Embedded Niche Overlap: A Media Industry History of Yaoi Anime's American Distribution from 1996 to 2009

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Abstract: This article offers an industrial history of yaoi anime's distribution in the United States by companies that acquired official distribution licenses. During the course of this history, the term "yaoi" was not always dominant in American anime vernacular; rather, it only ascended to widespread American usage after it was adopted by American distributors as an industry term. Yaoi anime's complex distribution history reveals that, unlike yaoi manga, yaoi anime began and continues to be industrially situated at the overlap of seemingly disparate niche categories.

Keywords: Media Industry Studies, Distribution, Retail, Yaoi, Anime History

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Reporting on international film markets in 1983, American media industry news source *Variety* announced that the major Japanese studio Toei was producing an animated feature *Patalliro! Stardust Project* (1983, *Patariro! Sutādasuto keikaku*), an extension of Toei's television series *I, Patalliro!* (1982-83, *Boku patariro!*).[1] Printed in a section covering foreign media productions, this announcement would have been directed towards potential American licensees because it served to advertise *Patalliro!* as a media property soon to be available for American distribution. To a British journalist, *Patalliro!* epitomized the contemporaneous shocking revelation that some types of Japanese girls' media were saturated with sensual encounters between "homosexual boys and bisexual princes,"[2] as described by a sensationalist *Guardian* exposé on shōjo manga from the same year. Unremarked in the *Variety* report, *Patalliro!* was among the first Japanese animations to feature bishōnen (beautiful young men) with homoerotic implications, a category later understood in an American context via the term "yaoi." The term "yaoi" originally emerged in Japan out of the specific subcultural context of dōjinshi independent production and reception, whereas the terms "shōnen-ai" and "bishōnen" were more commonly employed to describe the diffusion of homoerotic elements within mainstream commercial sectors. In an American context, yaoi became a multipurpose term to describe both independently produced fan works and commercially oriented media products, like *Patalliro!*, that appeal to yaoi fans. At present, there continues to be an industrial distinction between yaoi products that overtly address the genre's fans, and more mainstream products that attempt to exploit yaoi fans as one of many potential markets by only suggesting male-male eroticism as a subtext. The current categorization of *Patalliro!* as yaoi on some

English language websites instantiates yaoi's additional slippery status as a retrospective term of reclamation.[3]

Although Toei had previously forged relationships with American distributors and television networks for the American release of its products, including *Alakazam the Great* (1960, *Saiyūki*) and *The Magic Serpent* (1966, *Kairyū daikessen*), the studio more aggressively pursued the international market in the 1980s. Referred to as a "giant" by the industry press, in 1984, Toei became the first Japanese company to participate in the American Film Market, a distribution-focused event organized by a trade organization of production and distribution companies.[4] After the decade's close, Toei offered the *Patalliro!* series at the 1990 and 1991 annual international television industry conference hosted by the National Association of Television Program Executives.[5] The show was not picked up. The original 1983 *Variety* announcement of Toei's *Patalliro!* was perhaps the first yaoi anime advertisement in any American publication, yet as of this writing, no components of the franchise have been officially released in the United States. Following Toei's promotion of *Patalliro!*, *Variety* would not mention the word yaoi until mid-2006, defining the category as erotica "for women about pretty gay men."[6]

The non-release of the *Patalliro!* media products in the United States instantiates the main argument of this article that, despite yaoi's existence in Japanese markets and the term's use by some fan constituents in North America, yaoi did not become a visible or viable component of the American anime niche market until the term solidified into a distribution category. By "distribution category", I mean a classification term that a distributor understands to have a market significance, as indicated by either the distributor's explicit usage of the term in its industry materials or the distributor's

implicit usage of the term through the development of a product line or marketing campaign associated with media grouped under that term. As is reflected in the case of yaoi anime's distribution in the United States, both cultural and economic factors affect yaoi media's circulation—as Sean Cubitt asserts about the covert power of distribution generally—"sometimes amplifying class, race and gender segmentation, sometimes muting them."[7] Critical inquiries into distribution within media industry studies have interrogated the arbitrary and profit-oriented origins of distribution categories. For example, Bryan Wuest has investigated the invention of the LGBT distribution category, which targeted LGBT niche audiences during the home video boom, and Ron Becker has traced the development of gay television that addressed socially liberal classes in the late 20th century.[8]

In mapping yaoi's emergence as a distribution category in the United States, this article places anime studies in conversation with critical media industry history. The distributor focus of this article follows recent industrial approaches in anime studies, such as Rayna Denison's innovative analysis of the global distribution of officially licensed anime.[9] This focus also follows seminal anime and manga studies that underscore how shōjo and shōnen media shifted from their initial gender and age demographic origins to become primarily associated with generic and stylistic conventions by the 1980s.[10] Yet it is uncommon for yaoi media studies to take an industry approach. Instead, scholars in the field of yaoi manga or anime studies tend to focus on content, cultural interpretations of content, and fan production practices.[11] Because of its strong association with unofficial fan distribution models, such as peer-sharing and fansubbing, the history of yaoi anime's official distribution is an important industrial case study that reveals the stakes, investments, and failures of corporate

endeavors to adapt a category of previously fan circulated products to the American retail marketplace. As we will see, American anime distributors became invested in yaoi as a product category once market data was available to these distributors through their involvement with the Yaoi-Con. At stake for these distributors in the development of yaoi as an industry term was the maximizing of profit, yet yaoi's unique market positioning in Japan—professionally produced homoerotica largely consumed by young, heterosexual women—was without an obvious American analog.[12] Distributors experimented with branding yaoi products to align with at least three different existing niches: LGBT media, general audience anime, and adults-only anime. While the comparative effectiveness of these strategies is unknown, they all continue to be deployed by existing distributors. In sum, yaoi exists as a sub-niche within multiple market alcoves, simultaneously embedded within the broader anime category and overlapping with other niche markets such as that of LGBT consumers.

In this article, I map the materialization of the yaoi anime market in the United States through an industry history of official distributors. Ultimately, the market formed via distribution decisions, and supply chain hurdles specific to distribution led to the demise of one of the major players in that market. The history of the American distribution of yaoi anime can be divided into three distinct phases: pre-2001, 2001-2009, post-2009. The inflection years of 2001 and 2009 are chosen here because they mark events that shifted the landscape of the yaoi distribution. Specifically, 2001 marks the year of the first Yaoi-Con. The convention's promotional tactics, engagement with official distributors, and its reporting in anime fan and press outlets solidified "yaoi"—as opposed to "shōnen-ai," "BL," or "boy's love"—as the dominant term for homoerotic Japanese animation in the United States. In turn, 2009 is the year when Central Park

Media—one of the two major 'official' yaoi media outlets in the United States during this decade—declared bankruptcy. That same year, the streaming platform Crunchyroll shifted to a policy of hosting only officially licensed content and began cracking down on unlicensed uploads. This study examines the early years of yaoi anime distribution that preceded the implementation of streaming platforms, and therefore will primarily focus on the 1996-2001 and 2001-2009 phases of yaoi anime's distribution history.

