

Japanese media tourism as world-building: Akihabara's Electric Town and Ikebukuro's Maiden Road

Craig Norris

University of Tasmania, Australia

Abstract:

This article examines how female yaoi fans construct an ideal fan-tourist identity through framing their online travel advice to Tokyo in terms of the distinctive properties of yaoi's story world and conventions. In particular, I investigate how fans draw upon their relationship with yaoi – a genre focused on romantic or erotic stories between male characters – to endorse, appropriate and revise the mainstream tourism discourse of a city. I specifically look at the online travel advice offered for two of Tokyo's popular-culture shopping and entertainment districts: Akihabara's 'Electric Town' and Ikebukuro's 'Maiden Road'. Data is drawn from two active web pages – the *Yaoi BL goods in Japan?* page on *Life in Japan* (a community site which answers questions broadly related to travelling, working and living in Japan) and *A Treasure Hunter's Guide to Dōjinshi* page on the *Contemporary Japanese Literature* site (a sole-authored blog devoted to Japanese literature and popular culture).

Keywords: tourism, world-building, yaoi, media mix, Tokyo, manga

Introduction

The genre of Japanese popular culture known as *yaoi* or *BL* (Boy's Love) depicts romantic relationships between male protagonists and exists across Japan's 'media mix' - the 'multimedia marketing strategies for entertainment franchises' (Hemmann 2015). Drawing upon the evolution of the Wachowski siblings' *Matrix* franchise, Henry Jenkins sees Japan's media mix model as a forerunner to the transmedia, world-building strategies which have become increasingly prominent in Hollywood:

Arguably, their [the Wachowski siblings'] entire interest in transmedia storytelling can be traced back to this fascination with what anthropologist Mimi Ito has described as Japan's 'media mix' culture. On the one hand, the media mix strategy disperses content across broadcast media, portable technologies such as game boys or cell phones, collectibles, and location-based entertainment centers from amusement parks to game arcades. On the other, these franchises depend on hypersociability, that is, they encourage various forms of participation and social interactions between consumers. (Jenkins 2006: 110)

Like Jenkins' focus (via Mimi Ito) on media mix's *dispersal* and *hypersociability* strategy, so too does my use of media mix seek to highlight the ways yaoi's fictional world becomes incorporated across both media platforms *as well as* the social life and shopping practices of yaoi fans as they plan trips to Tokyo. By looking at the advice offered on fan websites, this article will demonstrate how fans attach themselves to particular yaoi genre motifs, narratives, rules and conventions to create a narrative to negotiate a real-world cityscape. As I will show, the world-building properties of a media franchise and the branding of a city's landscape can converge through the narratives of exploration and connection, or disconnection, fans post to travel advice sites online. This analysis will argue that many of these self-described fan-tourists make use of their particular fandom – and the world and conventions depicted in key texts – as a 'cultural resource' (Fiske 2010) to navigate Tokyo's real-world streets.

By focusing on the ways fans draw upon popular culture as a cultural resource, 'world-building' provides a useful way to exploring the relationship between media mix's *dispersal* and *hypersociability* strategy. The idea of world-building has been predominantly used to discuss models of storytelling within the entertainment industry, as Susan Karlin (2014) writing for the business oriented magazine *co.create* writes:

World building is a system for creating rules and behaviors for fictitious worlds arising from the science, technology, social structure, geography, economics, and politics governing them. These parameters can then inform plausible characters, conflicts, and plotlines.

In contrast to this industry focus, my article explores these 'plausible characters, conflicts, and plotlines' as a framework used by fans to make sense of the world around them. As Karlin (2014) goes on to point out: 'while this approach is most apparent for film, TV, gaming, and interactive media, it also has potential applications in urban planning, product design, and business scenarios.' As I will suggest later in this article, similar moves can be seen in the yaoi fan tourists applying that genre's world building system of plausible rules and behaviors onto their travels in Tokyo. The approach I have taken is informed by Jenkins' (2010) concerns with teaching and researching transmedia and storytelling. In particular, I

have drawn on the questions he asks of grassroots media extensions to existing entertainment franchises, adapting these to ask: where do these yaoi fan-tourists seek to attach themselves to yaoi's distinctive properties and why? And how do the yaoi genre's rules and parameters express something of the fan-tourist's own identity and connection with other fans or tourists?

Theoretical context

The exploration, interpretation and response to the expansion of imaginary worlds into a media mix of a 'multimodal' spread of content (Kress 2003) and 'hypersociable' audience participation (Ito 2007, 2008) can be approached in a number of ways. These include critiques of the top-down strategies to intensify audience engagement with careful control and consolidation of canon and fan participation (Hills 2012; Scott 2010). An example of this are the attempts by various governments around the world to construct 'brand-nationalism' such as *Cool Britannia* or *Cool Japan* through leveraging of popular culture for political advantage (Iwabuchi 2002, 2010, 2015). Alternatively, this can be approached from the grassroot, participatory practices of fans who wish to collaborate (Jenkins 2006; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013) or share in the production, curating and critiquing of unofficial and emergent extensions of favourite media properties and brands (Hills 2012; Johnson 2013; Nørgård and Toft-Nielsen 2014). While top-down and bottom-up approaches are closely related, this article will focus on the role of fans' grassroots, collective experiences in shaping the expansion of the yaoi genre and fandom into travel narratives.

As Michael Saler (2011) argues, the term 'world building' has predominantly focused on the expansion of 'geographies of the imagination' within the text, and there is a need to expand its use to incorporate other types of relationships 'between these worlds and those who engage in them' (2011: 4), particularly in terms of better recognising the impact fan communities have on defining the value and meaning of a media property through the creation, circulation and synthesis of an encyclopaedic knowledge and creativity. This concern is illustrated in Rikke Toft Nørgård and Claus Toft-Nielsen's (2014) analysis of Lego's cross-franchise world-building, where they ask:

In other words, transmedia storytelling serves to bolster the boundaries of a single franchise through sender-controlled, franchised seriality. But what happens when fan use and fans' participation moves beyond the consumption of texts that narratively and financially supplement a single franchise? How do we theorize the playful intermingling of multiple franchises through multiple media? (Nørgård and Toft-Nielsen 2014: 179)

Similarly, how do we explain the 'playful intermingling' of multiple franchises in *dōjinshi* combined with the multiple travel spaces of fan tourism? In terms of world-building and media tourism, I do not wish to overly generalise world building or tourism practices which are revealed through travel advice, or to contrast the online with offline performance of

media tourism. However, world-building does provide a useful way to consider how the in-world rules and behaviour can become cultural resources for framing and performing travel narratives of yaoi tourism in Tokyo. In particular the *concealment* and *discovery* practices which characterise yaoi fan-fiction readings of heterosexual characters as homosexual (Okabe and Ishida 2012) and their echo in the yaoi-tourist practices represented in the websites studied here.

