

Japanese Queerscapes:

Global/Local Intersections

on the Internet

Although Japan was slow to reform its telecommunications industry so as to facilitate widespread Internet access, Japanese is now the third most widely used language on the Net after English and Chinese.¹ In 1998 the number of characters used on Japan's 18 million Web sites was already in excess of the total number of printed characters in all Japanese newspapers and magazines published in a year.² However, unlike English, Japanese is not an international language³ and, as Gottlieb points out, the difficulty of learning to read Japanese for non-Japanese means that, "in the case of the Japanese script, geographical location remains very much a predictor of social practice and preference."⁴ Despite the potentially "global" reach of the Internet, material written in Japanese is generally accessible only to Japanese people themselves, and so far practically no research exists in English on the ways the Internet is being used in Japan. This essay looks at two "queer" uses of the Internet by two very different Japanese subcultures and suggests ways that the use of the Internet in Japan troubles the rhetoric of globalization that has so far characterized much research on Internet use in Western societies.

I have chosen to focus on two Internet realms, Japanese women's YAOI sites and *nyūhāfu* (newhalf) sites, because of their potential to subvert Western classifications of sexual identity. For instance, YAOI is an acronym made up of the first letters of the phrase *Y*Ama-*n*ashi (no climax), *O*chi-*n*ashi (no point), and *I*mi-*n*ashi (no meaning); it describes a genre of Japanese women's fiction/art dedicated to graphic descriptions of "boy love" (sex between boys and young men). There are nearly as many sites featuring

boy love created by straight Japanese women as there are sites produced by gay men about homosexuality, and their audience is almost entirely made up of schoolgirls and young women. *Nyūhāfu*, on the other hand, is a term used to describe transgendered men who work in the sex and entertainment industry. Newhalf are not transsexual, even though some of them do undergo sex-change surgery, but many of them understand themselves to be a distinct "intermediate sex" and seek out and accept their role as entertainers. Newhalf sites are often run by transvestite/transsexual cabarets and bars and serve to promote the bars as well as offer a space for the entertainers working there to discourse about who they are. The political correctness that so often accompanies discussion of homosexuality, transgenderism, and transsexualism in English is here largely absent.⁵

These domains are extremely extensive and well organized, with most of the sites being linked together in Web rings that acknowledge a sense of common content and identity. Many site owners are known to each other, and links carry the casual browser from one site to another along pathways established by friendship and common interest. They therefore have some sense of community about them in that they offer a space for like-minded individuals to come together and relax. It is therefore easier to generalize about these sites than about the more diverse sites with "gay" content aimed at gay men.⁶ Also, these sites are interesting for being largely "about" sexual interactions between biologically male bodies but not being written or produced by or for gay men. Much queer theory, although gesturing at inclusiveness, tends to become a description of distinctively gay male issues and concerns. In looking at (straight) women's YAOI fiction and the Newhalf Network, the association of male-male sex and gay men can itself be "queer(i)ed." Most important, though, I think that these sites stretch the parameters of the English term queer, which attempts to be as inclusive as possible, and shows its limitations. Queer, it would seem, is not so much about content as about political positioning. It is an attitude;⁷ where that attitude is missing, as it is on both the YAOI and newhalf sites, it seems unlikely that any sense of community can be created because neither of these realms sets out to self-consciously "oppose" heteronormative discourse or practices. They offer, not an alternative to the constricting regime of compulsory heterosexuality, but a respite from it. This is the underlying assumption behind Japanese society's often cited "tolerance" of nonnormative sexuality: that it is always circumscribed by heteronormative discourses and institutions.⁸

Japanese women have long been avid consumers of popular entertainers who would seem to disrupt sexual and gender boundaries while at the same time being committed to normative gender performances in their daily lives. In the early modern period, *onnagata* (female-role players) in the kabuki theater were popular role models for many townswomen, who followed the fashions pioneered by men performing as women on stage.⁹ Later, in the Taishō period (1912–1927), the *otokoyaku* (male-role performers) in the all-woman Takarazuka Revue became national celebrities to their all-female audience. Both kabuki and the Takarazuka continue to be popular today and gender play on the Japanese screen and stage is still widespread.¹⁰ But perhaps the most intriguing evidence for Japanese women's fascination with transgender/homosexuality occurs in girls' comics (*shōjo manga*) featuring stories of "boy love" (*shōnen'ai*).

