



Yaoi Zine 4

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my concept sketch for the cover

CANIS

In the spirit of bell hooks' dialogue chapter, 'Paulo Freire', in *Teaching to Transgress*, this is a similar, playful dialogue with versions of myself: sully glowtoads, as my writing voice and creative identity, and Nusrat Sultana, as my pedagogical and pragmatic front. I wanted to reflect on my experience with *Canis* in this way as it allowed me to approach with familiarity and intimacy that I could not find in another form. Here I share with you some of the warmth that growing around yaoi has given me.



Sultana:

Thirteen years on from first reading *Canis*, it's clear that you've been greatly influenced as a creator. Can you speak about why yaoi has touched your life so deeply?

sully:

before even getting to yaoi in the truest, purest sense of "gay comics written by japanese creatives", i was already thinking and caring about gay relationships. the feeling of taboo excited me. i was coming from a very closeted, claustrophobic environment, and in this transitional era between several identities: at that point, anything could have taken a hold of me. i was malleable and

changeable. when i did touch a yaoi manga, i was approaching it as a voyeur: i took it from my current position of alienation and saw a world that was totally separate. none of the characters i was reading about could have ever been me, and i think that was reassuring. of course, that's the kind of thing i can do as a creator. writing as a way of engaging with the world is about seeing everything as a source of inspiration. the connection between how i use ideas in my work and how yaoi writers use gay people as a storytelling device feels tongue-in-cheek, but i like it. in the end, i'm at a distance from the creators of yaoi too, and it's helped me to complicate my own identity as a creator, knowing that there is an impassable valley between myself and my audience. i'm distanced from even you as another identity, but i'm curious how yaoi has changed you, as one who engages with materiality in a way that a creative voice can't.



Sultana:

It's interesting that you talk about approaching yaoi with a sense of rawness, because looking back on my first yaoi manga has been revealing in ways that I hadn't anticipated. I reread *Canis* recently in preparation for this conversation, and was startled to see threads that I recognise in myself. The art style that I channeled in my own portraits, the saturation and textural interest that I've carried through to today: it's all *Canis*. I think I was lucky in my first yaoi. *Canis* was a sweet experience, centring on the growing relationship between a hatmaker and a strange boy he finds on the side of the road, who ends up becoming his muse and lover. Satoru's commitment to marrying his career and his relationship was probably wasted on a teenager (meaning myself, not Ryou), but the meteoric impact he left on my identity is something I would re-discover when I was trying to make it as a young, gay professional. I'd like to turn your earlier statement about authorial distance back around, and ask you to reflect on how *Canis*, particularly Satoru and Ryou's relationship, has influenced you to take refuge in that position.

sully:

yaoi as a genre exists in an openly homophobic world, and a similar tension grips me as a creator. whilst satoru and ryou are generally accepted for their relationship, i always feel as though i have to prove my worth as an individual before my own relationships will be accepted. much of my work as a creator is grappling with the inadequacies that i feel within myself. if what i make is good enough, will i be accepted? there are so many ideas that i want to work with, but i am fearful of what they reflect about me—specifically, i fear lacking control in how the audience will interpret what i put out. the reality is that i am still not in a position where i can make openly gay works, and conceptualising a distance between myself and yaoi makes that easier to bear. you've picked up on tangible connections between yourself and satoru as ambitious working professionals, and what influences me about satoru is that he takes ryou on as a muse before a lover. there's comfort—refuge—in how yaoi is artful in form. presenting yaoi as predominant-

ly another facet of art and ignoring the implications of that is one of the ways i keep myself safe, but i believe that's intrinsic to how yaoi has been interacted with since the very beginning. taking an honest, critical view on how i play with my toys feels dangerous in that it exposes the lie of a linear to-and-fro between audience, text, and author; i'm all three.



Sultana:

How does *Canis* work with ideas of vulnerability and honesty, and how do these both fit into yaoi as this second face to art?

sully:

canis is a tale of two stories, potentially three. the first story can be split into dear mr rain and dear hatter, but they're both about the growing relationship between satoru and ryou. this part is grounded in healing, with a particular focus on containing trauma within backstories. ryou's suicide attempt is curtailed, and he finds a new master to tell him what to do. satoru finds his muse. everything here is pulled together by the metaphor of the dog: *canis* can be flippantly described as a man's relationship with someone who reminds him of his dog. obviously, real life is not governed

by metaphors in that sense, but it fits the pattern of pattern-seeking—that is, the human tendency to make connections and find meaning in that. those backstories get pruned to match perfectly with what satoru and ryou want to find in each other. so i do think that the first part of *canis* is wholly concerned with honesty, even through the saccharine love-at-first-sight plot. it engages with the world that these characters have come from, by thinking about how to move them past that, and settling on a form of connection that exposes both characters. though, i think people are normal about seeing their partners as dogs now. what *canis* values through the dog is important to me; i appreciate how the first story links art, healing, and metaphor.

Sultana:

What of the second story?

sully:

satoru and ryou's story ends after two volumes, but zakk stays in the universe of *canis*. the speaker is tonally disparate, but i think zakk is concerned with the same ideas that they worked through in the dear arcs. that resonates with me as someone who reworks and worries over the same topics—it feels as though the characters involved in the criminal underground that were carefully contained in ryou's backstory took a hold of the writer and forced their way out. i think the presence of the speaker as a follow-on story shows that appetites have not been fully satiated, and that yaoi—as the audience of *canis* understands it—is diverse, and erotic, and obsessive. the speaker takes that dog metaphor and amps it up; it's like zakk has found their feet and committed. the dog in hal, nobu, and sam is not the kind that plays so nice. it has teeth. their story is about being honest only around each other, and the scars they keep worrying over are proof that they were once vulnerable together. look at where you bit me; you can't hide from this.

Sultana:

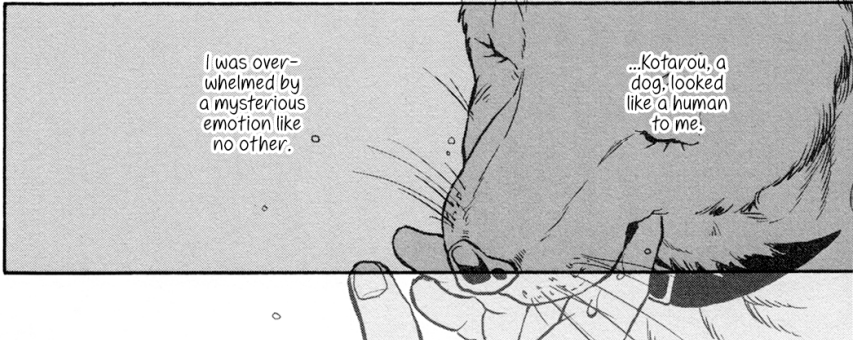
Dogs upon dogs.



When I noticed...

...Ryou, who is a human, overlapped with Kotarou's image...

...I remembered...



I was overwhelmed by a mysterious emotion like no other.

...Kotarou, a dog, looked like a human to me.

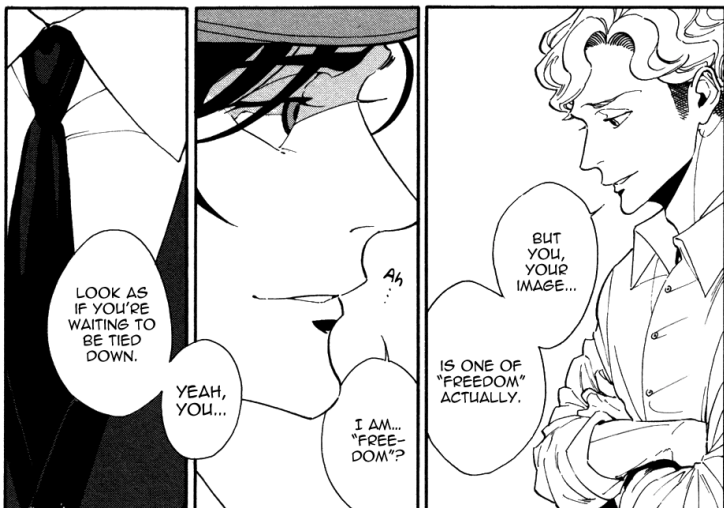


sully:

right! your own body of work as an educator has similarly revolved around ecology, particularly between animals, humans, and nature, which you never really seem to put to bed. what role, if any at all, does canis play in that?

Sultana:

It's hilarious to make the connection linear, and I like the idea that this has been lying dormant in me since first reading *Canis*. Consider how *Canis*, and yaoi in general, has to use the existing world of storytelling to platform itself. You mentioned earlier that the idea of taboo was exhilarating, and part of that comes from knowing that there isn't really a space for yaoi—so making a space for it, and partaking in that new space, is very transformative. It isn't the case that yaoi is inherently revolutionary, or progressive, but the act of making things multiple is resisting a sense of hegemonic unity. Re-thinking and re-presenting relationships between humans, nature, dogs, sexuality: this is perhaps one of the responsibilities of yaoi. Or, well, rather than a clearly-laid out responsibility, it could be something that yaoi takes ownership of its capacity to engage with. *Canis* encourages me to reconsider the supposedly natural separation of humanity to other species, as well as the construct of the metaphor as something that previously seemed impenetrable. The repeated thesis of the dog as more comprehensible than the human—Ryou locking eyes with the dog that his lover holds; Hal as a bloodhound hunting Nobu; Sam, wolflike, howling and biting, during sex—all build upon each other to create this superstructure of identity that values the process of becoming, rather than a fixed state of being, and which has this very beautiful core of love underpinning it. This approach to thinking about ideas



is powerful, and empowering. As you said earlier, I don't really start new work, but instead hold up the same ideas to a different light. I enjoy going through it all again with new knowledge and experience. *Canis* seems to be multiple ways of looking at a single dog, and that's very inspiring.

sully:

how does metaphor open up channels of connection in *canis*?

Sultana:

By rejecting separation to the other part of the metaphor, we enter an open space that is, as posthumanist Donna Haraway puts it, "a making available of events". What happens in this space is, essentially, communication that is removed from the boundaries of individual identity or, in the case of *Canis*, species. Satoru knows Ryou through his dog—he does not understand Ryou until he realises that the metaphor can be in play. Similarly, Ryou must choose to see himself as a dog to access his new relationship with Satoru, but also with his own history. It's important that the metaphor is a deliberate choice. As you said before, vulnerability is a route to healing for Satoru and Ryou. They can break down the complexities of a relationship into something that is distinctly understandable through the metaphor of the dog. Olga Solomon, who works in clinical paediatrics, talks about how dogs perform social actions that are "highly anticipatory, unhurried, structurally simple and easy to interpret," which makes it easy to anticipate the next move:

[t]he dogs reside not only in [the] 'here and now', but in a 'here and now' that happens over and over, allowing the children to practice being intentional, intersubjective agents.

The metaphor of the dog is dense with meaning, but that meaning is far more accessible than the distant human. When your lover is a dog, you don't have to worry about the fallacies of language getting in the way. Haraway calls the relationship between dogs and humans a "dance", itself another metaphor that I think reveals a lot: a

visual, visible entanglement.



sully:

returning to an earlier comment, what do you feel your responsibility is to *canis*, and yaoi as a genre?

Sultana:

There's a quote from Gengoroh Tagame that really makes me laugh. He's a figure I admire deeply, for both the beauty of his work and his openness about being gay whilst writing gay manga. Yaoi doesn't quite fit Tagame's favoured genre, but on the topic of allowing women authors who have been rejected from yaoi magazines for drawing men that are too "big" into his gay manga projects, he says:

Some people have problems with this, like 'BL is inherently anti-male.' Since it's inclusive of females, it must be exclusive against males. Others say that the nature of BL is inherently not feminist... I think regardless of gender, it's what you want to read, it's what you want to get out of it that's important. Men write porn for women all the time, so I think it's fine.

I want to take this quote alongside one from Kazuhide Ichikawa, another gay manga artist who is also openly gay but shares his identity with fewer people:

...because lots of my gay friends have helped me, I want to do something in return. By staying connected, I think gay people feel less isolated... Japanese gay culture cannot be analysed only from a manga point of view. You need to analyse it from how Japanese gay society and community is changing. How Japanese culture in general is shifting.

Both Tagame and Ishikawa are blunt about publishing in an institutionally homophobic society, and this is the same context in which yaoi like *Canis* are being published. Ichikawa takes an intertextual approach to reading manga, which I really like: for Ichikawa, the reader's responsibility is to consider his work not just as a tool to analyse Japanese culture, but also as a tool for shaping Japanese culture. Tagame takes a similar stance on turning the potential distance of yaoi writers (women) and their subjects (gay men) into praxis, by inviting women authors into a space with gay men authors and encouraging an "inclusive" porn. In both of these quotes the idea of community holds strong. There's safety there—but it's also limiting, insular, and potentially resistant to change. I talked earlier about a broad responsibility of yaoi in breaking boundaries and making space, and I don't think it's unreasonable to say that is also my responsibility. Yaoi has an immense readership, and of the gay imports from Japan, the popularity and impact of yaoi still leads. Many gay manga writers make their start in yaoi, and perhaps that contributes to why they speak positively about it. But I also think they recognise a shared root. Eroticism; community-building; the practical need for money. So in terms of pragmatic activism, I should champion their voices and ensure that they get a financial footing in their industry. I suppose what I'm thinking through is, "what do I, the writer, and the story owe each other?" I've signed up to be entertained, and to be made thoughtful; I owe it to *Canis* to come with an open heart, and meet the story on its own terms. On the mirror-side, *Canis* should reach back and connect with me as an audience member, albeit unexpected. My position as an outsider is never removed, no matter where I put myself. *Canis* itself considers the question of outsiders, on a textual level with non-Japanese characters in a predominantly Japanese setting

(and then reversed, with Japanese characters in New York) and further, on a genre level, with the yaoi-typical theme of existing outside the norms and expectations of monogamous and heterosexual relationships. So I must be careful of these cogent differences while reading. At the same time, it isn't responsible to artificially keep my distance. In the endpiece for Volume 1, ZAKK says:

In reality the [human of canis genus] biologically does not exist, but if we classify it as personality as well it might exist somewhere. A human with no owner, collapsed on the side of the road, might exist. To let it live or let it die solely depends on the human who touches it... Searching for someone's hand is more or less how I have drawn "Dear Mr. Rain", but in the end I have not grasped the depths despite looking far to find it; this will have to be enough for today.

ZAKK clearly feels a sense of responsibility in their work—a "searching" that they must attempt, if not ever complete. I find that quite moving. There's a danger of presenting responsibility as a cold, distancing thing, but I don't think it feels like that for ZAKK. And not like that for me either: it's in trying to build a connection that some of my most fruitful work as both a writer and an educator is achieved. Perhaps with *Canis*, trying is enough.

YAQI POSES

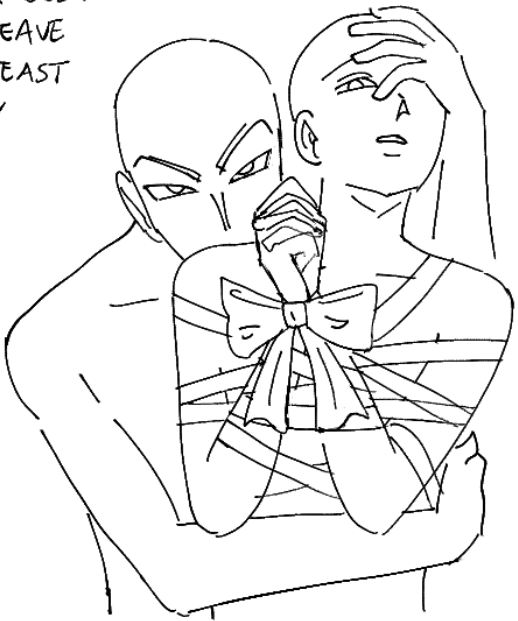
BY I'M GOING

FUJO MODE

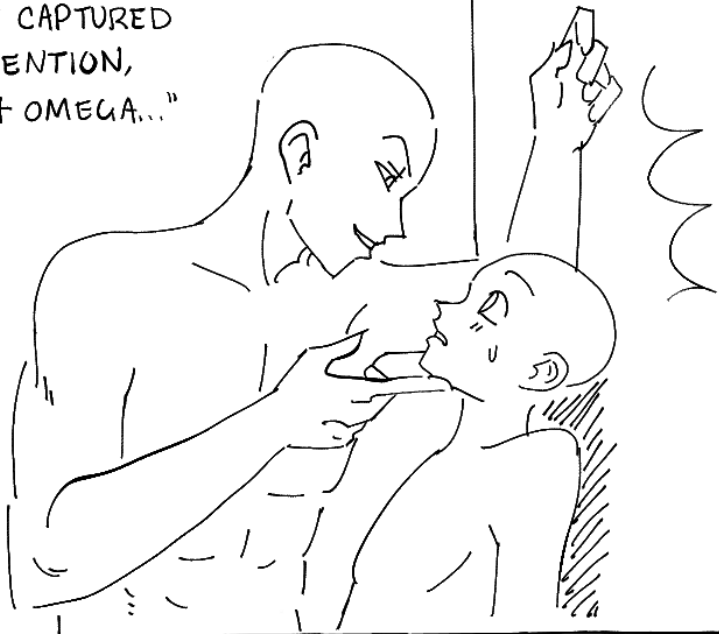
"Y/N... I ONLY
WANT YOU."