In exploring how the travel advice of this article's focus frame and negotiate yaoi media tourism, I draw upon an increasingly rich area of study which explores the relationship between fan practices, media franchises and tourism studies. Matt Hills' (2002) writing on fan communities has contributed some useful approaches to understanding media tourism. One key argument, which he makes in his study of *X-Files* fans traveling to film locations in Vancouver, relates to the process of identification and transposition that fans practice as they draw upon the imaginary worlds of their fan object to revalue and reinterpret the environment around them. Reworking Roger C Aden's concept of cult geography, Hills argues that fans re-order a location's meaning around the fictional story world through their practices such as re-enacting key scenes, writing travel narratives, and replicating story motifs and characters. Hills suggests that this 'inhabitation' of extra-textual spaces ... forms an important part of cult fans' extensions and expressions of the fan-text relationship' (Hills, 2002: 144). According to Hills, this re-ordering of meaning involves a 'creative transposition' where fans project motifs and tropes from the *X-Files* story-world onto the spaces they travel through and the people they meet. For example, just as the *X-Files* TV series often involves a procedural mystery narrative ('The truth is out there'), so too can a fan's own travel narrative adopt a similar quest for tracking down and discovering the 'truth' of the film locations through 'informants', 'clues' and so on.

Couldry's (2007) study of the *Sopranos* tour extends Hills' concept of creative transposition into a framework of three competing and overlapping spaces with the fan pilgrimage: '(1) the space of general tourism, (2) the space of media tourism, and (3) the imaginary action space 'within' the fictional narrative that (2) sometimes generates' (Couldry 2007: 143). Similar to Hills' creative transposition, this 'imaginary action space' includes fans re-staging particular scenes, participating in immersive themed-tours and other fan performances designed to foster identification between the fictional text, the real space and particular actions. Couldry notes that it is the contradictions that emerge between the imaginary action space and the spaces of general tourism and media tourism that yields the most significant research data. These contradictions are most clearly seen in Couldry's (2000) earlier work on media tourism to the studio set of the British soap opera *Coronation Street*, where he observes that the distinction between the 'ordinary world' and the 'media world' can paradoxically reinforce and normalise media power rather than rupture or subvert it.

The analysis of media pilgrimages has been further explored by Reijnders' (2011) examination of media tourism phenomenon such as the James Bond tours (Reijnders 2010), *Dracula* (Reijnders 2011) and *Inspector Morse* (Reijnders 2009) amongst other popular texts.

In his analysis of James Bond tours, Reijnders shifts the focus away from Couldry's media power argument (Couldry 2000) to instead examine the way these pilgrimages normalise social and cultural frames such as masculinity (Reijnders 2010: 370). My analysis of yaoi tourism builds on research around the re-ordering of meaning through media-related tourism, and seeks to further continue Reijnders' suggestion to expand our understanding of media pilgrimages by taking into account their 'cultural embeddedness' (Reijnders 2010: 370). To avoid overestimating the role of media institutions Reijnders (2010: 370) argues further research is needed into 'the way the authority of the media is related to other power structures, such as gender and ethnicity.' A pilgrimage is not a simple excursion into a media world or colonisation of the ordinary world by the media world. As the participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) approach shows us, we need to reconsider and challenge notions of a simplistic one-way 'media effects' model, and embrace a more nuanced, complex understanding of media cultures.

Of particular relevance to this article is Fiske's (1991) conception of fan agency, in which he argues that fans use their familiarity with media properties as the 'raw material' to express themselves through. As he has argued, 'these popular forces transform the cultural commodity into a cultural resource, pluralize the meanings and pleasures it offers, evade or resist its disciplinary efforts, fracture its homogeneity or coherence, raid or poach upon its terrain' (Fiske 1991: 23). In drawing upon a 'cultural resource' process, my intention is to identify the ways this fandom works with the existing media space as a cultural resource within their travel narrative of Tokyo, in order to express a narrative of meaningful media tourism.

In looking at the way fans use yaoi as a cultural resource in their travel narrative, we can see how particular locations in Tokyo such as the bustling metropolis of Ikebukuro has become attached to new and transformative narratives of significance and belonging. In the case of yaoi media, the fans' online posts and comments reveal their role in actively curating and critiquing the crossover of specific places and popular culture, which in turn reveals the convergence of distinctive properties of the yaoi genre with a specific, tangible cityscape. However, the ability of fans to empower themselves through these practices and the alternative agendas of government stakeholders have been questioned and critiqued. Criticisms of 'Cool Japan' and western fan communities have rightly pointed out the potential misrepresentation of Japan which can occur within this marketing and fan experience (Iwabuchi 2002, 2010, 2015), arguing that it can lead to gross generalisations and stereotypes of Japanese people and/or particular forms of cultural practice.

As studies such as Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto (2013) and Jenkins (2006) have argued, these types of criticism often rely upon assumptions around an individual's inability to be reflective of the schism between fact and fiction. Instead, Jenkins (2006) argues that there is often a personal and political value in the fans' attachment to a foreign popular culture text that has much to do with their identity at 'home' and their attempts to escape or critique a perceived patriarchy and so forth. Equally, audiences interpret texts in diverse

and unpredictable ways. Additionally, as I will argue in this paper, the openness of a genre and its broad world-building principles often invites audiences to debate and analyse it.

Methods

The two websites analysed in this article both focus on providing information about traveling to Japan for an English-speaking audience. At the time of writing, both the *Hunter's Guide* (<http://japaneselit.net/2011/06/16/a-treasure-hunter%E2%80%99s-guide-to-dojinshi/>) and *Yaoi BL goods in Japan* (<http://lifeinjapan.livejournal.com/136588.html>) web pages were active and accessible and their most recent comments dated from 2012 and 2010 respectively. The *Hunter's Guide* was first posted in 2011 and the *Yaoi BL goods in Japan* question was posted in 2010. These dates are significant as they reveal a 10 year period from the time when Ikebukuro first became associated with a specifically female-centric yaoi culture (Morikawa 2012) – suggesting Ikebukuro has continued to consolidate its female-fan centric reputation and has become incorporated into western fan travel advice over this period.

