characters might suggest, and in appropriate contrast to their backgrounds as an actual teacher and an actual student, Urara arguably has a stronger presence in BL Metamorphosis as a senior and mentor. Although she herself has only just started to understand the ins and outs of offline fujoshi community spaces, her consciousness of the fact that Yuki has even less exposure to the scene that she does pushes Urara to take on these roles. What starts as an ordinary interaction between customer and bookshop clerk grows into an intimate relationship as equals, centering not only their shared love of BL but also the acts of sharing in and of themselves. It is not an exaggeration to claim that communication through acts such as recommendations or physically lending books and other media are the foundation of fandom itself. The relationships within fan communities are intimacies built through a repeated pattern of disclosure and the exchanges of personal preferences and fantasies. The worries that both Urara and Yuriko hold about the sexual content of some of the books they have

either lent out or otherwise made accessible to unaccustomed eyes speaks to the precarity of their positions in society as fujoshi, as well as of BL as a media genre. Urara's leap of faith in sharing not only recommendations but also books from her personal collection is an exceptional gesture of good faith, opening herself up not only to the possibility of losses, but also to the potential for a more involved relationship with the older woman. In turn, as their bond progresses, so too does the accumulation of the many layers of contexts — both social and fictional — that exist between them.

Narumi and Hanako are another example of a fujoshi duo for whom sharing serves a vital function in maintaining their dynamic. However, in comparison to the relative compatibility of Metamorphosis's two protagonists, Narumi and Hanako are barely able to agree on anything, especially when it concerns their personal interpretations of character relationship dynamics. To put it plainly, neither of them can ever agree on who is better suited to be the top or bottom between the same two characters, with the possibility of a reversible dynamic also completely out of the question. One of the features of Azuma Sonoko's relationship-chart consumption framework is its specific focus on "yaoi-esque derivative story consumption [やおい的創作消費 *yaoiteki sōsaku shōhi*]" (Azuma, 2010:253), beholden to a practice of seeking moe through the delineation of relatively fixed top/bottom dynamics in a relationship between whomever or whatever the fujoshi in question wishes it to be. Given how well they otherwise get along, it is truly ironic that Narumi and Hanako's tastes diverge at this one single point even as they pin down the same two characters as a couple. Nevertheless, in the greater context of fujoshi fandom, their enduring friendship even in the face of diametrically opposed viewpoints is truly something worth noting. After all, for all that I have pushed forward a utopian reading of fujoshi community building, this is still a community in which the iron rule is to never place

circles pushing diametrically opposite orientations of the same character pairings anywhere near each other at offline events.[5]

Ironically, while their tastes never seem to converge in the yaoi sense, their rapport in the general BL department is amicable to the point where Hanako eagerly picks up all of Narumi's recommendations and praises her ability to drag people into new media fixations. Early in the manga's second volume, there is a scene that, when adapted to the anime, mimics this relationship of reciprocal recommendation with the viewer as an additional participant. During one of their after-work convergences at the nearby Animate store, Narumi and Hanako split from the men to peruse the BL stacks together, and it is here that Narumi generates an on-the-spot curation of selected works specifically for Hanako's tastes. When first featured in the manga, the covers of these recommendations are blank canvases; in contrast, the anime takes things a step further by filling in the blanks with new releases that had been popular at the time of the episode airing. This creative decision situates the world inhabited by Narumi and the others as layered upon that of the viewer's, weakening the boundaries between the women on the scene and the viewers in front of it. Establishing a relationship between fujoshi — and the meaning making practices used in such cases — is no simple matter. If anything, it is a rather complex undertaking that requires at minimum the willingness to bridge not just personal and fictional contexts, but also, to a certain extent, dimensional ones.

Even more harrowing than sharing recommendations between fujoshi are the situations in which one finds themselves making BL or any other such niche subculture suggestions to the completely uninitiated. The dilemma Yuriko finds

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[5] Often, this means placing such circles on opposite ends of the building, as far away from each other as possible so that the circles themselves as well as the fans have as little chance of interacting as possible; when describing such zones, Japanese fans have borrowed "island 島" from the yakuza slang designating one's own turf.

herself in is even more complicated than would be many similar scenarios because of her and her partner's circumstances. Most fujoshi would not, after all, have to keep finding ways to dissuade her curious gay husband from looking at her collection of homoerotica. On the one hand, Gakurōta being a gay does clearly have an impact on his dynamic with Yuriko, especially in relation to her hobbies. The legacy of the *yaoi ronsō* has clearly endured even with the passing of twenty years and a great deal of change both broadly across society and more specifically within fujoshi spaces. However, the tensions present within Yuriko and Gakurōta's relationship — and, to an extent, the tensions of the *yaoi ronsō* that still echo in contemporary discourses — are less a matter of identity politics and representation than they are about how to respond to fiction and fantasy. Ultimately, what alienates Gakurōta from his nominal wife is not his attraction to men, but rather the way in which he is much more firmly rooted in the real world in a way that she is not. As such, their approaches to engaging with BL and its related contexts differ at the most fundamental level — their own separate real-life contexts are just that much removed from one another. Bridging that gap is complicated precisely because Yuriko being (however unintentionally) open about her hobbies is the entire reason that their current relationship exists in its current state. Gakurōta, by responding in kind with a willing attitude, is doing his best to reciprocate on an equal basis using his wife's disclosures as a blueprint. It may not be perfect, but the path opened by these choices serves as a good first step towards a more thorough mutual understanding.

The mixed perspectives on BL that may arise from fan-outsider interactions are further explored in I Want to Be a Wall through the introduction of Momoya, who is not only Yuriko's close friend and fandom comrade-in-arms, but also a bisexual man engaged to another man. Momoya's presence as an alternative perspective into the Hanazono cooperative as well as another queer participant of BL fandom presents

even more avenues by which acts of disclosure and sharing are contextualized as care within BL spaces. Yuriko's relationship with Momoya is characterized by a deep sense of camaraderie in the face of oppressive heteronormative social structures, a bond forged not only through their shared love of BL but also in their shared struggles as queer Japanese exchange students in a foreign environment. Their commonalities are twofold even as they also contain fundamental differences: Yuriko's experiences as an aro ace woman and Momoya's experiences as a bisexual man likely inform their experiences with the fantasies of BL in different ways, and yet those fantasies are still something shared between the two of them as a necessary part of their friendship. This element of shared fantasies is also what distinguishes Yuriko and Momoya's relationship from those of either of their relationships with Gakurōta: as willing as he is to try his hand at learning about BL, developing something akin to a fujo/danshi awareness so quickly is practically impossible for someone whose point of view is so squarely rooted in a "normie's" worldview. To quote Galbraith and his interlocutors, Gakurōta does not quite have the "imagination to understand and participate in the alternative social world of fujoshi" (Galbraith, 2015:164). There is a marked difference in the way that fan-fan and fan-outsider relationships proceed, characterized by the presence or absence of not only communal fantasies but also a common imagination needed for reciprocal exchange.

Establishing a sense of community between fujoshi or between fujoshi and non-fujoshi is more than a matter of just merely finding topics in common. Relationships between fujoshi are reliant on agreements that go beyond simple commonalities such as a shared love for BL or for specific characters or the like — even what may seem like the smallest of disagreements makes a world of difference in the realm of fujoshi meaning making. Regardless of those differences, however, what remains consistent throughout are the acts of layering that bring together different

contexts and augment the experiences of reality for fujoshi, providing them with alternative ways of conceptualizing, perceiving, and interfacing with those around them.

Fujoshi and the Feminine Eqiups

Before delving into the notion of how the fujoshi from *Wotakoi*, *Metamorphosis*, and *Wall* are all representative of different types of femininity, I would like to take a step back to establish what exactly a "fujoshi femininity" is. Is there any connection between reading a specific genre and one's perception and presentation of their own gender? Although this also might be a factor, especially given early fujoshi studies theories on why girls were so drawn to the aesthetics of early homoerotic shōjo comics with their tragic, beautiful "girls disguised as boys" (Nakajima 1991, Matsui 1993), this description does not even begin to encompass the full spectrum of possible femininities present especially among contemporary iterations of fujoshi. The notion of femininity in relation to fujoshi is complicated by the very implications of what it means to be a rotten woman — the fact that "yaoi fans do not have to face reality and 'grow up' (they are 'girls') and fail to achieve reproductive maturity (they are 'rotten')" (Galbraith, 2015:155) implies a default state of failed woman/girlhood exacerbated by the fixation on male/male homoeroticism. By virtue of being involved in such a hobby, fujoshi have already forsaken and in turn have been forsaken by the natural order of social obligations — an overall negative image, but not one completely without merit depending on individual interpretation. Moreover, such interpretations are not set in stone, and the emergence of new fujoshi focused media has contributed to a greater diversification of fujoshi portrayals.