Official Distribution of Ambiguous "Gay" Anime as Embedded Niches: 1996-2001

Anime now understood as yaoi were initially distributed ambiguously within at least two existing niche markets, the anime market and the LGBT media market. The term "yaoi" was already in use in the 1990s among subcultural slash fandoms (women writers who explore male homoerotic fiction) and diasporic anime-manga consumers. However, the term did not ascend to popular American vernacular, even within general anime fandom, until the widespread coverage and promotion of the first Yaoi-Con in 2001. Before 2001, "yaoi" was only used sporadically within American anime culture. For example, Helen McCarthy's *Anime Movie Guide* (1997) describes *Zetsuai 1989* (1992) as yaoi, while her *Erotic Anime Movie Guide* (1998)—written in collaboration with Jonathan Clements—does not contain a single mention of the term "yaoi" despite further discussion of *Zetsuai 1989* and an entire chapter on shōnen-ai.[13] Even the popular North American anime industry press, *Anime News Network*, did not list yaoi in its lexicon of terms until mid-2003, a year after the terms "bishōnen" and "shōnen-ai" were added to the lexicon.[14]

Within niche anime and LGBT media markets, yaoi existed as an embedded niche, or a subcategory that emerged within an already established niche category. An embedded niche category like yaoi, in this case, produces a secondary market segmentation; after an initial niche audience is designated, that audience is further segmented into subgroups. Specifically, this embedded niche category of yaoi reveals itself as a subgenre of ambiguous shōjo anime in its first demographic segmentation, and in the second, at the intersection of "gay animation" and "international gay" media categories.[15] While yaoi has previously been described as a "niche within a niche,"[16] here I additionally assert that yaoi's embedded niche positioning predated the popular emergence of the term "yaoi" in the United States. The earliest stage of official American yaoi media distribution commenced with the Culture Q Connection—an LGBT imprint of Phoenix Distributors, later operating as Ariztical Entertainment—release of *Kizuna* (1994) on VHS in October 1996, and Viz Communications' publishing of the manga Moto Hagio's *A, A'* in 1998 and Akimi Yoshida's *Banana Fish* (*Banana Fisshu*) in 1999.

Phoenix Distributor's 1996 *Kizuna* release under their Culture Q Connection label was the first American home video release of an anime containing overt male homosexual content. It proved to be a dual-intervention in existing anime and LGBT markets in the United States. *Kizuna*'s release represented a convergence of the popularity of anime home video in the United States and the parallel development of an LGBT home video market. Originally specializing in low-budget horror releases, the gay owners of Phoenix Distributors decided to shift their company to an LGBT market following their move from Los Angeles to Phoenix in 1994. *Kizuna* was the company's first LGBT acquisition. Given that several LGBT distributors had already established home video libraries, *Kizuna* was designed as a flagship release for the distributor's

LGBT imprint that provided a strategy to differentiate their product. Not only was *Kizuna* a gay animation and a gay Japanese release, but it also represented a noticeable intervention in the hetero-masculinist anime market. Up and to this point, American home video anime skewed towards science fiction releases marketed to male audiences and often with content warnings to differentiate anime from children's animation by underscoring violent or sexual content.[17] By directly catering to an LGBT audience with an anime product, the distributor attempted to ride the increasingly lucrative anime home video wave with a crossover release in order to position the imprint as an innovative player in the LGBT niche market. However, *Kizuna* was not marketed as "yaoi" at this stage, but only as either a gay Japanese animation or a gay foreign product.

Other than the release of *Kizuna* for the LGBT niche market, yaoi anime's American distribution was also facilitated by the distribution of shōjo manga and anime. However, similar to the delayed usage of the term yaoi, the earliest official distribution of shōjo did not define this media as shōjo or specify that in Japan this media targeted the female sector of a gender differentiated market. Rather, anime adapted from shōjo manga were distributed in the United States as general anime products with the expectation that they would find their own market through anime fans' impulse buying practices. Undoubtedly, diasporic audiences and some anime fans would have understood these products as shōjo. However, the general sense from emergent anime fans in the United States was that anime and manga preferences were a trial and error process dependent on the fan's "blind buy," the purchasing of a product without being significantly informed of what the product is or what kind of content it contains.[18]

This ambiguous distribution and its trial and error form of consumption were evident in earlier American releases of shōjo manga and anime that included bishōnen

elements. American manga publisher Viz released Moto Hagio's *A, A'* in January 1998, and Akimi Yoshida's *Banana Fish* the following year—in a compilation book entitled *PULP* and as a standalone release.[19] Both *A, A'* and *Banana Fish* contain shōnen-ai elements and would subsequently be understood as shōnen-ai or yaoi by their American fans in later years. However, both the homosexual content and the female audiences for these manga were all but disavowed in their initial American distribution. While both of these manga releases were framed as shōjo by their American publisher Viz, what is striking is that links to female audiences of shōjo go either unspoken or are immediately contradicted to underscore a crossover male reception. Specifically, the back cover of *A, A'* defines shōjo without any mention of gender as "a uniquely literary genre of Japanese comics in which the relationships between characters are as meticulously crafted as the story's action."[20] Likewise, initial online advertising for *Banana Fish* defined the manga as an exceptional crossover release despite its shōjo association: "The only shōjo (girls' comics) title currently in *PULP*, *BANANA FISH* broke out of the shōjo mold and won a huge male crossover audience due to its realistic Katushiro Otomo (*AKIRA*)-like character designs."[21] These techniques of eliding the gender specificities of shōjo worked to frame products like *A, A'* and *Banana Fish* within a general American manga market that was imagined to be heterosexual men by the emergent industry.