While both pages utilise popular blog-oriented web services – Wordpress (*Hunter's Guide*) or LiveJournal (*Yaoi BL goods in Japan*) – they differ in terms of layout and number of authors and participants. The *Hunter's Guide* post is a long blog entry offering advice for the novice *dōjinshi* shopper in Tokyo, with few comments. It is part of the web site *Contemporary Japanese Literature* maintained by university lecturer Kathryn Hemmann which covers topics across a wide variety of Japanese related interests including books, manga, anime and video games to academic material. Hemmann's blog is highly regarded, with references to it appearing across popular travel information sites such as the 2015 *Lonely Planet Japan* (Lonely Planet et al. 2015), as well as being recommended by Japanese popular culture scholars Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy as a useful and informative blog about Japanese popular culture (2015). While the entire site may not be dedicated to Yaoi or BL manga, the *Hunter's Guide* is focused on this subculture and appeared on the first page of a Google search for 'yaoi in Tokyo'.

The *Yaoi BL goods in Japan* page is part of the *Life in Japan* LiveJournal blog with a community of over 700 members. As the 'About' section explains: 'This is a community mostly for foreigners living in Japan or for those interested in coming here at some point in the future' (labluething 2004). The blog is built around unmoderated questions and answers pertaining to 'anything from customs questions, travel experiences/information, queries on working programs, interesting events/meet-ups or basically anything else as long as it relates to the country' (labluething 2004).

My aim here is not to provide a quantitative statistical analysis of particular identities or issues. Although such an analysis of the authenticity and transparency of biographical and conceptual data would be of significant research value, the representativeness of such a small sample size and narrow, self-selecting nature of the communication presents limitations for such an approach. The analysis presented in the article is based on the qualitative and interpretative netnographic approach complimented

by discourse analysis. The research is based on twenty-one comments – five from the *Hunter's Guide* and sixteen from *Yaoi BL good in Japan*. I have reproduced the online postings verbatim, with typographical and other errors left intact, to best convey the informal, conversational tone of the information these fans provide.

Netnography is an observational rather than participatory approach to examining online communities, and is drawn from ethnographic research methods (Kozinets 2010). The discourse approach I have taken provides a method for focusing on how the authors justified and framed their advice through adopting particular identities and relations with other communities within their postings. Given that discourse analysis is primarily used to reveal and evaluate the reality constructed by texts (Fairclough 2011; Van Dijk, Kintsch and Van Dijk 1983), this approach was a useful one to incorporate with netnography.

Following Kozinets' (2002) advice for selecting research-relevant online communities, these two sites were chosen for their relevance to the yaoi tourism focus of this research, and the rich interactions between members they offer for framing and discourse analysis of fans and their relationship to media properties. Although these pages may not have a high amount of traffic or number of posts, the results were fruitful as the small size was contrasted by the richness of the individual posts and comments. The *Hunter's Guide* in particular offers a detailed and descriptively rich account of negotiating Tokyo's popular culture oriented shopping – as a blog managed by an academic would be expected to. The *Hunter's Guide* is part of the web site *Contemporary Japanese Literature* and has an explicitly academic focus and is maintained by one author. However, both sites focus on popular Japanese media texts and offer travel advice for visitors to Japan.

While I have not participated in these sites, my understanding of the fandom and travel advice to Tokyo is informed by having supervised three field trips to Japan with a class of Australian university students since 2014 to investigate aspects of the implementation of the 'Cool Japan' policy. These trips included visits to animation studios, cosplay performance spaces, fan conventions, architectural walking tours, museum and gallery visits, as well as investigating notable subculture locations such as various *dōjinshi* events and markets, including yaoi events. Both web sites used in the analysis were first brought to my attention by students' referring to them during their fieldwork as useful websites they consulted before leaving for Japan.

My analysis of these two cases involved an exploration of the entire site they are part of, and then a focused analysis of the two pages that were examined for specific topics and information. The focus was determined by the ways the posters talked about the imaginary world of yaoi, the 'real world' of Japan's cityscape and the media mix distribution and circulation model. There were two dominant themes that emerged: first, a rejection of the dominant male, heterosexual media tourism space; and second, the challenges and opportunities that were identified in exploring Japan's cityscape searching for yaoi goods.

Introducing Yaoi and Ikebukuro

Yaoi, since it emerged in the 1970s, exists across this media mix of amateur and commercial manga, anime, video games, novels and related merchandise. Yaoi interests are also catered to in particular spaces such as speciality manga libraries/cafes, butler cafes and, as I will discuss in this article, shopping districts in Tokyo. Yaoi is particularly associated with *dōjinshi* work (amateur, self-produced fan-fiction and fanzine manga, often of a very high quality) and depicts narratives where two male characters, usually appropriated from existing commercial texts, are rewritten into a romantic or sexual relationship with each other. As pointed out by Daisuke Okabe and Kimi Ishida (2012: 210) ‘these characteristics of yaoi and BL culture in Japan share many parallels with U.S. female ‘slash’ fandoms’. While yaoi depicts queered relationships it is not aimed at a gay readership, and instead is largely produced and read by a heterosexual female fandom (McLelland 2001). Since the late 1990s, yaoi material has become particularly popular throughout much of East Asia (Williams 2015), and has also spread throughout Europe, the UK, the US, Australia and elsewhere to receive attention from various mainstream news publications (Baker 2008; Hollingworth 2011; Poole 2009; Scott 2011). The phenomenon of yaoi and its female fandom became the focus of a recent episode of the U.S. animated TV series *South Park* where two male characters were thought to be in a gay relationship based on their portrayal in yaoi fan-fictions and artwork (19.6, ‘Tweek x Craig’, 2015). At the same time, the global popularity of Japanese popular culture like yaoi has afforded the Japanese government an opportunity to brand itself as ‘Cool Japan’ and promote itself as the destination for young, creative people to visit (Japan External Trade Organization 2005).

Ikebukuro is a large, sprawling commercial and entertainment district in Tokyo. It is considered to be amongst the most popular shopping and entertainment districts in Tokyo, Japan. Ikebukuro’s entertainment base is built around a combination of shopping and entertainment areas that includes Seibu’s main flagship store and the large shopping mall Sunshine 60. Ikebukuro’s rail terminal is a significant source of visitor traffic and is reported to be the third busiest station in the world (Blaster 2013). As Morikawa (2012) points out, Ikebukuro has one of the longest established histories of catering to fan subcultures, or *otaku*, in Japan. Since the early 1980s, East Ikebukuro has been a significant centre for manga and anime-related goods and businesses. Ikebukuro is also home to the Pokémon centre and J-World indoor amusement park, dedicated to media properties from JUMP manga magazine such as *Dragon Ball* and *One Piece*. As well as being a prominent location for shopping and entertainment, Ikebukuro has also featured as the setting for various TV shows, anime, manga and light novels, including *Durarara!!* and the manga and TV drama *Ikebukuro West Gate Park*.