Yuki's presence in *BL Metamorphosis* as a protagonist is incredibly notable not only because of the scarcity of elderly protagonists in media generally, but also due to her own layered positionality in relation to her much younger companion.

Initially attracted by the aesthetics of the art, Yuki's foray into this world is both an accident and a perfect extension of the forward-facing attitude that she strives to adopt as the distance from her husband's death gradually lengthens. Despite the initial contact being entirely by accident —or, perhaps, because of her relative unfamiliarity with the genre and the stigmas attached to it — Yuki is able to fully lean into the process of becoming a fujoshi. She is already halfway into her seventies, fully capable of consciously applying herself to her new hobby due to the experience at her back. Yuki's age renders her an incredibly hyper-visible existence as a fujoshi, whether that be during her book-buying excursions, or her attendance of events populated by young fans and creators alike. People notice her, their reactions ranging from those like Urara's coworker gawking at the old lady buying BL to the deeply engrained impression she leaves on other event goers, to the point where the creator of her favorite series can immediately identify her at a book signing event.

The enthusiasm and energy with which Yuki approaches her new hobby, largely unperturbed by the prying eyes of those around her, is nothing short of refreshing especially amidst younger protagonists who are all too conscious of how they fit into their surroundings. Yuki's fresh perspective and new initiate fearlessness stand in noticeable contrast to her age and the occasional aura of an experience elder characteristic of one with her bounty of experience. There is no doubt that part of this enthusiasm is buoyed by the fact that she has no outstanding, immediate obligations as a wife, mother, or grandmother — and is therefore free to act without fear of being judged for indulging in a hobby unbecoming of a woman her age. BL, after all, is grouped among other feminized hobbies stereotyped as fleeting interests, to eventually be graduated from so they can transition from the uncertain stage of girlhood into the confines of adult society (Nakajima, 1991:269-273). Yuki's relative independence and self-sufficiency are already valuable enough for a woman at her stage in life, but their

importance is further emphasized in the ways they empower her ability to explore her new hobby. While it is undeniable that her circumstances as a widow with a grown child living overseas makes for a series of convenient coincidences for someone in her position, Yuki's active participation in fujoshi spaces is nonetheless remarkable for the ways in which she overturns expectations of how women her age ought to act — as well as what might considered a "normal" or "acceptable" age to open her eyes to the appeal of BL.

In contrast, or perhaps in addition to Yuki's distinctive uniqueness as a much older active fujoshi, her companion Urara is representative of a much more commonly seen fujoshi archetype. As a plain, socially awkward teenager, she fits not only the mold of one of the most commonly seen fujoshi stereotypes, but also that of the generalized otaku girl. Visually, Urara is in some ways as much of an outlier as her elder friend is even as she blends in with the scenery and those around her; whether it is at school among other girls her age or within fujoshi spaces that might bring more attention to her youth, Urara fades into the background while simultaneously remaining that on incongruous element — always just slightly out of place. Her self-presentation and style are not so much feminine as they are neutral — a touch masculine, even — leaning, especially when placed in comparison with the other adults featured in this chapter. Moreover, Urara's choppy, uneven haircut and generally baggy silhouette also create a somewhat messy impression, evoking those of the "otaku girls [who have no fashion sense]" that some fujoshi deliberately dress up to *not* resemble (Ishida & Okabe, 2012:219), or even to those of male otaku. The interviewee who stressed the importance of not appearing sloppy like a stereotypical otaku *girl*, also interestingly connects the state of being an otaku girl and a general state of not being an adult. In this sense, Urara is perhaps the closest fit to the notion that BL readers are "girls who couldn't become boys" (Nakajima 1991; Matsui 1993),

her youth and unclear (or perhaps, merely underdeveloped) gender presentation alluding to deeper set uncertainties about growing up that are currently exacerbated by the inevitable end of high school. Urara's self-presentation is remarkably consistent throughout the run of the series, a sustained liminality constantly on the cusp of something without having yet been realized.

Awkward fujoshi adolescence is — or rather was — an important aspect of Yuriko's journey on the path to fujoshi womanhood as well, though hers was one doubly punctuated with a deep unease at even the slightest prospect of sex or romance. Not unlike Urara, Yuriko spent her youth in high school in a form she herself describes as "The Ultimate Otaku Girl" (Shiono Vol.1:104) — shoulder length hair in pigtails accentuated by large round glasses that hid her eyes regardless of the frame style. Unlike Urara, Yuriko was blessed with company who shared both her hobby and her distaste for "girl talk" between classmates about each other's romantic encounters, or her friends' hushed excitement over their borrowed R18 dōjinshi — at least, up until college. Yuriko's high school days paint a picture of a quiet and demure archetypal "literary girl" more absorbed in books, rather than becoming deeply involved in matters of becoming deeply involved in matters of the real workd sl. However, the departure from the "literary girl" archetype in Yuriko's experience of alienation from her classmates is most succinctly explained through her rationale for turning to BL in the first place:

> What I like about BL…is that all of the characters are men. There's no girls, like the protagonists of shōjo manga or the heroes of shōnen manga. It's a whole other world. A place that has nothing to do with me. I can pretend like I don't feel out of place. (I don't imagine myself falling in love with another person.) It's another "safe space" for me.
>
> Shiono V.1:107

Weaved into Yuriko's thoughts are echoes of Nakajima and Matsui's writings on how the rejection of an adult femininity became an important draw of JUNE for girls. Nakajima connects the rejection of adult femininity through BL fantasies with eating disorders in a sort of proto-trans theory line of thinking, writing that girls who were "terrified of being in a mature woman's body…chose 'being a boy' as an escape" (Nakajima, 1991:224), while Matsui connects the identification that many young women were wont to feel with bishōnen protagonists with the boys "being the girls' displaced selves" (Matsui, 1993:178). Whether or not Nakajima and Matsui had ever considered anything beyond "just not wanting to be a girl" was in store for these 'girls,' some of whom may truly have been boys striving for their idealized body located within shōjo aesthetics is a question for a different time; the main point here is the reification of a link between BL and the desire to escape from heavily gendered aspects of aspect of reality.

In any case, Yuriko's escapades into the world of BL do not slow down even as she grows more into herself as a person and as a physical entity. The distinct boundaries that she maintains between the fantasy of BL — where matters of romance and sex actually make some modicum of sense to her — and real life — where the reality of such things and her own relation to them are to remain as distant as possible — speak to a different understanding of what femininity entails when normative expectations of romantic love and sex are brought out of the conversation. What is an aro ace femininity in this case — or rather, how is it distinguished from a nonproductive heterosexual femininity? Often when considering the gender dynamics between readers/creators and the male characters of BL, the attraction to the characters experienced by the reader tends to be the focus. "What fujoshi should always remember to keep in mind and continue to ask themselves, are the (sexual) desires I hold toward these characters, 'correct?'" (Yanagase, 2020:118), asks Yanagase Mai as

she grapples with the ethics of BL consumption as a feminist for her article in *Eureka's* "The Now of Women Otaku" issue. Putting the loaded question of a "correct" way to feel about yaoi and BL and the characters involved aside, the assumption of sexual attraction towards the characters highlights what is expected of the non-productive heterosexual femininity. Even if nothing were to come of it — given both the homoerotic subjects of such attraction and their fictional nature — it is presumed that women are drawn to such material because of their attraction to the characters themselves. Even if it is a little twisted, the general direction of attraction is still oriented in a normative configuration — which brings us back to the question of what an aro ace fujoshi femininity is.

