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Transcultural creativity in anime: Hybrid identities in the production, distribution, texts and fandom of Japanese anime

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to examine some of the overlooked transcultural aspects and elements of creativity in anime. Through a series of contemporary case studies, it is argued that anime supports an array of transcultural creative practices that span across borders, hybridize content and even force the creation of new types of text and distribution. The attention to the transcultural here is an attempt to move beyond discussions of how Japanese anime are, and to open up a space in which to discuss their relevance beyond their home nation. In these ways, the creative work undertaken by those within and beyond the industries related to anime is demonstrating the global reach of Japanese cultural products.

KEYWORDS

anime
transcultural
creative work
piracy
*Emma: A Victorian
Romance*
Afro Samurai

Creativity, in relation to media texts, takes on multiple potential forms when considered through a transcultural lens. It can refer to the original makers of media products writing, filming or, indeed, animating products in ways

that deny the centrality of their originating cultures. These hybrid-identified products can then be sold across cultures, and can be made sense of in terms of translinguistic and transnational regional promotions and sales, creating what Charles Acland calls 'mutating commodities' (2003: 23). Additionally, transcultural creativity can take place after those originating moments, in the times and spaces between 'legitimate' cultural flows, as when groups of fans take up the mantle of creative re-producer, in order to fill gaps in transnational media flows (see Lee 2011, in this issue). Creativity in this sense, then, is not just about making media products, but about their continual recreation as they travel around the world. Therefore, this article is concerned with examining how Japan's creative industries act as, and interact with, global 're-producers' of their texts, from the overseas firms distributing anime, to the fan groups who turn re-producers of anime. The methods employed here are qualitative, and based in the analysis of a range of discourses produced by the creative industries involved with anime, and their fans. Through these means, this article challenges essentialist notions of anime as either intrinsically 'Japanese' or intrinsically '*mukokuseki*' (stateless), seeking instead to look for the discursive moments in which anime cross between cultures. In this study, moments of cultural and creative mediation are therefore taken as focal points in order to open up a space in which to debate the relative impact of transcultural creative practices on the anime industries, and, consequently, to analyse how such transcultural practices challenge the ways in which anime has been conceptualized.

Considerations of trans- phenomena litter contemporary academic work. This article attempts to distinguish between cultural and national variations on the trans- theme, because doing so enables greater understanding of the difference between a media product from a particular (inter)national background, and the global or transnational cultures that become attached to it. David MacDougall, in *Transcultural Cinema*, offers a useful definition in relation to ethnographic films, which he claims 'have been widely understood as transcultural, in the familiar sense of crossing cultural boundaries – indeed the very term implies an awareness and mediation of the unfamiliar – but they are also transcultural in another sense: that of defying such boundaries' (1998: 245). The notion of cultural boundaries is a useful one to this study, because it suggests that media may not just be produced for one domestic market, but, rather, for diasporic audiences, for subcultures in other nations, for regional cultures and for audiences who join in what Matt Hills, following Benedict Anderson (1983), has termed the 'communities of imagination' (2002: 180) that gather around media texts.

In this way then, anime becomes not just a set of texts emanating from a Japanese cultural centre, but rather a culture of interconnected industries and (prosumer-) consumers (Toffler 1980). This amorphous 'culture' of anime can be considered in line with the cultural 'contact zones' outlined by Henry Jenkins, wherein 'unpredictable and contradictory meanings [...] get ascribed to [...] images as they are decontextualised' (2006: 154) during global circulation. Likewise, the creativity required to enhance cultural transferability and to resituate those increasingly decontextualized images is the central concern here. It is the resulting transculture(s) of anime that this article seeks to unpack by examining some brief case studies that have emerged out of research undertaken in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States between 2007 and the present. The case studies are grouped around industrial, textual and fan discourses and around the potentially transcultural anime

(re)production that has taken place during this period. These groupings are intended to cover a range of synchronic moments in different kinds of transcultural creativity, providing examples of how some anime texts are created to be, or are re-made as, transcultural objects. The examples chosen are sometimes extreme, though instructive, cases, or are cases that exemplify a particular trend. Neither sort of example is intended to stand in for the entirety of anime (re)production practices, but rather, it is hoped that their presentation herein might suggest areas where further work on the transcultural nature of anime might be undertaken.