From early 2000, a combination of retail and consumer factors led to the convergence of manga and anime stores predominantly aimed at female consumers in Ikebukuro (Morikawa 2012). Several established stores, such as Animate, and various new stores congregated around East Ikebukuro, and the area has become known as Otome Road in recognition of its density of female-oriented popular culture stores and services. Its status

and popularity is such that it has been officially recognised and supported by the local government (Onishi 2015). For the purpose of clarity I will refer to Otome Road by its common English translation, Maiden Road. As an example of the services on offer, Ikebukuro has received attention for its popular butler cafes such as *Café Swallowtail* where butler-attired men serve a largely female clientele.¹

Onishi's (2015) article in the national Japanese newspaper *The Asahi Shimbun*, entitled 'Female otaku stake new anime 'holy ground' in Tokyo's Ikebukuro', emphasised Ikebukuro's focus on female fandom, particularly at a local government level. Ikebukuro's public officials have joined with local companies to further promote its status as an *otome*, or female fandom, friendly destination through large cosplay events:

The rise of otome subculture has not gone unnoticed by public officials. In October, a Halloween cosplay event was held in Ikebukuro, with women accounting for nearly 80 per cent of the approximately 50,000 people who visited the area. ... Even Toshima Ward Mayor Yukio Takano paraded through the town dressed as a character from the classic 'Cyborg 009' sci-fi manga series. 'We want to promote community development measures to ensure the safety of young women who are full of vitality,' the mayor said. (Onishi 2015)

Ikebukuro's gradual recognition as a significant popular culture destination since 2000 can also be seen within the context of the Japanese government's recent interest in the overseas popularity manga and anime received during the late 90s and early 2000s. This prompted a range of government policy initiatives and white papers (Japan External Trade Organization 2005, 2007; Japanese Economy Division 2005, 2007), which hoped to encourage and promote Japan's cultural sector domestically and overseas by focusing on popular culture related industries which could be incorporated within tourism strategies such as the 'Cool Japan' program. Heavily informed by Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' (Nye 1990 2004) and the attention Japan received internationally, there have been various high-profile attempts to leverage financial and cultural status through the selective promotion and endorsement of globally popular elements of Japanese popular culture, such as giving cultural ambassador status to popular icons such as Doraemon in 2008 and Godzilla in 2015.

Of all the locations to feature prominently in Cool Japan promotional material, it is Akihabara that has received the most attention, and which has seen the most radical transformation from an electronic hobbyist location to central otaku culture destination. Ikebukuro's status as a media tourism destination needs to be seen in the shadow of the more recognised and promoted location of Akihabara. While both locations share many broad aspects of an otaku-centric cityscape with a density of manga and anime stores, cafes catering to a fan's fantasy (butler or maid services), the framing of Akihabara as a city catering to male fantasies and Ikebukuro to female fantasies results in significant differences around the portrayal of the sexual fantasies within these imaginary worlds as

displayed on billboards, store fronts and staff attire. For example, in another travel blog on yaoi in Ikebukuro, the butler café *Swallowtail* is listed as *the* place to go if one enjoys the yaoi culture. As the blogger La Carmina (2011) writes: ‘The Ikebukuro district of Tokyo is boys love central. Be sure to visit the Swallowtail butler cafe where, 19th century style pretty boys serve you tea.’

Gender division at an urban scale

There are two key piece of travel advice given by members of the yaoi community which reveal how the yaoi genre’s rules and parameters express something of the fan-tourist’s own identity and connection with other fans or tourists: avoid Akihabara, and discover Ikebukuro. Each recommendation is significant as a reinterpretation of space through a highly gendered relationship between the yaoi media mix, its fandom, and Tokyo’s cityscape.

Both Akihabara and Ikebukuro represent different aspects of the ‘creative transposition’ (Hills 2002) of yaoi’s ideals and motifs onto Tokyo as perceived by yaoi fans through their travel advice. The framing of each district involved fans drawing upon an ‘encyclopedic expanse of information’ (Jenkins 2010: 948) to advise new fans and travellers to Japan of the yaoi genre and its place within Japan’s media mix and how to navigate Tokyo’s physical retail landscape in search of yaoi goods and services. Like the synthesis and circulation by fans of transmedia storytelling identified by Jenkins, this advice ‘gets put together differently by each individual consumer as well as processed collectively by social networks and online knowledge communities’ (Jenkins 2010: 948-49). Significant differences between the expansion of the media mix into Akihabara and Ikebukuro resulted in a very different narrative linking the ‘geography of the imagination’ (Saler 2012: 4) to the geography of a cityscape. The substantial differences in the convergence of mainstream tourism, yaoi tourism, media mix, and cityscape in these locations means some brief background is worth covering here.

As outlined above, within Tokyo there are various districts where tourism is oriented towards attracting local and overseas ‘otaku’ or fan communities. Akihabara is the most well-known example of a location that has become an ‘otaku town’ or ‘epicenter of otaku taste’ (Morikawa 2012:133). A quick image search online for ‘Akihabara’ will reveal a proliferation of visuals related to, if not entirely composed of, a cityscape deeply interwoven with Japanese otaku culture, icons and services. From billboards advertising the latest manga and video games, and multitudes of anime figurines in display cabinets, to employees of maid cafes promoting their establishments in elaborate maid costumes. Akihabara’s main street is saturated with otaku culture. Its density of popular culture commodities and services builds upon an older otaku foundation of a once-flourishing marketplace for radio parts and other electronics that flourished after World War II and gained the area its nickname of ‘Electric Town’.

In comparison to Akihabara’s overflowing otaku imagery, Ikebukuro’s equivalent location - Maiden Road - appears modest and unassuming. As the TripleLights (2014)

tourism site that connects tourists and tour guide professionals describes Ikebukuro to prospective clients:

[The] majority of anime, manga, and Japanese games fans are already aware that Akihabara is definitely the place to go for all your merchandise and fandom needs. What a number of fans still aren't aware of, is the existence of Ikebukuro. Ikebukuro is yet another district within the boundaries of Metropolitan [sic] Tokyo which can also be considered a home to the anime and manga fanatics.

Maiden Road can be difficult to locate, particularly for first time visitors, and as a result fans assist each other through numerous, detailed online guides.² These travel guides exhaustively map key routes and landmarks to orient first time yaoi shoppers. As I will argue later in the 'Finding Ikebukuro' section, there is a strong parallel between the concealment and discovery narrative of this media tourism, and concealment and discovery being a key motif of the yaoi community and fan identity. While this concealment/discovery narrative could be considered a coincidental outcome of the language and cultural barriers non-Japanese-speaking fans face and common across many aspects of tourism, it is nevertheless a powerful example of the synergy between genre and practice. Like Ito's (2007, 2008) definition of media mix as involving both content dispersal and hypersocial user practice, so too do these moves by yaoi fan tourists provide the hypersocial counterpart to the content dispersal of yaoi content across media platforms and nation branding tourism campaigns.