NOTE: FOR BEST
EFFECT LEAVE
UKE AT LEAST
PARTIALLY
NUDE

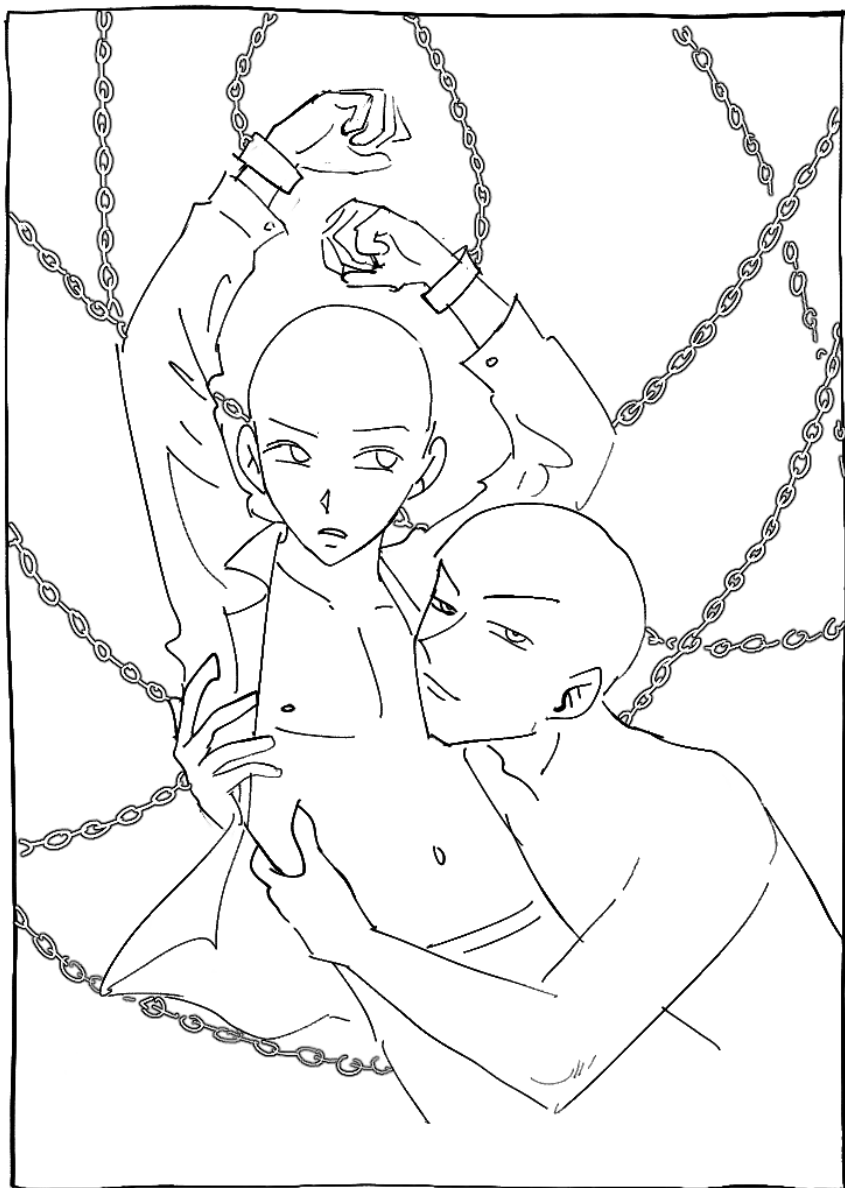


"YOU'VE CAPTURED
MY ATTENTION,
~~WOMAN~~ OMEGA..."

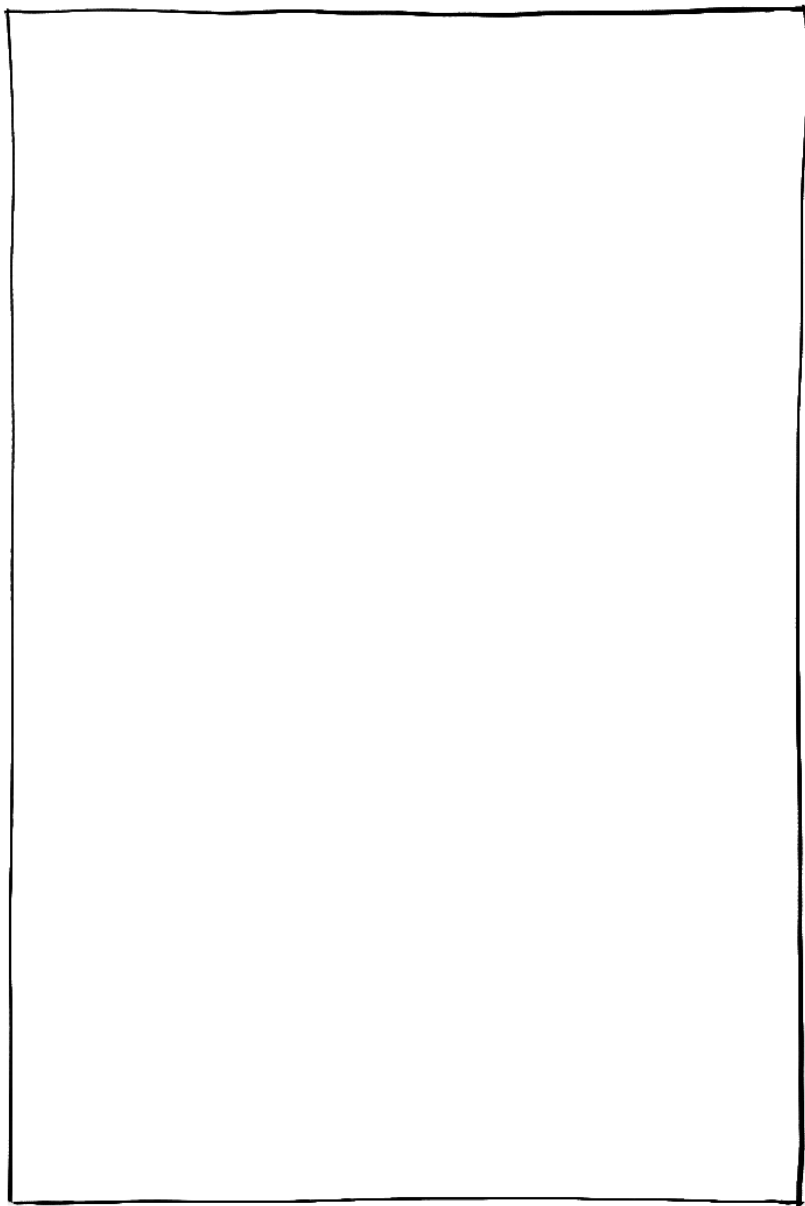


LEASH &
HEADBAND
OPTIONAL





SADOMASOCHISTIC LOVE STORY #81



FREE SPACE
DRAW YOUR OWN YAOI!





i start apologetically. that is, i begin by defending the inclusion of nu carnival. nu carnival is a “social simulation RPG developed for mobile devices” by a taiwanese company. that said, it competently styles itself as a japanese BL game. and as my friend xtine wisely put it, they moan in japanese. here, and here only, we embrace what xiqing zheng terms “global homoromance”--that is, “all female created, female consumed male–male love stories, including but not

limited to slash fiction, yaoi/BL/shōnen'ai and danmei.” whatever. the point is that i wanted to write about it and i'm editor in chief.

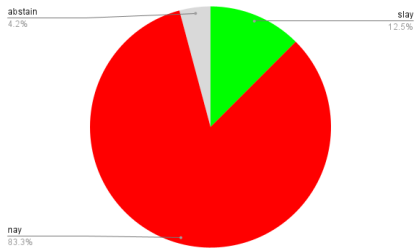
this project is derived from a collaborative effort with aforementioned friend xtine, who runs an ongoing participatory performance art series on his twitter @GALNAX entitled “slay or nay,” in which he invites the public to adjudicate whether a newly released outfit for any given character in the game is a “slay,” that being positively received, or a “nay,” the opposite.

we crunched some results, and we present some highlights here.

quincy perhaps surprisingly had both the worst received and the best received outfits. first up, arctic warden quincy:



arctic warden quincy was the most nayed, with 93.3% of participants agreeing that the look was trash. a slim 12.5% thought the look was a “slay,” and 4.2% cowardly abstained.



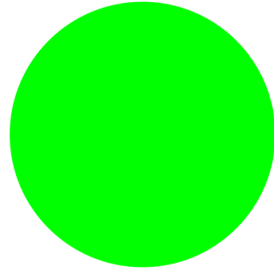
criticism was scathing:



The chaps don't even look assless

le went as far as to comment: “if i was stuck in the arctic with quincy without food or water i would kill eat and live inside him like in this movie i saw once”

but quincy achieved redemption with his distant promise outfit, the only outfit to receive a coveted unanimous “slay” rating.



that was not a palette swapped flag of japan. that was a graph of limited utility.



andre
@ghostisphere

undeniable slay people died

the only neutral to negative thing about this outfit came from xtine, who said:

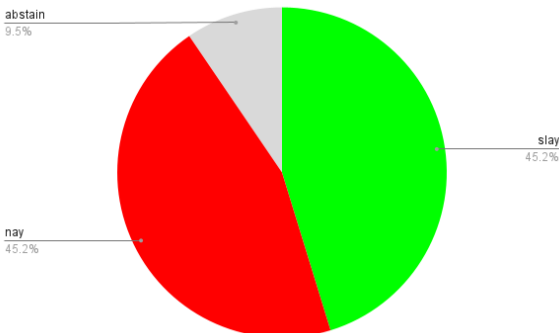


Okay im going to be honest i dont have much to say about this card bc its like one of 3 cards i dont have on any of my 4 accounts. Rip. i hear he's good. I don't even know what happens in his sex scenes

next up, you just have to experience howling cyclone garu, our most controversial outfit.



he is wearing two hats and has SIX ears. a lot of individual elements of this are cute but i'm baffled by the composite. they asked him what he was dressing up for halloween as and he said yes.



answers were perfectly split between slay and nay at 45.2% each. there were also 9.5% of people who chose to abstain.

those who felt positively about the outfit generally appreciated its excess.



ike

...

Full slay. He's wearing a lot but it's ok he's trying his best and he's still somehow basically naked

those who disliked the outfit generally disdained its excess.



THE payaso vanidoso

@hechizerias

...

why is he a mummy when he is already a werewolf also what the hell is that coat. nay too much nothing is going on

and those who refused to assign a binary rating also generally commented on its excess.



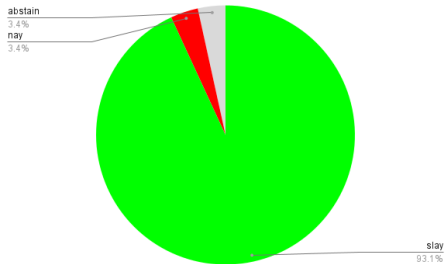
father of bean

@shedaeb

...

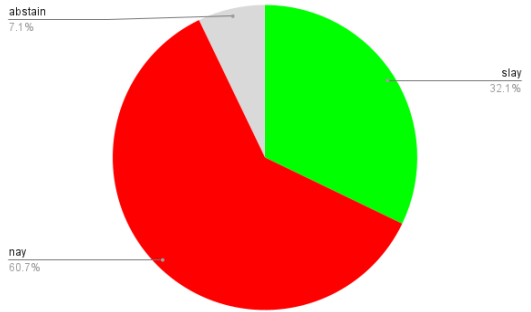
this is the gay guy at the queer event who's doing too much but he's very nice and also he's picking up dmt

most outfits were more normal in both looks and response. for instance, spring chaos edmond had a generally positive response.



even i, a known edmond hater, was forced to admit that this was his best outfit. the sheer pants, the garters, the low heels, the sleeves, the braid... this once, and only this one, edmond won.

dark nova yakumo had a generally negative response except for a couple strong voices.



those strong voices were:

not only does that slay as normal clothing i want that pussyslayer OUT on the library table. the illustrious temptation of his hidden figure. even his height stocked away like a little nerdboy turtle -- crossy

HOT. definite slay. i hope he gets really embarrassed and cries a lot and gets his erection made fun of in this outfit. -- isaac

in conclusion, gacha fashion, whether it be slay or nay, never ceases to entertain and amaze.

NU:CARNIVAL AND MARTHÄ NUSSBAUM: SEX- UAL OBJECTIFICA- TION IN MY YAOI EROGE GÄCHÄ?!

by Sash (@ineedacatchynal)

Exploitative business practices, overwrought character designs and superficial storytelling: My whole life, I've been a staunch opponent of gacha games. But then, something terrible happened to me. Not only did I download *a* gacha, I downloaded *yaoi* gacha, and we're not talking demure anime boys kissing, no. We're talking "pay-walled cock" *eroge* yaoi gacha. It seemed absurd to settle for any less.

What is NU:Carnival about?

In case you're unfamiliar with the game, I'd like to introduce it briefly. Nu:Carnival (henceforth shortened to NU:C) follows the magical journey of sex toy designer Eiden, who gets isekai'd to the vaguely medieval-ish Klein Continent. There, he discovers that he is the successor of the Grand Sorcerer who'd ensured harmony with the help of his allies until his sudden disappearance. Ever since, the world has fallen into disarray – and now, Eiden is the only one capable of restoring peace with his newfound magical abilities. While

traveling across the continent, he bumps into some of the Grand Sorcerer's old companions as well as their descendants, and as you might guess, they swiftly become part of his harem.

The specifics of the story aren't that important. What matters most is that Eiden is a switch vers and that the entire flora, fauna and magic system of Klein are designed to foster erotic encounters of the Live2D kind. Each skimpily clad "love interest" roughly corresponds to a certain archetype (e.g. "the stoic protector", "the arrogant prince", "the malewife", etc.) and with sufficient resources or luck you can unlock bonus content that fleshes them out further, be it through sex scenes or otherwise. Though most of NU:C's gameplay resembles that of a visual novel, there are times that have you, the player, engage with the characters directly by e.g. tapping them. Overall, NU:C has some surprisingly okay character work (enough to get me attached at least), and sometimes it does things like take a bold stance on nature preservation and prison abolition. Don't count on it though.

Edmond was right! The Warden really is using the prison as an illegal crowcave processing plant!

Yet, as charming as the worldbuilding of this porn game might be, something puzzled me.

Fetishization & BL¹

A specter haunts the land of fujoshis: the fetishization of gay men by cishet women. This is a common critique leveled against BL in general, one that you'll probably be familiar with. What does fetishization mean? Strictly speaking, we'd have to go back to Sigmund Freud, who coined this concept in the first place. However, I'd say the colloquial use of this term has come to mean something slightly less involved, namely, the sexual objectification of a human

1 I use the word "yaoi" as a flippant synonym for "BL", an umbrella term for Asian gay romance fiction.

caused by a fixation on one of their traits (physical or otherwise). It therefore seems like the crux of the issue lies in the ensuing objectification, rather than the fixation itself.

When I started playing NU:C, this discourse came to mind. To be precise, I felt like the game was encouraging me, the player, to sexually objectify its characters. It struck me as very strange.

Now, you might be wondering what the problem is. After all, this *is* a porn game and these 2D men were, in fact, created to be wrangled into compromising positions. On top of that, I don't even agree with the fetishization claim, nor do I have moral issues with explicit content. Still, I found myself inexplicably put off without being able to put my issue into words. Why did I care so much about the dignity of a bunch of pixels? Was I stupid? No, was it even correct to say that these fictional characters were being objectified?

To make sense of this mess, I decided to sit down and think. Let's embark on this journey together.

What is objectification?

In an essay titled "Objectification", the philosopher Martha Nussbaum defined the term as follows:

"One is treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being."

This might seem fairly obvious, but actually delineates a few necessary conditions that must be fulfilled for objectification to take place. We could rewrite the sentence as follows:

1. There is *one* (A) who objectifies.
2. There is *another* (B) who is a human being.
3. A treats B as an object.

If all of these three conditions are met, we can speak of objectification. However, we still haven't defined what it actually means to be treated as an object, i.e. the specifics of condition 3.