Romantic stories about "male love" (*nanshoku*) have a long tradition in Japan, usually focusing on the attraction between a priest or samurai lover (*nenja*) and his acolyte (*chigo*) or page (*wakashū*).¹¹ However, these early stories were written by men for an anticipated male audience; women *manga* artists and writers did not begin to feature love stories between "beautiful boys" (*bishōnen*) until the early 1970s. These early romances, aptly described as *Bildungsroman* by Midori Matsui, were long and beautifully crafted tales, often set in private boys' schools in the past century.¹² Some *manga*, however, used figures from Japan's past, such as Yamagishi Ryoko's *Emperor of the Land of the Rising Sun* (1980–1984) about the eighth-century Prince Shōtoku.¹³ Schodt describes the *manga* as "One of the most popular girls' stories of all time [which] depicts a revered founder of Japan as a scheming, cross-dressing homosexual with psychic powers."¹⁴

In the early 1980s, amateur women *manga* artists began to create their own boy-love comics and fiction and circulate them at *komiketto* (comic markets) held all over Japan.¹⁵ As well as original works, these women also produced "parodies" (*parodi*) and "fanzines" (*dōjinshi*) based on mainstream boys' *manga*. Like Western "slash fiction" writers, the authors took heterosexual, heteronormative narratives and "queered" them by imagining sexual relationships between the male characters. These amateur *manga* tended to focus on the sex and contained less well-crafted stories, leading to the acronym YAOI, as described above. The sexually explicit nature of many

of these stories is made clear in another suggested derivation for the acronym YAOI: YAmete, Oshiri ga Itai! (Stop, my ass hurts!). Demand for these privately produced texts was such that mainstream publishers began to sign up the most talented of their creators and make them commercially available. The YAOI *manga* are now big business and hundreds of new titles are released each year. One of the earliest boy-love monthly magazines was *June* (pronounced ju-neh), first published in 1978. In 1995, *June* was still being published, now in a three-hundred-page bimonthly format and with a circulation of between 80,000 and 100,000.¹⁶ *June* was so successful in pioneering a new style in boy-love stories that the term *June-mono* (June things) now refers to boy-love stories in general. Many other boy-love *manga* followed *June's* lead, and there are now so many YAOI titles, and such is Japanese women's interest in them, that special editions of general *manga* and animation magazines often bring out boy-love specials. For instance, the February 1999 issue of *Pafu*, describing itself as a "Boy's Love Special," contained synopses and illustrations from a wide variety of boy-love comics organized according to genre, including sexual love.

As with Western slash fiction writers, the advent of the Internet provided a new forum for women writers and artists to distribute and popularize their work, and the Japanese Net contains several thousand sites created by women celebrating the love between "beautiful boys." The strict division of labor in many Japanese companies between the male career-track regular employees and the noncareer female "office ladies" has resulted in word processing and data input being gendered as women's work; many women thus develop computing skills superior to their male colleagues'. Furthermore, the fact that much routine computing work is contracted out to women in the home is indirectly facilitating women's access to the Internet.¹⁷ Recent statistics indicate that women are the majority of new Internet users and that they access the Net primarily for entertainment and not business.¹⁸ The various structural features of Japan's employment system that disenfranchise women may in fact be supporting their access to the Internet, and, because most women work in noncareer positions, they have greater time to devote to their hobbies than do men.

A search for YAOI on Yahoo Japan (June 2000) produced 557 individual Web pages as well as two links sites: *Creative Girls' Home* and *Yaoi Intelligence Agency*.¹⁹ *Creative Girls'* had 801 sites listed, all connected in some way with "YAOI, boys' love (*bōizurabu*), and *June*," whereas *Yaoi Intelligence*

online/
offline
issue

created?
consumed?
blue

provided a choice of 43 different categories of “June and boys’ love” pages. These included 543 “original,” 400 “same-character,” 225 “games” (where players role-play as boys), 140 “parody,” 98 “novels,” 90 “adult,” and 81 “sm.” Despite the fact that all the sites on *Creative Girls* are in Japanese (sites in English are not allowed to join), T’Mei, the Ringmaster, provides a brief English introduction. She stresses that the illustrations must not be stolen for reproduction on other pages, commenting, “Do not presume that we will never notice your sneaking in and stealing our works, for there are many ways to detect your shameful acts.” To stop “foreigners” from accessing and taking images for use on their own sites, a few Japanese sites have introduced password protection. In these instances, the Web page owner simply posts a message on the site’s entrance page stating, “In order to stop foreigners entering and stealing our illustrations, we have introduced a password,” which is usually followed by an explanation of what the password is. Here the use of the Japanese language itself is a kind of code that is expected to keep foreigners out. There seem to be two reasons behind this precaution: as mentioned above, some foreign site owners have been stealing images and reproducing them on their own sites without due recognition; however, other Japanese site owners have complained that their sites are being linked to “unpleasant” (*iyarashii*) foreign sites that, in this instance, probably refers to child pornography.