In comparing Akihabara and Ikebukuro one of the most noticeable differences is the dominance of goods targeted towards male or female demographics in each location. Targeting male or female consumers is an established part of Japan's Media Mix. As Morikawa (2012) points out, male and female sections in bookstores and various other media retail spaces are clearly divided; however 'this in-store divide has been duplicated on a larger, urban scale in Akihabara and East Ikebukuro' (Morikawa 2012:139). Morikawa explains that this geographical gender divide began as a gradual bifurcation influenced by key stores expanding their male or female focused goods before snowballing into a dominant retail strategy to focus on only one gender for each location. Of course, this trend also built upon existing trends that had equally emerged over time, Akihabara and Ikebukuro had always had higher numbers of male or female shoppers respectively, and the emergence of specialty stores catering to male or female clientele can be seen as following these established patterns.

The construction of gendered media tourism

In this section I will consider how the travel advice offered on these two web pages defines Ikebukuro in opposition to Akihabara through the construction and exclusion of the 'male' otaku fantasy. In discussing the differences between *dōjinshi* material in Ikebukuro and Akihabara, the posters articulate an entrenched and hegemonic male fantasy space that

dominates the mainstream tourist image of 'Cool Japan'. The *Yaoi BL goods in Japan?* and *Hunter's Guide* both express a yaoi space that operates outside of, and in contrast to, the male gaze. As I will argue, the rejection of male media tourism and playful subversiveness of a 'quest' to find the hidden yaoi space of Tokyo reinforces tropes and practices of yaoi dōjinshi itself.

On both sites there was a clear consensus as to why Ikebukuro was the best location to get Yaoi and BL goods – namely, that it wasn't Akihabara. The *Yaoi BL goods in Japan?* question posted to the *Life in Japan* LiveJournal site provides a typical starting point for this conversation. The poster asks:

hello

I'm going to Japan Tokyo this week (finally!) i have two questions.

- first (very important lol) where can i find famous Shops that sell Yaoi goods like action figures, accessories and Boys love games.

example sweet pool game, is there any shop in Japan that sell it's good?

my friend went to Akihabara to buy some boys yaoi action figures yet she didn't find any. all are girls hentai! -.-

Second

where do you advice me to go? is there any great places i must go in Tokyo?

thank you ^__^

Akihabara, the main location for popular culture goods and services, is positioned negatively in terms of finding female-oriented popular culture. Here we see the negotiation of gender segregation in Tokyo. The friend's experience of Akihabara is one where she finds only *hentai* (overtly sexualised and pornographic) merchandise of girls – a type of good targeted predominantly to male consumers, and not the 'boys yaoi action figures' aimed at female consumers. The post significantly places an emphasis on the sexualised content of the material aimed at men, defining Akihabara's merchandise as only 'girls hentai!' – in contrast to the less value-laden term 'boys yaoi action figures' used for the merchandise they are searching for.

Of the ten replies to this question of where to find yaoi stores, four mentioned Akihabara and agreed it has little to offer yaoi fans in comparison to Ikebukuro:

I wouldn't recommend going to Akihabara more than once, to be honest. It's great for cheap electronics (take your passport and you'll get a lot of it tax free) and crap, but to be honest I find it really ugly and boring besides that.

For BL, your destination shouldn't be Akiba, but Ikebukuro's 'Otome Road' :)

Akihabara is geared towards the traditional otaku (male, tech-obsessed, maid-obsessed, etc). For girls/fujoshi etc, Nakano and Ikebukuro (Otome Road) are the only places to go.

And:

I was going to mention Ikebukuro as well. Akihabara is basically only good for buying electronics. And it's crowded and noisy (even more so than some other parts of Tokyo). I spent 30 minutes there and never want to go back. x)

The experience of Tokyo's premier popular culture shopping district of Akihabara is here presented as a space dominated by electronics and a male 'tech-obsessed, maid-obsessed' market that exudes a cheap, ugly, crowded and noisy ambiance. This criticism and rejection of a male cultural hegemony is similar to the characteristics which Tomoko Aoyama describes first galvanised the homoerotic *shojo* (girls) manga authors, which would later develop into BL and yaoi fandom. As Aoyama argued, the desire to escape 'the persistent variations on the Cinderella theme' of the 1970s and 80s lead to a 'desire to explore masculinity or androgyny as opposed to the worn-out image of femininity' (Aoyama 2009: 194). Midori Matsui (1993) equally argues that yaoi can be interpreted as an attempt to escape patriarchal society. Similarly, this turning away from Akihabara and the representations of femininity seen in its maid cafes and hentai goods provides a powerful narrative for yaoi fans' own identity and the Western fans' discovery of Ikebukuro.

A Treasure Hunter's Guide to Dōjinshi

In discussing the dōjinshi retail environment in Akihabara versus Ikebukuro, the *Hunter's Guide* similarly extends the imaginary worlds portrayed in men's and women's dōjinshi into the experience of yaoi media tourism. Like the rejection of the tired and omnipresent maid cafes and hentai female figures in Akihabara voiced in *Yaoi BL goods in Japan*, the imaginary world being extended by these online posts is that of the broader yaoi fan fiction conventions of inverting and subverting the dominance of male fantasies.

As described in the previous section, the rejection of Akihabara as a location to find and enjoy BL and yaoi goods can be understood through the industry segregation of male and female consumer goods in Japan. This gender division is not simply a division which fans use, but a long standing, entrenched part of Japan's media mix model of producing and circulating content.

While my focus is the consumption of goods (manga, anime DVDs, figures and related commodities) the relationship between these tangible goods and media content warrants some further clarification. The values, uses and meanings of material culture are complex and multifaceted (Appadurai 1988; Douglas & Isherwood 1979; Miller 1987). Within fandom studies there has been a focus on the role of paratextual material such as toys and merchandise related to major entertainment franchises such as *Star Wars* (Gray

2010) and synergistic and multi-platform transmedia strategies more broadly (Jenkins 2006; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). The particular model of media convergence and transmedia circulation in Japan known as media mix has assisted a seemingly ceaseless flow of tangible and intangible Japanese popular culture goods from toys to anime (Sandvoss 2005; Ito 2007, 2008; Allison, 2006; Steinberg 2012; Condry 2013). BL and yaoi merchandise and media circulate in this complex and multi-platform media mix. These techniques and synergies of relating and exploiting character licensing and merchandising with various media content (movies, TV shows, anime, manga, music, etc.) into consumer lifestyles and media cultures is seen by some as manifestations of post-Fordist models of production and consumption (Steinberg 2012). The posts and blogs I examine are fan sites maintained by people outside of the media industry and, as such, provide an opportunity for fans to discuss and pool knowledge around this flow of yaoi and BL content in terms of shopping trips. But more than this, it provides an insight into attempts within the community to advocate good fan practice and brand loyalty.