Yuriko's interpersonal relationships offer some insight into answering that question — "maybe···it's because I can't imagine what it's like to go from friendship to romance…I think I act more familiar with male friends than most women do" (Shiono, V.2:100). There may be no direct connection specified between her sexual and romantic orientations and her performance of womanhood, but the influence that these parts of herself have over her interpersonal relationships is clear to see. Yuriko's relationships can largely be divided into two categories: those she makes with herself as an aro ace fujoshi in mind, and those that she forms with an idea of herself as a woman. Regarding a similar type of separation of the self among fujoshi, the participants in the Ishida and Okabe study describe a practice of essentially treating one's fujoshi identity as a separate entity from their self as a feminine member of mainstream society, in order to remain illegible to all but those who share the same affiliations (Ishida & Okabe, 2012:218-29). Yuriko's usage of this strategy gives it a multi-dimensionality through placing her love for BL within the range of experiences informed by her queerness.

Thus far, the focus has remained focused on the femininities situated closer to the peripheries of fujoshi representations in contemporary Japanese manga and subsequent media mix adaptations. However, that does not mean that the more mainstream portrayals of the feminine fujoshi are any less complex in their iterations. In particular, the myriad ways in which adult fujoshi perform gender within their communities have much to comment on. In particular, there are few other subculture groups who carry themselves with as strong a self-consciousness as fujoshi do, both in terms of their subordinate position in the social hierarchy and their inherent difference from "normal" women (Ishida & Okabe 2012:219). As members of such a group, the performance of a gendered ideal is not just a survival strategy meant to make life somewhat easier to navigate, but also a way to signal one's place in the hierarchy. For working adults such as Wotakoi's Narumi and Hanako, femininity is a necessary asset regardless of whether they are among colleagues or fellow fujoshi. Of course, this does not mean that the individual characters' gendered self-expressions or their specific fujoshi personas may necessarily reflect the same ideals — in fact, they do not. However, what is certain is that both Narumi and Hanako's performance of fujoshi fit into popularized ideals. One could argue that they are in fact two sides of the same spectrum, Narumi on one end with her soft hyper-feminine clothes and exuberant affection, and Hanako on the other, maximizing her height and sharper features with Takarazuka-esque crossplay.

There are few other occasions where Narumi and Hanako are as willing and able to put out all the stops for than their regular dōjinshi events. Moreover, the two of them have vastly different approaches to what dressing up for an event actually entails. In Narumi's case, the dissonance between her actual attitude and her outfit coordination at the first big event to appear in the series is an apt illustration of the social and hierarchical weight to one's appearance within the deceptively highly

policed setting of fujoshi communities. Narumi may be all dolled up in her first Comiket since she began dating Hirotaka for the free labor, but the focus of the panels are not on her outfit, but rather the feeling of going off to battle exemplified by the actual dialogue as well as the artistic references to shōnen battle manga *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*, illustrated through the sharp shading of her cheek and bold brush-like line work in the close-up of her face appearing in the background. This is only a face she shows in apprehension of the event to come, something she can comfortably show to her childhood friend but not to any of her compatriots — when the event begins for real, the tension from the previous scene is nowhere to be seen. Narumi's face and mannerisms soften, the pitch of her voice goes up, and her general aura becomes fluffy and bright — she begins a performance of hyper-cuteness that almost never manifests otherwise, as something that is primarily constructed "in relation relationally and through interaction within and between genders" (Ishida & Okabe, 2012:222). In other words, her ultra girlish behavior in this moment is one that comes in reaction to the femininity of others around her — a different kind of context layering and also a different kind of reciprocal fantasy.

While Narumi ramps up her feminine wiles to respond in kind to the event goers dropping by her booth to pick up copies of her dōjinshi, then Hanako more or less goes in the exact opposite direction. Rather than take what she has and enhance them like how Narumi does, Hanako plays not just with her own personal self-expression but also gender performance as a popular crossplayer known for BL photoshoots. Dansō in and of itself, and especially in a specific context like the women's area of Comiket where all the yaoi dōjinshi are sold, constitutes not just a play on gender or the performance of a specific character, but also a similar mode of reciprocal fantasy and context layering that motivate fujoshi to dress their best at such events. Hanako may be dressing and acting as a male character, but the masculinity

that she is performing is ostensibly an idealized female masculinity, similar to the kata performed by the male roles in Takarazuka Revue plays (Gigi & Hansen, 2022:11). The role of these male characters is layered over the flesh of her body, and in embodying the ideal version of him that exists in the fantasies of the women around her, Hanako finds fulfillment as part of the community, through different means than creating and sharing dōjinshi. Once again, the space of the dōjinshi event is reiterated as a site of collective fantasy and meaning making through such activities as crossplay photoshoots and dōjinshi dissemination.

Gender in the realm of the fujoshi is a complicated mix of negotiated performances hinging on the relationality of oneself — more specifically, one's fujoshi self — in position with other entities, most particularly other fujoshi. Rather than claim that mature fujoshi femininity is a natural connection between gender and gendered interest, it would be more accurate to conceptualize it as any number of interfaces a fujoshi would need to not only interact with but also integrate into different social situations as different faceted identities separate from her fujoshi self. Behavior may naturally be influenced by one's environment, but the performance of identity in fujoshi circles involves a continuous state of negotiation to determine the appropriate level of response. Moreover, there are a multitude of other factors to consider that may completely alter or at least heavily influence such things as how one may act as a woman compared to acting as a rotten woman, and what it means to be rotten women together.

Rotting Through Dimensions

BL culture has come a long way since the 1970s when it first emerged from shōjo manga and shōjo novel spheres, and one of the most visible examples of its evolution as a genre are the mediums into which it has successfully managed to expand into. Namely, there are more live action adaptations of BL works than ever

before, with new adaptations being announced at a breakneck speed; moreover, the genre has finally started to really catch a foothold in anime as well, even despite certain content limitations. Accordingly, when BL has its advancements so too are fujoshi beholden to the varied new ways in which they can enjoy their beloved stories. All of this is to say, when the ways in which fujoshi are able to enjoy stories increases, so too is there a need to examine the unique aspects of each medium in respect to the stories they are telling.

One of the strengths, for example, of the manga format in which *BL Metamorphosis* was originally written is the ease with which the turn of the page can emulate the experience of the characters as they themselves flip through the pages of the BL manga that brought them together. This, too, is a matter of layering contexts: on one level is the story as the readers from across the page experience it, and on the other is the story as the characters themselves go through it. Moreover, there is also the matter of stories within the story and the characters within those stories, and so forth and so on. The reader follows Yuki and Urara as they navigate through the unfamiliar environs of BL fandom, dōjinshi events, and the creative process — while also at the same time experiencing on a different level the stories of *You're the Only One I Want to See* and Urara's original dōjinshi *He Came From Far Away*. Even within the context of a single work in a single medium, there is a strong feeling of linkage to the different dimensions of narrative and reality that populate the pages of *BL Metamorphosis*.

Signified by a change in the page borders from white to black (with unfilled white pages signifying the first layer of "reality" in which Urara and Yuki live), the reader is able to follow the progression of *You're the Only One I Want to See* at the same pace at which Urara and Yuki are themselves reading the story. The reader follows along with the characters rather than deciding things by their own initiative,

first in larger chunks with the volumes that Yuki buys, then in sparser, more gradual bursts as the both of them move to magazine releases out of impatience. The meta-textual nature of each appearance *Only One* makes in the text of *BL Metamorphosis* is twofold: some pages emulate the character's reading experiences by appearing as snippets of print pages confined within the bounds of a page's panels, while others completely eliminate the barriers between fiction and reality/meta-fiction by taking over whole pages altogether, transforming portions of *BL Metamorphosis* into different stories for the span of a few pages at a time.

In contrast to the original manga, the meta-aspects of the live action film manifest in a completely different manner, with a much more elaborate way of execution. As one might expect from the change in mediums, the effect of reading along with the characters is no longer as prominent or effective. While the live action movie does make an effort to attempt to mirror reading along through the screen, the cumulative effects of several major creative decisions results in an entirely different first impression of *I Only Want to See You*. Its first appearance in the movie would produce very different impressions depending on the viewer and their knowledge of the movie. If one had only read the manga and seen nothing from the extensive marketing campaign, for example, seeing *Only You* on screen for the first time would be a truly jarring experience — it is nothing like how it appears in the manga, after all. Entirely new pages drawn by a well-known BL mangaka, in a completely different style from the books would have been least surprising new development coming from the movie.