Early officially distributed yaoi videos were marketed with even more ambiguity. Some of the earliest shōjo anime releases that included bishōnen elements were Viz Video's *Please Save My Earth* (1993-94, *Boku no Chikyū o Mamotte*) series that commenced in early 1996, Manga Video's *Tokyo Revelation* (1995, *Tokyo Mokushiroku*) released in 1997, and Anime Works' *Earthian* (1989-96, *Āshian*) videos with releases starting in late 1998. None of these releases were specifically marked as shōjo, bishōnen,

or yaoi; instead, their genre elements—specifically science fiction—were emphasized. Recalling the male-oriented targeting of U.S. shōjo manga releases, anime consumers were thought to be exclusively male and heteronormative, therefore, distributors emphasized genre elements associated with those consumers.[22]

One exceptional case was industry and fan discussions of the release of *Fake* (1996, *Feiku*) on VHS. These discussions and the anime's marketing reveal that it circulated at a transitional moment before the adoption of the term "yaoi" in American anime circles by 2001. *Fake* was released in May 1999 by the Anime Works label of Media Blasters. Whereas *Kizuna* was licensed by a distributor that specialized in non-anime products, *Fake* was the first anime released by an official anime distributor that explicitly featured same-gender desire between men. At this time *Kizuna* was the only other anime in U.S. release with overt homosexuality as a main plot feature, although there were previous official releases with bishōnen.[23] The distributor's text for the release situated *Fake* as an action-filled anime, and only hinted at its homosexual content with tongue-in-cheek copy like, "Not only does this pair of crime-fighting crusaders chase down criminals, but Dee can't stop chasing Ryo either."[24] Before the VHS' release, the distributor's pre-order announcement closeted the homosexual content of *Fake* more firmly by excising all gender-specific nouns and pronouns from the synopsis, and by watering down the gendered and sexual implications of the words "crusaders" and "chasing" with the more neutral terms "duo" and "crazy about." Out of ten total releases in the announcement, *Fake* is the only one with a synopsis absent of gender-associated nouns and pronouns making this elision stand out as awkward and likely a deliberate masking of the anime's content.[25]

Yet the retail circulation and reception of Anime Works' release suggest that it was understood to contain homosexual content despite the distributor's evasive marketing. Anime retailer Right Stuf International recognized the ambiguous nature of *Fake*'s distribution and included copy in their May 1999 release announcement that coded *Fake* as gay-associated anime for those familiar with Culture Q's previous *Kizuna* release, "If you're looking for something a little different (and you enjoyed *Kizuna*), you might want to give *Fake* a try!"[26] While not specifically referencing *Fake*'s homosexual content or its later categorization as yaoi, this retailer plays on the trial and error nature of anime consumption—the "give *Fake* a try"—while also referencing the only existing U.S. anime release previous to *Fake* that contained homosexual content. *Anime News Network*'s review of the *Fake* VHS underscores not only how heteronormative and male-centric North American anime culture imagined itself to be, but also how "yaoi" was not yet an established term in American anime culture. Written by a self-described straight man, the review repeatedly circles between a description of the plot and speculation on whether anime with gay content could possibly appeal to other straight men. The review is filled with phrases that centralize straight male reception, such as "us straight men can probably get into it if we're liberal enough" and the rhetorical question "but is it something straight guys will like?"[27] Although the reviewer does acknowledge a possible straight female and gay male audience for *Fake*, phrases that centralize the straight male reception once again imagine the anime niche market is a straight male market, and in doing so, argue that a release unaccepted by that market is doomed to failure. This perhaps explains the fact that the reviewer rated *Fake* with a B+ when the only negative aspect of the review was that the anime would not appeal to homophobic straight men. Furthermore, the review describes *Fake* as "shonen ai" rather

than yaoi, which also supports the observation above that yaoi was not yet a dominant term in American anime culture.

The reception of *Fake*'s official DVD release on December 19, 2000 anticipated the emergence of the term "yaoi" in the vernacular of American anime culture. Whereas the official packaging and marketing of Anime Works' VHS release all but disavowed the show's homosexual content, the DVD release materials included explicit references to its homoerotic elements including a screenshot on the back cover of two men with eyes locked about to kiss and an awkward content warning stating "contains dipictions (sic) of alternative lifestyles."[28] The majority of reviews for the DVD release invoke the term "yaoi," with all but one review on Amazon designating *Fake* as yaoi by August 2001. The review on the website *Anime on DVD* categorized *Fake* as "soft yaoi/hard shounenai" and described its official American distribution by Media Blasters as "a rarity in the domestic licensing scene."[29] Notably, all of these reviews were posted online in 2001, the year of the first Yaoi-Con held on September 1 and 2 in San Francisco.

The Yaoi Anime Distribution Landscape from 2001 to 2009

I argue that the occurrence of the Yaoi-Con in 2001 coincided with a shift in official yaoi media distribution in the United States. It marked the moment when "yaoi" emerged as a distribution term, indelibly affecting American anime subcultural vernacular. The Yaoi-Con generated a promotional buzz within the larger anime niche market, and critical coverage of the convention emerged in the anime news press. Due to this proliferation of promotional and critical discourse, American manga publishers and anime distributors began to perceive yaoi media as a commercial product that could be adapted for the American market. Subsequently, "yaoi" became a widespread reception,

marketing, and distribution term within North American anime cultures, outstripping the popularity of related terms like shōnen-ai. Ultimately, the convention provided an experimental setting for emergent and established North American anime distributors to test the market for yaoi media.

The Yaoi-Con was founded by Susan Chen, a major figure in the United States yaoi fandom who launched one of the first and most functional American yaoi fan networks *Aestheticism.com*.[30] The online network was run by fans and kept afloat by the Aestheticism Cybershoppe that stocked manga, dōjinshi, and other yaoi related merchandise. *Aestheticism.com* publicized the Yaoi-Con as early as October 2000, jump-starting widespread promotion through Yahoo message groups, cross-linking on yaoi fan and artist sites, and eventual coverage by *Anime News Network*, the primary anime industry publication for North America. In early 2001, an *Anime News Network* commentator objected to the event due to the lack of a congruent heterosexual-oriented convention, complaining "we don't have a Hentai con," and asserting that yaoi is "gay porn, flat out. Please stop fooling yourselves."[31] Some of *Anime News Network*'s readers demanded the press apologize to the convention's organizers for the comments. Ultimately, the antagonistic Yaoi-Con coverage sparked controversy and generated more publicity for the convention.

The Yaoi-Con was a key moment for the history of yaoi distribution because it solidified yaoi as an industry term for distributors while simultaneously inducting the term into general U.S. anime fan vernacular. Many of the distributors that had yet to enter the yaoi media market (and those that were beginning to dabble in it) were present as vendors and sometimes sponsors for this first annual convention. Sponsors and vendors at the first Yaoi-Con also included an eclectic mix of mainstream North

American anime distributors, retailers, graphic designers and artists.[32] Culture Q Connection was present as a dealer as were Media Blasters and Central Park Media (CPM), which would become the two most prolific distributors of yaoi anime until 2009. Media Blasters and CPM had not yet released products more explicitly associated with yaoi and had yet to invoke "yaoi" in their promotional materials. It is conceivable that distributors perceived the convention as an opportunity to test the market and promote their quasi-yaoi and bishōnen products, such as *Fake* and *Earthian* from Media Blasters' Anime Works line, and *Darkside Blues* (1994, *Dākusaido Burūsu*), *NightWalker* (1998, *Naitouōkā Mayonaka no tantei*), and *Angel Sanctuary* (2000, *Tenshi Kinryōku*) from CPM's library.