Nussbaum attempts to do so by listing seven criteria for objectification as it occurs in reality or fiction:

1. Instrumentality: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. Fungibility: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable.
 1. with other objects of the same type, and/or
 2. with objects of other types.
5. Violability: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. Ownership: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. Denial of subjectivity: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

Note that Nussbaum herself doesn't believe this list to be all-encompassing or absolute. Not every case of objectification will fulfill all criteria, and likewise, a relationship that fulfills a few of them is not necessarily objectifying. Some criteria are also weightier than others and carry a moral connotation, while others are neither intrinsically good nor evil. Nonetheless, this list is useful because it gives us the means to talk about objectification (sexual or otherwise) in a slightly more, well, objective way. As to whether characters in BL should be read as "(effeminate) men", "women with extra steps" or something else entirely, thereby potentially leading to a wider discussion about sexual objectification of women in line

with feminist theory, I decided to disregard that for now. This essay would have simply grown too long otherwise.

Now we have all the tools to revisit the original problem.

Are the characters in NU:C being objectified?

And if so, by whom? Let's take a look at the story itself first, i.e. the visual novel portion. Despite the omniscient narrator, Eiden is the protagonist and the figure of identification for the player. As the center of the harem, we are primarily experiencing the world from his perspective, hence we can safely say he's A, the one who objectifies. His love interests would obviously play the role of B, the objectified. Within the story, the characters are without doubt portrayed as humans (or humanoids, in some cases). The first two conditions for objectification are therefore fulfilled – then what about the third and most important one?

If we consult the seven criteria we will quickly discover that they don't apply at all. This may come as a surprise to some readers – after all, it's possible to have fleshed out characters who are objectified by the protagonist regardless. But NU:C does something interesting. Eiden affirms the agency, autonomy and subjectivity of his companions, who almost invariably suffer from repression or loneliness due to external circumstances. Characters such as Olivine, Yakumo or Edmond are sexually liberated by Eiden, who teaches them to surrender to baser urges. Conversely, more assertive love interests such as Quincy, Kuya or Dante find a worthy “challenger” in him, allowing them to emotionally connect with another person for the first time in a while. This is directly contrasted by Eiden's predecessor, the Grand Sorcerer, who used his companions to achieve his ends with little regard for their well-being. The story of NU:C makes one thing very clear: treating other people as objects is evil.

But what about the rest of the game? I would say that most BL stories in whichever medium posit the recipient as a voyeur who

cannot directly interfere in the story. For many reasons, the protagonist is rarely a blatant self-insert, but rather a proxy to be observed from a secure distance. Except that's not quite true here, is it? If I fondle the anime man on my home screen, it's because I want to, not because Eiden does (though he probably wouldn't mind). The protagonist disappears as the middleman between reader and object of desire, as does the diegetic justification of this action. Thus, the player becomes A, while the fictional characters take turns being B, which may include Eiden himself. Two questions are left: Is B a human being, and does A treat B like an object?

Let's look at the latter problem first, since it's easier to solve. Ownership is guaranteed, since you can effectively "purchase" characters with in-game currency, which are then bound to your account, not to mention that the player is addressed as "master" by the game. The fact that each character has nigh-identical doubles in form of other units, which in turn can easily be swapped out with one another, implies fungibility. The turn-based combat system, on the other hand, promotes instrumentality (e.g. "building units" as a means to win a battle) and violability (e.g. when characters take damage they lose their clothes and blush, which is to say, the player is rewarded for "hurting" them). What's left is denial of autonomy/subjectivity and inertness. The game encourages you to display the characters in varying states of undress, to touch them anywhere you please and to increase their "intimacy points" by gifting them presents, thereby unlocking sex scenes. Though characters respond in slightly different ways (and may grumble if you touch them inappropriately), none of them are programmed to rebuff your advances. You can't *decrease* intimacy points or ruin a "route" by misjudging a character's preferences. All of them share the same fate: helpless arousal. It is therefore safe to say that the remaining three criteria for objectification are met as well.

These observations would be rendered moot, if we concluded that "object" B wasn't originally human. In my opinion, they were. Of course I'm not claiming that fictional characters are actually sentient! However, as with most stories, the creator works hard to

convince us that we aren't just staring at words and pictures, but at something resembling fellow human beings. If we couldn't be tricked into believing that fictional characters were real on some level, at least for the duration of the story, empathizing with them would be wholly impossible. And so, if we are to consider NU:C immersive enough to suspend our disbelief in this manner, I think we might consider them *sufficiently* human – the narrative itself certainly spends a considerable amount of time telling us about the characters' worldviews and backgrounds, their thoughts and feelings. So how dare I grope Edmond's crotch unbidden when I'm informed that he has a mother who loves him dearly and worries about his workaholic tendencies?

This contradiction is what threw me off when I first started playing NU:C.

What does this *mean*?

It is precisely because the story humanizes its characters while strongly condemning objectification, that the rest of the game feels uniquely perverse. The gameplay is antithetical to the themes it wishes to convey, something that can feel quite troubling when it comes to a topic as sensitive as sexuality. It feels a bit immoral. But as we all know, thanks to Freud, taboos are sexy.

So perhaps this ludonarrative dissonance is deliberate. Rather than crafting a coherent message, the game leverages this contradiction to make a "taboo action" (i.e. sexual objectification) possible, from which the player can derive pleasure safely. For this purpose we must make that, which we wish to objectify, human first. After all, there is no "fun" in denying agency where none was to be had. We could therefore argue that the story of NU:C fulfills two purposes: imbuing its characters with just enough humanity to make objectification possible, while simultaneously reassuring the player that they aren't indulging in anything too terrible. Why would you be disturbed by the implications of this gameplay, if you knew that these characters wanted to be debased all along? Moreover, isn't

Eiden the one who is doing the debasing in the first place?

For a seemingly trivial porn game, NU:C sure demands a high tolerance for ambiguity from us. Just as the “realness” of these characters is in constant flux as we dip in and out of the story, the identity of A oscillates between Eiden and the player, while the remaining characters (B) morph from humans to objects and vice versa. Sometimes, it might even seem like the line between contradicting identities blurs: where and when do you stop being Eiden and start being the player? Is it possible to be a human and an object simultaneously? If so, what do you call such an existence? This too, is yaoi dialectics.

I don't understand. Should I delete NU:C?

Not unless you're developing a crippling gambling or porn addiction. However, it is true that I've been avoiding one topic that I only briefly touched on at the beginning: morality. After everything we discussed, we still haven't answered the question whether NU:C is Evil for objectifying its characters. Interestingly, Nussbaum doesn't believe that objectification is inherently bad, but highly dependent on context. It's easy to imagine how it could be fulfilling and consensual in a BDSM context, for example. My personal opinion on this matter is: I think NU:C is unlikely to contribute to wider societal problems by means of yaoi objectification. If you find meaning or pleasure in this game, then go ahead. However, I also think there's value in being critical of the gameplay and to question what other gachas or eroges are implicitly saying about human interactions. Whatever we read, watch or play will affect us, no matter how inane it might seem at first glance. Therefore, we must think seriously about the media we consume, the things we can't put a finger on – perhaps even more so, when it's something as “silly” as yaoi eroge gacha.

11PM BROWSING MANGAFOX.COM: YAOI/HONTOYAJUU

by zarintheI

Honto Yajuu, e.g., “Like the Beast”, first published in 2008, had volume 15 of its story translated and put online five months ago-- that’s right, it’s still updating in the year 2024, and I’m still reading it.

When I was first reading it, I think the go to site was still mangafox.com, before it got weighed down with so many ads that opening up that site now could kill a laptop with a single page. Now, of course, I read it on mangadex.com.

Such a huge difference.

Honto Yajuu is a love story between a cop and a yakuza.

Oh? An action adventure story? A tragic love? Torture? Misunderstandings?

Not at all.

Ueda Tomoharu is a neighborhood traffic cop who helps old ladies cross the street. His love interest, Aki, his the only heir to the local yakuza gang, but his ditzy and unreliable nature mean that he does basically no actual crime aside from his criminally bad fashion sense.

Wow, that’s so normal that it’s still crazy, somehow. If they both are

just chilling, then..

What's with that title?

Well it's about the fact that Ueda is into Aki to the point that he acts "like a beast" during (consensual) sex. Obviously.

It's notable because Ueda is someone who spends almost all of his screen time as mild mannered, sunny, calm, collected, and gracious.

Why did he become a policeman? Not because he likes helping people, although he does help people. But because he "likes people" and wanted to interact with them.

That's right, he says it with the same meaning as when Izaya Orihara (Durarara!) says it.

Liking to see people, liking to interact with people, but not considering himself 'part of that group'.

Of course, because he's a nice person, he doesn't talk people into jumping off buildings. He just lives an ordinary life.

Let's skip past all the plot about Aki's parents trying to recruit Ueda into the yakuza that makes up the casual drama and move deep into my favorite part of the novel: Ueda takes Aki back to meet his family.

He was always getting dumped, is what Aki learns.

Ueda, who was a perfect gentleman, was consistently dumped by every girl who he went out with. Because they didn't feel special to him, because it felt to them like he treated them no differently from before they had begun to date.

He admits to it-- to not understanding what they had wanted, to not understanding the difference between being friends and going

on dates, even though he'd deliberately taken them on dates because he knew that's what he was supposed to do.

In a shocking aversion to normal yaoi tropes, neither he or Aki are virgins, or, in fact, strictly gay.

Aki is bi, and was dating a string of other people before he fell in love with Ueda. We meet some of them-- most relevantly the porn star who remains a major side character. Excitingly, he's the exact opposite of Ueda: he was the guy dumping all of his lovers as soon as he got bored and wanted to move on.

Ueda had only previously been dating girls, and it takes him exactly two weeks between Aki's confession and him deciding that he could also be into guys. But, of course, he's not into "guys". He's into Aki.

So he could be gay, but that's never how I've read it.

That's right, I, the aro person, am claiming another one.

The series pivots on Ueda discovering and committing to what it means to more than "like" someone.

This is the second part of what the title is referring to.

Sex is not a dramatic story beat because it's always there and it's always good. It exists as a strikingly neutral part of a story where it, itself, is the daily life filler. Other acts of affection-- visiting each other's homes, offering a key, offering of rings...

Those are the dramatic beats. But the sex is constant and largely uncomplicated.

So, then, what can Ueda even be "like a beast" about?

He can, for the first time in his life, find an ex-boyfriend of Aki's

unpleasant to talk to even though he loves meeting Aki's strange acquaintances. He can be anxious that Aki's mom will do something crazy, he can be willing to call in sick and take vacation time because he suddenly has new priorities in life--

He can roleplay as a yakuza and get in a gunfight (lol).

By caring about Aki, everything in life that had flowed by easily now gets stuck, and forces Ueda to make judgements, to get angry, and to care about an entire world.

Aki is not the one changed most by the relationship.

By the time Ueda goes home, it's him who has changed so much that the man his family knew and the man Aki knows are irreconcilable.

Introducing Aki to them is nothing-- it's introducing himself back to them that is instead strange.

His younger brother is alienated by the fact that apparently his idolized older brother was capable of a level of stubborn devotion that he simply hadn't previously received. His parents are confused.

It's only his grandfather who's happy.

His grandson has something in his teeth and he isn't letting go.

What has he got?

Is it love? The rings, the key, the time he cracked his head on the windshield of a car looking for Aki, is it their honeymoon, where they dressed in suits and went to a hotel and then had the same type of sexy they always had.

How can it be 'just' love. Ueda loves his family, and always has.

And yet he didn't act like it. Until Aki, he failed to realize the need to 'communicate' love.

A blind man opening his eyes and saying oh, is that what you meant by the color red.

You're right, it's such a beautiful color.

And then looking down at his own clothes and realizing that he's been wearing red from the start.

Such a man was already born as a beast.

Not knowing love, yet experiencing love.

I do remember thinking, all those years ago--

Oh, I get it.

Even without feeling it, you can have it.

Happiness is like that.

YAOI CHRONICLES

MIDAS, TANAGURA - THURSDAY AUGUST 30, 1992 - SIX PAGES

*farm grown, no
pesticides, no
artificial
preservatives*

by **sabrin**

a collection of thoughts and musings about the farm grown ai no kusabi 1992 OVAs. spoilers ahead.

not quite a love story, but a chance encounter between two men that changes the trajectory of their lives forever. ai no kusabi starts us off with iason's thoughtless decision to save riki from a violent confrontation with the police. not out of the goodness of his heart (no such goodness exists) but merely acting on a whim. riki's impulsive reaction (backed by his pride) to this seemingly random act of kindness has led to the messiest entanglement of love, hate, and stockholm syndrome i've ever seen, probably. riki and iason lit a fire in each other in ways they never thought possible, and

in turn lit a fire in me that made me feel feral for three weeks.



mr jork
@bsinsopheur

Follow ...

AI NO KUSABI (1992 VERSION)

they dont make yaoi like this anymore this was farm grown no pesticides no artificial preservatives yaoi. we used to eat good. now we fight over microplastics esque yaoi. is it wrong to yearn for better times



10:00 PM - Feb 2, 2024 · 872 Views

[original tweet](#)

iason has always had what he's supposed to want. he is feared, he is respected. he has all the wealth and power he could ask for. he has human furniture at his beck and call and human pets to sit there and look pretty like little decorated ornaments. he has the perfect mind, the perfect body, and is one of the pillars of their godless society, yet he and the rest of the blondies are still worshiped. being worshiped is isolating. and dehumanizing.

so when iason comes across riki, who does not worship him, who treats iason with the same dis-

dain and devil-may-care attitude as anyone else, iason feels an emotion for the first time ever probably. he becomes obsessed with the feeling of being seen as something other than a mighty god, a divine creature of technology. the way his motivations switch gears after encountering riki for the first time was amusing to me, reading the novels was like watching a live play-by-play of iason's brain short circuiting every time he has a Feeling. because having an Emotion is way too human for someone like him, a half-android sorta-human blonde boy like himself... this is the beginning of iason's humanization project through yaoi and desire.

men (iason) only want one thing (and it's fucking disgusting). riki and his obnoxious leo energy (astrology source: me) seem to light a fire in everyone within a twenty mile radius of him and also turn their worlds upside down. he's such a polarizing character. most people hate him, and those who don't, love him for how aggressive and disruptive he is, the grenade that blows up everyone's understanding of the world around them and makes a dazzling spectacle out

of it. so despite the fact that iason has access to all the technology and advancements the world has to offer, none of it is real. raoul's biotechnological successes (read: eugenics projects) developed a capitalist fascist hellscape so profitable and so "efficient" but so far removed from the reality that grounds the human experience-- the body! that sensation of being alive. the pain and the pleasure. and he wants that to himself. his selfish desire to feel human morphs and mutates into his selfish desire to have riki all to himself, even if it costs him everything.

iason cared not for his status as at Blondy. The power, the prestige. Desire—to dominate, to subjugate, to possess—took hold of him and filled his thoughts. Desire for Riki's exquisite, frail, organic flesh. **And envy for the sensations that iason himself could never feel.**

He, a Blondy, immortal in all but name, envious of flesh condemned to mortality?

Was it so?

from volume 7 of the novels

ON DENYING DESIRE...

*Let go of your
conscious self and act
on instinct*



"If I said that I—that I loved Riki, would you laugh, Raoul?"

iason is told by his peers that what he wants cannot possibly be. that what he wants is below him. that his desires are undesirable. that his search for humanity has no value. which only makes iason reject the social rules of Tanagura more forcibly. he is so overwhelmed with his need to feel what riki feels, to experience the best and worst sensations at the same time, to feel something in his that mechanical body of his, because it's the one thing his so called perfect body isn't engineered to do. why is it that the main cultural economic engine of Eos is its showcase of sexual exploitation, but those who reap the benefits of that labor physically cannot touch it themselves? i dunno. it's enough for iason to question the values of the Tanagura elites, and it's what pushes him to accept the consequences of rejecting it all. if *that* [points at riki in a puddle of his own tears and jizz after being edged

for hours] *isn't what you consider the pinnacle of life itself then i don't want what you're selling me.*

yaoui eugenics...
yaoui biopolitics...

i'm reading too much into this

for a world that's literally built on exploiting desire itself for power and profit, it's funny how iason crumbled the moment he experienced that desire for himself. something something about the biopolitics of his own created society ended up incarcerating himself in the process thru the self-policing done by the other blondies. "no you can't want him like *that* you have to want him like this." etc etc.