The greatest peculiarity of *BL Metamorphosis's* live action adaptation lies not in the movie itself, but rather in its marketing campaign — or rather, in the short drama series that was produced in conjunction with the movie as part of its marketing campaign. *I Only Want to See You* is a story that readers of *BL Metamorphosis* only

know bits and pieces of. There is enough to piece together the general plot, but just putting together the pages readers have access to does not make much of a story, still. The newly redone pages by Janome that are featured in the live action are likewise still lacking, not to mention not all that accessible — so, as if to supplement these, the *BL Metamorphosis* movie production team also produced a short drama series based off of the *I Only Want to See You* in-text manga in a unique sort of spin-off take on the media mix. With the creation of the *Only You* drama comes a completely different arrangement of layered experiences as a *BL Metamorphosis* fan. The synchronized experiences that form one of the main draws of the original takes on an entirely new form with the inclusion of this miniseries in the mix. After all, Urara and Yuki were never able to watch their beloved characters make the transition from page to screen — this has become something exclusive to the audience of this side. However, because the drama miniseries is something that does not exist in the original, and the manga is something that does not exist in its full form in real life, the layered synchronicity of experiencing *Only You* along with Urara and Yuki persists albeit with a slightly different feeling. The airing of the miniseries along with the movie may make it almost seem as though there is a natural progression and a folding of fiction into reality, from the events of *BL Metamorphosis* to the events of real life. *I Only Want to See You* became popular, and managed to secure a live action adaptation, even if it was just a miniseries — making it seem almost as real life and the world of *BL Metamorphosis* are one and the same.

In comparison to the deftly planned adaptation strategy of the BL Metamorphosis production committee, the Wotakoi live action movie (2020) could be evaluated as a typical live action adaptation in the manner in which it only takes the most surface level aspects of the manga to adapt. The most obvious reason that might affect perceptions of the live action would be the fact that it had the unfortunate luck

of being made well after a much beloved anime adaptation (2018), so fans of the manga and or anime would have likely already formed opinions on what another Wotakoi adaptation should be like. Anyone who has read the manga or watched the anime would likely feel a strong sense of dissonance from the characters and story they know and the entire musical element of Wotakoi (2020), not to mention the major alterations made to characterization and relationship dynamics — resulting in a movie where the four main leads of the original only manage to make it into the same room at the very end. While *Wotakoi* (2020) does feature some interesting Comiket scenes, neither the sense of affection towards otaku culture of the original nor its affirming relationships of care are able to quite survive the transfer into live action. Neither Tarō nor Hanako, especially, are characters in the same capacity as their manga or anime counterparts, and their four-person friend group was completely dismantled in favor of a romantic plot involving problems Hirotaka never had in the first place. Moreover, the live action element of the movie exacerbated many of the otaku elements of the story to the point where the playfully positive zaniness of the original lost most of its positive and playful elements.

Conclusion

While fujoshi in real life may hold on to self-deprecating views of their subordinate position in greater social hierarchies, the same does not need to be said about fujoshi in fiction. The rotten girls featured in newer generation otaku manga such as *Wotakoi*, *I Want to Be a Wall*, and *BL Metamorphosis*, among so many others, are building spaces for themselves to exist as they are, not just within their own narratives but also beyond them. The deliberately transgressive nature of fujoshi activities, their penchant for feeling loudly and openly, and their particular talents in drawing out and enabling similar affective responses are all powerful tools for

building solidarity within fujoshi spaces as well as making connections with those outside their circles.

IN THE END, IT'S NOT SO EASY TO LEAVE THE LIFE: PROFESSIONAL/FAN PERMEABILITY IN JAPANESE FUJOSHI SPACES

Whereas the previous chapter centered the inherent possibilities present in the figure of fujoshi in fiction and her multiple incarnations across mediums, this chapter is poised to elaborate on a different — though still connected — take on the question of lies at the heart of fujoshi self-identity. Fujoshi are by no means an unusual sight in scenes across different mediums of Japanese popular culture, but before they made their way into fictional worlds, they first had to appear in this one (the so-called real-world). For contemporary characters in particular, the influence real-world contexts on any fictional depictions should not be understated, especially in the case of niches such as fujoshi. Such practices of context layering are further elaborated in the hands of media fans who layer the knowledge of the world in which they inhabit over the worlds of various stories and franchises central to their interests as part of the process of creating secondary derivative works. Moreover, these fans themselves become layered into fictional worlds as well through their inclusion in the growing body of fan-centered commercial works created by their fandom fellows. Fans take from the works of professionals in acts integral to the maintenance of fan communities, while professionals draw upon their experiences as fans to sustain acts of creation. For fujoshi fandom in particular, where the boundaries between fan and professional are uniquely porous, this results in a vital feedback loop wherein each side provides inspiration and textual material for the other to draw upon. This reciprocal relationship between amateur and professional fans is a major contributor to the sustainability and longevity of fan communities.

The largely communal nature of fandom creative activities is a major contributor to the fostering of an environment where making the transition from fan

consumer to cultural producer is actually a tangible possibility. Although the internet and social media have weakened some of the barriers that have traditionally kept fans from considering the option of going pro, not all fan cultures are built in the same way. Fans-gone-professional may not be a particularly unusual phenomenon in and of itself — especially not in the contemporary age of hyper-visibility and viral potential associated with social media — the implications of many of the finer aspects of "going pro" for both fan creators and their communities have yet to be fully explored. As far as the Japanese fandom context is concerned, there have been some forays into the benefits of dōjinshi events particularly for women and other minority groups within greater fandom. However, questions such as what an overwhelming presence of yaoi dōjinshi or current trends in fujoshi attendance at such events may signal have yet to fully be addressed even as the configuration of dōjinshi events are steadily changing. Questions of genre specificity or reasons why professional mangaka may or may not continue to participate in such events as fans even after their professional debuts — or whether they are even able to — are also mostly untouched territory. What I aim to explore in this chapter is precisely those questions concerning the strategies used by fan-creators and professionals in navigating and negotiating their own transitional paths.

Dōjinshi and the Shape of Fandom

The prominence of fan creators shines most in an environment where their creative abilities are actually given room to take root and grow — and few other fandom contexts have had the fortune of an environment as forgiving as Japan's. Japanese media fandom has maintained continued access to a whole host of community based self-publishing dōjinshi fairs over the course of several decades, of which the most prominent would be the semi-annual Comiket (コミックマーケット *Comic Market*) which regularly boasts attendance numbers surpassing half a million

people for an event that is almost completely dedicated to the distribution of self-published derivative comics. With Comiket at the helm and a good number of smaller events taking place across the country, it is no wonder that Japanese otaku have managed to cultivate a thriving fanworks scene given both their resources and their history. The relative abundance of opportunities and venues in which dōjinshi creators — dōjinka — can share their derivative or original publications along with the relatively lax attitudes of IP holders and the so-called "powers above" responsible for the creation of popular commercial media has contributed greatly to creating a nurturing, generative environment in which fan creators are able to freely expand upon existing universes and share those works amongst themselves without much fear of any repercussions.[6]

The strength of Japanese fujoshi creators and their influence on the media landscapes in which they operate are most obviously felt when put in contrast with their equivalents overseas, such as Anglophone fandoms. For the most part, the relationship between media fandom and its central media property — or rather, with those charged with the creation of said media property — has traditionally been contentious. This situation is especially fraught in the case of male/male slash fans, whose methods of non-normative, transformative engagement with the source text has a tendency to elicit less than favorable reactions from "the powers that be" who decide things about your favorite show or series. Take, for example, the infamous bad blood between the show runners of the BBC's "Sherlock" television drama and its slash fandom. Despite the palpable queer subtext between the two lead that fans obviously picked up and ran off with, multiple people involved with the show — most notably writer and show runner Steven Moffat — continued to insist on much the opposite.

[6] For more on the role of dōjinshi and Comiket in Japanese otaku culture, see Tamagawa Hiroaki's "Comic Market as Space for Self-Expression in Otaku Culture" chapter in Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World (2012).

There is no potential for a gay romance here, or at least that is what they would like you to believe. To add insult to injury, the absolute power imbalance involved in this dynamic between Moffat and the fans, where the queer potentiality and creative passions of dedicated fans was effectively and one-sidedly exploited to make it one of the most streamed and pirated shows in the world during its airing with little to no pay off for the fans. Not only were they completely taken advantage of, but Moffat specifically singles out slash fans as targets of ridicule[7] — it is no surprise that things soured quickly among fans. Such treatment hammers in the acute and painful awareness many fans have that "these fictions do not belong to them and someone else has the power to do things to those characters that are in direct contradiction to the fans' own cultural interests (Jenkins, 1992:24). In comparison to the harsh environment of Anglosphere fandom, Japanese fans are privy to a much more forgiving attitude on part of original creators and rights holders to accommodate their activities.