Anime distributors were given particular incentives to participate in the convention. Firstly, distributors or fan dealers without official licenses were forbidden from selling fansubs or bootlegs, which cleared the dealer room for official distributors only. This allowed official anime distributors to set their prices in relation to one another without the possibility of being undercut by unlicensed distributors. The ban on unofficial distribution was enforced with a zero-tolerance policy, which threatened prosecution and blacklisting from conventions beyond the Yaoi-Con. The convention's policy stated, "Bootlegs will be confiscated on sight and police presence will be used. Dealers who sell bootlegs will have their actions publicized through our website, warning other conventions about the Dealer's infraction."[33]

Beyond buying dealer tables, distributors could also sponsor the event. Sponsors were recognized with additional advertising space in the program, on the website, and in signage throughout the convention space. Distributor sponsors were also enticed by intangible benefits such as "building long-term relationships with an exclusive

audience" and "creating and/or renewing brand awareness."[34] To support these intangibles, demographic data was collected from registered attendees and compiled into a concise market analysis. The Yaoi-Con's corporate sponsor promotion framed sponsorship as a key way for distributors to reach a new ideal market of diverse, tech-savvy, collectors looking for new products to buy and new favorite distributors to promote.[35] The ad calling for corporate sponsorship provided the following demographic breakdown: "Average Attendee Age = 28; Attendee Locations: United States, England, Germany, Canada and Japan; Attendee Gender: 81% Female, 19% Male."[36] These distributor incentives proved attractive as the Yaoi-Con gained sponsorship from major distributors like Animeigo and ADV Films, as well as the previously mentioned LGBT media distributor Culture Q Connection.

The participation of Media Blasters and CPM at the first Yaoi-Con is significant because these companies became the two largest yaoi anime distributors in the period from 2001 to 2009. As competitors in both the yaoi niche and the large anime market, Media Blasters and CPM engaged in distribution tactics that mirrored one another. Both specialized in distributing print and video media often with the intention of providing tie-in products for fans of a franchise. For example, CPM distributed both the *Geobreeders* OVA and five volumes of the manga. Media Blasters similarly distributed DVD and manga from the *Apocalypse Zero* franchise. By 2001, both companies had already developed bifurcated product lines to differentiate general release titles from adult-oriented titles. CPM branded its general audience anime with the product line US Manga Corps, while its hentai (usually understood as heterosexual-oriented and "adults only") products were branded Anime 18. Similarly, Media Blasters used the name Anime Works for its general release anime, and Kitty for its adult anime. Notably, both CPM

and Media Blasters yaoi libraries were often branded within their established hentai lines. In 2004, CPM's initial announcement for their *Kizuna* DVD and manga releases occurred in their age-segregated Anime 18 catalog suggesting that these products would be released as part of the hentai imprint.[37] Eventually, CPM would rebrand its *Kizuna* products within a third distinct product line called Be Beautiful exclusively reserved for its yaoi releases. On the other hand, Media Blasters released several of its yaoi anime, including the *Kizuna* redux *Kizuna: Much Ado About Nothing* (2001, *Kizuna: Koi no Kara Sawagi*), via its Kitty hentai brand. However, Media Blasters did acquire several less explicit yaoi that were distributed as general release products through its Anime Works line.

From 2001 to 2009, the American yaoi anime distribution market began to develop as yaoi physical media releases began to increase substantially with the new focus on DVD distribution. During that period, the competitive formation of this niche industry reached a tiered structure, rather than a micro-oligopolistic structure like the larger anime industry where a few key distributors held comparable sway. The yaoi anime industry's tiered structure can be observed with respect to acquisition and release frequency: Media Blasters dominated release prevalence with the highest number and frequency of releases, CPM experienced a brief yaoi boom, and Ariztical's Culture Q Connection remained stagnant with no new acquisitions or releases after 2001. One-off releases by other companies occurred as well (see Appendix for a list of releases up to 2009). At this time, Media Blasters was by far the most prolific distributor of yaoi anime. Per year, the company averaged 4 releases, which it branded through two of its established lines. Its adult-oriented Kitty line released a total of 10 yaoi DVDs from 2002 to 2008, averaging approximately 1.67 yaoi releases each year. Its general

audience line, Anime Works, released a total of 26 less explicit yaoi DVDs from 2001 to 2009, averaging approximately 2.89 yaoi releases each year. On the other hand, the bulk of CPM's yaoi DVDs were released in the window from 2003 to 2006; if *Descendants of Darkness* (2000, *Yami no Matsuei*) is included in this count then the company distributed nine yaoi titles, averaging 2.25 DVDs per year during this brief boom period. As we will see, due to financial difficulties at CPM, mid-decade appears to be the point when Media Blasters began to overtake CPM's position in the anime (and yaoi) market, leading one industry source to observe, "Media Blasters is picking up the slack of releasing Central Park Media's backlist on DVD, it seems."[38]

The American yaoi anime distribution market's tiered structure shifted notably by mid-decade as the second-tier distributor, CPM, sustained significant financial hardship and a new distributor emerged from the retailer Right Stuf. As early as 2005, CPM began layoffs. The downsize was attributed to a DVD warehousing mistake and increasing product returns from customers who were reportedly "much more selective" than in the past.[39] CPM took a major financial blow following the January 2006 bankruptcy of retail conglomerate Musicland, CPM's "largest customer."[40] Later that year, CPM's other primary retailer, Tower Records, filed for bankruptcy. Finally, in mid-2006 a Japanese company called Biblos, which was the major licenser of yaoi manga to American distributors, folded and was acquired by one of Japan's major vertically integrated anime conglomerates, Animate, which rebranded Biblos as Libre Publishing. CPM and its yaoi manga competitors—Media Blasters, Tokyopop, and Digital Manga Publishing—all expressed uncertainty about the new owner's renewal of their licenses.[41] Following these three significant impediments to CPM's operations, the company restructured its distribution arrangements by contracting with other distributors rather

than dealing directly with retailers like Musicland and Tower. Shortly thereafter in October 2006, the company was reportedly on a "rebound" according to a *Publishers Weekly* interview with CPM managing director John O'Donnell.[42]