ON LETTING GO...

iason mink learns life lessons

"if you love someone, set them free. if they're yours, they'll come back to you." is bullshit (or is it?), according to one insane stalker iason (riki's words, not mine). after all, iason tried that already! he let riki go back to ceres after three years of cap-

tivity, but he never actually let go of riki. *be free!* he said. *i still have your name on the pet registry and you're still legally mine*, he didn't say. iason, the man that he is, made sure to keep the legal ties between him and riki in tact as a form of insurance. no matter what, riki is still his. but that's not really setting someone free. which is why, when riki came back a year later, he wasn't really his. not yet, at least.



riki turning back to be with iason one last time after iason finally let go

in fact, it's not until the very end, until it's too late for him, that iason truly lets go of riki. it's only when he's confronted with how much guy means to riki that he relents, because unlike kirie, he doesn't want riki to really hate him. he'd rather die loved by riki than live and be hated by a man who hates himself. so when he saves guy, and saves riki, sacrificing himself, he lets go of riki for realies.

only when iason truly let go of riki, did riki come running back. only when riki realized the weight of iason's desire (or if you're watching the super romantic 1992 OVA, love) for him, did riki finally give his heart to iason. witnessing iason abandon himself and everything he stood for is what made riki

turn back, to give iason not only himself, but one last act of comfort. i won't let him die alone. because after all this time, riki learned what people mean to each other. he knows that people need to lean on each other, and so riki leans onto iason, and iason leans onto him. and so in the end, iason died with riki in his arms, holding onto what was given to him willingly (this time).



people need each other, people need to lean on each other, so riki leans on iason

there's just something too yaoulicious about iason mink, Tanagura's favorite genius boy, losing all

rational thought when it comes to riki (because since when is yaoi ever rational) and riki, the clever charismatic cutthroat leader of the bison gang, confessing to katze that being with iason makes his head spin? that he can't help being with him? their yaoi is explosive, impulsive, chaotic, disorderly, and permanently world-altering. their yaoi developed from the process of their own undoing. the way they grapple with their desires clashed with their society in a way that led them to a path where the only choice was to self-destruct. self-cannibalize. yaoi that burns so hot there's nothing left but ash and some leftover liquid nitrogen (thanks guy!).

and i think that's what makes the yaoi of the late 90s feel so different from BL today. ai no kusabi is yaoi that burns hot and burns out. it's not about a happy ending, it's not about living together in domestic bliss after all the horrors they've endured, nor is it about "pure love" as reiko yoshihara puts it.

ai no kusabi is more focused on the bonds created by that first chance encounter and the emotions that come out of it ([1989](#)

[interview](#)). ai no kusabi is so focused on what it means to need someone that nothing else really matters. they were never meant to live happily ever after. they were meant to run into each other, crash, and burn in the heat of their own fiery yaoi passion



YAOI!!!!!!

which is why i love the "microplastics esque yaoi" phrasing of that initial tweet so much. something about ai no kusabi burning hot and burning out vs microplastics esque yaoi of today built to last forever (happily ever afters, domestic dynamics, etc etc) while sacrificing the intensity of their desire. something something. i just know that i love my wildly absurd, all-consuming, 90s yaoi. the yaoi that

feels like that one image of the alpha wolf ripping his shirt off. perhaps nothing was meant to last forever... do we really want to fight over microplastics esque yaoi that will outlive us?.

so yes, ai no kusabi is ridiculous. it's tragic it's melodramatic it's problematic and it's hot. but it is also Raw. ai no kusabi showed me how yaoi can be both self-destructive and totally healing. ai no kusabi is yaoi that centers the meaning of desire, and what it costs. iason's feelings for riki caused him to abandon everything he ever was- to give in to his desires.. riki's feelings for iason caused him to lean on someone, fully, for the first time in his life. learning what it meant to be human. getting both ends of the yaoi love give-or-take spectrum is what makes ai no kusabi so special to me.

*i so cherish these
moments when you
defy me. when you
react to me so
humanly.*

- iason mink

how am i meant to move on from this... how am i meant to move on with the rest of my life when iason mink himself said, "*i feel myself tingling right down to the center of my brain. i love how you look at me with such undisguised disdain. it's so endearing i want to rip out your beating heart and press it to my cheek.*" is he crazy? is he crazy?? yes.

NOTES ON CONTAMINATION AND COMPLICITY: *SLEEPING DEAD* AND THE POLITICS OF YAOI CANNIBALISM

by Elliott Queerapika

Note: this essay contains allusions to and brief descriptions of rape and sexual assault, including dehumanizing rhetoric about said assault, as well as spoilers for *Sleeping Dead*.

“Sorry for dirtying you with human meat,” former high school teacher Sada Seiji thinks as he places a tupperware container in his hotel room fridge in Chapter Eight of Asada Nemui’s manga *Sleeping Dead*. Sada is on vacation with his captor and semi-friend Mamiya Touya, the scientist who brought him back to life as a cannibalistic zombie after he was stabbed to death.

Of course, this vacation isn’t really a vacation so much as a murder trip—at least initially. What’s keeping Sada living even though he’s technically dead is “a mold-like bacterium that uses the blood as a

breeding medium,” which gives his body black blood, a low temperature, instantaneous healing ability, and the need for an exclusively cannibalistic diet. This means that every couple of months, Sada and Mamiya need either to locate a corpse, or create one, in order for Sada to stay alive.

The usage of cannibalism as a plot device, layered on top of Sada’s kindly-seeming and morally scrupulous personality—and contrasted with Mamiya’s antisocial behavior and largely amoral worldview—creates a crucible of conflict and tension where theoretical ethics and the actual practices of living collide.

Similar to other horror media where cannibalism is a feature—the televisual adaptations of *Hannibal* and *Interview With the Vampire* come to mind—*Sleeping Dead* doesn’t treat eating people as a metaphor, or at least, not exactly. There’s no one-to-one equivalence here between cannibals (or vampires, which for the purposes of this brief reference I’ll risk treating as a subset of cannibalism) and, say, members of a group currently marginalized by society, a fact made perhaps more compelling with the understanding that each of these horror properties is overtly queer in terms of its character dynamics.¹

This plays out over the course of *Sleeping Dead* in a couple of different ways, which I will articulate here in the briefest manner because I’m almost out of time even though I got an extension on this essay (thank you tshirt. Sorry tshirt).

So, the first thing I should probably say here is that I primarily owe my understanding of contamination and complicity as interrelated phenomena to Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” I will only gesture towards the manifesto here, but I urge those

1 Alright, I GUESS you can argue that *Hannibal* isn’t overtly queer, but I think you’d have a hard time proving it. Also it aired a decade ago, notions behind what constitutes “representation” have changed, etc.

of you who may be interested to google it; the top result is a freely accessible pdf copy.

In short, Haraway argues for the utility of the cyborg figure as both fictional representation and lived experience for women in the late twentieth century, one which traces both social and embodied realities. From a materialist perspective, women today are always already cyborgs—the boundaries between human, machine, and animal have become “leaky,” fatally undermining the certainty of what can exist under the rubric of the so-called natural.

If we look at *Sleeping Dead* with this in mind,² it becomes clear that it’s not so much about the specificity of cannibalism as a particular and unique form of exploitation, but rather that, due to the lack of distinction between human, machine, and animal, we are all always already cannibals—it is just a matter of degree. This is somewhat akin to the popular refrain “there is no ethical consumption under capitalism,” but whereas people who say that seem to use it as a pass to kind of just do whatever, understanding cannibalism as a fundamental and quasi-universal system of relations that undergirds twenty-first century life really ought to prompt us to problematize our current ways of being.

Sleeping Dead uses the plot device *and* reality of cannibalism to nail down the emotional and material stakes of its yaoi. A major driver of the tension between Sada and Mamiya is the way in which Sada’s biologically necessary cannibalism forces him into isolation with Mamiya, who tells him he’s the only one who can ever even

2 Observant readers may notice that the protagonists of *Sleeping Dead* are not actually women. I’m going to make a claim I don’t really have room to fully support right now, which is that Haraway’s assessment can be extended to some marginalized subjectivities other than women due to the misogyny underlying social forces such as homophobia. For further reading, please see the introduction to *Feminism Against Cisness*, edited by Emma Heaney, which is available to read for free on the Duke University Press website.

begin to understand him. The two argue over how to determine who to kill for Sada's food supply, with Sada strongly believing that no one actually deserves to die and Mamiya holding that the most vulnerable people in society will be the easiest to get away with murdering. They eventually come to an agreement to choose victims based on the evil they've already done in the world. While Sada's conscience isn't entirely satisfied, eventually he tells Mamiya he has come to terms with having to eat other people as a means of staying alive. This is, of course, a type of complicity.

The manga delves further into complexity when it's revealed that Mamiya and Sada were former classmates—a fact known to Mamiya, but not initially to Sada—and that Sada, as someone well-liked and respected by teachers and bullies alike, largely pretended not to notice as Mamiya was bullied severely to the point of sexual assault and rape (though to his credit, Sada had no way of knowing the bullying had escalated to that level). While Mamiya initially takes pleasure in the irony that Sada has gone from beloved teacher and former honor student to murderous cannibal, he eventually concedes that he bears no particular hatred for Sada himself so much as for people who pretend they are not complicit in the suffering of others.

In keeping with Mamiya's scientist nature, there isn't a buildup of sexual tension between the two men so much as there is Mamiya's desire to experiment—literally. About a third of the way into the manga, Mamiya chains Sada to his bed and gropes him under the guise of a science experiment, despite Sada's overt statement that he is being sexually assaulted. Interestingly, the openly gay Sada breaks free of one of his restraints and turns the tables on Mamiya, flirting with him and offering to give him a blowjob. Mamiya, seemingly confused that one of his experiments has taken charge of the situation, and presumably triggered by his high school trauma, reacts poorly to this, tasing Sada and ordering him to never touch Mamiya again. The next morning, Mamiya calls Sada's behavior "violent," to which Sada responds that Mamiya had assaulted him—and to which Mamiya replies that Sada is his property, and

that if that was assault so is artificial insemination of cows, which. Yeah. Sada is understandably horrified by this, but, probably because this is yaoi, it's not inherently a total game changer.

Eventually Sada and Mamiya do have consensual, unsatisfying, kind of bad sex which I honestly love for them. But I'm getting away from my point, which was that themes of contamination and complicity serve as throughlines in this yaoi; the "leaky" (as Haraway would say) boundaries between human and animal especially highlighted in Mamiya's initial treatment of Sada as an animal experiment, and with the function of the motif of cannibalism itself as an interrogation of those boundaries and our complicity in blurring them to our own advantage.

Haraway writes that her manifesto is "an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (emphasis in original). I hope that these notes on cannibalism and yaoi, while hardly comprehensive, can serve as a sketch gesturing towards the same.

SHIT HAPPENS: *SWEET POOL*, GENDER, AND VIOLENCE

by tshirt

Content warnings for *Sweet Pool* include sexual assault, cannibalism, child abuse, gore, kidnapping, and self-harm. This essay will discuss those topics.

YOUR CHANGING BODY:

He didn't understand what was happening inside his own body—and that terrified him.

He knew that he should see a doctor straight away. It was always better to address health issues promptly, rather than allow them to fester.

And yet, he couldn't bring himself to pull the trigger.

He was just... scared.

Scared to learn exactly what was taking place inside him.

Quick, what's causing these symptoms: puberty or an unholy para-

site? In *Sweet Pool*, the answer is probably somewhere in-between. In the studio's own words, this is what *Sweet Pool* is about:

After recovering from a serious illness, Sakiyama Youji hoped that things would finally get back to normal. But shortly upon returning to school, his world begins to change—and no one seems to notice. Bizarre symptoms plague his body, and vivid hallucinations of blood and flesh stalk his every waking moment. At the same time, two fellow students — the stoic Tetsuo and the notorious troublemaker Zenya — begin to take an intense and inexplicable interest in him.

What are Tetsuo and Zenya after? Are his hallucinations really nothing more? Everyone seems to know more than they're letting on—but by trying to put the pieces together, Youji may be sowing the seeds of his doom.

So the game is literally about being the host to a parasite, and thematically about puberty. That much is obvious. Now, Youji is, as the game helpfully reminds us at its onset, above the age of 18. He has already experienced his first puberty. So this is his second. And you know who else has a second puberty? By the way, rather than read Youji as trans Jesus-cum-Eve, one could read the second puberty as allegorical for the first. But first, that's boring. And second, Youji goes through a specifically feminizing puberty at odds with his coercively assigned gender at birth. Despite the similarities this may share with a trans woman's experience of HRT, Youji reads as a trans man due to his horror at this experience. We are working towards a yaoi theory of transgender puberty here.

To be clear, I am not making the claim that Youji is "secretly" canonically trans or that Nitro Chiral is sending me hidden messages. Rather, I am arguing that when writers decide that they need to be misogynistic towards a gay man for yaoi purposes, they often cleave to one of two lines, each corresponding to a trans experience. Namely, they can choose to embrace anti-effeminacy, depicting

a brutalized proto-trans woman; or they can choose to embrace feminization itself as horror, depicting a proto-trans man. Because *Sweet Pool* is concerned so centrally with the protagonist's emerging reproductive capacity as horror, Youji is more characteristic of the latter transmisogyny-exempt experience.

My dear mutual and Yaoi Zine regular Cel refers to his shits as omegaverse births. Although *Sweet Pool* anticipates omegaverse, being two years its senior, the parallel is obvious. Youji gives birth repeatedly through his anus. To put it uncouthly, he shits out meat babies. That's what the synopsis delicately terms "Bizarre symptoms." This is accompanied by a regular pseudo-menstrual cycle.

***He lay there, still as a corpse, for what felt like hours.
Then, suddenly, he felt a damp warmth on his leg.***

He knew it could only mean something unpleasant, but he barely had the energy to get up. Sluggishly, he forced his body out of bed.

He felt neither panic nor surprise; instead, he was perfectly calm.

Unbuckling his belt, he slowly lowered his briefs along with his slacks.

"...."

Even now, he felt no surprise. This had become almost normal for him.

You see why the transgender reading is compelling. *Sweet Pool* bravely asserts that there's nothing harder than being a trans man on his period.

The descriptions of his stillborn "births" are similarly vivid. It could easily be mistaken for a faithful depiction of period shits.

His body knew what was going to happen next. There was no stopping it, no matter how hard he tried.

The pain in his gut swelled as something grew inside him.

With sweaty hands, Youji loosened his belt and lowered his pants and underwear.

His entrance burned as the first trickle slid down his thighs.

Shame filled his heart to bursting.

All he could do was gasp for breath and wait for the nightmare to end.

The swelling in his abdomen grew rapidly, until it was almost too much to bear. Then, finally... the tension drained from his body.

"Ugh..."

Now, careful readers will note the scatological motif that has developed. A yaoi theory of transgender puberty really seems to resemble a transgender theory of shitting. The two find their common ground via abjection. As Susan Stryker writes in "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage":

To encounter the transsexual body, to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk a revelation of the constructedness of the natural order. Confronting the implications of this constructedness can summon up all the violation, loss, and separation inflicted by the gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness. My transsexual body literalizes

this abstract violence.

Both shit and the trans body disturb the social order and draw attention to its artificiality. While Stryker is making a point about the figure of the monster, shit is easily monstrous to us. As Julia Kristeva explains in *The Powers of Horror*:

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.

What is interesting to me here is “society threatened by its outside.” We can read, as Stryker does, the trans person as “monster,” trans people as outside of the constructed natural order. But we can also read puberty—and the coercive process of being gendered—as something from the outside that threatens oneself and one’s unity. Puberty, in this view, becomes something done to you. So shit horror is trans horror.

But Kristeva goes on to talk about another kind of polluting object: menstrual blood. She says:

Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.

Where shit contaminates and sticks from the outside, menstruation contaminates from the inside out. Menstrual horror is the horror that you yourself are trans. Youji experiences the two in tandem, becoming a person who shits alongside becoming a person who births—an abject woman of a sort. More on that later.

Anyway, to be clear, as Taro Gomi’s *Everyone Poops* teaches us, everyone shits, not just trans people. In his *Three Essays on the Theory*

of *Sexuality*, Sigmund Freud describes the anal stage as something all infants pass through. Early on, we experience shitting as a source of pleasure: “The contents of the bowels [...] act as a stimulating mass upon a sexually sensitive portion of mucous membrane...” Moreover, shit is the infant’s “first ‘gift’: by producing them he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience.” This perfectly mirrors the binary choices that are the gameplay of *Sweet Pool*. Blerdy Otome writes:

There are no “good” or “bad” choices, rather, your decision to either follow Reason or Instinct helps shape Youji’s feelings towards his fate at the end of the game. It’s the choice between having your fate thrust upon you or deciding to embrace your fate.

You can shit, or you can withhold. You can choose instinct, or you can choose reason. *Sweet Pool* dramatizes the choices an infant faces as it ages, highlighting the theme of puberty even further. So, everyone shits, but Youji’s life and only choices revolve around it. He’s this monstrous trans abject piece of shit.

Now, what happens if Youji embraces that? By choosing the Instinct option every time, you get the pure shit ending. As the game describes that ending’s final scene:

Meanwhile, Youji and Tetsuo’s bodies were changing. The dark protrusions were growing more prominent, veins extending over every inch of skin.

Their bodies were beginning to fuse together, as well. Their skin stretched and melted like rubber.

They were becoming one—inside and out.

With each thrust, his inner walls seemed to cling tighter to Tetsuo’s length. Tetsuo must have felt it too, and still

he kept going.

Nothing could separate them now. They would be joined together until the very end, until only a single flesh remained.