In discussing where to find yaoi goods in Tokyo, the efficient and effective shopping for dōjinshi in Tokyo requires understanding how the division of dōjinshi along male and female readership affects what you will find and where you will find it – both within a store and within a large metropolis such as Tokyo. Online, this gendering of space and practice was presented as a central component of being a yaoi fan. The rejection of Akihabara and its catering to the male gaze may express a normalising of masculine and feminine identities within otaku shopping; however, it also includes a critiquing and subverting of these identities. While this gender division is explained in different ways across these online travel advice spaces, they all configure gender as a polarising characteristic of Japan's dōjinshi market.

For example, the first paragraph in the *Hunter's Guide* presents shopping for dōjinshi within the male and female divide:

First, stores specializing in dōjinshi tend to fall into two categories, dansei-muke (for men) and josei-muke (for women). Dansei-muke dōjinshi are usually highly pornographic, and it is far from uncommon for them to feature the graphic rape of minors (or characters drawn to look like minors). The term josei-muke refers to the genre of boys love (BL), but the majority of the dōjinshi found in josei-muke stores aren't BL at all but rather humor, parody, drama, or light heterosexual romance.

In this post for example, we see how the shift from male to female targeted dōjinshi was presented as involving a distancing move from a negatively coded dansei-muke (aimed at men) product dominated by 'highly pornographic' content and a more mainstream spread of content in josei-muke (aimed at women) product which contains only 'light heterosexual content'. While one reading of this might suggest in drawing a distinction between men's and women's dōjinshi in this way, the author is able to contain and isolate a negatively

coded aspect of *dōjinshi* – pornography – as being a problem with men’s, but not women’s *dōjinshi*. Another interpretation could see this distinction between ‘pornographic’ men’s *dōjinshi* and the purportedly more diverse and rich women’s *dōjinshi*, as a transposition of the ideals of the *dōjinshi* form onto the yaoi *dōjinshi* market. As has been argued elsewhere (Hemmann 2015; Orbaugh 2010), *dōjinshi* are a proliferation of potential what-ifs, juxtapositions and speculations involving ‘multiple readers actively seizing the text and expanding its possibilities in incredibly diverse ways, each basing his/her expanded text on his/her preferred reading of the source’ (Orbaugh 2010: 176). Hemmann (2015) extends Orbaugh’s work, pointing out ‘*dōjinshi* are therefore transformative readings of the source material, which is to say that they are interpretations and expansions of textual elements with which the reader feels unsatisfied’. Similar to the dissatisfaction expressed towards Akihabara’s limited fan service to heterosexual male fandom, the narratives of media tourism to Ikebukuro from yaoi fans suggests an expansive interpretive skill set drawing upon textual and geographic elements of shopping.

For example, while the advice offered on the *Hunter’s Guide* acknowledges that women’s *dōjinshi* can also contain erotic content, the display and purchasing of erotic yaoi material is presented as requiring a skilful semiotic decoding of various elements of the cover, its cost and related factors.

You can usually tell what you’re getting from the cover, but every *dōjinshi* is enclosed in a plastic slipcase that you can’t (and shouldn’t try to) open until you actually buy the thing. Most general-audience *dōjinshi* are ¥210, and a good rule of thumb is that, the more expensive the *dōjinshi*, the more pornographic its content. There are exceptions to this – the *dōjinshi* in question may be particularly rare, or particularly good, or by a particularly well-known artist – but again, you can usually make an educated guess on the content based on the cover.

By drawing a distinction between *dōjinshi* for men and women in this way, the poster establishes a moral position towards the male *dōjinshi* fandom – one that is based on the representation of pornography and content that is seen as rupturing the public display of this content. The emphasis on the management of graphic and explicit content serves to define the yaoi fan as a responsible consumer rather than deviant, suggesting an identification with the careful public portrayal of identity with explicit content coded by specific signs such as cost and cover art – to those who can read them. The framing of female sexual interests (which must be kept concealed) and male sexual interests (which are all too public and revealed) are duplicated in the way this fan regards the presentation of yaoi content.

Because of the dominance of Akihabara, and its status as *the* location for all subculture and pop culture interests, giving advice on the *Hunter’s Guide* is framed as a responsibility to protect the unwary yaoi tourist from the omnipresent visibility of sexually

explicit heterosexual pornography aimed at men. This point is emphasised in the 'Treasure Hunter' entry that begins its entry on Akihabara with: 'Akihabara is where you go to get porn. The end.' The entry goes on to say:

Okay, seriously. Akihabara specializes in dansei-muke dōjinshi. There are tons of small dōjinshi stores located several floors up or several floors down from the narrow side streets that twist through the main electronics district. Many of these smaller stores cater to specific fetishes, and some of these fetishes might be extremely disturbing to some people. I will therefore leave the true exploration of this area to the truly adventurous. Thankfully, the Akihabara branches of K-Books and Mandarake are fairly mainstream (although still filled with porn).

The adventurous spirit required to explore Akihabara is here judged as entailing an abnormal exposure to 'extremely disturbing' content where even mainstream manga stores are based on their ability to effectively isolate their collections of pornography or not. These moves establish clear in-group/out-group boundaries that stigmatise Akihabara's sexually explicit, male-oriented otaku culture. This framing of female yaoi versus male otaku culture along concealed or revealed sexually graphic content provides an important insight into how the intersection of travel and fandom can generate a moral and identity-forming position. While Akihabara may be seen in the tourist literature as the main location for fan culture in Tokyo, this is not a location in which all fan communities unproblematically identify with. As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013: 54) recognise, 'fan communities are often enormously heterogeneous, with values and assumptions that fragment along axes of class, age, gender, race, sexuality, and nationality, to name just a few.'