The number of boy-love sites is so large that it is difficult to make generalizations about them. Some consist only of illustrations, either created by the site owner herself or by her guest, friends, or members of the “circle” to which she belongs; other sites are exclusively text-based, consisting of *shōsetsu* (short stories). Most sites, however, contain a mixture of the two and other material, often including a profile of the site owner; her diary, where she details what she has been reading or doing; a guest slot, where she features the work of a friend; and a BBS where browsers can comment on the site or offer news or information relating to new publications. A brief description of the sites’ contents is listed on their Web links entry. For instance, *Yaoi a laboratory* describes itself as dedicated to commercial YAOI stories, containing criticism and ranking of the work of YAOI writers; *I’m on your side* (subtitled *BOYS OR GUYS LOVE OK*) is an interactive game based on the male students of a fictional university and high school that share the same campus; *Catnap* is dedicated to love stories centering on the members of boy band L’Arc en Ciel and also features illustrations and

manga; and *Sadistic* contains original stories about men in their twenties with an emphasis on SM and hard sex.²⁰

That an exclusively female audience is anticipated for this material is made clear on the entrance page to most sites. The creator of *Sadistic*, for instance, states, “I recommend that men and people who do not understand YAOI should proceed no further; I welcome women over the age of 18” (but no age check is given). *Catnap*’s author writes that her site is “basically for women,” continuing, “If you don’t like YAOI or don’t know what it is, please leave quickly.” Despite the common assumption that women are more interested in romance and relationships than sex, many of the illustrations and stories contain graphic sexual scenarios. One story on *Sadistic* involves a 15-year-old boy who seduces his 22-year-old neighbor. Although his family moves away from the area soon after, the boy has been so deeply impressed by his first sexual experience that he is unable to forget the older man, and the writer describes a number of scenes in which the boy masturbates while day dreaming about the touch of his first lover’s lips and hands: “As I lay in bed I began to think of Toshiaki and my hand naturally stretched down to my groin. Oh, oh . . . I can imagine that big, firm hand on my body . . . imagine him looking at me. Oh, oh, Toshiaki! To be clasped to that breast . . . to be kissed by those lips is a dream. I love you Toshiaki. To be together with him is to dream. I . . . love . . . you. Oh! My sperm should flow along with his . . . he should hear my cries . . . With sticky white liquid on my fingers, I stare into space . . .”

As he grows older he begins to sleep with women in a vain attempt to recreate the intensity of his first sexual encounter. These graphically described sex scenes become increasingly bizarre. At one stage, he is asked by a female partner whether he has ever experienced anal sex (i.e., anally penetrated a woman), in response to which he muses, “Is it a lie to say this is my first time when last time it was with a man?” And although he penetrates the woman and “his body convulsing . . . spat sperm out into a condom,” his thoughts are once more with his first love. Afterward he thinks to himself, “Today, as always, it wasn’t especially pleasant. It feels like all I have done is ejaculated. [I feel] more or less empty . . . let’s face it, it’s impossible with anyone but him . . .” This story line, mixing heterosexual and homosexual encounters and focusing on sexual acts unusual for women such as anal intercourse, has parallels in “ladies comics,” again written by and for women, that emphasize sex. As Schodt says of these comics, they “would

make American and European feminists wince" because they depict "a woman seducing a son's very young friend, a woman becoming a molester of men on a subway, and women characters who apparently enjoy gang rapes [and] sodomy."²¹ However, although sexually graphic, the sex in many YAOI stories does not itself seem to be the "point" but is used to underline the centrality of the characters' feelings. As I have argued elsewhere, this differentiates Japanese women's "homosexual" narratives from those characteristic of Japan's gay press.²²

Because YAOI is primarily about sex between "beautiful boys" (*bishōnen*) and "beautiful men" (*biseinen*) it confounds Western conventions that stigmatize the sexual representation of children.²³ These stories and illustrations that imagine sexual interaction between men and young boys are known as *shōtakon* (Shōtaro Complex, Shōtaro being the boy hero, always dressed in short pants, of a popular 1960s animation show entitled *Tetsujin 28-go* in Japan and released in the U.S. as *Gigantor*, a term created by YAOI writers and modeled on the loanword *rorikon* (the well-known Lolita Complex). In Western societies it is hard to imagine sexual scenarios more transgressive than transgenerational homosexual acts between adult men and pubescent boys, and yet this is a central trope in women's YAOI. This differentiates YAOI from Western slash fiction that imagines sexual interaction between the adult male stars of TV shows such as *Star Trek* or the *X Files* and is a clear example of the cultural relativity of sexual values.²⁴ Despite the fact that women and children are often assumed to be the primary "victims" of pornography, YAOI is a pornographic genre created by women about (male) children and is considered innocuous enough that it appears in comics commercially produced for an audience of schoolgirls, young women, and housewives. Schoolgirls and housewives are not normally considered a "queer" constituency, and yet their interest in graphic homosexual love stories involving boys troubles Anglo-American assumptions about the synchronicity of "sexual identity" and sexual fantasy.