A helpful term here is Bini Adamczak's neologism "circlusion." It is the antonym of penetration. If tab A penetrates slot B, slot B *circludes* tab A. It reframes who is the active participant and who is the passive participant in sex. As Youji's inner walls cling tighter, Youji subsumes Tetsuo. He circludes. This is a victory for anality, a victory for circlusion.

Freud could tell us what happens next. Their merging leaves behind a single child, to be discovered by another character. This shit baby is anticipated by his analysis of young children: "From being a 'gift' [shit] later comes[s] to acquire the meaning of 'baby'—for babies, according to one of the sexual theories of children..., are acquired by eating and are born through the bowels." So it's a victory for shit as well. That's why it's my favorite ending. Let's talk about something even darker.

LIKE A WOMAN:

Now we venture deep into the guts of the elephant in the room. It's time to talk about rape and masculinities in *Sweet Pool*. Youji is raped by each of the "love" interests in the game. This is typical for the publisher and genre. I am not saying this for shock value, but rather to argue that because rape is so central to the game, it ought to be analyzed.

As Tetsuo rapes Youji, Youji reflects on his powerlessness. From there, it is an easy slide to reflect on his gender.

This was not the first time Tetsuo had made him feel so powerless.

Would it happen all over again?

Didn't Tetsuo ever tire of breaking him?

Then, something occurred to him.

Was he trying to... use Youji like a woman?

Maybe he'd grown tired of the real thing and was looking for a new toy to play with.

That had to be it. Nothing else made sense.

And with that thought, the dam burst, unleashing a torrent of rage and shame.

Rape is a process by which Youji is both gendered and degendered as a woman. I want to spend a moment with the language of “the real thing,” as it pertains to both sex and sex. Consensual sex is the real thing; cis women are the real thing. But Youji becomes “like a woman” by being raped. So ideology meets ideology here. Simultaneously, [cis] women are the people who are raped, and rape is what happens to people who do not meet the criteria of cis womanhood. We see an easy connection to trans experience here, and the difficulty of parsing through corrective violence against trans people, and misogyny. A careful reading of the idea of “like” a woman can correlate to transmasculine experience without making any claims that transmasculine people are “like” women.

[Cis] men are raped, too, of course, but in the context of *Sweet Pool*, it makes sense to read rape as part of the highly gendered pubescence in which Youji finds himself. This is the space that yaoi plays in, with its like-women, who are both substitutes for “the real thing” and made realer than the real thing by the process of possessing abject womanhood in the absence of women.

And where are the women? They're presumed to be the viewer of

the scene of abjection. This is not to say that the only consumers of BL are cis women, or even women, but rather that the genre is conditioned by this expectation. And to refer to my previous work in *Yaoi Zine 2* and *Yuri Zine*, we know that the fantasy of yaoi “is a scopophilic fantasy, where the pleasure is in looking”, which in turn “creates both identification and dissociation with yaoi characters...” Here again, “like” a woman appears. This allows for the generic tension between the elevation of women’s pleasure via displacing violence onto men, and the denigration of women via the act of bringing a male character low by his similarity to a woman.

It is clear the scene is meant to titillate and only secondarily to repulse the viewer. If not, how do we explain the orgasm CG for a rape scene? This is not to say that rape is not rape if it is pleasurable; this is actually a central conflict for Youji in his post-traumatic interactions with Tetsuo. Rather, by treating a rape scene as a sex scene in the traditional BL visual novel style, even as Youji’s anus leaks blood from the assault, we learn that *Sweet Pool* derives gratification from his subjection.

I have no particular desire to make a judgment call on that. Like, *Sweet Pool* thinks rape can be sexy? Should we tell everyone? Should we throw a party? Should we call Koogi? But there’s any number of things that can be read into that. We can read it as further commingling of the grotesque and the erotic that makes up the bulk of the game, as it dovetails with the abject eroticism described in the shit section.

We can also read the stylized sexual violence as being part and parcel of the genre, along with its distorted bodies. As AI @actualhamlet writes in *Yaoi Zine 2*, in the fujoshi’s view, “Gay love between two men is simply too powerful and emotional to be depicted using a natural depiction of the body.” We here view rape as sexual excess, spilling into violence from its immensity. She further explains that “The yaoi body is a language that a fujoshi learns in order to quickly understand the story and roles being presented to them.” These narrative codes presented to the reader unlock scripts of pleasure

built upon by a storied fujoshi past. It is worth mentioning that this is not necessarily a positive or even neutral thing. The source of pleasure might be the disciplining of gender nonconforming bodies for a presumed cis audience.

But back to masculinities. While Youji is not a woman, he is a Female. I'm not saying this in a transphobic gender-sex mind-body dualism way, I mean this in a "he is called a Female in game" way. Zenya comments to him:

"Everything that's happened? Every little thing is your fault. All because you're the Female. You got the Males all riled up, see? So now it's time to pay the price. Now, eeverything will end."

The cult who explains the lore of the game calls the people able to give birth to meat babies Females, and they are intrinsically attractive to Males (and males as well, as evidenced by Makoto succumbing to Youji's pheromones). So, at least in Zenya's view, violence against Females is justified by biology. Normal sex for Male-Female pairs is sadistic. Here we return to Freud.

Freud wrote about what children at an early age think about sex when they are inadvertently exposed to sex itself or its byproducts (babies). He comments that children often have a sadistic view of sexual intercourse:

If children at this early age witness sexual intercourse between adults—for which an opportunity is provided by the conviction of grown-up people that small children cannot understand anything sexual—they inevitably regard the sexual act as a sort of ill treatment or act of subjugation: they view it, that is, in a sadistic sense.

In the child's view, sex is abuse; sex is punishment. All children are Dworkinites, as it turns out. Pleasure comes from the inside of the primal scene; an observer only has access to the subjugation. But

what insights do we get from this, other than that *Sweet Pool* is lore compliant with Freudian psychoanalysis? Do we read BL rape as parodic of sex, in the fujoshi reading; or do we read BL sex as imitative of rape, in the child's? When faced with a yaoi adolescence, we embrace both readings.

Now, Twitter-poisoned readers when faced with Female-pessimism will turn to the ultimate theorist of it: Andrea Long Chu, of the infamous "everyone is female and everyone hates it" formulation. We diverge in parts. But we can still learn from her provocative thesis.

What is a female, according to Chu?

Femaleness is "any psychic operation in which the self is sacrificed to make room for the desires of another." She continues that these desires can be diverse in form, "but in all cases, the self is hollowed out, made into an incubator for an alien force. To be female is to let someone else do your desiring for you, at your own expense." Chu is making a facetious argument that naturalizes trans desire—after all, "how one *cope*s with being female... this is what we ordinarily call *gender*."

Chu's definition is productive for analyzing *Youji* primarily. *Youji* is subject to the desires of others, his self is negated, he is made to carry aliens within him, and it is all at his own expense. Rather than *everyone* being female, it's more that *Youji* is Female. But we already knew that; the game told us as much. What this further reinforces is the collapse of sex and sex. What sex—Femaleness—represents is made manifest *through* sex—the physical act—or more specifically, rape. Rape produces a Female in the same way that sex produces a baby, to *Sweet Pool*.

Like Chu, we have been continually echoing these second-wave radical feminists, in an odd transsexual way. Their sexual anxieties animate *Sweet Pool*, even as violent gay pornography seems far afield from their work. Something useful here is Leo Bersani's

sharp distinction between perversion and subversion. In relation to gay machismo, he comments that despite their “blasphemy,” the leather queen “at least intends to pay worshipful tribute to the style and behavior he defiles.” Moreover, the “heterosexual” can discern this “yearning toward machismo”—making it “a perversion rather than a subversion of real maleness.” So *Sweet Pool*, similarly, blasphemes Female identity even as it yearns towards it, in its perversion of reproductive horror. Ultimately, *Sweet Pool* isn’t queering rape or deconstructing trans identity or critiquing feminists past. It’s not a critique of power; it’s luxuriating in how sexy it can be.

Now, we enter our final note on rape and masculinity. There is one more male “love interest,” shall we say, that I have not discussed yet: Makoto. Makoto, as already alluded to, is not unique amongst the characters Youji’s age, he also attempts to rape Youji. But as he does, he comments:

“That’s what you get for fighting me.”

His voice triumphant, Makoto yanked Youji’s briefs and slacks off his legs.

Youji glared up at him through tears of self-loathing.

How could he call himself a man if he couldn’t defend himself?

“...You did this to me, Youji.”

Youji explicitly loses access to masculinity because he cannot defend himself. A Female is a failed man, an abbreviated man. Pierre Boaistuau writes:

Among all things... nothing is seen that... provokes more terror or admiration to a greater extent among creatures than the monsters, prodigies, and abominations through which we see the works of nature inverted,

mutilated, and truncated.

So, women are scary. Or maybe just women of male experience, which may indeed be all women. Everyone was once Male [a whole person] until they encounter sex under patriarchy, which de/genders them monstrous. We seem to be approaching Chu's theory from the other side. Everyone is a monster, and everyone hates it.

But we also return to our initial objection to Chu's theory: some of us also seem to be more Female than others; some of us seem to be rendered more monstrous than others. Universalizing feminization is fun rhetorical legerdemain, but can it be more than that? Can it sustain a coherent politic?

Stryker's monster theory is more measured, but makes the same gesture. She concludes her essay with a call to cis audiences. She first explains that "'Monster' is derived from the Latin noun *monstrum*, 'divine portent,' itself formed on the root of the verb *monere*, 'to warn.'" Monsters historically, she continues, serve as warnings of things to come, "saying, in effect, 'Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening.'" And this is her warning:

You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic Womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.

It's a call to liberation. But *Sweet Pool*, many things as it is, struggles to be liberatory. Horrible things happen to Youji, and then he dies, in every ending (yes, even in the one that's kind of ambiguous about it). It gives us, as I not-so-facetiously referenced earlier, trans shit Jesus-cum-Eve Youji, who takes all Females on his back and dies for it, birthing a new way of seeing from the violence done to him. Youji is "like" a woman, and you are "like" him, it says. But what is Youji's warning?

I'm trying to articulate the dissatisfaction I feel with the trans-pessimism that *Sweet Pool* expresses. It gets at some of the horror that's part of the trans experience but fails to imagine the far side of transitioning. Consequently, this essay has made me say things I don't stand by out of context, like use the word Female to refer to "people with the capacity to reproduce." *Sweet Pool's* accidental trans horror is the fear that bioessentialism is meaningful, that rape produces a real woman, that inside and out trans identity has contaminated you and everyone can smell it. It sexualizes and complicates those things, sure, but *Sweet Pool* is just a warped mirror of the worst beliefs about the world we live in.

It's fun sometimes to metaphorically jack off in a funhouse mirror. Conservative fantasies can have their place, I suppose, especially in a often conservative genre (see "Notes on Erogoro"). They often take place in the "magic circle" of roleplay, fantasy, and here, video games, where normal rules of the "real world" are suspended and replaced with game logics. But these fantasy worlds are permeable, and at least for me, *Sweet Pool's* magic circle is compromised by its inability to truly see us all as monstrous. Youji is alone, exceptional in his abjection, and maybe his warning is that there's nothing revolutionary in imagining yourself that way.

i would like to thank simk and soph for fearless and insightful editing and roland for unsticking my conclusion with the magic circle comparison. the support of other trans people made this essay possible.

NOTES ON EROGURO:

In Mark Driscoll's *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895-1945*, he comments that he:

[follows] the lead of Japanese Marxists of this same period in recasting the erotic-grotesque as a code for the ways the erotic - what Deleuze and Guattari configured in the 1970s as "desiring production" - was captured or grotesqued by capitalism in distinct political ways.

These contemporaneous critics include figures like the sociologist Akagami Yoshitsuge, who argued that "the image commodities of *ero* capitalism must become increasingly more bizarre, strange, and *bentai* to continue to elicit stimulation and stupefaction and guarantee the human investment of money and attention." This is perhaps a familiar argument to anyone who's heard the phrase "porn poisoning" before, or can guess what it means. I'm not particularly interested in saying that the reason people have kinks is because they're too porn or commodity hardened to get off to nice vanilla missionary like they "should," but rather in his more subtle point that the monstrousness of capitalism itself builds a mass culture preoccupied with novelty and consumption. It tries to instill desires that only consuming its images can satisfy.

So what is the role of art in a capitalist society? We turn, of course, to Walter Benjamin and his 1936 "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin writes that fascism's goal is to organize the masses without acceding to their impulse and right to redistribute property. He continues, "Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves." Fascism preserves property via its aestheticization of politics, and in doing so "self-alienation has reached such a degree that [humanity] can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order." In short, *Sweet Pool* is predictable, in both its eroticism and its politics.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF QUEER UTOPIA: EXPLORING DRAMATICAL MURDER'S VISION OF THE FUTURE

by AI @actualhamlet

What is a Queer Utopia

José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia The Then and There of Queer Futurity* and Angel Jones' et al. *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* both contend with the messy potentiality of queer utopian futures through various queer practices. These works create a baseline for understanding what queer utopia means. Drawing on Muñoz, Jones establishes "queerness as a refusal." Queerness rejects binaries, categories, essentialisms, and time.¹ It is in defiance of straight time and space. They are not discussing a fixed time where an idealized queer space was created successfully; They instead focus on the idea that these queer spaces and moments created have the potential for utopia, and even if they do not eventually achieve utopia, their

1 Angel Jones et al., *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 12.

existence and failure are in itself noteworthy.² Queer actions and creations are utopic in the present in their potential for a queer future. Even in failure, they construct promises of new attempts at queer futures.

Imagined Technology and the Body

While there has been extensive work examining the queer futures and queer technologies as separate entities, little has been discussed about the imagined technologies of queer futures. Technology, especially imagined technology, is not a neutral entity that comes into existence on its own. Technology is a product of social, cultural, economic, and political context and decisions. Imagined technology is the same way.

The imaginary is a powerful force when it comes to the design and creation of technology. In general, imaginary technology is considered to be the collective cultural perception of what something could be. Sheila Jasanoff, in her edited volume, *Dreamscapes of Modernity Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, says of the imaginary:

Imaginaries, moreover, encode not only visions of what is attainable through science and technology but also of how life ought, or ought not, to be lived; in this respect they express a society's shared understandings of good and evil.³

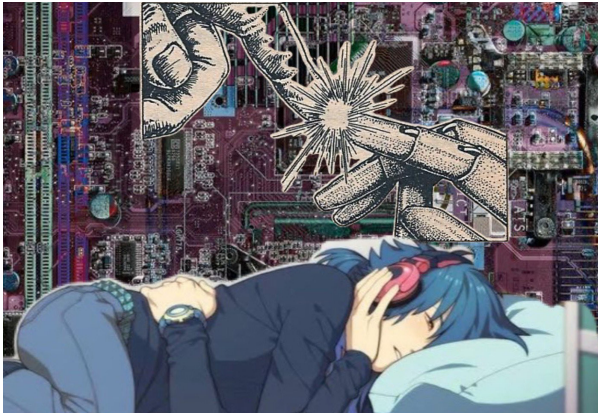
Imaginaries show what people think is possible along with what people think is right. To understand why people imagine technology the way they do, it is necessary to understand people's emotions and perceptions of technology and electrification at the turn of the 20th century. For my purposes, I will be focusing on America, as it's the area I am most familiar with, but I will be speaking

2 Ibid., 4.

3 Sheila Jasanof, *Dreamscapes of Modernity Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 4.

in generalizing terms as the reactions to modernization are fairly standardized.

Modernization in the late 19th century and early 20th century occurred rapidly. Infrastructure changed, time was crunched, and electricity created dividing lines between classes. A telegraph could now get a message across in hours in what previously could have taken weeks. There was now the very real threat of getting crushed by a trolley on the way to work. You could now see through your neighbor's window who had their new electric lights on at night. The world was more visible, fast paced, and dangerous. It was reasonable that the general public would be afraid and anxious about technology. Because of this, people needed a way to cope.



One of the ways people coped, according to Carloyn Thomas de la Peña in *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American*, was through associating technology with the body. Big, scary machines were taking over peoples' lives. Especially in the workplace, machines were a site of fear and anxiety. Was this machine stronger than me? Will this machine take my job? Will this machine replace my body? These giant, inhumane structures occupied the average American's mind. In order to combat this fear and anxiety, technologies were invented, and most importantly, imagined that would acclimate the body and mind to these new creations. For example, de la Peña examines muscle building

machines. These machines were personal, small, and operated close to the body. Whereas the machines people used at their workplace were better than the human body, these machines were for the sake of improving the human body; Rather than being dominated by technology, human beings were dominating the technology. Actual machines were created that were positioned to increase a body's muscles, but through this, people envisioned technologies that could do more. They imagined technologies that were integrated with the body and propelled beyond its normal capacities.