As somewhat detailed above, the legal landscape that Japanese dōjinka operate within is a far cry from their overseas counterparts, especially when it comes to the most integral of all activities — the creation and circulation of derivative fan works. Unlike their English-speaking counterparts overseas, not having to worry about the very real possibility of being taken out by copyright infringement lawsuits nor the vindictive levels of dismissive ire from official creators and staff directed towards fan creations and homoerotic readings and interpretations would have and still evidently is quite reassuring for aspiring dōjinka — especially the fujoshi among them. In fact, for much of Comiket's early history, the largest segment of eventgoers and participating circles were women, with a correspondingly large number of the exhibited dōjinshi

[7] For more, see Lori Morimoto's "When I'm Crying about Mark Gatiss Please Remind Me Bryan Fuller Exists" from the "Ontological Security and the Politics of Transcultural Fandom" chapter of A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies (2018).

being yaoi parodies. Although the gender ratio of participants has evened out over the years and the corresponding volume of yaoi dōjinshi also starting to show signs of dropping, this has less to do with a surge in male fans as it does with the growing reluctance of fujoshi to participate in such large scale, general events. Although not so many may be participating in Comiket compared to the heyday of fujoshi dominance in the 1990s, in return there has been an explosion in the number of smaller, more intimate fandom- or character relationship- "only" events that cater to specific fandoms or yaoi character pairings.[8] This openness is a far cry from the situation in similar spaces overseas where the creation of derivative fan works and especially the creation of male/male slash fanfiction has remained relatively underground until much more recently due to aforementioned hostilities and a general understanding among slash fans and fanfiction writers of their place in fandom as a not very well looked upon niche. One of the clearest differences between fujoshi and slash fandom cultures is the evident lack of in person community spaces or activities among male/male writers and artists in Anglosphere fandom. The overwhelming presence of fujoshi creators and consumers in Japanese media fandom continues to influence the tide of media creation in both formal and informal capacities.

The significance of offline dōjinshi events — the ultimate mode of informal creation for Japanese fans — cannot be overstated; unlike similar subculture conventions such as the Comic Conventions in the U.S. that are ostensibly geared more towards providing an interface for fans to interact with professionals and other fans, Japanese dōjinshi fairs put the circulation of dōjinshi first and foremost. As a result, such distinctions between amateur and professional, official and unofficial, and so on and so forth consequently hold less weight in such spaces than usual; as a result,

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[8] For more, see https://note.com/loseheroine_wsd/n/n2b8cdb169664?fbclid=IwAR2WDWoI1E2hXKa_N1w_F1e7D0fDV5A2_3-q_A04wuQHYCJ8vb8BqigMXBk

it is also then easier for boundaries between such categories to loosen. In essence, these fairs serve fans not only as sites of community building and the exchange of creative endeavors, but also as important facilitators for significant developments in the trajectories of fan-lives. The site of major dōjin fairs such as Comiket are not just venues that host events, but also are in their own rights significant, literal pilgrimage destinations to which fans travel as a sort of figurative coming-of-age ritual signifying their development as "true" fans. While the landscape of Japanese creator and fan-creator circles is indeed changing due to the growing relevance of internet-based activities and self-promotion, in-person events continue to feature prominently in the popular consciousness as a concrete starting point for budding creators. This is especially true in the case of fujoshi-based iterations of fandom, where the mere act of making fantasies communal through the exchanges of dōjinshi comics and other such fanworks are just as, if not sometimes even more so, important than the actual contents of the pages. Most of all, even if favored distribution methods eventually change, dōjinshi continue to remain at the forefront of fostering and discovering new talents.

To return to the subject of going professional, for many fujoshi their participation in dōjinshi events is more than a matter of their fan activities; such events may also serve as opportunities to develop their own unique art and storytelling styles and form not just horizontal connections between themselves and fellow fans and creators, but also vertical connections to those in the industry — thereby raising the possibility of achieving a "big break" in the form of a formally publisher- backed serialization. The stories of such amateur to professional successes may be common across the various creative industries and genres, but the underlying structures and circumstances involved in the ascension of yaoi dōjinka to the status of not just professional mangaka, but also high-profile names within the industry, make such transitions all the more notable. After all, while the popularity of yaoi-style fandom

and BL has garnered quite a deal of attention throughout the years, it is still quite firmly considered a niche among niches in comparison to other more normative genres and fandoms. That there is not only a sizable contingent of currently serialized mangaka with backgrounds as yaoi dōjinka, but also that included within those ranks are some of the most well-known female mangaka currently active in the industry speaks for itself in terms of the sheer potentiality that fujoshi hold as both a creative force and as a consumer base. Needless to say, it is not wholly unreasonable to attribute at least some of these mangakas' successes to the support from fans with whom their tastes align, in all meanings of the word. It may not be possible to interact with other fujoshi as though nothing has changed once you've made your debut as a professional, but that does not mean that all aspects of your experience as a fujoshi must change — at least in the realm of personal taste and fantasies, professionals can stay on equal footing with fellow fans.

Yoshinaga Fumi and Continuities in Fujoshi Imaginations

Given that one of the defining characteristics of dōjinshi events such as Comiket is the sheer permeability of professional/amateur boundaries especially in fan dōjinshi circles (in contrast to original dōjinshi circles, for example), it is only reasonable to assume that such permeability takes on slightly different forms depending on the fans and professionals involved. Fujoshi in particular take the notion of permeability a step further through their characteristic ability to not only go above and beyond in creating and sharing fantasies, but also in encouraging others to join in on the fun of challenging various limits.[9] While it can be said that the production of any and all fan works by a professional count towards this loosening of the fan/official and amateur/professional dichotomies, there is still a very pointed difference between

[9] For more on interactions between fujoshi, see Thorn's "Girls and Women Getting Out of Hand" chapter in Fanning The Flames (2004) and Galbraith's "Moe Talk: Affective Communication among Female Fans of Yaoi in Japan" chapter in Boys Love Manga and Beyond (2015).

plain fan works meant for general audiences, and fan works with a clearly yaoi tint in terms of their subversive potential. One of the unspoken rules of conduct in Japanese online fandom is the separation of fan works that can be seen by general audiences (which are ok to tag with the name of the media) and anything implying a non-canon relationship especially if that relationship is between two men. For the general fan artist, this is not something they would have to pay much attention to — for the average fujoshi even less so, as many have accounts exclusively for yaoi art. Professional mangaka, on the other hand, tend to be recognizable regardless of their screen names, and are also likely to have a much wider reach compared to your average fan artist. So long as they are not BL mangaka (whose accounts by default come with the assumption of yaoi content), the fact that they are making and posting yaoi fan art becomes all the more remarkable because of their visibility.

There are several ways in which such fujoshi professionals perpetuate such subversions: continuing to post fanart on their professional social media accounts or attending dōjinshi events in the capacity of a fan, selling derivative dōjinshi, are generally the most common manifestations. For newly debuted mangaka, it is also not uncommon for their first work or first several works to feature characters with strong resemblances to the stars of dōjinshi they have previously released, or characters from fandoms they were previously active in. Moreover, there is also the possibility of making fanart or fan comics in a professional capacity through invited participation in (usually female-oriented) compiled anthologies for popular titles, a perfect example of a crossover between one's fandom and professional obligations. In somewhat of a twist on this, there is also the possibility of a fujoshi professional making dōjinshi of her own professional works, either on her own or with others like her. Whatever the method or manifestation, what remains consistent throughout is an unbroken

continuity of dōjinshi creation as a means of personal expression and collective passion.

One such prominent mangaka having come out of yaoi dōjinka origins is the critically acclaimed award winner Yoshinaga Fumi, who debuted as BL mangaka through the Hanaoto magazine after spending her time in high school and college creating dōjinshi for popular shōnen manga series such as *Slam Dunk*. Her repertoire has since expanded into shōjo, josei (adult women's), and seinen (adult men's) magazines through works such as *Ōoku: The Inner Chambers* (2004), *Antique Bakery* (1999), and *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* (2007) — all of which have received multiple manga awards as well as live action (and in the case of *Ōoku*, anime) television and film adaptations. In addition to her formally published works, Yoshinaga also occasionally participates in Winter Comiket as an exhibiting circle, selling R18 dōjinshi of her gay characters primarily from *Antique Bakery* and *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* that expand upon parts of these characters' lives that are left unseen in the main stories. In this sense, in spite of their unique origins being penned by the original creator, these dōjinshi fulfill the same role as any other at the most basic level, in the sense that they are filling the gaps left by the original work. However, this is not to say that they are indistinguishable from any of the dōjinshi offerings available at such events. In the end, it is precisely because they come from the hands of the original creator, while also not bearing the label of the official, that makes them unique. The key distinguishing feature that separates them from other male/male dōjinshi is the fact that these booklets are made for works that essentially will likely never see any other actual derivatives made.

