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Chapter 19

Embodied Fantasy: the Affective Space of Anime Conventions

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Introduction

The first fan convention that I ever visited was Animecon in 2005, a festival devoted to 'manga' (Japanese comics) and 'anime' (Japanese cartoons). From the entire country, fans had come to a hotel in the Dutch town Almelo to celebrate their joy for fiction. Supposedly, over 1,000 people attended, as visitors and as volunteers. Fans arrived by car and train. Some were quite recognizable since they had dressed up as fictional characters, a practice that many anime fans engage in as a homage to their favourite fiction. Because the convention was not large, these fans stood out from the local citizens and their space of play was infiltrating everyday life. My best friend had sewn me an outfit of Aerith, a fictional character from a game that I liked (*Final Fantasy VII*). I did not want to walk around town in that pink dress but, when I saw more people in their costumes I felt that maybe I should. It would have been a visible sign of anticipation and belonging.

Although I had been preparing for this convention for a long time, I had in fact no idea what to expect. My friends described it as a kind of Disneyland where fiction would be all around you. I could only wonder what a place like that would be like. The long line near the hotel gave it away, though. Fans cheerfully camped outside of the building, quoting their favourite series, sometimes throwing in Japanese jargon, excitedly exchanging experiences and planning what to see or do for the weekend. The convention was very different from the online fan forums where you could be present and engage in discussions, but also be invisible. The virtual spaces that I had subscribed to were mediated and somehow distant. Here, in the flesh, I met like-minded individuals, for the first time, en masse. Still, many of them participated in the same online spaces as I did and their activities could not be separated from this convention. In fact, I was going to meet some of my online friends at this convention for the first or second time. I recognized some of the outfits that people were wearing but I had no idea if some of these people corresponded to usernames that I had been seeing on my screen for years.

When I donned on my costume the second day, I gained a sense of belonging. This was not only related to the outfit that made me fit in visually. Conversations became easier because fellow fans also found topics to converse with me about; my character, *Final Fantasy*, video games. Some visitors recognized me from the forum because they knew that I was going to be wearing an Aerith outfit. They called me by my nickname. At the end of the weekend, I made many new friends while watching anime, playing games and attending workshops. Fan conventions, from that point on, seemed at once foreign, exotic and diverse to me, as well as attractive. Year after year, Animecon became a place that I could fall back on and that slowly grew on me until it became one of the highlights of the year. Even though I travelled to many conventions abroad since, arriving at Animecon feels like coming home.

Fandom has been studied as audience communities that create tight bounds between their members. Over the last ten years or so, online fandom has become a prominent social phenomenon. Before that, fans were mostly adults, as they had the economic and social means to attend conventions or clubs (for example Jenkins, 1992). With the arrival of the Internet, fan practices became more visible. Fans could now meet like-minded individuals more easily. Early fan online practices operated through mail lists, news servers and boards. Later, specific platforms were established, such as FanFiction.net (1998, the biggest site for uploading fan fiction still) and LiveJournal (1999, a blogging system that allows users to publish texts and art). Due to the rise of Internet platforms, fandom has become entwined with youth culture as well. Jenkins (2006) sees it as part of 'participatory culture', which refers to a trend of online users becoming co-creators.

Offline, fan conventions also grew in popularity. The 2011 San Diego Comic Con reached over a 120,000 visitors (see also Chapter 2 in this volume). In Japan, events such as Comiket, a fair devoted to the buying and selling of fan comics, are mainstream events with hundreds of thousands of visitors. In general, fan cultures are spaces rife with emotions amplified by fiction and by the social environment. As Cornel Sandvoss (2005: 64) writes: 'Fandom best compares to the emotional significance of the places we have grown to call "home", to the form of physical, emotional and ideological space that is best described as *Heimat*'. Sandvoss' ideas clearly resonate with my own experiences of the convention space. The convention is a rich, social space that dynamically transforms an ordinary physical space into media environment, rife with allusions to collective fantasies.