In the DVD realm, CPM had initially worked directly with retailers, so-called "one-step distribution," and in some cases wholesalers, "two-step distribution," but by mid-decade it began implementing arrangements where larger distributors interfaced with retailers and wholesalers on behalf of CPM. Late in 2004, CPM began a partnership with the conglomerate Warner-Elekra-Atlantic Corporation (WEA), which became the exclusive distributor of CPM products in the United States.[43] This was a surprising development not only because WEA was a conglomerate specializing in music distribution, but also because it was perhaps the first instance of a corporation linked to a major Hollywood studio, Warner Bros., involved in the distribution of both yaoi and hentai. Specifically, the Warner-Elekra-Atlantic name appeared on the back cover of CPM's DVD release of *Kizuna*. WEA had previously distributed anime DVDs put out by Manga Entertainment until that company was bought by the media division of the telecommunications conglomerate International Discount Telecommunications Corporation. According to John O'Donnell, WEA sought another anime distribution venture following the loss of its relationship with Manga Entertainment.[44]

During this period, Media Blasters established a substantially different set of distribution relationships with licensors, retailers, and streaming services than CPM. Media Blasters licensed product from a broader array of industries including American independent companies, television networks, Italian distributors, as well as Japanese companies. Whereas CPM relied heavily on the Trans World/Musicland conglomerate as a primary retail customer, Media Blasters had relationships with Trans World as well

as Best Buy and Walmart. CPM eventually shifted toward soliciting sub-distributors to release product to retailers, but Media Blasters continued a focus on one-step distribution until 2010 when it contracted with Allegro Media Group for subdistribution in the United States.[45]

While both Media Blasters and CPM operated from an assumption that television programming of their content could facilitate consumer buying, CPM primarily sought relationships with North American networks to license their existing media properties while Media Blasters tended to seek distribution rights from shows already scheduled for North American television. By the year 2000, television anime such as *Dragonball Z*, *Pokemon*, and *Sailor Moon* had made their way onto American television networks, popularizing these franchises among American audiences and leading to the success of tie-in merchandise. CPM aimed to replicate this phenomenon with its anime library, and in early 2002, CPM shows were being broadcast on Cartoon Network, Encore, and the International Channel.[46] CPM continued to license its anime for television with the International Channel acquiring new shows for its on-demand service and FUNimation licensing CPM shows for syndicated programming on the Colours TV network.[47] On the other hand, Media Blasters gained industry prominence through a reverse strategy of licensing shows already programmed for North American television. According to *Video Store Magazine*, it was Media Blasters' measured distribution decisions, such as the combination of the company's acquisition of *Invader Zim* and a successful run of its *Rurōni Kenshin* (1996-99) on Cartoon Network, that led to the company's expansion in the American anime market.[48]

Throughout its existence, CPM was at the forefront of online distribution, forging strategic partnerships with numerous online platforms. In 1997, CPM developed a

subsidiary called Binary Media Works that hosted content on AOL's International Channel and designed an online storefront on AOL that was reported as the first such partnership.[49] Throughout the 2000s CPM continued to partner with digital platforms to release content. By 2005, CPM offered over 100 trailer downloads compatible with Sony's PlayStation Portable, became the first anime distributor to provide full-length anime content for the Apple Ipod, and contracted with online VOD services Movielink, OnAir and TotalVid to offer full episode and OVA downloads.[50] In 2006, CPM had expanded to additional VOD platforms CinemaNow, GreenCine, and Direct2Drive, and became the first anime distributor to directly provide streaming content for Google Video.[51] On the other hand, Media Blasters promoted online content later in the decade, including streaming endeavors initiated with Crunchyroll in 2008, *Anime News Network* in 2009, and Hulu by 2010.

In sum, CPM's multi-channel distribution framework appears to have been structured by an impetus to diversify its industry presence through distribution and subdistribution deals with larger distributors, television networks, and streaming platforms. It is unclear whether platform diversification helped or hindered CPM's market status. During the same period, Media Blasters overcame CPM in number and genre diversity of DVD releases, but also appears to have branched out more slowly into online, VOD, and streaming content. Ultimately, CPM's diversification strategy could not save the company from financial peril by the decade's end.

Yaoi: A Distribution Category of Embedded Niche Overlap

For distribution studies, the case of American yaoi anime distribution underscores how distribution decisions, infrastructures, and reach have the power to recontextualize

media for market purposes. American distributors experimented with an array of strategies that operated independently from content or original target audience. During the initial wave of circulation in the United States, yaoi products were categorized as ambiguous anime, foreign LGBT, and hentai until the word "yaoi" gained notable purchase in American anime vernacular. The history of its American distribution strongly suggests that yaoi was more than a niche-within-a-niche. As a distribution category, yaoi developed into an embedded niche intersecting with seemingly distinct niche markets: the emergent home video markets for LGBT media and anime. On the one hand, yaoi products have been historically understood in the United States as part of the LGBT media landscape, whereby yaoi products were sold in American gay media catalogues, covered in the gay press, and categorized as LGBT on some retail venues like the now defunct Amazon.com Listmania platform. On the other hand, as a subgenre of gender-defined niche of shōjo media, some anime that are now considered yaoi were marketed ambiguously in the context of early American anime consumption of the 1990s. Within that context, industry-defined categories—like yaoi—were still in flux, and trial-and-error consumption patterns proliferated. Because of this, early products like *Earthian*, *Fake*, and *Please Save My Earth* were compelled to seek audiences via networks of online reviews, yaoi fandom platforms, and Amazon's Listmania and So You'd Like To platforms. After 2001, a yaoi anime market solidified while an industry hierarchy formed. Distributors experimented with either placing yaoi anime within existing product lines or developing standalone yaoi media subsidiaries. Yaoi anime products once again emerged at the overlap of seemingly distinct niches. However, this time, such products were explicitly marketed with the term "yaoi" and were branded within bifurcated hentai and general release product lines that corresponded to age-

based segments of the anime audience. The first American distributor to develop a product line designated for yaoi media was CPM. However, the closure of two major retailers resulted in uncertainty for the company, and only three DVDs were released in CPM's yaoi line.

Despite CPM's restructure and reports that the company had recovered from financial peril, CPM filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy in 2009. This event was widely reported in both anime fan networks and the mainstream media industry press. Accounts of the bankruptcy varied, and reports offered numerous conjectures for the company's demise. Erica Friedman of ALC Publishing and Yuricon wrote a eulogy for CPM, and speculated that the Musicland bankruptcy and the Biblios licensing incident were significant negative factors in the company's history.[52] *Crain's New York Business* situated the bankruptcy as part of a wider demise in New York-based media industries due to the Great Recession and a contemporaneous decrease in tax incentives for local media productions.[53] One dedicated fan followed the bankruptcy case documents released on PACER, and culled from them revelations about CPM's subdistribution agreements with KOCH Entertainment and AD Vision prior to the bankruptcy.[54] The fan coverage speculated which companies might acquire CPM's licenses to release its library titles in the future. However, the subdistribution data also suggests that CPM was increasingly moving away from direct physical media distribution, yet it remains unclear whether this was due to a lack of interest, increasing emphasis on online content, or a decline in feasibility following the company's restructure.