While these anti-pornography sentiments demonstrate the type of heterogeneity of values which typically occurs when one unpacks a large, generalised community like manga fans or 'foreigners shopping in Japan', the transparency and authenticity of relying exclusively upon blog and online forum data raises important questions in terms of how far one can stretch the validity of material such as this. While the profile data from the LiveJournal website indicates the posters are female, there will always be uncertainties around how reliable and transparent this data is if the research is not complimented by face-to-face interviews or similar follow-up processes. Who really are the people posting on these web pages? Using blogs and online forums in a research context is thus by no means straightforward. As indicated earlier in the methodology section, netnographic enquiry and discourse analysis offers a partial solution by focusing on the public and strategic framing of the reality constructed within the text, a reality which can be critiqued on its own terms (Potter and Wetherall 1987; Fairclough 2011; Potter 1987). The adoption of particular justifications and statements of authority within online posts can reveal the construction of particular identities (Whiteman 2009). This analysis has promoted a juxtaposition of heterosexual male hentai (discursively coded as highly pornographic) against heterosexual

female yaoi (framed within these comments as less sexually explicit content), which has relied upon assumptions around the sexual identity of fans and their familiarity (or lack thereof) with Japan. This type of binary is common within many fandom studies that analyse the gendering of audience and particular content. Research into related fandom studies such as fan fiction, particularly the area of slash fiction which explicitly sexual content written predominantly by women and for women. Early research was divided between explaining its appeal as either overtly political acts that extended feminist pornography (Russ 1985), or as metaphorical moves where the portrayed homosexual male relationships acted as displaced desires for equity and compatibility within heterosexual relationships (Lamb and Veith 1986). From these perspectives, sexually explicit content created by and for women is contrasted with mainstream heterosexual male pornography as the texts emphasize character, narrative and emotionally rich relationships. More recent research in Media, Cultural and Queer Studies has developed a more nuanced approach that moves beyond simplistic binaries of heterosexual male and female positions or straight/gay divides (Lackner, Lucas and Reid 2006; Busse 2006). This work sees sexual identity as often in flux, containing multiple and even contradictory aspects. This is not to deny that the discourses around shopping for dōjinshi material in Japan don't draw upon gender binaries, but that sexual identity is embodied and performed in ways that are more diverse and unpredictable than the snapshot glimpse provided here.

Finding Ikebukuro

To avoid defining the yaoi media tourism experience as simply a deviation from male otaku tourism, and perpetuate the tendency of defining femininity exclusively in contrast to masculinity, in this final section I consider how *Yaoi BL goods in Japan* and the *Hunter's Guide* work to advocate and establish their agency and participation as fans and tourists visiting Japan – a journey which requires skills, literacies and expertise. As I will show, these moves also transpose yaoi textual motifs and community identity onto narratives of travel and travel advice.

The title of *The Asahi Shimbun's* story on the rise of stores catering to female fandom in Ikebukuro equally emphasises the recentness of this shift: 'Female otaku stake new anime 'holy ground' in Tokyo's Ikebukuro' (Onishi 2015). The media pilgrimage overtones are fuelled by the descriptions of Ikebukuro's Maiden Road across many of these online travel sites which proclaim Ikebukuro variously as a 'mecca for fujoshi', 'the holy grail of yaoi content', 'boys love central' and 'the Akihabara for girls'. These descriptions of Ikebukuro as a space that will offers female fans what they are searching for configures these fans as not simply tourists, but fans on a quest or pilgrimage. The *Hunter's Guide* proclaims:

Ikebukuro, and more specifically Otome Road, is the mecca for fujoshi. It should be the first and last place that any female dōjinshi hunter visits. If you've never

been here before, let me promise you that it's anything beyond your wildest dreams. Bring lots of money.

The suggestion to 'bring lots of money' raises the question of what the objective of the tourism being discussed within these websites is. As the above extract suggests, purchasing merchandise and goods in Akihabara and Ikebukuro is celebrated as a quest for 'the holy grail of yaoi content' or as involving 'female dōjinshi hunters.' The role of consumerism within popular culture fandom is a recurring concern which can be traced back to Frankfurt School scholars such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2007) and Herbert Marcuse (2013) who adopted a 'false consciousness' approach, whereby consumerism is regarded as a powerful tool for manipulating the masses within a capitalist system. More recent research regards consumerism as a more active process, where individuals are seen as more reflexive and self-critical of their shopping and collecting practices, with recent collections such as Elana Levine's (2015) raising the issue of feminine popular culture as a key focus in understanding contemporary society. Significantly, the world-building being described in this article is predominantly composed of women, and further research would certainly benefit represents an opportunity to further develop the discussion of the intersection of gender and consumerism through approaches such as world-building and media tourism. It is significant with consumption being imagined feminized practice.

In my analysis of the posts and discussions that explicitly refer to consumerism these 'female dōjinshi hunters' frame themselves as more than consumers or tourists. Calls to journey to 'the holy grail of yaoi content' suggest a creative identification with the fictional worlds and narratives often portrayed in dōjinshi manga. In a similar way that Hemmann (2015) examines how female dōjinshi writers and artists 'employ the female gaze to create their own interpretations of stories, characters, and relationships in narratives targeted at a male demographic', so too do these yaoi tourist-shoppers contest the dominant male-oriented media-tourism/consumerism narratives focused on Akihabara to create stories, values and relationships based on the female gaze and female-targeted consumerism.

On the *Yaoi BL goods in Japan* page in response to the overwhelming recommendations to visit Maiden Road in Ikebukuro as the main, or only, location which a yaoi fan needs to visit, the original poster reacts with surprise and wonder: 'Otome Road? Woow I didn't know there's a place in Japan called that.'

This is not an isolated response, and in discussion of Ikebukuro's Maiden Road it is often presented as a relatively unknown location that can be tricky for the first-time visitor to find. In the comments section of the *Hunter's Guide*, shopping for yaoi merchandise and dōjinshi in Ikebukuro is akin to urban orienteering with links provided to complex maps and photographs of key landmarks such as *Xandria's Quick & Dirty Guide to Buying BL/YAOI in Ikebukuro*. The successful yaoi tourist in Ikebukuro is presented as not just needing to understand the retail presentation of dōjinshi within Japan's media mix, but also negotiate the dense cityscape of a major Japanese city and stores which are scattered amongst basements and the upper floors of buildings.

In the following comment, for example, navigating Ikebukuro is presented as demanding a situational awareness and familiarity with branded buildings and stores rather than street names and numbers:

Just wanted to let you know that your directions to Otome Road were incredibly helpful. I did get turned around though, near the Toyota Auto Salon, because there are two Family Marts in the area. In fact, if you stand at one you can see the other. I just noticed that if I used the second Family Mart in the directions, I came on the road a little bit further down than if I had taken the first Family Mart. The Animate is def a good landmark to look for.