There exists a small subcategory of male/male dōjinshi sold at Comiket and similar events, as well as online, that essentially consist of (semi-)official works penned by the creators of the official works themselves, meant to either fill in holes or

to tell the stories they were unable to in the actual body of the official work. Their particularity lies not only in who made them but also in the shared quality of being possibly the only such dōjinshi available based on their parent stories. After all, Yoshinaga's works aside the vast majority of these original mangaka dōjinshi are extensions of BL works — and with Yoshinaga's and a scant few others' dōjinshi included, are overall consisted of stories where "the openly homosexual element tends to take the mischievous fun out of yaoi-izing" (Thorn, 172) for the majority of fellow fujoshi. Such things would not stop a typical fujoshi from enjoying these works, but the specific type of enjoyment and engagement that comes with the yaoi-esque plays of viewing media are greatly diminished in the face of canonized homosexual relationships. Engagement on the level of creating dōjinshi is pretty much out of the question because the elements of ambiguity that normally fuel yaoi fantasies are delineated differently in works where the homoerotic elements are elevated to the very forefront of the text as homosexuality.

There are characters whose dynamics and interactions have by default already reached a climax, who already exist as a finished story rather than a plateau without a concrete end in mind (Galbraith, 2015:159). As far as secondary derivative creations and the yaoi-type fujoshi are concerned, there are countless better frontiers to explore for ship fodder than a neatly manicured, meticulously maintained garden. Therefore, what these works subsequently achieve, unlike with ordinary secondary creations, is the role of a unilateral communication of fantasy between a creator and their fans, both an extension and an augmentation of the dynamic already present between the two parties as part of the formal publishing process. As long as the dōjinshi they share are ones that continue to expand upon their own published works, these creators' exchanges with others in the space of the dōjinshi event will continue to affect a very different sort of dynamic compared to the days before they became professionals.

Moreover, even in cases where their dōjinshi have nothing to do with their professional repertoires, it does not guarantee a completely level playing field between them and other fans.

Very few examples serve as good an illustration for how permissive this level of fan to creator interactions are than comparisons with fandoms in other geo cultural contexts. For example, there are clear parallels that can be drawn between the way that Yoshinaga confines the sexual lives of her gay male protagonists to locales outside the main story even as she affirms them through the creation and dissemination of dōjinshi in spaces specifically meant for such content, with similar practices utilized by Chinese danmei (male/male novel) authors. Of course, the key difference between Yoshinaga and these authors is that her censoring of sex is a matter of personal choice, while theirs is imposed upon them by a variety of higher powers. Nevertheless, there is still something to be found in the way that sex scenes are treated as a type of bonus content that needs to be shared by all means possible. These characters' sexuality is at once an integral aspect of their portrayals that dedicated fans will go to great lengths to obtain, and also something that exists only in a space separate from the canon. Yoshinaga's choice to separate her characters from their sexual selves in such a manner is somewhat ironic given that her stated reason for leaving BL magazines was precisely the requirement for sex that was enforced in such magazines.[10] Although there is something to be said about the whole concept of requisite sex scenes especially in the BL publishing industry, Yoshinaga's continued participation in male/male dōjinshi creation on account of her gay characters from non-BL series indicates a certain continuity of fujoshi-style imagination that persists even after one has made the leap from amateur to professional.

[10] See Yoshinaga's 2022 Interview with Tokion https://tokion.jp/en/2022/09/14/interview-fumi-yoshinaga/

The persistence of a fujoshi ethos running through the threads of Yoshinaga's dōjinshi manifests through more than just the mere presence of sex that is otherwise limited from her commercial works. Continuing to produce and share dōjinshi — male/male erotic dōjinshi more specifically — in such a manner continually reaffirms Yoshinaga's membership as a part of a larger collective of fujoshi. In her Kenji and Shiro-san dōjinshi series, for example, Yoshinaga makes it clear through her author's notes that being able to share these stories with fans is one of the most important motivations for her continued participation in dōjinshi creation. *Kenji and Shiro-san* (ケンジとシロさん), which further explores the relationship between the main leads of Yoshinaga's widely acclaimed seinen manga *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* (きのう何食べた？) was first sold at C89 Winter Comiket 2015 and has since expanded into nine installments. Each of the issues of *Kenji and Shiro-san* can either be placed directly within the story's timeline or is referenced in or makes reference to part of the canon timeline. The author's note for the first installment of the *Kenji and Shiro-san* dōjinshi series begins with an introduction for new fans and a greeting for long time readers; "Nice to meet you. It's been a really long time," (2015). Clearly, the dōjinshi event space is not only not unfamiliar to her, but also one that she has quite the attachment to.

There is value in the space of the dōjinshi event and its communal nature, mirroring how Honda Masuko imagined the formation of the shōjo community in the 1990s. Nagaike Kazumi, in citing Honda, writes that girls, or rather shōjo, circulate among themselves stories almost like yaoi dōjinshi because "the various versions of these [male/male] fantasy narratives serve to enhance the shōjo community; by sharing stories, by "reading" each other's stories, these shōjo also demonstrate the value they place on a certain kind of communication among themselves" (Nagaike, 2010:112). BL has its roots in shōjo stories, and so it is not unreasonable to connect shōjo culture

and narratives to BL and yaoi culture — however, that does not mean that the figure of the shōjo and the figure of the fujoshi are one and the same. At this point, Nagaike goes on to reference Takahara Eiri and the notion of the shōjo consciousness, which is "manifested primarily through women's motivation to share their fantasies with other women, thus creating a specific domain that only they can access" (Nagaike, 2010:113) and is thus not something limited by age or maturity. The very fact that they center male homoeroticism in their shōjo fantasies at once distances them from a pure shōjo identity while also simultaneously rendering them shōjo in their privileging of fantasy over sexual productivity.

In Yoshinaga's case, her perpetual references to the next possible Comiket that she can theoretically attend signals a continuity of seeking belonging in the not-quite shōjo community of fujoshi that descend upon regular Comiket events. "I'm hoping to be at Winter Comiket next year, all being well" (2017), Yoshinaga writes in the note of the third installment. "Will I be able to sell this book to you all in person this winter? If I can, it will make me so, so happy" (2021) she writes in *Kenji and Shiro-san 6* as COVID-19 makes holding offline dōjinshi events next to impossible. These dōjinshi are not merely just a matter of putting out stories or scenes that did not make it into the main story; they serve the important purpose of maintaining a reciprocal relationship between creators and fans that goes beyond that of a typical traditional author-reader dynamic. However, this is not to say that such dynamics are completely unprecedented when in fact the exact opposite is true: a pattern of such horizontal relationships between creator and consumer has been a feature of Japanese feminine literary history since the early days of shōjo literature (Orbaugh, 2010:177). Yoshinaga's care towards her readers is expressed not only through her repeated expressions of gratitude, but also in the way that she ensures that her dōjinshi are able to reach the widest possible audience by not making them event exclusives, compiling the earlier editions into

omnibus volumes, and also allowing for mail order through the internet. While the focus of dōjinshi dissemination methods, especially for derivative comics, remains concentrated on in-person events, the internet has made for a much more diversified market. Moreover, there is also an increasingly growing number of formal/official vendors through which dōjinka and their circles are able to sell their goods. These changes in dōjinshi culture do, of course, expose dōjinshi circles to greater risks of unauthorized sharing and uploads — yet at the same time, also create additional spaces for non-Japanese fans to discover and explore new territory.