The inability for press and fan accounts to reach a consensus on the reasons for CPM's demise speaks to the complexity of accounting for industry shifts more generally. Industrial history requires a diversity of sources and an awareness of how public image

maintenance utilizes measured information disclosure and selective information omission.[55] Unstated in the contemporaneous press and fan coverage of CPM's bankruptcy were the larger market transformations resulting from the rise in popularity of streaming platforms and the parallel decline in the DVD market. Netflix began offering streaming content in 2007, and introduced the option for stream only subscriptions (with no DVD rental component) in 2010. In 2008, Hulu launched its streaming site and began its subscription service in 2010. Also in 2008, Crunchyroll announced its partnership with official licensors to begin simulcasting official content in early 2009.[56] The DVD market was in decline by 2009 with sales down a third from the market's peak year of 2005.[57] While CPM was one of the earliest anime companies to seek partnerships with streaming and VOD platforms, the majority of those partners did not survive this early boom against Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, and YouTube. Since 2009, a new tiered structure has emerged in the North American distribution of yaoi anime. In terms of release frequency, four distributors—Funimation, Media Blasters, Nozomi Entertainment, and Sentai Filmworks—hold significant proportions of the yaoi physical media market, each with several DVD releases and at least one Blu-Ray as of 2010.

For anime and manga studies generally—and BL studies in particular—this case study underscores how media content is not the sole influence on how a product is received. Profit-oriented distribution decisions and local cultures of yaoi reception—such as fan practices of categorization—condition the ways yaoi media are accessed and experienced. Yaoi continues to maintain an embedded niche status, perhaps with a more fluid definition across previously distinct LGBT and anime niches. In part, yaoi still exists under the aegis of LGBT media in its American consumption and the LGBT press continues to discuss yaoi.[58] It also continues to be categorized via American sexual

identities, such as the LGBTQ metadata tags on Amazon Prime for *Hitorijime My Hero* (2017, *Hitoriji me Maihīrō*) and *This Boy is a Professional Wizard* (2016, *Kono danshi, mahō ga oshigotodesu*). Yet this association with LGBTQ+ identities has notably diffused across North American otaku cultures as well. One case in point was the 2006 reporting on Southern California's popular Anime Expo. English-language sexual orientations were transposed onto the terms yuri, yaoi, and uke, mistranslating them respectively as "girl-on-girl," "boy-on-boy," and "bisexual."[59] This diffusion is also evident from the incorporation of other American queer signifiers, such as the increasingly common presence of rainbow flags at anime conventions to signal queer or queer-friendly booths and constituents.

Queer media elements have in some ways become naturalized in both contemporary anime production and North American otaku culture—reflecting profit motives and market transitions as much as cultural changes. For example, in the last ten years, there has been a tendency for studios to produce shows that imply shōnen-ai in their design and promotional materials, but do not follow through with sustained displays of homoeroticism or male-male relationships.[60] Such production decisions suggest an attempt to serve multiple markets—including both yaoi fandoms and fandoms averse to yaoi—and mirror the earlier assimilation of shōjo aesthetics within mainstream anime and manga of the 1980s.[61] During the early years of yaoi anime production, stylistic and narrative choices served to accommodate distribution to the yaoi market. Now, a related style-narrative combination—character design in the bishōnen style without explicit same-gender eroticism—reflects a strategy to circulate both within and beyond the yaoi market. Aware of this profit-oriented tactic, yaoi fans on online platforms have applied the critical terms "queer baiting" and "yaoi baiting" to

signal shows that insinuate male same-gender desire but lack substantive queer focus. As with its earliest American distribution, yaoi continues to be a site of struggle between commercial interests and fan sensibilities.

Appendix: Official Yaoi Anime Releases in the United States by Year Until 2009

Year	Date	Title	Distributor	Aniztical	Central Park Media		Media Blasters		Right Stuff	Other	Format
					US Manga Corps	Be Beautiful	Anime Works	Kitty			
1996	3/19/96	Please Save My Earth Vol. 1	Viz Video						X		VHS
	5/10/96	Please Save My Earth Vol. 2: Memories of the M	Viz Video						X		VHS
	7/12/96	Please Save My Earth Vol. 3: The Moment's Mem	Viz Video						X		VHS
	10/15/96	Kizuna	Aniztical	X							VHS
	10/15/96	Kizuna 2	Aniztical	X							VHS
1997	5/6/97	Darkside Blues	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						VHS
	8/26/97	Tokyo Revelation	Manga Video						X		VHS
	3/31/98	Kimera	Ad Vision							X	VHS
	8/20/98	Earthian: The Beginning of the End	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				VHS
	8/20/98	Earthian: Fallen Angel	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				VHS
	11/17/98	Earthian: Angelic Destroyer	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				VHS
1999	1/19/99	Earthian: Final Battle	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				VHS
	5/18/99	Fake	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				VHS
2000	6/11/00	Please Save My Earth	Viz Video						X		DVD
	12/19/00	Fake	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
2001	1/30/01	Earthian Anjelic Collection	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	6/12/01	NightWalker - Eternal Darkness	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	6/26/01	Kizuna	Aniztical	X							DVD
	7/10/01	Angel Sanctuary	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
2002	8/27/02	Tokyo Revelation	Manga Video							X	DVD
	9/10/02	Level-C	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
2003	1/14/03	Descendants of Darkness 1	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	1/28/03	NightWalker - Midnight Detective	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	3/11/03	Descendants of Darkness 2	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	5/13/03	Descendants of Darkness 3	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	6/24/03	Mirage of Blaze, Vol. 1: The Summoning	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	7/8/03	Descendants of Darkness 4	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	7/8/03	Descendants Of Darkness: DVD Collection	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	8/26/03	Mirage of Blaze, Vol. 2: Ancient Rivals	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	10/28/03	Mirage of Blaze, Vol. 3: Darkness Descends	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	12/16/03	Mirage of Blaze, Vol. 4: Tragic Love	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	12/23/03	My Sexual Harassment	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
2004	4/27/04	Anime Test Drive: Descendants Of Darkness	Central Park Media (US Manga)		X						DVD
	11/30/04	Mirage of Blaze Box	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD

Year	Date	Title	Distributor								Format
				Ariztical	Central Park Media		Media Blasters		Right Stuff	Other	
					US Manga Corps	Be Beautiful	Anime Works	Kitty			
2005	4/19/05	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 1	Geneon							X	DVD
	5/31/05	Kizuna Much Ado About Nothing	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	6/5/05	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 2	Geneon							X	DVD
	8/9/05	Kizuna 1	Central Park Media (Be Beautiful)			X					DVD
	8/30/05	Mirage of Blaze: Rebels of the River Edge	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	9/13/05	Gravitation Lyrics of Love	Right Stuf						X		DVD
	9/20/05	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 3	Geneon							X	DVD
	9/27/05	Sensitive Pornograph	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	10/11/05	Kizuna 2	Central Park Media (Be Beautiful)			X					DVD
	11/1/05	Sukisho 1	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	11/1/05	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 4	Geneon							X	DVD
	11/15/05	Legend of the Blue Wolves	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	12/27/05	Sukisho 2	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
2006	1/1/06	Gakuen Heaven 1	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	1/3/06	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 5	Geneon							X	DVD
	2/14/06	Loveless 1	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	2/28/06	Sukisho 3	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	3/7/06	Kizuna Kazuma Kodaka Signature Edition	Central Park Media (Be Beautiful)			X					DVD
	3/7/06	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 6	Geneon							X	DVD
	3/28/06	Loveless 2	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	4/25/06	Loveless 3	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	5/2/06	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 7	Geneon							X	DVD
	5/16/06	Sukisho! Complete	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	6/11/06	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 8	Geneon							X	DVD
	9/5/06	Kyo Kara Maoh - God (?) Save Our King! Vol. 9	Geneon							X	DVD
	10/31/06	Gravitation Box	Right Stuf						X		DVD
2007	4/3/07	I Shall Never Return	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	5/1/07	Princess Princess 1	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	5/29/07	Gakuen Heaven 2	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	7/10/07	Princess Princess 2	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	8/7/07	Gakuen Heaven 3	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	9/11/07	Princess Princess 3	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	10/16/07	Gakuen Heaven 4	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	10/30/07	No Money 1	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	10/30/07	Angel Feather	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	12/18/07	Princess Princess Collection	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
2008	5/27/08	Embracing Love - Cherished Spring	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	6/10/08	No Money 2	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	7/1/08	Gakuen Heaven Collection	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD
	10/14/08	Embracing Love - A Cicada in Winter	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
	12/30/08	Kiss in the Dark	Media Blasters (Kitty)					X			DVD
2009	10/20/09	Loveless Collection	Media Blasters (Anime Works)				X				DVD

[1] "International Sound Track: Tokyo," *Variety*, July 20, 1983, 38.

[2] Robert Whymant, "Japanese Boys' Comics Set Businessmen Chuckling," *Guardian*, August 24, 1983, 6. While *Patalliro!* was not mentioned in the *Guardian* piece, an earlier Australian article on Japanese comics with a similarly exotifying perspective referred to *Patalliro!* (spelled *Pataliro* in the article) as an example of a Japanese comic with homosexual content; Hamish McDonald, "Japanese Enjoy the Low Life—in Comics," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 31, 1982, 7.

[3] In this article, an anime's categorization as yaoi is based on whether it is classified as such on a fan or industry website. See Appendix for a list of licensed anime categorized as yaoi in an American context up to 2009. While some American fans differentiate yaoi from shōnen-ai or boys' love, yaoi has been widely recognized as the dominant term in American fandom since the 2000s. For an early discussion of this as an industry-driven phenomena see Dru Pagliasotti, "Boys' Love Vs. Yaoi: An Essay On Terminology," *Research* (blog), July 17, 2008, http://drupagliassotti.com/2008/07/17/boys-love-vs-yaoi-an-essay-on-terminology/.

[4] "Toei Takes Giant Step In Market Participation," *Variety*, March 7, 1984, 12, 412.

[5] "NATPE '90: Booth by Booth at NATPE," *Broadcasting*, January 8, 1990, 93.

[6] Thomas J. McLean, "As Comics Diversify, So Do Movie Options," *Variety*, July 19, 2006, A6.

[7] Sean Cubitt, "Distribution and Media Flows," *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 2 (July 1, 2005): 207.

[8] Bryan Wuest, "A Shelf of One's Own: A Queer Production Studies Approach to LGBT Film Distribution and Categorization," *Journal of Film and Video* 70, no. 3–4 (2018): 24–43. Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

[9] Rayna Denison, "Anime's Distribution Worlds: Formal and Informal Distribution in the Analogue and Digital Eras," in *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Media*, ed. Fabienne Darling-Wolf (London: Routledge, 2018), 403–18.

[10] Kanako Shiokawa, "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy*, ed. John Lent (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1999), 109. Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 44–49.

[11] A full yaoi and BL studies literature review exceeds the scope of this article. Important recent works in the field include an edited collection, Mark McLelland et al., eds., *Boys Love Manga and beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), and a special peer-reviewed journal section, Dru Pagliasotti, et al., eds., "Special Section: Boys' Love Manga (Yaoi)," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 4, no. 1 (June 1, 2013): 44–63."

[12] As Andrea Wood notes, a key difference between yaoi and North American slash fiction has been the pervasive commercial orientation of yaoi, Andrea Wood, "'Straight' Women, Queer Texts: Boy-Love Manga and the Rise of a Global Counterpublic," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 406.

[13] Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Movie Guide* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1997), 172; Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements, *The Erotic Anime Movie Guide* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1998), 32-41.

[14] "Lexicon: Yaoi," *Anime News Network*, May 17, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20030517015734/http://www4.animenewsnetwork.com:80/encyclopedia/lexicon.php?id=23.

[15] For example, *Kizuna* was discussed in the gay press not as yaoi, but as a "gay Japanese cartoon" and it existed in the "foreign" sections of LGBT mail order catalogs. Allyson Mitchell, "Kendo & Ken Dolls," *Xtra!*, December 19, 1996, 31; "TLA Video Holiday 1997 Gay & Lesbian Video Catalog," 1997, Subject Files: Part 6: Spinsters-Youth Folder No.: 14920, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, New York, USA.

[16] Anna Madill, "Erotic Manga," in *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*, ed. Clarissa Smith, Feona Attwood, and Brian McNair (London: Routledge, 2018), 133.

[17] Denison, 409.

[18] Anime fans' "blind buy" practices were widely discussed in the forum section of the industry news source *Anime News Network*. Additionally, within Amazon.com's now defunct Listmania section—a functionality that allowed consumers to compile and share lists that ranked products under a descriptive heading—yaoi fans compiled lists of yaoi and shōnen-ai anime because of the fact that these products were not distributed with markers of that category.

[19] "Whats New! 1/5/98 Graphic Novels," *Anime Nation*, January 10, 1998, https://web.archive.org/web/19980110111125/http://www.animenation.com/freethought/comsoon.html ; "Whats New! 1/18/99 Adult Manga," *Anime Nation*, February 8, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/19990208215308/http://animenation.com/freethought/comsoon.html.

[20] Moto Hagio, *A, A ´* (San Francisco: Viz Communications, 1997).