Japan's Newhalf Net

Japan has a long tradition of transgendered men offering sexual services to gender-normative men. In the Tokugawa period (1600–1867), transgendered prostitutes (*kagama*), who were often affiliated with kabuki theaters,

would offer their services to male members of the audience.²⁵ In the Taishō (1912–1927) and early Shōwa (1927–1989) periods this role seems to have been taken over by *okama*, a slang term for the buttocks that, when applied to male homosexuals, means something like the English "queen." In the 1960s and 1970s, the term *geiboi* (gay boy) referred to cross-dressing male hustlers, and *gei* (gay) still carries transgender connotations today.²⁶ Giving fixed content to any Japanese terminology dealing with sexual- or gender-nonconformist individuals is problematic and producing English-language equivalents almost impossible.²⁷

Nyūhāfu is particularly difficult to translate, partly because its meaning in Japanese is ambiguous. The term was first popularized in Japan in the early 1980s due to the success of Matsubara Rumiko, a male-to-female transgendered model and singer. In 1981 she issued an album of songs entitled *Newhalf* and the next year published a photo collection.²⁸ Newhalf, along with gay boy and Mr Lady (*Mr redi*), became one of the many terms used in the media to refer to transgendered men working in the entertainment industry. Since the legalization of sex-change operations in Japan in 1998 and the resulting resurgence of media interest in transgender identities, newhalf has established itself as the most popular term for male-to-female transgenders. Several books, such as *Deciding to Be a Newhalf and Living Like "Myself,"* have been published since 1998, but the variety of identities expressed by individuals using the newhalf label is such that it is impossible to fix its meaning.²⁹

On the surface, it would seem that newhalf refers to individuals who, in English, would probably be described as transsexual, but definitions of newhalf in the Japanese media contradict this. For instance, one definition in a sex industry guidebook defines newhalf as "male homosexuals who have had a sex-change operation."³⁰ The commonsense assumption that newhalf are male homosexuals (*dansei dōseiaisha*) is also clear from an article in the popular magazine *Da Vinci*, which describes them as "male homosexuals who have 'come out,' undergone a sex change and work in the sex industry."³¹ This definition is problematic, as most newhalf who introduce themselves on the Internet would not see themselves as male homosexuals but a distinct "intermediate sex" (*chūsei*); some newhalf take hormones, some have silicon implants, and some have their male genitalia removed, but by no means all undergo sex-change operations. Newhalf do, however, tend to work in the entertainment industry in some capacity or

diff
defins

other; therefore, newhalf is better understood as an occupational category rather than a sexual orientation.³² The interviews in *Deciding to Be a Newhalf* support this; several of the newhalf sex workers interviewed cite commercial concerns as reasons for undertaking specific transgender practices. For instance, Cherry expresses affection for her “nicely shaped penis” because her clients often request that she penetrate them.³³ However, other newhalf in the collection say that they decided to have their penis removed and an artificial vagina created so that they could avoid being asked to provide either active or passive anal sex. For some newhalf, then, decisions about how to transgender their body are taken with their livelihood in mind and not out of any desire to make their exterior body correspond to an interior sense of gender identity. Newhalf therefore share many similarities with transgendered men in other societies who also seek out work in the prostitution world, such as the *travesti* of South America, who Cornwall points out are “neither . . . ‘transvestite[s]’ nor . . . ‘transsexual[s]’ as defined in Western terms.”³⁴ Newhalf also share similarities with the *bakla* of the Philippines, and some Philippine male-to-female transgendered prostitutes enter Japan on “entertainer” visas to seek out jobs in the sex trade.³⁵

Newhalf can be understood as a site of identity. However, it is an identity based on occupation, because being a newhalf in Japan is not seen as a part-time activity, whereas simply cross-dressing as a woman is.³⁶ The newhalf in *Deciding to Be a Newhalf* speak of themselves as “professionals.” It is true that newhalf have “come out” in that they transgender the body in very obvious ways, often taking hormones or obtaining breasts through silicon implants. A newhalf is therefore very different from a man who simply likes to cross-dress (*josō*), (although the Internet also provides easy access to information on clubs and bars that offer professional stylists who help their male guests create the most attractive female persona). However, the association of newhalf with the sex and entertainment industry makes the conceptualization of newhalf as a political identity problematic, as newhalf often present themselves as offering a service for men either as “hostesses” in clubs, cabarets, or bars, or as “escorts” and “companions.” They very much locate themselves in the entertainment sphere. When offering sexual services, newhalf tend to stress their *intersexual* status by pointing out their firsthand knowledge of male anatomy and their ability to offer increased sexual pleasure to straight men. Unlike biological women, newhalf “understand” straight men’s desires because they are believed to share them.³⁷