Until now, the fan convention has been underexplored as a site of fan research. Scholars usually attend one event and frame this as an introduction into fan practices (for example Bacon-Smith 1992; Taylor 2006). Theses authors, however, do not examine conventions and their social dimension in detail. Other scholars have used the convention space as an interview site to recruit informants (Bryant, Bielby and Harrison, this volume). Moreover, the mentioned studies detail large American conventions which are arranged differently from European conventions. These continental events do not only differ in size and focus, but also in their audience culture and set-up. For instance, they often have less discussion panels with spokespersons from the media industry. In this chapter, I aim to do justice to the richness and diversity of these sites. I consider the convention as central to the articulation of narratives and their related fan practices. This study explores how fan engagement flourishes in offline spaces rather than the frequently studied digital fandoms (for example Baym 2000; Busse and Hellekson 2006).

I analyse the convention ground as a rich space where fan practices and social relations are displayed, performed and discussed. I argue that the fan convention is an 'affective space' that cannot be separated from the narratives it mediates and the social contacts that are established there. These meanings structure the space in three ways: first, as an imaginative space; second, as a social space; third, as a space of intimacy. Thus, I mark the fan convention as a promising site of ethnographic research to unearth the affective dimension of fandom.

Media Spaces and Affect

Two other types of space are similar to fan conventions in how they mediate existing narratives: locations visited during what has become known as 'media tourism' and the locations of theme parks. First, research on fan tourism points out the importance of traditional places in fandom and explains how fiction is envisioned in these places (for example Cartmell 1993). By travelling to certain locations, fans experience where authors wrote their famous novels (Watson 2010), discover film sites or the villages that star in their beloved fiction (Gordon 2003) and even retrace the steps of a novel (Reijnders 2009, 2011). In media tourism, media scholars suggest, actual places are transformed by the narratives and the memories that we associate with them. Specifically Nick Couldry (2003: 33) investigates media tourism as a type of pilgrimage that involves an affective travel to get closer to the 'media centre'; the ritual heart of the media product. The journey, then, matters as much as the space itself.

However, fan tourism also differs from the experience of going to a fan convention. In media tourism, the existing location already plays a central role in the formal narrative. Fan conventions take place in random locations, such as hotels, determined by practical considerations such as suitability and budget. Any connection to the narratives of fan texts is constructed. The space gains interpretive meaning through the fan practices that are hosted there and its history of fan activity.

Fan conventions also resemble theme parks, as these are also concerned with structuring narrative in physical places. Scholars such as Eco (1986), Baudrillard (2002) and Bolter and Grusin (1999) show how a theme park creates a highly media-saturated environment where every ride tells its own narrative. However, the park itself can also be understood as a fictional world that draws its visitors into a different reality or 'hyperreality'. Here, the media surroundings and entourage of the theme park are often effective in creating a sense of immersion that transports the viewers from the everyday into an imaginative reality.

Unlike the fan convention, however, is the theme park structured by a corporate identity that owns the facility and its rights. Combined with a specific layout of the park, often in fields or sub-worlds (for example Adventure Land), this assures more narrative coherence between rides and the shows or parades. Moreover, though a park offers different narrative experiences through rides, shows, games and commodities, these are designed in advance. The fan convention allows more modes of participation and contribution. At different times, the convention visitor can be a volunteer, actor, spectator, supporter, judge, model or photographer.

In all these media spaces, audiences give additional narrative meaning to a place. As a result of this interpretive process, an affective relation is constructed with the space that is embodied and situated. While the affective relation with space has been investigated in both fields discussed above, in fan studies affect is still underexplored. In fandom, affect is a situated, interpretive phenomenon but also a self-reflexive, social process. Fans play with the affective experience of art and fiction consciously and in part also relive the narratives that they enjoyed and reconstruct them at fan spaces. Affect is an integral, conscious part of fan practices which function as a homage to existing fiction.

Lawrence Grossberg understands affect as a textual response that characterizes fans, but carefully divides it from emotional responses: 'Affect is not the same as either emotions or desires.

Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the feeling of life' (Grossberg 1992: 56). Unlike Grossberg, I understand affect as a broader process of meaning-making, in which emotions do play a part as they show how the subject experiences the convention site. Moreover, I argue that affect in fandom is more than a response towards texts and depends on the social context.

In his analysis of fandom as an 'affective space', Matt Hills (2001) explicitly takes the community into account as an important creator of feelings and meanings. Hills looks at fan communities through the lens of Anderson's 'imagined community' (1991), that supposes that communities, such as the nation, are constructed because people envision their membership based on a shared affinity with the group. Hills opposes his site of study, an *X-Files* mail list, to the spatial and temporally bounded fan convention, 'involving embodied face-to-face contact and an increased intensity of fan sentiment' (2001: 148). Unlike Hills, I do not assume that there is more sentiment in this space than in mediated fan spaces. Online spaces motivate meaningful interaction as well and are not necessarily more distant, they just involve a different kind of physicality (for example Markham 1998).

Ultimately, Hills argues that affect in a virtual community depends on love for the text first and foremost. Rather than an imagined community, that supposes a constructed community through interests, this creates a 'community of imagination'. The social relations are always subjected to, and coloured by, the affect for the text itself that is shared and relived. Though I adopt Hills' concept of affective space, his understanding of affect seems narrow to me and downplays the importance of social relations in virtual communities. Based on the theories and critiques above, my rephrasing of fan conventions combines the fields of media tourism and fan studies. I elaborate on the fan convention in three ways: an imaginative space; a socially constructed space; and a space of intimacy. First, I outline my methods and then describe the fan convention in general.

Method

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork in The Netherlands. I attended the most notable fan conventions, meaning for example Tsunacon, Animecon and YaYCon. My observations detail the Dutch anime scene from 2010 onward, but I also draw from experiences as a participant in the Dutch fan scene before that time. Anime conventions are a fairly new phenomenon in The Netherlands.

Animecon hosted its first edition in 1999, inspired by English anime conventions (Niels Viveen, white male, age 30–40). The length of the events varies as some conventions last a day (for example YaYCon, Tsunacon), and others the entire weekend (for example Animecon, Abunai). Dutch conventions are generally attended by a few hundred (YaYCon 2012) to up to 3,000 people (Tsunacon 2012).

During my fieldwork, I often played with different stances as a fan scholar. I attended some of the conventions as a visitor or researcher, but others within clearly defined roles that allowed different ways of approaching fans, such as an artist, or lecturer. In the case of YaYCon, I was also an insider as a staff member that arranged the internal communication and organized events, and also analysed my own experiences of working for a fan convention. To give proper voice to the fans and their organizations, this chapter has been written in dialogue with my informants at online spaces (for example Aniway.nl), conventions and meetings.

As additional documentation, I used convention program books and websites, as well as the online communication of the conventions (for example forums, Facebook pages). I also performed colloquial interviews at the convention site and in-depth interviews (through Skype or in the flesh) with staff members of the conventions.

Fan Conventions

Fan conventions have been an important stage for fan practices inspired by existing texts the last decennia. Fans meet up at these venues to socialize, discuss fictional content in panels, attend video screenings, play games or buy merchandise. Anime conventions outside Japan often show a broader, cultural interest in Japan as exemplified by workshops in Japanese writing or making sushi. Fans can often meet media professionals at conventions such as actors, animators, ‘mangaka’ (Japanese comic artists) or translators.

Fan conventions of any genre offer fans a platform to express themselves. Dressing up is a common activity for anime, science fiction and fantasy fans. In anime fandom, however, this is most prevalent and diverse. The activity is referred to as ‘cosplay’ (an abbreviation of costume playing) in which fans create their own outfits inspired by fictional characters. To many cosplayers, wearing these outfits to the convention is the zenith of the experience. The cosplay competition tends to be the highlight of many conventions, during which fans strut the catwalk or perform short theatre skits. At

Animecon and Abunai, fans line up hours before the event, hoping to get a seat. Anime conventions also offer competitions in gaming, drawing or writing. The anime music video (AMV) competition is a common highlight in which fan editors showcase their own anime music videos that remix existing footage.