CLAMP and the Value of Names

It stands to reason that those involved would be aware of the potential shifts in one's own status and their consequent interactions with others that accompanies a professional debut; one of the main strategies that such professionals utilize to deal with such situations is through negotiations of the identities with which to present themselves. At times, this may mean separating the private person from the fan persona, while at others, it may involve a similar process but with one's fan and professional personas. The widespread usage of pen names in dōjinshi spaces dates to an era from before when the term dōjinshi became largely associated with self-published manga; back when it was primarily literary work. Moreover, pseudonymity as a practice is also an incredibly well- documented practice in the more mainstream history of the Japanese publishing industry and literary spaces. Furthermore, the usage of pseudonyms in BL can be traced back to its very beginnings, with prominent artists and writers featured in the earliest JUNE issues having likely made use of pen names at least partially in consideration of the fact they were producing erotic male/male content. Cultural critic Nakajima Azusa, for example, writes of herself, "after all is said and done, it was I, or rather the writer Kurimoto Kaoru, who laid out the foundations and general principles of these *JUNE* novels" (Nakajima, 1992:171).

Nakajima makes a point of separating "Kurimoto Kaoru" the novelist and "Nakajima Azusa" the cultural critic as not just different names that the woman known as Imaoka Sumiyo used in professional capacities, but completely different identities in and of themselves. There is a strong sense of separation between private selves and public-facing identities within Japanese creative culture, as evidenced by the strategies used by Nakajima/Kurimoto (professional pseudonyms) or even Yoshinaga (only giving the basic pronunciation of her name rather than the actual ideographs used to write it in order to preserve privacy).

The spread of the internet, and particularly the inherently "faceless" nature (at least, for the earlier iterations) of Japanese internet culture has further contributed to the cultivation of a space where the weight of a name may or may not be as much as it seems. Even within the space of the offline meetup, where participants have direct access to each other, general etiquette dictates that a certain level of anonymity be preserved precisely because that is the norm in the increasingly web-based media landscape. This, too, according to Nozawa Shunsuke, is characteristic of otaku sensibilities — from which many such conventions originated — where "the actual human, in its fullness, is gross" (Nozawa 2012). It must be noted that the so-called "otaku sensibilities" that Nozawa references generally refer to those of male otaku, some of which later found additional resonance among female fans. As was elaborated previously, female fan socialities, particularly those of fujoshi, operate on different expectations informed by their experiences of marginalization as women, as fans, and as fujoshi. Okabe Daisuke and Ishida Kimi (2012), through a series of interviews with fujoshi, found that fujoshi identity in particular to be continually bound to a state of being in "a self-deprecating and 'undercover' mode" (Okabe & Ishida, 2012:209), as such, it would be logical to assume that such a group would be even more prepossessed to dividing their personal/private and fujoshi selves. Moreover, if the

situation for the average fujoshi is as described above, then it becomes all the more prudent for those who actually create BL and yaoi content to rely on tools such as pseudonyms to maintain a pretense of normalcy in their private lives.

This is not to say, however, that the only function of pseudonyms within fujoshi communities is merely to allow her a facade behind which she can shield her hobbies from prying eyes, or herself from other fans. Pseudonyms, particularly in the fandom context, are just as a practical measure of privacy as they are another manifestation of the inherently playful nature of media otaku activities. A name is but another layer of playful fun to drape over oneself in the pursuit of the ultimate moe, something that is at once both an incredibly distanced and also an intensely intimate aspect of the fujoshi self (Galbraith, 2015). Nicknames, usernames, pen names, and other pseudonyms are often a reflection of not only an individual's personality and other parts of their private selves, but also their more public-facing interests — interesting, unusual, or just plain silly names are not at all unusual as both personal indicators and for larger groups such as dōjinka circles. Perhaps the most famous example of such a phenomenon are CLAMP, who are arguably the most famous mangaka group in the history of Japanese manga.

CLAMP made their debut as dōjinka in the mid-1980s as a larger group of eleven, making dōjinshi for popular shōnen series such as *Captain Tsubasa*, *Saint Seiya*, and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*. Their professional debut came with a dramatic restructuring of the group that whittled their numbers down the current four members, and the formal serialization of *RG Veda* in the *Wings* magazine in 1989. Since their debut, the group has continued to produce best-selling hits such as *X/1999* (1992), *Magical Knight Rayearth* (1993), *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1996), *Chobits* (2000), *xxxHolic* (2003), *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicles* (2003), and many others. The vast majority of their popular manga series have quickly been picked up for anime and live

action adaptations in both film and television formats. Unlike many creators in similar positions, CLAMP has a reputation of being uniquely involved in the creation process of anime adaptations of their works, with the members working in various capacities within the anime creation processes.

The name CLAMP was originally chosen back when the members were high school students and refers to a large storage clamp or pile of potatoes. Moreover, each of CLAMP's members has made use of pseudonyms at one point or the other in their professional and fan careers, and up until their appearance at the 2006 Anime Expo, had not allowed for any photography of themselves to circulate either. The overall mystery that surrounded the mangaka group was perhaps partially meant to render their "social identities irrelevant to the event of [reading] and virtual togetherness as much as possible" (Nozawa, 2012) in a similar manner to the kind experienced by the users of video platform NicoNicoDouga. The 2006 Anime Expo appearance, consequently, would have functioned as a sort of *kaodashi* or "face reveal." Interestingly, despite their consistent use of pseudonyms and the CLAMP collective name, the group has been well known as an all-female cooperative since its debut, in contrast to the more nebulous situation of other pseudonymous mangaka within the industry, or various online personalities, whose "masking of gender generates and sustains a powerful source of playfulness" (Nozawa 2012). CLAMP has taken full advantage of this bit of disclosure, utilizing this fact to their professional benefit as a main marketing point for the different manga series that they have published over the years. In the same vein, however, their overall anonymity through the first decade and a half of their careers has also allowed them to maintain a certain level of distance between themselves and their work.

While their lengthy list of accolades and even lengthier body of work afford the group an ample amount of prestige, the group still manages to keep some of the

playful air that originally brought them together all those decades ago. In the duration of CLAMP's long and illustrious career after their debut as professionals, for example, they had managed not only to fulfill their professional obligations as mangaka, but also to make the time for more personal projects. There are a number of CLAMP yaoi dōjinshi released during the 1990s — after the group had already begun to serialize *RG Veda* and subsequent series — including the legendary *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* dōjinshi where Kakyōin lays an egg (*CLAMP in Wonderland* 1994). CLAMP's derivative dōjinshi from this period tended to be formatted as collections of short, often unconnected stories with a strong focus on humorous themes such as the *Jojo* piece — quite the difference from the prevalence of single-story thin books that dominate the booths at fujoshi-oriented dōjinshi events currently. Their focus on humor rather than more emotional plots may have stemmed from a desire to put up a mask of sorts, to maintain the distance between CLAMP as a professional mangaka group and CLAMP as a dōjinka collective, to allow readers to "link these masked [creators] as nothing more than" a female mangaka group and accept them as such without the need for any more information (Nozawa, 2012). CLAMP then becomes both the collective effort of a group of four women, and the singular entity behind some of the most popular manga in Japan.

In comparison to Yoshinaga, CLAMP do not take the route of making the bonds between their male characters explicitly gay for a good number of their works, instead opting for (incredibly unsubtle) homoerotic subtext between their male characters in series such as *xxxHolic* and *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicles*. It could be said that it is precisely because of their background as a dōjinka circle and their experience making yaoi dōjinshi that their portrayals of the relationships between male characters are so compelling. Given that the women of CLAMP know what exactly it means to take advantage of gaps in male-oriented media to conjure homoerotic

readings, it is also conversely easy for them to write stories and characters in such a way that deliberately leaves spaces in which their fellow fujoshi can go wild. Although the position of cultural producer comes with it an entirely different set of rules of engagement when it comes to fandom and one's access to anonymity, it is also not as though your world drastically changes with the promotion.

CLAMP are a particularly outstanding example of the amateur to professional success case not only because of their storied career, but also because they are a rare example of a dōjinka/mangaka collective that have actually stayed together for the duration of their careers and still continue to work in the capacity of a group with equal authorship rights shared among all the members. While it is not unusual for mangaka to work in groups, this usually takes the form of a single main author/artist and a group of assistants, each with slightly different responsibilities split in a manner meant to increase workflow productivity. Such artistic cooperatives were a much more common occurrence in dōjinshi circles, especially during the days when putting together a book and making enough copies to sell required the cooperation of more than a few people. The advancement of the internet and printing technologies have since decreased the need for such large groups, so many of the circles that participate in contemporary dōjinshi events are now basically either one-man acts or compiled anthologies with multiple participating artists (Hemmann, 2020:80). This pattern is not just confined to fan activities either — a growing number of the mangaka-sourced dōjinshi discussed earlier in the chapter have also come to follow these trends.