Okay, now that we have that brief summary of the history of technology and the body, it's time to go on to what really matters: yaoi. I argue that DRAMAtical Murder (DMMD) presents a queer utopia which functions upon an understanding of imagined technologies that are queer in and of themselves as well as create the environment of a queer future. In other words, the technologies that exist within DMMD are queer by themselves, queer the world they exist in, and tell us how we in the real, tragically non-yaoi world perceive the potentiality of queerness.

Imagined Technologies of a Queer Future

Rhyme

Rhyme is a major technology featured in DMMD. For the uninitiated, Rhyme is an in-game game that is essentially a VR fighting sim. Participants gather in random in-person locations, wherever the judge, Usui, appears and duke it out in mindscapes that they create. Typically, Rhyme games cannot be played without Usui present, but this proves to be untrue when it comes to our main character, Aoba. The players fight using their own skills but mainly those of their Allmates, their AI pets that exist in the game and in the real world (we'll get to those later). In the game, players can feel real pain and experience things that they would not be able to in the real world. Rhyme, as presented in the DMMD exposition, exists in contrast to Ribsteez, a fun, popular game where various gang members beat the shit out of each other in real life.

Rhyme itself is a queer technology, and it can be read as one through looking at similarly to how Brandy L. Simula conceptualizes BDSM in her essay “Queer Utopias in Painful Spaces: BDSM Participants’ Interrelational Resistance to Heteronormativity and Gender Regulation.” She uses Muñoz’ concept of ‘ecstatic time’ to present BDSM activities as utopically queer. Muñoz, about ecstatic time, says this:

To see queerness as a horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold . . . [of] straight time is interrupted or stepped out of. Ecstatic time is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one’s past, present, or future.⁴

Rhyme, as a technology, creates a literal area outside of straight time and space, as opposed to BDSM which creates a psychological/emotional space which, while it sometimes takes place within a designated space, it does not literally do so. Rhyme also incorporates pain, similarly to BDSM, which elicits the ecstatic response Muñoz discusses: a moan, a grunt, a whimper. Pain and pleasure are blurred in this time/space which is queered through its separation from reality and the bodily actions that take place inside it.



A WORLD WHERE GAY IS A NORM &
STRAIGHT A MINORITY - HD

Lauren Martins · 78K views · 5 years ago

4 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 80.

Besides being queer in conception, Rhyme also queers the world and characters of DMMD. This technological approach to fighting replaces the real, skin-to-skin contact of Ribsteez. However, because it is fantastical technology and creates an area of ecstatic time, of queer space, it allows players to experience sensations beyond the physical.

The main characters that are the main players of Rhyme and Ribsteez are Noiz and Koujaku, respectively. Noiz and Koujaku both have interesting relationships to queerness and their understanding of self. Noiz is relatively open with his sexuality, actively touching, kissing, and having sex with Aoba with relatively little issue. This is in spite of the fact that Aoba, through his confusion and protests, demonstrates that the DMMD world is not a yaoi utopia where gay is the norm and straight is the minority, but that homosexuality/queerness is typically abnormal. In contrast, Koujaku is much more repressed. He is fixated on the much more old-fashioned Ribsteez and is way more hesitant to approach or consider any sort of relationship with Aoba, whether it be physical or romantic. We see here, an association with queerness and technology. Noiz, who is able to experience and appreciate the space/time of Rhyme, develops a familiarity with queerness.



Aoba, our main character that we play as, gets reluctantly roped into various Rhyme matches throughout the story(s). While Aoba

claims to actively dislike both Rhyme and Ribsteez, it is later revealed that he has lost his memories and, in his past, used to be a hardcore Rhyme player who would actively harm other players. The problem became such an issue, that it causes most of the plot, as Aoba decides to separate his consciousness three ways (though that is a problem for another time). Rhyme causes Aoba harm, but it ultimately allows him, in the main plot, to resolve the issues of tension in his life. He is constantly reflecting on his past because of his relationship with Rhyme, in moments of intense contemplation. By being pulled into Rhyme, albeit involuntarily, Aoba restores his relationship with his past and with his loved ones. Aoba originally uses Rhyme incorrectly, but once he uses it correctly, he is able to come to terms with both his past and present queer identity.

Now how does this reflect on our world? This imagined technology, Rhyme, reflects, like the imagined technologies of the late 19th century and early 20th century, the fears and desires of our society and culture. Whereas people of that time imagined machines that incorporated the body and technology as one to assuage fears of industrialization, the creators and writers of DMMD imagine a technology that accomplishes similar objectives through queer processes. Rhyme is located inside and outside of the body; it demonstrates a paradoxical want for intimacy and privacy. It shows a very queer fear of being close to another or being too close to a person, enough to hurt, and it resolves that fear. Players of Rhyme are touching each other, are hurting each other, but are not actually doing so. It creates a messy space/time as well as physical/intangible location. In doing this, in imagining this as a technology that could be in the future, the creators tell us that the future ought to have spaces like this. The technology of Rhyme presents the intricate potentiality that is characteristic of queer utopian thought.

Allmates

Allmates are all purpose AI pets. They act as a phone, as a computer, as a weapon in Rhyme, and each contain their own unique personality. Allmates are a queer technology in their potentiality. J. J. Gibson's concept of affordances is useful here. This concept is

used to describe the way a space's or object's function is reflected in its properties or design. With communication technology in the real world, you can see that in the way a phone fits to your hand or, more specifically, the way certain apps or UI, in general, limits what you are able to accomplish. For example, scholar Avery Dame-Griff discusses the ways in which the affordances of Tumblr allow for people to speak freely in the tags, but structures still emerge that constrain what one is able to or wants to say in them.

Because of the Allmates form as an animal, there is much more potentiality in their affordances. There is no correct or apparent way one is supposed to use your Allmate. They have their own personalities that you have to communicate with in order to accomplish what you want to with your Allmate. This is in line with the queer messiness that Muñoz and others have talked about. There is no clear (ha) binary involved with the Allmate, no off/on button, it is a relationship as well as a technology.

In terms of queering the world they exist in, Aoba does have sex with his Allmate (IN HIS HUMAN FORM!!! (also, it is kinda himself so it's more like selfcest if anything...ANYWAYS). So, speaking generally that's pretty queer, I guess. But besides that, Allmates represent their users, their empathy, and their ability to form relationships. Koujaku has a little bitchy sparrow called Beni. Noiz has a little rabbit cube called Usagimodoki. Both are reflections of their users but have also developed their own personalities. They are sort of like a more complex fursona that has spawned into reality. An Allmate's user can exist as themselves but also see themselves in this non-human entity and interact with it. It queers the user in the way it creates opportunities for gender and sexuality expression outside of the body.

For Aoba, his Allmate, Ren, is literally himself. When Aoba's personality is split into three, one of those personalities gets put into an Allmate that is a blue dog. That is Ren, who was the mediator in Aoba's mind. Ren, like Aoba, loses his memory, and believes himself to have always been an Allmate. An Allmate is created

from Aoba's mind and is turned into a real boy! And that boy is gay! Allmates, here, allow Aoba an expression of queerness separate from his body. However, when that separation becomes its own entity, Aoba is able to see his own queerness manifest and accept the queerness within him. Ren becomes an object of self-actualization and then a very literal object of self-love and self-acceptance.

Similarly to turn of the century imagined technologies, Allmates represent the need to calm fear and anxieties of change. Here, rather than industrialization, the change is queerness. Allmates take the form of a cute little animal to ease fears of knowing oneself. Sure, you can go on your phone and take an "Am I Gay Quiz?" to discover stuff about yourself through technology. However, DMMD imagines a future where the processes of coming into queerness are enacted through self-interrogation that involves a cute thingy! The queer utopian future this technology predicts is one where technology is soft and aids in queerness, rather than a shameful, lonesome process.

Conclusion

There are many other technologies within DMMD that I could get into. Clear is one that comes to the top of my mind. However, I found that I was most interested in Rhyme and Allmates as they seemed pretty unique to DMMD, where androids like Clear can be seen in a lot of places. I also added a lot of history here, not just because I'm flexing my degrees >:), but because I think it is useful to have real life, tangible examples of imagined technology situations so that it is easier to apply to more abstract things, like yaoi. Technology does not spawn from nowhere and neither does its fictional representations, so it's worthwhile to think about what those technologies mean. **ESPECIALLY** if you get to make it gay. I hope in the future I get to write more about yaoi technologies <3.

CHERRY MAGIC AND THE MECHANICS OF VIRGINITY

by **shrimpchipsss**

I chose Cherry Magic because I thought it would be funny to read it the year I turned 30.

For the unaware, Cherry Magic is about a guy who, upon turning 30 years old as a virgin, gains the ability to read people's minds if they are touching. It is a beloved manga with anime, drama, and movie adaptations and has also become something of a classic alternate universe setup for fanfiction writers, which is how I first encountered the premise.

Basically, I was curious if Cherry Magic had anything interesting to say about the mechanics of the construct of virginity.

Do Adachi's abilities go away after he and his boyfriend Kurosawa cum? Would they both have to finish? Does it require penetration or would a handjob or blowjob do?

The first time Adachi and Kurosawa decide to go beyond kissing, penetration is implied by the placement of Adachi's knee hiked

up by Kurosawa's hip before their lower bodies are cropped out of the frame. At the very least their dicks are probably touching. But going by ao3 ratings Cherry Magic is Mature and not Explicit; no dick or hole will ever be visible.

Not to be extremely annoying, but technically, we do not know if penetration definitely happened even if we can assume that it did. More importantly, because Adachi and Kurosawa don't engage in other sex acts in instances before this one, we have no way of testing the question of whether Adachi might have retained or lost his powers after, for example, giving or receiving a handjob.

Some fanfictions do explore this concept. I know of at least one Cherry Magic AU in which the characters have to have penetrative sex and THEN stop being able to read people's minds. But the project of the original Cherry Magic doesn't seem concerned with that.

Alas, my question was not explicitly addressed. However, I think this says something about the exact mechanics of "what counts as virginity" not really being important to the spirit of Cherry Magic as a magic system.

Which I think is very cool and queer and freeing.

To begin with, for a story whose premise involves the main character being a virgin, the text is extremely normal about virginity. The characters aren't made fun of or shamed for being virgins, and neither is it some kind of neurosis that rules their lives. Virginity is just a descriptor that reflects someone's life experiences rather than some kind of identity marker or value statement.

In fact, virginity is framed as something personal to each character and relationship rather than something that is assumed that the characters would want to be rid of. Adachi and Kurosawa are briefly shown contemplating that they'd treasure the chance to have all kinds of "firsts" with each other, but it doesn't read as fetishizing or

infantilizing and has more to do with their connection and desire for intimacy with each other. Sexual attraction and allosexuality is not assumed; the characters tell us what they want.

Furthermore, having the ability to read minds (and losing that ability) doesn't fix Adachi's life problems. Adachi's magic turns out to be simply another thing that helps him realize that he needs to learn how to communicate his feelings, especially to Kurosawa who he grows to love. Adachi also doesn't know that sleeping with Kurosawa will make his abilities go away, so when they have sex for the first time, it is not encumbered by weird baggage around why they are having sex other than because they want to.

But to go back to the mechanics of virginity. It's almost like Cherry Magic is saying,

“What counts as virginity? It doesn't really matter—what mattered was Adachi and Kurosawa connecting with each other.”

As a disclaimer, I'm going to be talking from a western and specifically US-centric point of view since that's my context and the research that's accessible to me with the time I had available. The English language research I saw tended to be about Japan's birth rate and people's attitudes on singleness and relationships but not so much about sex or virginity.

As you probably know, the construct of virginity breaks down very quickly. Its definition varies cross-culturally, and some cultures do not even value it; a 1980 study of 141 societies found that only about half place value on it (Tuthill, 138).

It is kind of refreshing seeing a man depicted as a virgin in such a normal way when for men, virginity tends to be viewed as something to be rid of or a rite of passage to adulthood. A study done in the US found that for men, virginity is viewed as a stigma that

needs to be lost (Tuthill, 146).

It is also nice seeing virginity be reframed in the context of a queer relationship when sex, and the loss of virginity, is traditionally understood as penetration of a man's penis into a woman's vagina—which might not be a preference or exist as a possibility between people.

Interestingly, the penetration aspect of heteronormative sex and virginity extends to gay sex between men. In his frottage manifesto, Bill Weintraub describes a paradigm shift among gay men in the US:

Whereas previously sex had been a smorgasbord, with oral sex, JO, frottage, and anal sex seen as essentially equal, a new and rigorous definition of good gay sex appeared in the mid-70s, in which the first three were considered foreplay, and only the last regarded as the culminating, and therefore essential, gay sexual act.

Gay sex underwent a heterosexualizing matrix, and we got our current hegemony of tops and bottoms, completely excluding those who might have other sexual preferences. (And you can read more about heterosexualizing matrices in tshirt's essay on girl yaoi.)

By the way, you guys have to go to this guy's website, Frot: The Next Sexual Revolution, which advocates for frottage to be accepted as a legitimate primary sexual act; it's awesome. He can be a bit harsh on anal sex enjoyers, but in the context of him speaking out against anal sex supremacy and efforts to rethink safer sex in the AIDS crisis you get where he's coming from, and he digs into the really important question of

“what makes sex sexual: penetration or genital contact?”

This question has implications for gay men who aren't interested in anal penetration, some of whom have taken up the label of "sides" as an alternative to the top/bottom dynamic and in an attempt to disrupt a dated notion of what sex "should" look like (Box). And this doesn't even get into what the hell the assumption is supposed to mean for lesbians or sexual partners where there are no dicks or straps involved.

On top of the effects the obsession with penetration has had on the queer community's expectations around sexual dynamics, there is another very pernicious way it can hurt people.

Not counting anything other than penetrative sex as sex can make things very fraught and confusing for people who have been sexually assaulted or abused but for whom there was no penetration. Can it still count as sexual assault if penetration didn't happen? (Yes, it does.) There are legal ramifications to such assumptions. In Japan, until 2017, sexual assault referred solely to cases in which the offender was a man, the victim was a woman, and the man used "violence or explicit intimidation to coerce her into vaginal sex" (Mizutani Cesar, 2).

Disarticulating [sex] from [penetrative sex] and furthermore [penetrative sex between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman] is meaningful for our understanding of sex, whether it is to better the intimacy and connection between sexual partners, or for victims of sexual assault to better understand their experiences, or for us to be free from the various social scripts and expectations there are about what sex "should" be.

I really enjoyed Cherry Magic's total disinterest in the mechanics of virginity and the way it focuses on desire and connection between Adachi and Kurosawa. It's queer and personal, and since Cherry Magic seems to be bestowed upon characters who wanted to experience sex in the first place and just needed a small scenario pusher™ to get them there, I find the way the story does not project compulsory sexuality onto its characters to be very ace in a

way as well.

One last note, she is a very minor character but I really enjoyed Adachi and Kurosawa's fujoshi coworker who ships her blorbos from her job. Great stuff.

Notes:

Thank you to Zoe miss_coverly and pallas_rose for our conversations about this topic and some of the reading recommendations!