Though the emphasis may vary per country, the anime convention is many things at once: a commercial venue to buy Asian commodities, a platform for fan creativity and competitions, a performance event, a film festival as well as a knowledge space. The different features of a convention and their yearly editions also create different expectations amongst visitors. A newcomer will often go to an anime convention to get acquainted with the fiction and cherry-pick from the event schedule. Later, s/he might attend for social reasons. Some routine visitors enjoy watching videos while others focus on obtaining particular merchandise. Again others have a more creative focus and work on their costume months in advance or rent tables at the artist alley to sell their fan art or draw upon request.

In addition, non-fans fulfil practical roles such as volunteers and vendors. Since the convention is a public event, there are also guests (for example press associates or parents of teenagers) who experience the festival without much knowledge of popular culture. Though they may enjoy the convention, their affective experience is often not comparable to that of the fans because they lack the 'subcultural capital'; the shared knowledge, commodities and interest that bind the fans (Thornton 1995). Moreover, the convention spills out into the town centres as well. When attendees in costume wander outside of the convention building, they transgress the public domain. At larger conventions, an entire town may find itself transformed and residents will be aware of the festival. At smaller conventions, outsiders often address fans with remarks about their outfits.

Imaginative Space

The convention fosters the affect that visitors experience for existing stories. Making sense of such a media space cannot be restricted to spatial analyses, but must take reading processes themselves into account. In an exemplary study of media tourism and fandom, Reijnders (2011) observes that during a *Dracula*-inspired travel to Romania, many fans come to terms with the emotional impact that the story had on their lives. The journey is not just an affective process related to the story, but also to the situated reading process itself and the memories attached to it. Moreover, fans want to make the story more real

by joining the tour and checking the facts behind the narrative. This allows them to contextualize their reading ‘as it should be’.

Though their knowledge practices are different, the anime fans that I have studied are comparable to these *Dracula* fans in that they reiterate a story again at a site. Literary studies have often focussed on how readers partly construct their reading process and ‘actualize’ the narrative according to their expectations and experiences (for example Culler 1975; Iser 1976). This articulation is an imaginary space negotiated by the reader. At a convention and during a media tour, the story is purposely actualized through commodities, performances and references to it. The narratives are made visible and touchable.

Like the *Dracula* fans, anime fans go to a convention to experience the stories that they love again. The convention is a memory place that, although public, relies on private meaning and past experiences. Watching an anime on a big screen or seeing it re-enacted in cosplay means reliving it again. The many allusions at the convention ground require that fans contextualize certain characters and content, which creates a deeper relation with the text. The nostalgia that may result from the reacquaintance with a favourite narrative is also the effect of an imagined history. In other words, when we revisit a text, we embed it in our life story (for example Hunt 2011). Nostalgia is not only a side-effect of a reading then, but a mode of interpretation that valorizes the previous reading as well.

At fan conventions, actualization processes may be more difficult to interpret than in media tours. First, it is difficult to say what narrative is being actualized and in which practices this is most apparent. Unlike the narrative places in Romania, the convention is not a historical site but a constructed one in which the place is arranged to have connections to fiction. This is different from media tourism where fans go to places that are featured in a narrative and thus already bear a relation with the story. Moreover, the *Dracula*-fans rely on one story during their travel. The anime convention is more complex because anime is a mass medium with different narratives and genres that fans actualize (for example mecha, yaoi). At an anime convention, there is no shared repertoire other than that of popular series and tropes that function as a canon that binds fans.

Second, the convention does not just actualize fiction but also an imaginary space of Japan itself. Many of the visitors have never been to Japan. Through media, both fiction and non-fiction, they

align themselves with Japan's positive, fantastic imagery, which in marketing and politics has also been dubbed 'cool Japan', a term that originates from McGray (2002). At the convention, these ideas are re-enacted in fans' clothing (for example gothic Lolita fashion or a kimono), choice of words (for example by calling out 'kawaii', meaning cute) or by discussions about how a certain manga fits in Japanese culture. The identity of the anime fan is thus supported by different knowledge practices and texts that are associated with Japan and its soft but pervasive cultural power.