This post was followed by an interaction between the author of the site and the poster as they respond to the 'work in progress' elements of collaborative problem-solving and the community support which has arisen around the difficulty of foreigners exploring a dense and built-up cityscape like Tokyo:

It's good to know that all of this was useful to someone. Welcome to the Sisterhood of Otome! Thank you for clarifying the geography and directions. It's a really confusing area, isn't it? I like to think that it is hidden and only accessible to those of us who dare to find it...

To which the poster recounted a similar moment of spatial confusion:

I've always had difficulties with finding places via maps (turn to soon, not soon enough), so thank you again. Tokyo just seems to be a mess direction wise. I remember this past summer getting turned around in Akihabara once, looking for a figure store, and a young Japanese man decided to help me. Showed him where I wanted to go on my map, and I followed him all the way to a blood bank...which ended up being nowhere near the store I eventually found. You really do have to be adventurous. I'm going to try out your other directions when I'm there this New Years, as I've never had any real direction on what exactly I wanted to see when I've been.

The emphasis on the adventurous aspects of yaoi identity to locate these stores tucked away in the city blocks east of Ikebukuro station suggest identification with the brave explorer searching for a hidden object. This identity is far removed from the voyeurism label that is attached to the male Akihabara tourist. Whitman's (2009: 399) analysis of the *Silent Hill* video game forum links gamer practices with their identity formation, arguing that 'the mythologizing of individual agency and taking on an exploratory role can thus be regarded as invoking a resemblance to the fan object'. So too might these narratives of finding 'hidden', hard to get to stores and fan objects be an extension of the subcultural, non-

mainstream interest in yaoi. Or, if one were to stretch this connection to a textual level, many yaoi stories themselves involve narratives of the revelation of hidden desires or love between two male characters.

Here, yaoi fans' framing of their identity and the hiddenness of the fan object suggests Okabe and Ishida's (2012) argument regarding the visibility and invisibility of yaoi identity. According to Okabe and Ishida, the fujoshi (female fans of yaoi and BL manga; literally means 'rotten women', but has been ironically adopted by the community to refer to themselves) should be defined as much by the 'work to erase, or make invisible, their fujoshi identity as they do in making it selectively visible. These processes of visualization and erasure work in tandem to create a unique subcultural identity' (2012: 209). This 'expression and concealment' (Okabe and Ishida 2012: 207) of identity is primarily to avoid, or manage, the potential stigmatization and embarrassment of being publicly identified as a woman interested in stories of gay love between men. They point out that this management of invisibility and visibility is apparent throughout the subculture, from the production and consumption of male and female yaoi, the types of socialising that occurs within the fujoshi community, and the construction and maintenance of the individual fujoshi identity. While the case study in this article has focused on western yaoi tourists who may not share this specific cultural background, nevertheless Ikebukuro's Maiden Road is frequented by these fujoshi, in this way the space itself extends this concealment motif. The agency around this concealment necessitates further research beyond the limited scope of the online posts presented here. Is this concealment a strategic choice by shopkeepers, or is it a coincidental parallel that presents a convenient link to a similar ideology within a fan culture?

Conclusion

The analysis presented here has identified the moves and articulations used in the travel advice offered by yaoi fans attempting to explain the rules and conventions for exploring Tokyo's dōjinshi space and the yaoi media mix. Like the performance of 'expression and concealment' described by Okabe and Ishida (2012), introducing novice yaoi tourists to Tokyo's cityscape and media mix entailed explaining and contextualising the explicit and implicit rules and behaviours for entering and maintaining the 'Sisterhood of Otome' from a western perspective.

On both web pages, the configuration of yaoi tourist identities and practices in Ikebukuro were framed around two moves: first, the rejection of the all-too-public fantasies of heterosexual male fandom in Akihabara served to reinforce; second, the articulation of decoding and contextualising the dōjinshi media mix. The *Hunter's Guide* in particular expressed the textual and spatial literacies required for the yaoi tourist to make the invisible or concealed yaoi spaces and practices visible. These dominant narratives of opposing male, heterosexual fantasy and making visible previously 'concealed' (Okabe and Ishida 2012) yaoi spaces occur in both yaoi media tourism and fan fiction production and consumption. In this way, the yaoi tourist's navigation and negotiation 'creatively transpose' (Hills 2002) tropes and motifs from the yaoi genre and dōjinshi practice – 'the homoerotic readings and

interpretations that creatively subvert the phallogentrism implicit in many mainstream narratives' produced by female fans. The transposition of imaginary worlds into tourism that can be found in yaoi fandom travel advice demonstrates how the practices of world-building have expanded through active fan cultures. Like the multiple identifications Constance Penley points out occur in slash fiction, whereby 'the subject participates in and restages a scenario in which crucial questions about desire, knowledge, and identity can be posed, and in which the subject can hold a number of identificatory positions' (Penley 1997: 480), these yaoi tourism practices involve moments of identification with the quest narrative of discovery, as well as the desire to consume the fan object itself. The convergence of an increasingly transnational media mix, globally dispersed fandom, and the collaborative synthesising and disseminating of information suggests that the relationship between audiences and imaginary worlds also entails world-building as tourism. Just as 'world building is a system for creating rules and behaviours for fictitious worlds arising from the science, technology, social structure, geography, economics, and politics governing them, [parameters that] can then inform plausible characters, conflicts, and plotlines' (Karlin 2014), so too are these travel narratives informed and made plausible through the rules, conventions and justifications which have arisen from the culture and history of yaoi's production and consumption.

Biographical Note:

Dr Craig Norris is a lecturer in the Journalism, Media and Communications program at the University of Tasmania. His research interests are in emerging screen practices and transnational media flows. Contact: craig.norris@utas.edu.au.

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Notes:

¹ Websites discussing the significance of Ikebukuro's butler cafes include the travel blog Splodey (2013), the Japanese popular culture website *Rocketnews's* article *We get lost in a world of steamy boy-on-boy fantasies at Ikebukuro's BL cafe* (Clegg 2015), as well as various examples on *TripAdvisor* such as Loxley1979 (2011) page revealing the language difficulties and protocol hurdles facing foreign tourists visiting a butler café *Problem Booking at Swallowtail Butler café*.

² A collection of popular travel blogs and information sites focused on Ikebukuro and Maiden Road includes *Xandria's Quick & Dirty Guide to Buying BL/YAOI in Ikebukuro* (Xandria 2014), *IKEBUKURO:*

Yet Another Dream Destination for Anime and Manga Enthusiasts (Yuri 2014), *Ikebukuro* (Lee, 2015), *Yaoi Manga Bookstores in Ikebukuro* (La Carmina 2011), and *Ikebukuro and 'Otome Road'* (Edric, 2014)