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A RECIPE FOR HOMECOOKED YAOI: QUEER DOMESTICITY AND *WHAT DID YOU EAT YESTERDAY?*

by zoe @miss_coverly

ingredient list:

- being gay
- being old (sometimes sold as “old man yaoi” but the brand doesn’t matter)
- the cyclical nature of coming out
- secret ingredient (an insane doujin)
- queer domesticity
- second queer adolescence
- home!

step 1: take your first ingredient—*being gay*—and let it marinate in the fridge for approximately 45 years.

i had a recent harrowing realization: i am a gay adult. this is the closest to old man yaoi i have ever been.

this has also made me more aware of how much gay coming-of-age i read. when i contemplate my most recent yaoi excursions, they were either set in high school or a fantasy setting where age (and therefore youth vs adulthood) is a bit more nebulous.

this led me to read *what did you eat yesterday?* (or *kinō nani tabeta*) by fumi yoshinaga, a slice of life cooking BL that's been ongoing since 2007. a true middle-aged yaoi manga.

kinō nani tabeta follows shiro, a lawyer who loves two things—1. cooking and 2. not being perceived as gay—and kenji, his boyfriend, a hairstylist who has less qualms with “seeming gay.” every volume covers a year or so in shiro and kenji's lives, so you see them start in their 40s and age to their 60s as the manga progresses. but regardless of the time that passes, each chapter is tied together by a home-cooked meal shared in their apartment.

any food lover will eat up this manga (first and only joke i will make of this nature), as every recipe is illustrated with enough detail that you *could* call it a cookbook. however, while i never tire of seeing what shiro and kenji will have for dinner, i'm primarily invested in all the moments in between. despite its overall light and easy tone, *kinō nani tabeta* covers a myriad of situations that queer couples face, particularly in a contemporary social context that is urban but doesn't emphatically accept queerness.

katsuhiko suganuma's “queer cooking and dining: expanding queerness in fumi yoshinaga's *what did you eat yesterday?*” explores another striking aspect of this manga, which is the story's centering of queerness within the domestic sphere/ and of course, since this is a yaoi that never fails to make its readers hungry, i'd like to discuss it in recipe format. i hope you've all got your aprons on (i lied about only making one food-related joke).

step 2: dice *being gay* into cubes. add to side dish: *being gay in a society*.

as a middle aged gay couple living in tokyo, shiro and kenji occupy an interesting social space, both in relation to each other and the different social spheres they inhabit. kenji is a hairstylist and much more comfortable in his flamboyancy, so it's established from the first volume that he is out in most contexts. his coworkers and customers know he is gay, and he isn't shy to talk about his hot lawyer boyfriend (much to shiro's annoyance).

shiro, on the other hand, walks an interesting tightrope of being out in some contexts, like to his parents and some friends, but not at work. despite the fact that they are a couple, shiro and kenji's identities as gay men and how "out" they are isn't something that's identical.

what's striking about this to me is that *kinō nani tabeta* is not a coming out narrative. what's more? it never tries to be. there are a few comedic moments of shiro agonizing over being perceived as gay—but despite that, shiro is never pressured to come out. it makes sense that a lot of gay media is about coming out; after all, coming out as a concept is very tangible and familiar to straight audiences. in many ways, gay people have to "come out" *because* of straight people. and don't get me wrong, while coming out is a pivotal moment for many queer people, especially in adolescent settings, it can be tiring when it's presented as the only rite of passage for queer people, and by association, the defining trait of queer fiction.

thus, while shiro is mostly closeted, coming out never emerges as a quintessential milestone in *kinō nani tabeta*, nor does it emerge as a singular event that shiro does once and then never deals with again. it's common for queer people to realize that as you get older, you don't just come out once; every time you make new friends, move to a new place, or start a new job, you typically have to go through the process of coming out again.

this manga shines light on the idea of coming out being a choice you make in every context—and emphasizes that it *is* a choice,

which “centers the queer person rather than putting the onus on [queer people] to declare themselves to society” (danielle, googled-ocs). it also speaks to the emotional energy that coming out requires. sometimes, resistance to coming out doesn’t stem from fear, but instead a recognition that not everyone is owed the emotional energy it takes to repeatedly come out, to repeatedly make known our queer identities. suganuma points this out in his essay when he makes the distinction that shiro doesn’t “dislike being perceived as gay due to internalized homophobia, but because he hates anything that’s a bother” (96).

furthermore, the story offers ample respect to shiro’s boundaries regarding his sexuality. after shiro’s homophobic parents meet kenji for the first time, they request that shiro not bring kenji back home for new years again. while it’s upsetting for shiro, there’s something very cathartic to kenji’s reaction to the news: even though his family is more tolerant than shiro’s, kenji doesn’t wish for shiro to cut off his parents just because they don’t accept him.

after this, shiro makes the choice to still visit his parents, but he asserts that he will be spending new years with kenji since he’s the person who means the most to him. in contrast to a narrative that could be more black and white about the issue, this felt like such a measured and realistic take on navigating family dynamics and queerness—particularly when they clash.

step 3: after you’ve let *being gay in a society* come to a boil, set it to simmer for the next 10 minutes. season to taste with *homophobia* and *idgaf*.

in lieu of a narrative where coming out is the ultimate W for a gay person, something far more meaningful takes place in shiro’s character development.

the early manga paints a picture of an older, mostly closeted man. while he doesn’t fight his sexuality, he doesn’t like to draw attention to it or “act gay.” but over the course of the manga, and his nearly

20 years with kenji, we see shiro become more outwardly comfortable in his identity as a gay man *and* less self-conscious expressing affection.

in volume 4, we see shiro's agitation over going to dinner with another gay couple and being noticed by the straight couple next to them. it causes shiro to blow up at kenji, later chastising himself for "being such a wuss about it." compare this to several volumes later when shiro accompanies kenji to a nearby cafe on a date. even though two women in the cafe clock them as gay and stare, shiro doesn't seem bothered.

back at home, kenji asks shiro if he was uncomfortable, but shiro affirms that he wanted to go since it made kenji happy. a moment like this would've been unthinkable to shiro earlier on in the manga, so it's really satisfying to see his growth charted so visibly.

ultimately, it's clear that shiro's love for kenji is what fuels his growing confidence in his queer identity. the first few years of their relationship don't always cast shiro in the best light; he can come across as uncommitted and rarely affectionate. however, this is primarily due to his doubts about the longevity of their relationship. as a slice of life manga, it doesn't typically linger in melodrama or emotional theatrics, but bits of backstory make another thing apparent: shiro has never been in a healthy relationship before. he's used to cold, emotionally unavailable, and downright terrible boyfriends. gradually, it becomes obvious to the reader that shiro's repeated thoughts of kenji "not being his type" are due to the fact that he's never had a boyfriend love him and treat him well before. where does the turning point in their relationship come, then? i would pinpoint it quite easily as volume 7, when kenji meets shiro's parents. after dinner, kenji admits,

"this is a dream come true for me! i never thought the day would come where i'd go to my lover's house and eat a meal with his parents. i wouldn't care if i died right now!"

as he cries tears of joy, shiro puts his arm around him as they walk home.

this is a really powerful scene for a number of reasons. in the background of a moment so vulnerable, two men walk past them on the street and call them homophobic slurs. shiro doesn't react to it and continues to hold kenji as they walk. it's not a dramatic moment by any means, but it illustrates a clear example of shiro prioritizing his love for kenji over his aversion to his own queerness.

from then on, shiro becomes more affectionate and more forward about kenji's role as his life partner, as opposed to a boyfriend that's less permanent than a heterosexual spouse. some years later, shiro tells his landlord that his "roommate" is actually his boyfriend after over a decade of living there with him. when the topic of shiro wanting to add kenji to his will comes up, kenji takes it as confirmation that they'll be together forever. to this, shiro thinks,

"no, that's not it. even if we do end up breaking up, i think you're just about the only person in my life that i'd want to leave my estate to."

the big gay milestones in shiro's life do not revolve around other people's perception of acceptance of his identity, nor do they center him discovering that he is gay. especially when so much BL and queer media as a whole is focused on the act of Realizing You Are Gay or Coming Out As Gay, i was enamored with this subversion. shiro's queer identity grows and flourishes almost solely through his interiority as he allows himself to *lean in* to who he is and view his love for kenji as real.

step 4: season *queer domesticity* and add to main dish: *being gay in your own house*. let it roast in oven for 15-20 years.

all of this talk of interiority emerges as a metaphor for the home. ding ding, that's the queer domesticity!

suganuma actually brings up *brokeback mountain* to discuss how queerness is thought of as separate from the domestic, incompatible with the *home*. i'd never really considered this trend in BL and western gay media alike, where taboo gay relationships always exist on the outskirts of "real life" or a character's home. *kinō nani tabeta* is such a refreshing contrast to that pattern, showing the overlap of queerness and domesticity without defaulting into homonormativity (suganuma 99), which is basically the replication of cisheterosexual norms by queer people for social acceptance/assimilation.

this manga's focus on queerness in the home is necessitated by its premise, obviously, as well as the typical progression of each chapter. though shiro is the main "chef" of the series, the manga also will occasionally depict kenji taking the reins, shiro cooking with friends and family, or feature side characters on their own culinary adventures. what all of these meals have in common is that they show cooking *in the home*, in a domestic space.

the concept of food and shared meals as a love language is emphasized across cultures, and it's front and center in *kinō nani tabeta*. i'd argue that this *could* come across as homonormative—the legitimizing of a gay relationship because they live and eat dinner together every night, like a "normal" couple—but there's a distinct queerness to even this part of their life. just like anyone else, shiro and kenji have revelations, arguments, and meaningful conversations across the dinner table, and they ultimately grow closer through every meal. we learn about the characters through these dinner table conversations. furthermore, we learn more about their queerness.

shiro and kenji discuss their daily lives, but just as seamlessly they broach topics like shiro adopting kenji (a common practice for gay couples to gain legal protections in japan vs. kenji's fear that same-sex marriage could be legalized and then they'd never be allowed to get married), adding kenji to shiro's will, getting matching rings, and the upcoming wedding of kohinata and wataru, another gay couple.

through their meals, shiro and kenji are fleshed out not just as fictional characters, but as a queer couple who shares love through food, the same as many straight couples. at the same time, rather than this being something that homogenizes their relationship, their queerness becomes intrinsic to it. it is both universal and specific to their experience as queer men. that meta-text is soooooo tasty! the story's primary setting being shiro and kenji's apartment also creates a sense of privacy, of intimacy. every conversation at the dinner table or on the couch puts shiro and kenji's relationship at the forefront. despite the broader backdrop of societal homophobia, or how other people perceive the two men, at the heart of the story is *their experience*—as it is lived, and not how it is filtered through anyone else's eyes.

this ties back to who narratives are oriented toward. there are queer stories written for queer people vs queer stories that, while not necessarily being for cishet people, are narratives/experiences most familiar to cishet people (being bullied, coming out, discovering your sexuality, etc) and are therefore at least partially oriented toward them as an audience. in this way, *kinō nani tabeta* really strikes me as made for queer people. i never feel like i'm reading about queer experiences through the lens of cishet curiosity; the manga magnifies my experiences of being a queer adult and reflects them back at me.

because shiro and kenji are *being gay in their own house*, the manga isn't just about gay characters and how they interact with a cishet-eronomous world. rather, it centers the inherent queerness to the home that shiro and kenji have created together—and the safety that two queer people can find in the domestic space.¹

1 as a fun aside, which i could write an entire essay about but will limit to being a footnote—yoshinaga actually released a six chapter doujin entitled *kenji to shiro-san* which expands on their relationship, particularly their sexual relationship. it turns out that, despite never kissing or showing much physical affection in the series proper, kenji and shiro are actually very freak4freak. i consider this a footnote for this section because it really speaks to the idea

step 5: take your adult yaoi out of the oven and—idk what comes out!

this may seem like a cop-out to avoid writing a coherent yaoi recipe—but there's a point to this.

in volume 21, shiro grapples with giving kenji's contact information to his parents (in the event of an emergency) and the uncomfortable conversation that follows. he thinks to himself, "huh... there's probably no right answer with this sort of thing, but..."

he doesn't finish the sentence and, as he is apt to do, instead launches into cooking that night's dinner. however, shiro's lack of a conclusion actually builds on one of my favorite parts of *kinō nani tabeta*: the reaffirmation that there is no one right way to be queer, and there are no right answers for the complicated, nuanced dilemmas of being queer.

this is evident in how shiro chooses to navigate a relationship with his parents and his queer relationship. It's evident in how shiro and kenji split up household chores, how they divide expenses, how they contemplate their future together as an aging queer couple, and how their queerness isn't something that they have to Come Out with but rather choose who they Invite into it. shiro and kenji don't approach their relationship exactly the same as every other queer couple; they don't even approach life the same as kohinata and wataru. throughout the manga, queerness is never presented as something prescriptive or universal, because there *is* no right way to do it. and with this manga centering gay adults rather than teenagers/adolescents, these complexities are presented in a way that is both compelling and at times feels uncharted (or at least *rarely*

of shiro and kenji's relationship not being for cisheteronormative consumption, but something that's experienced thoroughly in the privacy of their home, as an expression of intimacy that doesn't hinge on their relationship being affirmed by society at large. highly recommend the doujin 1000/10!! feel free to add to this recipe for an extra kick.

charted) for yaoi manga.

it also calls to mind the idea of a second queer adolescence, which refers to queer people addressing “the experiences our younger selves missed” and “our internalized anti-queerness” (cohen, psychology today). this concept adds so much emotional resonance to the overall narrative—scenes where you see shiro really *invest* in his relationship with kenji, or when kenji cries after getting to have dinner with shiro’s parents, something he never could’ve imagined in his adolescence.

ultimately, despite the manga’s tendency toward mundanity and slices of life, *kinō nani tabeta* leaves the reader with overwhelming feelings of peace and optimism. although i am a queer adult in a different context than shiro and kenji, i derive a great deal of hope from the ways that they carve out a sense of comfort and belonging in their home—regardless of what may happen outside of it.

i’m aware that in writing this in a yaoi zine i’m basically preaching to the choir—but *kinō nani tabeta* is so reassuring in its assertion that, hey, queer people can make a home, too! a story about being gay in your 40s-60s is also reassuring in that it portrays queerness as not linked strictly to youth. there emerges a futurity to queerness, as queer theorist josé esteban muñoz would put it, a queerness beyond the present and what we can currently conceive of. making a home as a queer person and living there with your partner for 20+ years is the perfect encapsulation of that.

at times, shiro is characterized as being consistently noncommittal. in volume 10 he claims he “doesn’t have a life plan” and evades questions about having a long-term partner since he’s not out at work. nevertheless, moments like this are juxtaposed with how clearly he has a life plan: to spend his life with kenji. even if he can’t voice it out loud, there is a longevity to their relationship—and there’s something profound about this longevity stemming not from legal or otherwise “official” commitment, but simply from a mutual desire to continue sharing a life together, to repeatedly

choose each other with every year that passes.

kinō nani tabeta is an ongoing manga, but i don't have any worries about where the manga will take shiro and kenji next. yoshinaga presents their future hazily, with the precarious uncertainty that underpins the very existence of queer people, frankly.

and yet, but there's a steadiness to shiro's cooking for kenji. they'll continue to cook together, eat together, and make a home together, all at the same kitchen table—and i can't think of a better meal than that.

final step: congratulations!!! you made homecooked yaoi!!! please share with your friends.

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DESIRE, DENIAL, AND THE FANTASY OF BEING ABLE TO SAY YOU HAD NO CHOICE

by alatus @framrodia

In 2005, Mizushiro Setona began serializing *The Cornered Mouse Dreams of Cheese* in a josei magazine called *Judy*. It ran for several chapters until 2006, and was immediately followed by its direct sequel *The Carp on the Chopping Block Jumps Twice*, running from 2006 until 2009. Both *Cornered Mouse* and *Carp* are one volume each, spanning 5 lengthy chapters each for a total of 10, and today I'll be discussing them both.

This will contain **spoilers for the whole manga**, as well as discussions of homophobia, sexual encounters of dubious consent, and infidelity.

The opening to *Mouse* is familiar, giving us an over-used starting plot: Ootomo Kyouichi, indecisive and passive thirty year old office worker, is cheating on his wife, Chikako. Seeking an excuse to divorce him because their marriage has been stale and loveless for years, she hires a private investigator to find proof of his infidelity.

Enter Imagase Wataru, private investigator.

Imagase is Kyouichi's underclassman from college. He's also a gay man who has been in love with Kyouichi for years and, after such an unexpected reunion, cannot help but make a desperate attempt to have Kyouichi at least once.

Of course, he does this by blackmailing Kyouichi with the evidence of his affairs. He promises his old senpai he'll keep quiet in exchange for a kiss, and Kyouichi relents with surprisingly little resistance.

It starts with a kiss.
(How did it end up like this).

Typical, right? The sleazy, desperate gay man forcing the object of his affections into homosexual acts, growing progressively more sexual with each encounter — because of course Imagase comes back for more. Kyouichi's wife wants that divorce, and she wants that evidence, and Imagase uses each uncovered affair to bait Kyouichi into just one more night.

But, see, Mizushiro-sensei is fucking tricking you. It's a trick. You fell for her trap card of 'eye-rolling premise of gay man forcing himself onto his straight crush'. This is actually a somewhat bleak, incredibly poignant look into the complicated nature of relationships, sexuality, and social conformity.

In writing yaoi, women are able to further divorce the experiences they write about from their own realities; in this, they can explore concepts they cannot dare bring themselves to in their own lives, whether that may be related to their own identity or the particularly contentious fantasy of dub/noncon.

Many pieces of BL and yaoi alike feel like an idealization. The relationships don't feel entirely grounded in reality and oftentimes, homophobia is a distant afterthought that might come up to cause brief moments of tension in the absence of a real plot. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that. Sometimes you don't want to

think about how difficult it can be to live as a queer person; sometimes you just want to see art of handsome men having sex. No shame in that.

But in *Mouse* and *Carp*, the relationship between Kyouichi and Imagase feels heartbreakingly real, as do their relationships with their own selves; Kyouichi's internalized homophobia (externalized at times tbh) and Imagase, though confident on the surface, certain that his sexuality is 'dirtying' the man he loves. It all feels true to the lived experiences of many queer people, particularly of an older generation.

In their relationship, we see a cycle: Kyouichi, in that fantasy of being forced into homosexuality, his innermost wants ripped to the surface by a man who is bold enough to take what they both want; Kyouichi coming to terms with his desire; Imagase, guilty for 'tainting' him with his deviancy; and at last, Kyouichi being the one to take what he wants instead of waiting.

Kyouichi is a man who is so passive in his relationships with women that when he reminisces with his college ex, Natsuki, she says, "Just once, I wish you had forced a kiss on me." In that same conversation, she asserts her belief that if you love someone, you want to 'do it' no matter what, even if they say no.