Socially Constructed Space

The affective space of the convention is a social construct that is defined by the visitors and staff and the location itself. The social experience, for starters, is an important affective drive. For many fans, meeting up with friends and making new ones is one of the main reasons to go to a fan convention. Indeed, most of my informants say that the most important thing for them is sitting on the grass or at the lobby, sometimes in costume, and talking to others about their shared interests. Though visitors partly create the fun by participating in events and fan practices, a convention should offer them options to enjoy themselves.

Still, anime conventions in The Netherlands struggle to draw a larger demographic and define their social space. Practical limitations such as the location, the price of hotel rooms and tickets appeal to certain groups and exclude others. Though the Dutch anime scene is quite diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity, it attracts many fans in their teens and twenties. The Animecon, for instance, has an average age of 22 but tries to cater to older groups as well, for instance through sake tastings (De Jong, white male, age 40–50). Tsunacon is happy to draw an even younger crowd. 'When the other daily convention, Chibicon, ceased to be, we filled its spot as the convention for newcomers', chairman Martijn Brandwijk explains (white male, age 18–25).

The social space of the convention is a complicated one that draws from different contexts. First, the convention is structured by the events (for example cosplay competition, music quiz, panel) and rooms (for example game room, workshop room) that provide different social contexts. Engaging in activities such as workshops with your fellow fans also creates bounds, but so does watching anime together. At a convention, there is an overall social atmosphere to enjoy things together; to pay homage to people dressed up as characters that you like, and to share hugs and jokes with strangers.

Still, a convention is a social space as any other with its downsides. Some fans, for instance, have prejudices about fans of particular series or characters and question them. In Dutch anime fandom, fans of mainstream content such as *Naruto* are often the butt of many jokes and assumed to be newcomers. Appreciating higher forms of popculture or cult is innately tied up to the fans' status and is often seen as a reflection of their membership in the community. Informal discussions at the conventions reveal that some fans consider the space slightly extreme, referring to teenagers that act loud or inappropriately towards strangers, for example by forcing hugs upon them, or that wear outfits that are too erotic considering their age. Though some events may foster social cohesion, others, like competitions, also complicate social relations in a negative sense. However, one informant told me that despite the competitive atmosphere: 'I met most of my friends at cosplay competitions' ('Sara', white female, age 18–25).

Second, the social context is constructed by the building and its layout. Social studies on architecture have often argued how spaces influence the behaviour of their visitors. De Certeau is exemplary in his cultural analysis of urban life and how spaces are negotiated by, for instance, pedestrians in Manhattan (1984: 90–110). Though space is an order designed by others, he shows that our performances (for example walking) and our personal histories make it into a 'spatial practice' that also allows for appropriation. Actors can change the meaning of places by defining their context differently.

Similarly, fan conventions appropriate buildings with different intents and fans personalize this context. Where many conventions in other countries are in conference halls, The Netherlands has small conventions that are also hosted in hotels, university buildings or schools, concert halls or sport halls. When a convention moves from one location to the other, the emotional attachment and the architecture of the place is illustrated concretely. At the same time a convention identity emerges independent of physical place and that is created by the community and the staff members.

Animecon, for example, has been held in four locations during its 13-year run. The last eight years had been hosted in a stylish theatre venue, Theaterhotel in Almelo. In May 2012, the staff announced that they would move to a large conference centre, The World Forum in The Hague. Staff members Niels Viveen, Jeroen van der Vaart and Matijs de Jong explained that even though they had a

good run in the Theaterhotel, professionalizing the convention far outweighed the sentiments. When scouting for a location, the staff also had many practical considerations (for example connections to public transport, amount of hotel rooms, good personnel) that shaped their choice. However, maintaining their identity as Animecon was just as important. 'The fact that we could create the same atmosphere for visitors was the highest criteria when we scouted for a new location', De Jong explains. In addition, he argues that not all anime conventions will care about the location whereas Animecon believes that the location 'attributes to the atmosphere'.