[21] "Banana Fish," *PULP: The Manga Magazine*, October 13, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20001013145318/http://pulp-mag.com:80/manga/bf/index.html.

[22] Denison, 409.

[23] Other than *Tokyo Revelation* and *Earthian*, bishōnen anime released on VHS in the United States contemporaneous with or before *Fake* include *Darkside Blues* (U.S. Manga Corps), *Kimera* (A.D. Vision), *Please Save My Earth* (Viz Video), *RG Veda* (U.S. Manga Corps), and *Tokyo Babylon* (U.S. Manga Corps).

[24] This ambiguous copy was frequently invoked in online retail descriptions, for instance "Anime Castle Catalog: Fake (Dub)," Anime Castle, August 22, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/19990822111037/http://www.animecastle.com/ACAWVD-9935.html.

[25] The full announcement text is as follows: "Dee and Ryo are a popular duo at the 27th Precinct of the New York City Police Department. Dee, the troublemaker of the pair, is crazy about Ryo. In the meantime, a series of mysterious murders that target only Japanese-Americans are being commited (sic). Who's doing it?" "Media Blasters Future Releases," Kitty Media, May 1, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/19990501092707/http://www.kittymedia.com/mbnews.htm.

[26] "May 1999 Release Schedule," Right Stuf, October 9, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/19991009142038/http://www.rightstuf.com/releases/mang0599c.pdf.

[27] "Review: Fake," *Anime News Network*, March 11, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20000311050727/http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/fake.html.

[28] *Fake*, DVD (Media Blasters, 2000).

[29] Chris Beveridge, "Disc Reviews: Fake," Anime on DVD, March 3, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20010303030320/http://animeondvd.com/reviews/region1/e-h/fake-1.htm.

[30] Aestheticism.com began as a physical zine called *Aestheticism*, in 1996, and then shifted to an online format in 1997, eventually branching out into a members-only network. M.J. Johnson, "A Brief History of Yaoi," *Sequential Tart: A Comics Industry Web Zine* 5, no. 5, accessed July 2, 2019, http://www.sequentialtart.com/archive/may02/ao_0502_4.shtml.

[31] Zac Bertschy, "Answerman, Yaoi Better than Hentai?," *Anime News Network*, February 18, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20010630052635/http://animenewsnetwork.com/columns/answerman/answerman-01-02-18.php.

[32] For example, two of the most recognized North American anime distributors ADV Films and AnimEigo were present as vendors, with ADV also sponsoring the convention, yet the two would not effectively enter the yaoi market.

[33] "Dealers: Merchandise." Yaoi-Con, February 21, 2001. https://web.archive.org/web/20010221231359/http://www.yaoicon.com/dealers.htm.

[34] "About Sponsorship." Yaoi-Con, August 16, 2001. https://web.archive.org/web/20010816093142/http://yaoicon.com:80/sponsors.htm#about.

[35] "Corporate Sponsorship." Yaoi-Con, August 16, 2001. https://web.archive.org/web/20010816093142/http://yaoicon.com:80/sponsors.htm#corp.

[36] Ibid.

[37] *A18 Corporation: Mature Anime & Manga Buyer's Guide* (New York: Central Park Media, 2004).

[38] "Animania," *Playstation Magazine*, July 1, 2004, 66.

[39] Calvin Reid, "Layoffs at Central Park Media," *Publishers Weekly*, February 14, 2005, www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20050214/34704-layoffs-at-central-park-media.html.

[40] Christopher Macdonald, "Central Park Media Statement," *Anime News Network*, May 30, 2006, www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2006-05-30/central-park-media-statement. Musicland's bankruptcy impacted many distributors, for instance *Variety* reported that Image Entertainment and Ventura Entertainment sustained multimillion-dollar losses due to Musicland's defaulting on payments, Phil Gallo and Dianne Garrett, "Tower Feeling a Little Empty," *Variety*, August 7, 2009, 1, 34.

[41] Christopher Macdonald, "US Publishers Comment on Biblos Bankruptcy," *Anime News Network*, April 5, 2006, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2006-04-05/us-publishers-comment-on-biblos-bankruptcy.
For an overview of Animate's conglomeration see Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, "Animate Group," in *The Anime Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2015), 28.

[42] Calvin Reid, "Central Park Media Rebounds," *Publishers Weekly*, October 31, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20071215120409/http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6386690.html.

[43] "CPM Signs with WEA for Video and Audio Distribution," *ICv2*, November 10, 2004, https://icv2.com/articles/news/view/5989/cpm-signs-wea.

[44] "Interview with John O'Donnell on CPM-WEA Deal," *ICv2*, November 10, 2004, https://icv2.com/articles/news/view/5990/.

[45] "Media Blasters Goes with a Distributor," *ICv2*, October 24, 2010, https://icv2.com/articles/news/view/18658/media-blasters-goes-distributor.

[46] Kurt Indvik, "Anime Supplier Central Park Boosts TV Tie-Ins," *Video Store Magazine*, March 17, 2002, 35.

[47] "International Channel Gets CPM Anime: For t'Asia Street,'" *ICv2*, December 14, 2004, https://icv2.com/articles/news/view/6133/; Ryan Ball, "FUNimation Tunes in Central Park Media," *Animation Magazine*, April 11, 2007, https://www.animationmagazine.net/tv/funimation-tunes-in-central-park-media/.

[48] "Anime Visibility High at VSDA," *Video Store Magazine*, July 18, 2004, 30.

[49]Seth Goldstein, "Picture This," *Billboard*, March 1, 1997, 53.

[50] Edwin De La Cruz, "Anime Industry Faces Piracy Concerns," *Video Store Magazine*, January 2, 2005, 18; "CPM First Company to Provide Anime for IPod," *Anime News Network*, October 21, 2005, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/press-release/2005-10-21/cpm-first-company-to-provide-an; "Movielink Expands Library of Anime Films Through Distribution Agreement with Central Park Media," *Business Wire*, February 9, 2005, https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20050209005251/en/Movielink-Expands-Library-Anime-Films-Distribution-Agreement.

[51] "Anime Pulse Exclusive Interview with John O'Donnell," *Anime Pulse*, May 5, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20060511125331/http://www.anime-pulse.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/05/JOD%20Interview%20with%20Anime%20Pulse.pdf; "Central Park Media to Launch Anime Online," *Anime News Network*, September 13, 2006, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/press-release/2006-09-13/central-park-media-to-launch-anime-online.

[52] Erica Friedman, "Guest Blog: Erica Friedman Eulogizes Central Park Media," *Anime Vice* (blog), May 1, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20110201023101/http://www.animevice.com/news/guest-blog-erica-friedman-eulogizes-central-park-media/1086/.

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