In his relationships with women, Kyouichi never shows any sort of initiative or passion. When they want something, he gives it. When they say it's over, then he accepts it without argument. It's always the other person both starting and ending the relationship.

His relationship with Imagase is much the same, but unlike with women, Kyouichi puts up a token resistance. He insists he doesn't want Imagase, even as their relationship deepens and becomes both casually intimate (Imagase basically moves in with him!) and more sexual. But his resistance is just that: half-hearted and mainly for appearances sake.

Kyouichi *does* want Imagase, but his want is shameful and abnormal, so he claims otherwise and makes Imagase keep ‘forcing’ him — because that is what is easiest for Kyouichi. If anything goes wrong, he can point his finger and say, I was blackmailed, extorted, threatened; I had no choice. Even though he grows jealous when he sees Imagase with other men in public and gets upset when he hears about past sexual encounters with other men, he maintains that he is completely and utterly heterosexual, and it is Imagase forcing his deviancy upon him.

In a perfect encapsulation of Kyouichi’s desire for normalcy vs his desire for Imagase, chapter 5 of *Mouse* has Imagase jerking Kyouichi off. It’s something they’ve done before but they’re on the floor and Kyouichi turns his head. In his full-length mirror he sees his own face as Imagase kisses him, and is terrified by the sight of his own pleasure. He is so mortified that he hits Imagase to push him away.

It’s one thing to let himself be pleased by Imagase. It’s another to see his own shameful desire in action. Maybe that’s why later, when Natsuki asks him to either choose Imagase or go out with her, he picks her. When he leaves with her, Natsuki holds onto his arm as they walk. He looks into a storefront window, seeing his own reflection, and thinks about how normal they look. How he finds comfort in it even though he had just hurt Imagase.

Much later, Kyouichi sees Imagase on a rainy night. A fraught but heated reunion occurs, and when Imagase and Kyouichi have penetrative sex for the first time, Kyouichi once more looks at his reflection — only this time, Imagase covers his eyes with his hand. Don’t look, Kyouichi. If you don’t look, it’s not as real.

But it is real. Your innermost fantasies and desires will claw their way to the surface, even if you close your eyes to them, and as Kyouichi begins to finally reconcile with that fact, it is Imagase who begins to feel as if they’re on the precipice of breaking apart. Guiltily, he feels that his homosexuality is tainting Kyouichi and holding

him back from a better life, and this furthers after Kyouichi tops him for the first time despite the fact that, like Natsuki once did, he says *even if I say no, don't stop*.

And prior to this, Kyouichi had never felt real passion during sex. With women it was comforting — but that's all it was. Comfortingly normal. But as he fucked Imagase, for the first time, Kyouichi actually *wanted* to be doing it. And yet, even as he thought this, he still felt as if his feelings for Imagase were not real enough; he's not a 'real' homosexual, and even if he were, how much can two men love one another?

He can't shake that doubt. That's why, when Imagase decides to leave him, Kyouichi does as he always has and doesn't fight it. Even though Imagase's eyes he was dirtying Kyouichi with his homosexuality, he still wanted Kyouichi to tell him to stay. *Even if I say no, don't stop*. But like with all the women in his life, Kyouichi doesn't do that.

And yet unlike them, Kyouichi is haunted by Imagase; he doesn't throw out his ashtray, he thinks of him as the seasons change, and even as he himself finally acknowledges what he felt is 'love', he still believes that a 'real' homosexual would not believe it to be so. Even when he looks out at the moon, thinking about Imagase with longing, he believes his feelings are not enough. Even as Kyouichi beds his girlfriend while thinking of Imagase, he doubts the veracity of his love.

But when he sees Imagase again, Kyouichi — for the first time — truly takes initiative. He does as both Natsuki and Imagase have asked of him before: he takes, even when Imagase says no, and as he does he thinks to himself: *I want to be this selfish for the rest of my life. Are Imagase and I made for each other?*

Even though Imagase is happy, he's also that old guilt, as though he's eating away at Kyouichi's existence and will never make him happy.

“I’ll decide whether or not I’m happy,” Kyouichi tells him. “We’re both selfish.” It’s the most assertive he’s ever been. He thinks that if this pain is love, it must be divine punishment. That love which makes you happy is a childish dream. But with the bleakness of an adult, he thinks that if in a week or in twenty years, if Imagase tires of him and leaves for real — even if nothing is left of his life, he’ll let it happen knowing the love they had simply died.

Reading *Mouse* and *Carp* felt less like reading a typical yaoi and more like reading something akin to Nagata Kabi’s *My Lesbian Experience With Loneliness*.

In the author’s note at the very end of the series in 2009, Mizushiro-sensei wrote: “...I think I’m the kind of woman who falls in love, but I find it hard to stay in a relationship with a man for a long period of time. I expect there are a lot of women who feel like that. But what would I do if I were approached by a really wonderful, manly woman instead of some guy? My heart starts pounding when I happen to meet some gorgeous, young person, even if I know it’s a woman. But I don’t think that’s the same thing lesbians feel. Even if I had the same feelings, I probably wouldn’t understand them. [...] I’m a lot like Kyouichi-san.”

In yaoi, women are able to explore their fantasies in a unique way, particularly in a manner that gives voice to queer desires before they’re ready to fully confront them — or even before they are aware that those desires exist within themselves. When the central characters are men, it is further divorced from their lived reality.

Many scholars have argued this, but it always bears repeating, especially as newer generations of fandom seem to forget; the discourse on fantasies of consensual non-consent, or direct non-consent (as with Kyouichi, being forced into sexual situations in order to drag out his innermost desire). I think English-speaking fandom rehashes the ‘is fujoshi an acceptable label?’ argument every six months, but I digress.

In *Moe Talk: Affective Communication Among Female Fans of Yaoi*, Patrick W. Galbraith cites Kakinuma Eiko and Sagawa Toshihiko at their “Eien no rokugatsu (JUNE)” [Eternal June/JUNE] talk, given at the Yoshihiro Yonezawa Memorial Library of Manga and Subcultures in June 26, 2011:

“They say that the compulsion to consume certain kinds of manga is a sickness. But we all have our sicknesses. The question is what is your sickness? And what sickness can we live together with?”

Similarly in her author’s note, Mizushiro further wrote about herself, “...even if I can accept someone, love is hard [...] there are people who fall madly in love for no logical reason, even knowing they’ll get nothing in return, and it’s hard to put an end to that kind of love. In that respect, I understand Imagase completely. I really think love is a sickness or something.”

Perhaps love is a sickness, as Mizushiro-sensei wrote, especially when that love can cause such personal turmoil or outright ruin your life (socially or otherwise). But as Sagawa Toshihiko and Kakinuma Eiko said, we all have our sicknesses — whether one is a cishet woman whose abnormal fantasies other her from the rest of society, a deeply closeted queer person, or even one who is socially open about their queerness, yaoi provides a place for each individual to indulge what they can’t otherwise admit to wanting. And in *Mouse* and *Carp*, you get sex that is not only between men, but between two men who do pretty awful things to each other and the people around them, and also emotionally charged interpersonal relationship growth.

As Isaac of @iplidl fame puts it, *Mouse* and *Carp* are “... one of the most explicit examples of what we all believe about yaoi as a vessel for queerness outside of its textual contents.”

In conclusion, I think this is one of the most emotionally intimate pieces of yaoi I’ve ever had the pleasure of reading and even after

2.1k words I still feel like I have more to say about it. So please, if you've never read *The Cornered Mouse Dreams of Cheese* and *The Carp On The Chopping Block Jumps Twice*, I highly encourage you to give it a chance.

It is, as they say, #PEAKYAOI.

YAOI ZINE ADVICE COLUMN

dear t shirt:

i am an obsessive yandere shou. how do i get my sects senior brother to notice me.

talent of the orthodox path

dear talent of the orthodox path,

i'm noticing some big feelings in your letter, and some interesting word choices. before we even talk about winning your crush, i think we should turn to freud to break down the terms in which you've chosen to pathologize your desire. because if you can't psychoanalyze yourself how the hell are you going to psychoanalyze anyone else.

you characterize yourself as obsessive. we know from freud that obsession is the return of something repressed, "transformed self-reproaches" that he correlates to formative childhood pleasures. now, the thing about obsessions is that we have limited knowledge of them. this may seem counter-intuitive—all you do is think about them! but they always represent something else. so you're not actually obsessed with your shixiong; you're repressing something else.

obsession is characterized by doubt. you repeat your obsession because you doubt your own love. therefore, we already have an inkling what is repressed. if an intense love is matched by an almost equally intense hatred, freud says, that produces paralysis. that's why you haven't confessed yet. that's why you're paralyzed by your affection. you are truly preoccupied by your ambivalence towards your shixiong, who stands in for still something else.

what is that something else? it's the orthodox path that you define yourself by. your senior brother, whom you only refer to by his power over you, stands in for authority within that path. to free yourself from this obsession, i suggest abandoning the orthodox path and trying demonic cultivation or other forbidden arts. there's no way that could go wrong.

by the way none of this is medical advice.

sincerely yours,
tshirt

when you have a toxic ex who's still friends with lots of people in one of your irl social circles, bc they're high charisma and great at manipulation, what's a good way to handle it?

anonymous

dear anonymous,

whoa. i wasn't expecting a real question.

originally my advice bifurcated based on how toxic your ex is: could you learn to share space with them, or are they a danger to your wellbeing? but i think you're really asking a different question.

i think the real questions are "will people pick me over them? am i strong, am i capable, am i lovable enough to find support again?" and my answer to the last question, which is the most important, is that yes you are all of those things. you will find new communities, new support systems, and new friendships that have nothing to do with them.

i'm not saying to just cede that particular friend group and walk away from people you love and trust. but i believe you're already doing the best you can to navigate these shared spaces and that's

all you can do as you heal. what will reaffirm you is finding new connections. you are growing and changing. you are likable. there's a whole world of people out there waiting for you and the more you explore it, the more comfortable you will feel.

pardon me for putting words in your mouth. but that's my two cents.

all my love,
tshirt

Dear tshirt,

Lately I find myself contemplating the relationship between yaoi and my own transmasculinity. I feel that reading and watching yaoi (both western and normal yaoi) both enabled me to transition AND allowed me to put off doing so for years. I'm especially curious if you have any thoughts on the relation between fujoshis and transition, particularly regarding the self-conceptualization/identification of someone on the, if I may, fujoshi to transmasc spectrum, though I'd also love to hear any thoughts on yaoi and transition more broadly across identity categories!

Male Fujoshi

dear male fujoshi,

in his 1919 essay, "a child is being beaten," sigmund freud describes how a lot of his hysteria patients would come to him with a simple phantasy: "a child is being beaten." it was often a sexual fantasy, inspired by school aged beatings witnessed by the patient. but real life beatings never excited the patient—only the daydream with the passive voice.

in her 1922 essay, "beating fantasies and daydreams," anna freud [his daughter] describes a recurring fantasy a fifteen year old girl

had: this branching, overlapping set of stories about a knight who comes to capture a fifteen year old noble youth and hold him prisoner. the youth is enduring and attractive; the knight is sinister and violent. every time the knight seems about to inflict great suffering on the youth, the knight relents and nurses the youth back to health.

for decades there was an elephant in the room. until one brave researcher kazumi nagaïke said it: “dude, this sounds like yaoi.” (source: “japanese women writers watch a boy being beaten by his father: male homosexual fantasies, female sexuality, and desire” [2004]) (paraphrased)

the yaoi lens for psychoanalysis is an underutilized tool in our arsenal. it can give us several important insights like “analyst as seme.” this is obvious to all viewers of hannibal (nbc), and complicated by the fact that the patient in both cases is anna freud herself.

anna says the hidden meaning of the fantasy sublimated into her daydream is “father loves only me,” certainly a yaoiful sentiment. the fantasy evolves like this: the child takes all love for himself and leaves the punishment for others → guilt turns the punishment back on the child → beating as an expression of love → father only beats (loves) me. now i do not mean to suggest anna had a sado-masochistic incestuous fixation on her father any more than the woman herself already does. rather i want to argue that her possessiveness is interesting because it transforms her into a boy, her into him. she attains closeness to him via male fantasies. if any claim is being made at all, it is that anna freud is the first trans masc fujoshi.

now, projecting this latent masculinity onto/from the father-cum-analyst reads to me as transference. and what are transferences?

“they are new editions or facsimiles of the impulses and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis; but they have this peculiarity, which is characteristic for their species, that they replace some earlier person

by the person of the physician.” - freud sr.

if we are talking transference, we are talking dora. aka the main character of “fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria” (1905). dora was a hysteria patient, a young woman referred to freud by her father. it quickly became clear that there was something more sinister going on. dora was facing advances from herr k, a family friend, with whose wife dora’s father was having an affair. dora was repulsed by herr k, jealous of her father for possessing frau k, and deeply skeptical of freud. she abandoned analysis several months in.

freud was convinced that dora, despite her protestations otherwise, must despise herr k. *something* must be repressed, or she would have no hysteric symptoms. obviously we think something else was repressed. i was struck, reading her case history, by the consistency of her identification with her father, then herr k, then freud himself. freud paid more attention to her identifying with her mother and frau k. he argued “she was therefore identifying herself both with the woman her father had once loved and the woman he loved now.” but he struggled to explain ideas like this: “when dora talked about frau k, she used to praise her ‘adorable white body’ in accents more appropriate to a lover than to a defeated rival.”

lacan agrees with me by the way—he argues that the only way to frau k “was through the intermediary of the masculine partner.” the reason i prefer trans identification over an early misrepresentation of lesbianism is that dora transfers this identification to/with freud, who has nothing to do with frau k. so i want to read the hysteric as a queer identity, just as i read the fujoshi as a hysteric one.

now. ugh. fujoshi is not necessarily a trans, specifically transmasculine one. but to gender it as a cis feminine identity, to claim that identification with men is a pure cis woman experience seems needlessly obtuse. yes it is something women are encouraged to do by the patriarchy. we may read it, and the prioritization of men, as a force masculinizing process. but cross gender identification can and should be something we claim on a genderqueer spectrum. you

know what i mean?

anyway, what's the point of reading these women this way? what are the stakes?

it's reparative to me, to me, to tease out new readings of dora. maybe i'm just experiencing countertransference, the way freud did. but if we must make her speak—and there is no way to silence her now—let it be a different story.

where freud wrote: "i am my father's daughter. i have a catarrh, just as he has. he has made me ill, just as he has made mother ill. it is from him that i have got my evil passions, which are punished by illness," let us read a beaten boy, not a hysteric girl.

i think it's interesting how much fathers and daughters come up. because freud is the ultimate daddy, isn't he? the father who inspired the law of the father, the father of our discipline, the father from whose life we chart our own. i feel the same way in my own transition, that so much of it pre-transition was predicated on wanting permission to be trans, that my own wild desires for masculinity be validated by an authority figure. i was in my own analyst's chair, waiting to transition to analyst as well, the agent of my own diagnosis. i am trying to become my own father freud. would that he be impressed, or at least have a field day with me.

the place that yaoi held in this is a daydream as stultifying as it was heady. it was a repetitive text, as well thumbed as a rosary, endless ways to voice a masculinized desire and see myself in masculinized embodiment. this is why i want to trouble the figure of the cis feminine fujo: i think it offers cover for queer desires and heterosexualizes them. what must a woman be attracted to? men. what's better than one man? two men, with the observer (woman) conveniently absent. but i think the observer is not as absent as we might fantasize. the observer is an analyst, with all the transference that that may entail. observing acts upon you in turn. looking is also an active act. you cannot be passive in your own desire; it will be felt.

all in all, what am i saying? i am saying, i think, that trans desire is everywhere. it is, in my reading, central to the creation story of psychoanalysis; it is central to my adolescent fantasies; it is central to what brought us together and what will sustain us in the years to come. i believe that the analyst is a trans figure, who offers us a gateway into our fullest selves and identifications, and that yaoi makes analysts of us all.

your faithful analyst,
tshirt

WHAT IS YAOI? A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR, PART 2

we've been here before. yaoi zine 1 sought to be as expansive and inclusive as possible. now, in yaoi zine 4 (!), we went as narrow as possible. i jokingly nicknamed this issue the gatekept yaoi zine. in my call for submissions, i specified that entries must literally be about yaoi—that is, japanese bl. my lovely contributors rose to the challenge, of course. but why was there a challenge at all?

some reasons: i thought it would be funny. also i do like yaoi and i wanted to honor the genre that gave our zine its name. i also wanted its constraints and conventions to teach us something. and most of all i wanted to see more english language scholarship on not just bl fan communities but the objects of our adoration. like, what is it about yaoi that keeps us coming back? together we tried to plumb some of the depths of this excessive, melodramatic, lovesick genre. this zine does not pretend to be comprehensive. but i hope it serves as an invitation to read, write, and see things more queerly. because yaoi meets us where we're at, often before we're ready for it. so let's see what we learn.

xoxo, tshirt