The Animecon staff perceives the convention image as a social, comfortable one, as they remark in Dutch 'onder-ons-sfeertje' ('a good atmosphere amongst ourselves'). In the architecture, they looked for buildings that underline this (for example, that have a good bar) and have a central room or lounge that forms the heart of the convention. Since Animecon had resided at the Theaterhotel for years, the move to the World Forum was met with criticism. However, eager fans explored the building in advance and reported their findings at the online Aniway forum (1–5 June, 2012) in the feedback topic of the convention. Some theorized about the functions of room, the space outside of the building (for example, the beach of the adjacent coastal town Scheveningen, potential restaurants) and the hotels. In their own way, fans affectively prepared for the change and found joy in speculating about it.

Space of Intimacy

The fan convention's affective qualities stem from its media-saturated environment, in which fiction is actualized and memorized, and its social and physical contexts. However, it is also an affective space where intimacy is shared in relation to fiction. Through its close connection with narratives, conventions allow for expression of one's romantic and sexual feelings in new ways. This becomes most clear in fiction that also invests in romantic relations.

To explain this further, I shall focus on YaYCon, a convention that emphasizes 'yaoi' and 'yuri', respectively, manga and anime that focus on homosexual and lesbian romance. Though these genres are not widely discussed in academia, the Western equivalents of these fan genres, 'slash' and 'femmeslash', have been considerably analysed (for example, Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1997; Pugh 2005). Yaoi and yuri, like slash, find their origins in the 1970s but unlike slash, these underground genres became mainstream media content. Slash however is still considered a fan genre,

but some scholars (for example, Jenkins 1992) discuss it as subversive or emancipative because it deconstructs heteronormative tropes in fiction. At the staff meetings of YaYCon (2010–12), we often discussed how to connect Eastern and Western fan genres and identify our convention as 'cult' or 'queer'.

This focus on queer texts creates an intimate, affective space in three ways. First, it is an 'intimatopia', as Woledge (2006) understands it: a space of intimacy as fiction in which men (or women) forge intimate relationships. Both in mainstream fiction and in its resulting fan genres, this closeness can be found and, arguably, it is often intimacy within the series itself that motivates fans to create slash or yaoi fiction or artwork (Gwenlian-Jones 2005). In Western fiction, intimacy may also refer to subtextual elements in which men get emotionally close but do not express this sexually.

In Japanese popular culture, intimatopia may operate differently because of a gender bias that favours strong male characters. Intimacy, moreover, often occurs in mainstream texts that highlight the chemistry between male characters, such as the butler and his young lord Ciel in *Kuroshitsuji*. At YaYCon, this gender bias can be observed by the many women that costume as men, known as 'crossplaying' (a portmanteau of crossdressing and cosplay), a term that also connotes men dressed up as women. Though this practice also occurs at other conventions, my observations lead me to believe that it is more common at YaYCon. Discussions with female fans also reveal that they often favour male characters as they are perceived to be 'better written', 'prettier' and as having more 'depth' (field notes YaYCon, 2010–11). I would argue that this gender play is facilitated partly by the androgynous image of Japanese *bishounen* (pretty young men), who are not coded as masculine and are therefore suitable for female interpretations and performances. Although this play allows fans to transform their gendered identity, it should not be set apart from the norms of the community where male characters are held in higher esteem than female ones; a result of Japanese storytelling itself.

Second, romantic fiction creates a space of shared intimacy between its audiences. This requires a broader understanding of Woledge's space of intimacy. Busse, Reid and Lotherian (2007) have defined slash fandom as a 'queer space', a shared intimate space between fans as writers, editors and readers of erotic fan fiction that cannot be restricted to the content of its literature alone. 'For us, slash fandom has become a place where a young urban dyke shares erotic space with a straight married mom

in the American heartland, and where women whose identity markers suggest they would in a few points of agreement have forged erotic, emotional and political alliances' (2007: 104). Women of different sexualities find common ground in sharing these erotic texts. Similarly, yaoi and yuri open an affective space for all its readers to enjoy intimate fiction together which is also a way of experiencing sexuality. YaYCon draws a diverse demography but many of the visitors are adolescent women.