Many newhalf sites are hosted by clubs, bars, cabarets, and escort agencies and provide both information about the venue and the services on offer as well as an opportunity for the newhalf employees to introduce themselves and discourse about what being a newhalf means. Many sites also include BBS and chat rooms where a variety of individuals can write in with their questions and remarks. Like Japanese media in general, these sites contain a wide variety of levels and genres, from graphic sex talk and pornographic pictures to more sophisticated reflections on “how to sex,” personal biographies and experiences of newhalf employees and visitors, and more general news. They are not simply business sites but “realms” offering a great deal of information, entertainment, and sexual titillation. Two typical sites are *Newhalf Health Adventure* and *Virtual Gaybar Elizabeth*.³⁸ The latter is an information-based site, although the emphasis is very much on entertainment. It is a very colorful, well-designed, and interactive site; as visitors browse through the many pages on offer, they are treated to a synthesized rendition of *Phantom of the Opera*. Misaki, the Web mistress, greets the visitor with the phrase “On a cold day get warm by imagining Misaki’s naked body. What? You’ve got an erection . . . Well, there’s nothing I can do about that.” But the intended audience of the site is not exclusively male. For instance, one page is for women who like to have newhalf friends; as Misaki points out, “Some women seem to like men who are like women [*onna ni chikai otoko*].” This includes sexual interest too, for many of the women writing in to the page inquire about whether newhalf are interested in having sex with women—Misaki says some are—and how they might go about doing this. As Misaki, who is sexually interested in both men and women, writes, “Basically I have a woman’s heart but there still remains about 10 percent inside me which could be called ‘male.’” Although not confrontational in an Anglo-American sense, Misaki does discuss “identity politics” when s/he argues that “some people might think I want to live as a woman; I don’t, I want to live as myself [*watshi toshite ikitai*].”

Newhalf Health Adventure (*Nyūhāfu herusu abanchūru*) is basically a salon offering sex. “Health” (*herusu*) in Japanese is short for “health massage,” just one of the euphemisms developed in the 1980s to disguise the real business of prostitution taking place in massage parlors.³⁹ *Health Adventure* is upfront about the services offered by its newhalf employees, stating, “We, the newhalf at *Adventure*, try to ensure that all our customers feel satisfied

and secure so that [they can experience] enjoyable sex by using our hearts, bodies, skills and magic. We respectfully wait for your visit from the bottom of our hearts. Credit cards accepted." Immediately below are the club's telephone number and a chart detailing the "courses" (*kōsu*) on offer, their duration, and price. These include the basic "health" course, which lasts 30 minutes and involves "kissing, fellatio, etc., but anal fuck (AF) and reverse anal fuck (*gyaku* AF) are not included." This is followed by the 60-minute "regular," which can include AF. The "long regular" is the same as the above but lasts for 90 minutes. The "optional course" includes "soft SM, dressing up as a woman [*josō*] and lesbian play [*rezupurei*]." ⁴⁰ The "king course" involves two newhalf playmates, and the "Cindarella course" enables a customer to cross-dress in the club's clothes and then go out on a date with one of the newhalf hostesses. For busy businessmen, lunchtime courses are offered Monday to Friday between 12:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. at a reduced rate.

The main purpose of *Aventure's* home page is to advertise its services, and each of the newhalf "companions" working for the club is profiled. ⁴¹ This information includes pictures, age, blood group, star sign, anatomical details such as whether they have breasts and if so whether silicon or the result of hormones, and the current state of their genitalia. Also detailed are the sexual acts the newhalf will or can perform. This kind of description sounds extremely clinical, but the Web page manages to offer this information, to borrow a phrase, "in the best possible taste," employing the exquisitely polite Japanese that is characteristic of highly trained professionals working in the service industry. Being offered a "reverse anal fuck" in the same language a five-star hotel waiter might offer a napkin makes for disorienting reading to my English mind, but because the sex industry is a relatively expensive service industry, the same linguistic rules apply. As Kondo comments, "Awareness of complex social positioning is an inescapable element of any utterance in Japanese, for it is utterly impossible to form a sentence without also commenting on the relationship between oneself and one's interlocutor." ⁴² This applies equally to the relationship between the purveyors of sexual fantasy and their clients.

There are several hundred newhalf sites from all over Japan, most of which offer, to some degree or other, sexual services. Not all are hosted by large institutions such as *Aventure*; for instance, *Home Delivery Newhalf System* is the home page of Momo and Sakura, who provide the following

sexual services either at a client's home or hotel room: kissing, fellatio, vibrator, anal sex, reverse anal sex, and SM play. ⁴³ Momo and Sakura are clearly in partnership together (they offer "double play"), and their Web site, like that of *Aventure*, is very clear about what services are on offer and how much they cost. Other sites are more circumspect and offer newhalf the chance to post their pictures and describe the kind of acts they will perform but without detailing fees. *Newhalf Net* has a short, text-based imode feature for those using a mobile phone to surf the Net. This contains brief five-line biographies of newhalf, their preferred sexual acts, telephone numbers, and email addresses.