If Yoshinaga represents a unique type of yaoi-type self-reflexive creativity, and CLAMP the possibilities of playfully layering names and contexts in both fan and professional contexts, then what of the other strategies that fujoshi professionals evoke in order to most thoroughly serve their individual needs? In continuing on the thread of Nozawa's "gross face" and the conclusions by Okabe and Ishida on the invisibility

of fujoshi visibility and their awareness of their place as a "subordinate" subculture, it is logical to assume that the goal of keeping personas separate from one another is a primary concern for fujoshi creators both amateur and professional. What has yet to be discussed in this chapter is the question of how one might keep personal or fan and professional identities from being too strongly associated with the other. In the case with Yoshinaga and with CLAMP, their professional achievements and their characteristic art styles are so distinctive that even attempting to pass off as a regular dōjinka is basically impossible. But in the case of artists whose works have not achieved quite the same reach, there are still a number of feasible options.

Fungal Facades and the Strategic Layering of Identities

One such option is to rely on the social contract of otaku spaces which have a set culture of privileging facelessness (or rather, de-privileging anything that recalls reality or real life). In effect, what this strategy essentially entails is a contemporary version of the Nakajima/Kurimoto model, wherein a creator operates under multiple names or identities, each with their own specific purpose, rather than an all-purpose pseudonym. Although still very much a strategy utilized in the traditional publishing industry, the widespread adoption of the internet within otaku and fujoshi spaces has created an entirely new set of possibilities through which such identity swapping can manifest. Take, for example, the relatively new phenomenon of account abandonment, for which Japanese fan artists in particular are notorious in certain circles of the internet. In principle, this practice would likely fit in between the notions of *sutehan* (捨てハン, disposable names) and *kotehan* (コテハン, fixed pseudonyms) that Nozawa describes the denizens of 2chan and other online communities make use of. In summary, Japanese fan artists in particular have a particular reputation across the internet for being quick to not only abandon their usernames (thus relegating the *kotehan* to a *sutehan* in the process) but are also notorious for completely scrubbing

the internet of the presence/identity related to these abandoned usernames. The reasoning for such a practice has rationale ranging from wanting to leave fandom (or a specific fandom) to wanting to start afresh without the related baggage of the old account, to just not being satisfied with one's old work. As Wotakoi's Momose so agitatedly insists after being confronted with an old username, "I've long abandoned that name!" (Fujita v.2:230).

One such example of multiple identifier strategy is the BL mangaka Kyūgō, who started out in the early 2000s creating dōjinshi for popular shōnen manga like Fullmetal Alchemist and Gintama before making their professional debut in 2006 under the same name they used as a dōjinka. Although they began serializing more in magazines as their career progressed, Kyūgō still remained active in dōjinshi creation — but with some small caveats. First, in 2011 they return to making Sengoku Basara dōjinshi but with a different name than previously, despite having used Kyūgō up until just the year prior while making Gintama dōjinshi. Then, starting from 2013 they become absorbed into the fandom for Ace of the Diamond and in doing so adopt a new pseudonym — Kokonotsu — that they start using for all subsequent secondary derivative-related activities. Kyūgō's case is an interesting one because their current professional alias is one that they consciously chose to bring over from their previous escapades in fandom — a continuation of their personal brand from that period of their fujoshi life. When they returned to fandom after a period of time, having since become a professional mangaka, they chose not to continue using their old fan identity, instead opting for a blank slate. 'Kyūgō' has essentially gone through the process of *kaodashi* as a name now tied to their professional career, but it is also precisely because the two are intertwined they are unable to go through the usual practice of name/identity abandonment.

The option of having multiple accounts — therefore, multiple identities — as a part of fandom participation and as a professional can also lead to a sort of dual existence as one performs as both in the same space, at the same time. In some ways, this is a particular mode of interaction and engagement that is especially geared towards visual artists whose unique and recognizable signature art styles are the very thing that prevents their blending into anonymity. As a result, many professional mangaka who also continue to partake in dōjinshi creation in a fannish capacity have to do so with their professional identities attached to their personal projects. Publishing something outside the structures of conventional publishing, even if that something is a secondary derivative work, is not a guarantee that it will be received by others as a work separate from its (professional) creator. To which degree one might tie together their personal/fan and professional identities is different for each person. While self-publishing does indeed provide fujoshi dōjinka with an environment where they do not need to "conform to market demands or demographic genre structures…[and] are freer to challenge or subvert the visual and narrative conventions implicit in the visual and narrative structures catering to a presumed male gaze" (Hemmann, 2020:80), their creative freedoms are in exchange gained through a compromise between fannish anonymity (their ability to participate as just a fan) and professional visibility (how conspicuous their status as a professional makes them).

Conclusion

Identity is a tricky subject in the context of fujoshi communities and the social practices that bind them together. Regardless of which type of engagement you might prefer, what is true of the vast majority of fujoshi is that she likely started off as a fan of something, and in all likelihood continues to act in that capacity on some level even as her position in fandom changes. The reason why dōjinshi production is such an integral part of the Japanese media fandom experience — to the fujoshi experience

even more so — is because the creation of dōjinshi exists upon a continuum of imaginative and interpretive practices that not only carry on from one stage of fan-life to the next, but that also serves as a bridge between the two. Dōjinshi are the ultimate equalizer in Japanese media fandom because of their status as the pinnacle of fannish self-expression and their functions not only as practice and educational material for aspiring mangaka but also as a space that in and of itself provides the necessary conditions for fujoshi context layering. Of course, this is not to say that there are not hierarchies within the dōjinshi community, or that the power dynamics that exist between fans and copyright holders have little influence in such spaces. However, there are few other mediums of expression open to fans that is capable of sustaining the presence of popular IPs in the public consciousness than fanwork, and few other fandom contexts that have created a system that continues to acknowledge the significance of an actively participatory, creative fanbase.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the main themes that I found myself grappling with during the process of working through the various ideas present in this thesis was the notion of the fujoshi as a social entity possessing a core, and how that core has less to do with your personal preferences or the activities that you participate in, but rather the extent to which those things allow you access to membership as part of a greater community. As someone who self-identifies with the *fu* of fujoshi, the current situation of the field of otaku studies in English has left much to be desired when the topic of niche fan communities located not only within but also outside of and adjacent to the Japanese context are brought up in discussion — a situation that remains consistent regardless of whether those discussions are taking place within academic or fandom spaces. The conversation just simply has not moved very far past debating whether fujoshi as a term is neutral or not (whether fujoshi themselves have any right to be enjoying what they do or not, in other words). While it is not as though fujoshi communities and circles are completely invisible within the larger context of fandom, the contentious nature of fujoshi discourse tends to overshadow other fujoshi-related topics that breach containment and make their way out of said communities.

Reasonably speaking, the true anatomy of a fujoshi could be divided into 'thought' and 'action,' in terms of what specifically makes these rotten women so unique. Theirs is ostensibly a realm of the imaginative, where the ability to read transgressively and share those interpretations through fantasy is a process akin to decomposition: taking dregs and rotted material and converting them into the materials necessary for the continued balance of the ecosystem. Like it or not, fujoshi have always played a vital role in the greater scheme of Japanese media fandom and will continue to do so — because they provide an alternative notion of what it means to

engage not just with media or with other fans, but with the world itself. The fictional fujoshi featured in Chapter 1 illustrates the power of fujoshi affect and the potential it holds to transcend limitation, especially when amplified in the presence of like minds. The transgressive potential of dōjinshi — not quite as a medium but rather in terms of the spaces that making and exchanging them create — constitutes chapter 2's exploration into fujoshi identity making.

For all that the figure of the fujoshi loomed over my and many others' experiences in fandom, and for all her image began to proliferate and diversify, there just was not a corresponding depth of attention being turned towards these matters of rot. Yes, the rotten woman/man/person is someone who puts their energy as fans into imagining boys kiss — what about what lies beyond that? What does it really mean to evoke the fujoshi in conversations of fan culture and influence in relation to media? For all that it may seem simple to provide a definition of what a fujoshi is, what would it mean to examine rot for how it functions within continuities of imagination in fujoshi practices as both a destabilizing force and the foundations upon which fantasies are established.

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