At YaYCon, fiction creates a comfort zone that provides emotional closeness and even a space to discuss sexuality. The chair of the American Yuricon, Erica Friedman, also points out during her lecture at the 2012 edition of YaYCon that yaoi and yuri are strong media to 'experience one's sexuality because they are about emotional saturation'. She motivates fans to speak about their sexuality in relation to these texts. YaYCon is a fan convention that strongly connects sexual fantasy with reality, such as gay emancipation, and invites partners such as Stichting Outway to help adolescents with their coming-out. The rationale behind this – as discussed in staff meetings – is that queer fan genres target a larger queer demographic, even if it is also popular amongst heterosexuals.

Third, as in romance novels and soaps, the reader is also motivated to invest in the structure of the romance itself (Ang 1985; Radway 1987). In their study on soap fans, Harrington and Bielby (1995) adopt Eve Schowalter's concept of the 'wild zone' to explain that fans project their feelings on the romantic structures of the narrative. They invest in a constructed, fictional romance, which becomes a shared romantic experience in fandom:

> It is not that fans are infatuated with or in love with fictional characters. Rather, their emotional recognition of the pleasures of infatuation allows them to embed themselves in the love stories they see unfolding on television. Fans fall in love with a couple's state of love for each other (Harrington and Bielby 1995: 137).

These responses are applicable to how anime fans express their feelings within their communities, whether they support a heterosexual pairing ('shipping') or a gay one ('slashing'). Fans may identify with one of the characters more but, ultimately, they invest in the promise of romance. This comes to the fore at YaYCon as well, where favourite couples ('pairings') are subjected to critical discussion in panels, are drawn by fan artists or performed in cosplay and form the narrative theme of most of the fan

videos. In her lecture, Friedman (2012) jokes that men are attracted to 'visual porn', while women 'porn their minds'. The premise of romance, and its ultimate fulfilment, matters to them more than the sex.

At YaYCon then, intimacy is structured through fictional motives (intimatopia), the exploration of individual intimacy through fiction (queer space) and the relation between fans and their favourite couples (wild zone). The characters and love between them are a medium for fans to share their affect together. Affect becomes an intersubjective phenomenon then that signifies a relation between fans, but also between characters whose romantic potential is supported by textual and visual structures. This intimacy is what makes a fan convention unique. Though queer romantic fiction creates more layers of intimacy at a convention and additional forms of self-expression (for example, to perform a queer male), similar structures of intersubjective affect are found at all fan conventions.

Conclusion

The convention space is an affective space in several ways. First, it is a space of imagination in which affect for fiction is played out and also emotionally channelled. This cannot be separated from previous readings of the narrative and how these readings are situated in one's personal history. Second, the convention is a social phenomenon where like-minded individuals meet. It offers different social contexts and the contexts shifts according to the building the convention is hosted in. Organizations see it as their main task to provide this context. Third, affect can take on more intimate shapes when it mediates romantic fiction. Here, the convention becomes a strong platform of expressing and constructing one's sexuality and gender. The affective experience of the convention thus does not reside in the text but rather glues together social contexts, physical space and bodies. As long as these relations can be reproduced without much hindrance, the affective space can be recreated nearly anywhere.

Research on the convention space is much needed in fan studies. While online data might reveal patterns in fan communication and creativity, the offline space reveals fan cultures as they are lived, and provides ample situations to observe the identity markers and lingua franca of fans. The offline space can also be used in addition to online findings in a mixed method approach. Such a combination of fields and approaches is very suitable for future fan studies. While research on fans tends to demarcate online spaces or communities, fandom is a dynamic phenomenon and its communities are

heterogeneous and diverse. This combination of lived and mediated insights can effectively capture the experience of fandom which is never isolated, but always embedded in different affective contexts.

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