Other sites listed on the Newhalf Net, such as TV'S FORUM JAPAN, that at first glance might seem to be more information-oriented, on further inspection also primarily deliver "entertainment" of a sexual nature. ⁴⁴ For instance, TV'S FORUM describes itself as "a place where people who love women's underwear can get together" and features pictures of men posing in a variety of women's underwear as well as stories detailing their sexual exploits involving partners of both sexes. As with most newhalf sites, email addresses are given and viewers are encouraged to write and make dates to "play."

As frequently occurs in Japanese sex industry discourse, identities, terminologies, and practices blur and become confused. The ruling paradigm for sex industry participation is "play" (*asobi/purei*), and, as with any game, the rules can be bent or broken, especially if the client is prepared to pay more. Japan's noninterventionist legislation regarding private sexual practice has enabled the Internet to offer a cornucopia of erotic entertainment where there is surely something on offer for people of all persuasions. None of the sites I have discussed are password-protected, and none I attempted to enter required proof of age; although sometimes the question "Are you over 18?" was posted on the first page, the browser had only to click in the affirmative to enter.

Conclusion

The two Internet realms discussed, women's YAOI sites and the Newhalf Net, trouble the parameters of even a term like queer, which seeks to be inclusive of all sexualities that fall outside "mainstream" heterosexuality and the discourse attempting to tie sex to reproduction within the family.

Schoolgirls as a constituency are not generally considered queer, yet their interest in homosexual love stories between young boys clearly falls outside the parameters of what would be considered acceptable in Anglophone societies. Newhalf, too, in their acceptance of the space made available to them in Japan's sex industry and their self-promotion as an "intermediate sex" better able to satisfy the sexual demands of (straight) men because of their privileged understanding of male anatomy, trouble the political associations of queer and make it seem unlikely that newhalf could be included in an umbrella category of groups as diverse in their interests as gay men, lesbians, and those Japanese individuals who understand themselves to be transsexual in the English connotation of this term.

As outlined above, neither YAOI nor the newhalf phenomenon represents a radically new departure in Japan's sexual culture. The Internet has not enabled the emergence of a new type of sexual discourse but simply allowed greater access to sexual images, narratives, and practices; it has made them more popular and more readily available. Whereas previously a schoolgirl would have had to attend a komiket to purchase her favorite YAOI manga, paying large sums of money on transport, entrance fees, and hard copies of the comics, she can now access her favorites sites from the privacy of her bedroom, download images to keep, and even upload her own art and stories. Similarly, a man (or woman) with an interest in transgendered men who previously would have had to journey to the red light districts of Japan's major cities to meet and converse with newhalf is now able to enter this realm through the Internet. It is possible to download images of one's favorite newhalf, read about her doings in her diary, send her email, or chat with her live. It is possible to make sexual assignments or simply organize a date while saving money by cutting out the expensive fees charged by clubs and cabarets for making introductions. A man can even download information about several different newhalf on his mobile phone and then make a date to meet one of them during his lunch hour or stop off before his long commute home at one of the love hotels built near many train interchange stations.

In making more easily accessible the variety of sexual discourses, representations, and practices that have long been a part of Japan's popular culture, it is unlikely that the Internet is, by itself, going to encourage the increasing politicization of sexuality so long as Internet use is understood as a form of entertainment. Just as the video recorder and cable TV have

brought pornography into the domestic sphere, the Internet,⁴⁵ too, is further blurring the boundaries between the private home and the commercial sex scene, or indeed the office and the world of sexual entertainment.⁴⁶

So far, the Japanese government's reluctance to regulate sexual expression on the Internet has meant that it is in Japanese, not English, that the widest range of sexual representations and services are freely available. These diverse realms that confound Anglo-American understandings of pornography, sexual identity, and the correspondence between sexual identity and sexual fantasy have been protected from the disapproving Western gaze by the inaccessibility of the Japanese language. There are signs, however, that especially with regard to child pornography (four-fifths of which is said to originate in Japan) Western nations are putting pressure on Japan through international conventions to begin the process of Internet regulation.⁴⁷ Thus, although sexual sites on the Japanese Internet, so long as they are inscribed in the discourse of "entertainment," are unlikely to become politicized, the availability of material disapproved of in more censorious Western nations is itself likely to become a political issue.

Notes

Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

- 1 According to *Global Internet Statistics* (<http://www.glgreach.com/globstats/index.php3>) (June 2002), 40.2 percent of the Net's online population was using English, whereas 9.8 percent was using Chinese, 9.2 percent Japanese, 7.2 percent Spanish, and 6.8 percent German; other languages were all less than 5 percent.
- 2 Nanette Gottlieb, *Word Processing Technology in Japan: Kanji and the Keyboard* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000), 182.
- 3 According to *Global Internet Statistics*, 430,000 Japanese live in the United States and 2 million live in Brazil. Even if the majority of these were online, this is only a small proportion of the estimated 70 million Internet users in Japan. However, the majority of these users access the Net via cell phones and not PCs, limiting use to texting and downloading ringer melodies and animated screen graphics.
- 4 Gottlieb, 200.
- 5 "Political correctness" has yet to make it to Japan. For instance, the "lesbian and bi women's forum" *Bibian*, 7 June 2000, (<http://www.silkroad.ne.jp/bibian>) (7 June 2000), which contains sexuality information and chat rooms

for women, opens with a bare-breasted and provocatively clad blonde woman, seemingly scanned in from the pages of *Playboy*. Interestingly, this site is pioneering the adoption of the term *bian* (from *rezubian*) as an alternative to *rezu*, which is associated with women performers in male pornography, and is a further example of how Western borrowings like "newhalf" are invested with specifically Japanese meanings.

- 6 For a discussion of how gay men use the Internet in Japan, see Mark McLelland, "Out and About on Japan's Gay Net," *Convergence* 6, no. 3 (2000): 16–33.
- 7 "Queer" developed in the late 1980s as a new adversarial site of identity for individuals who felt "lesbian" and "gay" to be too limiting and exclusionary of other sexual minorities such as bisexuals, transsexuals, and sex workers. It is used in this sense in Michelangelo Signorile's *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power* (New York: Anchor, 1994). However, with the integration of queer theory into the academy and the increasing commodification of queer cultures, much of its confrontational force has been lost. As Morton comments, queer is now often used to mean "the embracing of the latest fashion over an older, square style by the hip youth generation." Donald Morton, "Birth of the Cyberqueer," in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, ed. Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 295. Neither the schoolgirl readers of YAOI nor newhalf sex workers are queer in either of the above senses. However, queer in the lifestyle sense has now entered Japanese through the magazine *Queer Japan* (first published 2000). Volume 2 (June 2000) is dedicated to "salarymen doing queer" and focuses on lifestyle and culture. It is too soon to judge whether this new departure in Japanese gay media will be successful.
- 8 Sharon Chalmers, "Lesbian (In)visibility and Social Policy in Japanese Society," in *Gender and Public Policy in Japan*, ed. Vera Mackie (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
- 9 Liza Dalby, *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 275.
- 10 Mark McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000), chap. 3, 43–60.
- 11 Tsuneo Watanabe and Jun'ichi Iwata, *The Love of the Samurai: A Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1989); Gary Leupp, *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 12 Midori Matsui, "Little Girls Were Little Boys: Displaced Femininity in the Representation of Homosexuality in Japanese Girls' Comics," in *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, ed. S. Gunew and A. Yeatman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 178.
- 13 Shōtoku Taishi (574–622) was never an emperor in his own right but served

as regent for his aunt, the Empress Suiko. He is famous for introducing the Chinese calendar and drafting Japan's first constitution. He was also a great sponsor of Buddhism and is revered today as an incarnate bodhisattva and a major architect of the Japanese state.

- 14 Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 182.
- 15 Sharon Kinsella, "Japanese Subcultures in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 289–316.
- 16 Schodt, 120.
- 17 *Wall Street Journal*, "Your Career Matters: Net Lets Japanese Women Join Work Force at Home," February 29, 2000, B1.
- 18 Gottlieb, 181.
- 19 *Creative Girls' Home*, 15 September 1998, <<http://www.lunatique.org/yaoi>> (5 June 2000); *Yaoi Intelligence Agency*, 2000, <<http://www.may.sakura.ne.jp/~yia/se/>> (5 June 2000).
- 20 *Yaoi a laboratory*, 16 June 2000, <<http://www.lilac.cc/~maco/>> (16 June 2000); *I'm on Your Side*, 1 March 2000, <<http://www.bridge.ne.jp/~pbem/DEMO/SIDE.html>> (16 June 2000); *Catnap*, 14 June 2000, <<http://www.people.or.jp/~asagi/catnap/>> (14 June 2000); *Sadistic*, 14 June 2000, <<http://www.2.networks.ne.jp/~foo/SDSTC/>> (14 June 2000).
- 21 Schodt, 125.
- 22 Mark McLelland, "No Climax, No Point, No Meaning? Japanese Women's Boy-Love Sites on the Internet," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (2000): 274–94.
- 23 Despite the fact that 15 percent of the 150 pornographic Internet sites sampled by Mehta and Plaza contained images of children, they report, "We never came across an image depicting a sexual act between an adult and a child/adolescent, or acts between children," which suggests that these images are very rare on the American USENET system. But, such images are, of course, ubiquitous on Japanese YAOI sites. Michael Mehta and Dwayne Plaza, "Pornography in Cyberspace: An Exploration of What's in USENET," in *Culture of the Internet*, ed. Sara Kiesler (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997), 64.
- 24 For a discussion of slash fiction, see Mirna Cicioni, "Male Pair-Bonds and Female Desire in Fan Slash Writing," in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*, ed. C. Harris and A. Alexander (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 1998), 153–78; Constance Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Study of Popular Culture," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 479–500; Henry Jenkins III, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- 25 Leupp, 72.

- 26 *Geiboi* is used in this sense in Matsumoto Toshio's movie *Bara no sōretsu* (Funeral procession of roses, 1969). Shot in a semidocumentary style, the film documents Tokyo's late 1960s gay bar (*geibā*) scene and stars the famous transvestite actor Peter, who is now one of Japanese television's top hostesses.
- 27 For a discussion of terms relating to gender nonconformist individuals in Japan, see McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, 7–12.
- 28 Rumiko Miyazaki, *Watashi wa toransujendā* [I am transgendered], (Tokyo: Neoraifu, 2000), 202.
- 29 Anri Komatsu, *Nyūhāfu ga kimeta "watashi" rashii ikikata* [Deciding to be a newhalf and live like myself], (Tokyo: KK Ronguserāzu, 2000).
- 30 Altbooks, *SEX no arukikata: Tōkyō fuzoku kanzen gaido* [How to find your way around Tokyo's sex scene: A complete guide], (Tokyo: Mediawakusu, 1998), 167.
- 31 *Da Vinci*, "Sei wo koeta hito bito wo rikai suru hito koto yōgo kaisetsu" (An explanation of terms for people who have gone beyond their sex), March 1999.
- 32 As described later, some newhalf offer services for men, women, and men dressed as women.
- 33 Komatsu, 128.
- 34 Andrea Cornwall, "Gendered Identities and Gender Ambiguity among Travestis in Salvador, Brazil," in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, ed. A. Cornwall and N. Lindisfarne (London: Routledge, 1994), 114.
- 35 *The Sex Warriors and the Samurai*, prod. Parminder Vir, dir. Nick Deocampo, 25 min., Formation Films Production for Channel Four, 1995, videocassette.
- 36 Being an *okama* or effeminate homosexual (rather like the English term "drag queen") can also be seen as a part-time activity. See my discussion of the *okama* farmer who works on his farm during the day and at night serves as a hostess in a bar (McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, 48).
- 37 Despite the fact that some newhalf can pass as women, in popular representations they are shown acting more like men. For instance, I saw a reconstructed scenario on Japanese TV, supposedly of an actual event, in which two "women" in bikinis entered a pachinko parlor full of men playing the machines. While one distracted the customers with a lewd display, the other stole their buckets of pinballs, which can be redeemed for cash. When apprehended by the staff, they started a fistfight and on the arrival of the police, it turned out that the women were newhalf.
- 38 *Aventure*, 14 February 2000, (<http://www.newhalf.co.jp/>) (1 July 2000); *Virtual Gaybar Elizabeth*, 27 January 1999, (<http://homepage1.nifty.com/Newhalf/index.html>) (5 July 2000).
- 39 For a discussion of Japan's sex trade, see Peter Constantine, *Japan's Sex Trade:*

A Journey through Japan's Erotic Subcultures (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1993); and Altbooks.

- 40 In this context, *rezupurei* refers to a cross-dressed male client pretending to be a lesbian.
- 41 Although counters advertising the number of hits can be unreliable, it would seem that *Aventure* is popular, having attracted 82,002 hits between 14 February and 30 May 2000. On 29 May alone, it attracted 1,145 visitors.
- 42 Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 31.
- 43 *Home Delivery Newhalf* System, September 1998, (http://members.xoom.com/_XMCM/newhalf/eigyou.html) (15 July 2000).
- 44 TV's FORUM JAPAN, 17 July 2000. (<http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Village/9111>) (17 July 2000).
- 45 The mobile phone is another technology disrupting the traditional distinction between the desexualized domestic sphere and the world of commercial sex. It is used by gay men who live with their parents (or wives or partners) to negotiate their sexual relationships (see McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, 212–14) and by schoolgirl prostitutes who call into "telephone clubs" where potential clients wait to receive their calls. See Takarajima, *Ura Tōkyō kankō* [Backstreet Tokyo sightseeing] (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 1998), 54–55; "Clueless in Tokyo: Schoolgirls Exchange Sexual Talk for Money to Buy Designer Clothes," *The Economist* 339, no. 7969 (June 8, 1996): 66.
- 46 I had to obtain a letter from the University of Queensland explicitly granting me exemption from a university statute forbidding the use of office computers for the viewing of pornographic images in order to complete the research for this chapter.
- 47 "Japan's Shame: Lawmakers are finally pushing legislation to help end the country's dubious distinction as the world's main source of child pornography," *Time International* 153, no. 5 (April 19, 1999): 34.