GLOBAL ANIME?: MEDIA MARKETS, TRANSCULTURAL CREATIVITY AND FLOW

Perhaps the most purposeful type of transcultural exchange in anime takes place between the Japanese producers of these media texts and their American industrial counterparts, who buy their products, translate them and then distribute them to the English-speaking marketplace (now often globally, thanks to Internet DVD sales). To focus on this kind of anime distribution requires some sense of where and in what forms anime travels. In this respect, anime distribution patterns are perhaps most easily understood in relation to the hierarchy of markets through which they move. For anime, the domestic Japanese market remains the primary market, where the vast majority of anime are still produced and distributed (JETRO 2005). Differentiating which countries and geo-linguistic regions form secondary and tertiary markets is, however, more problematic. Economic indicators such as distribution revenues provide only part of a larger picture of active fan cultures, not all of which partake of legally distributed anime. Historically though, anime have had an important cultural presence in mainland Europe, perhaps especially in France and Italy (and through Italy to Spain), and there are also developed markets for anime in Australia and New Zealand, as well as markets based around diasporic Japanese populations in parts of South and North America. However, historically, it has been companies based in the United States that have nurtured links with the Japanese industry, and have worked to speed the negotiation of rights to secondary market distribution of Japanese anime.

Distribution deals therefore offer a complex understanding of how, and to what extent, anime is becoming a transcultural set of phenomena. An interesting case of discord can be found in the control exercised by the Japanese producers over rights to merchandising. For example, the high-profile Disney–Tokuma deal of 1996 (see <http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/disney/>) enabled Studio Ghibli (through its then parent company Tokuma Shoten) to retain the licensing rights to merchandise. This effectively created a vacuum in merchandising around Studio Ghibli's films in the United States. Whereas in Japan, there are several stores that specialize in Studio Ghibli merchandising in Tokyo alone, and Ghibli merchandising can be found in most toy and department stores (specialist stores are, e.g., located in the Ghibli museum, at Tokyo Station and in Asakusa next to one of Tokyo's most famous tourist attractions), this is not the case in the United States, where Ghibli merchandise has had to be imported from Asia, rather than being produced directly through American licensing deals. This case offers an intriguing contrast to the other major Japanese success of the period: *Pokémon* (1996–). In the case of the *Pokémon* franchise it would seem that parent company Nintendo's American presence enabled the franchise to capitalize on the potential profits to be reaped from

1. English-language titles will be used throughout, except to clarify between Japanese and English-language versions of texts, and Japanese names are given in English-language order, i.e. forename, surname.

licensing and tie-ins (Iwabuchi 2004: 66–67). Comparatively then, the transcultural flow of Studio Ghibli's extratextual and epiphenomenal networks beyond Asia has been halting, and their transcultural presence has been purposely limited by the Japanese creative producers.

Despite the control exercised by the Japanese creators, however, even the high-profile anime of Studio Ghibli can be considered mutated commodities in the United States. Translated and re-dubbed with star voice casts, Studio Ghibli's films have become enmeshed within new cultural systems of stardom, and even authorship (Denison 2008). The evidence suggests that this process has been an experimental one, with different behind-the-scenes authors working on different films, perhaps most famously John Lasseter, who oversaw the reproduction of *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* into *Spirited Away* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001).¹ The result in relation to voice-casting is telling in that Disney began by using big star names [e.g. Kirsten Dunst in the title role in *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989)] until the relative failure of *Princess Mononoke* (1997). This led to a system that appears to have normalized around the use of star groupings ranged across demographics. For example, *Ponyo* (2008) features stars who range in age, from Frankie Jonas and Noah Cyrus, both then aged eight, and both younger siblings of stars from the Disney stable, to Betty White and Cloris Leachman, both in their 80s at the time of production. Moreover, these star groupings tend to range across film and television and across demographics. For example, Tina Fey, who played Lisa (protagonist Sosuke's mother) in the American version of *Ponyo*, is probably most famous for her writing and starring role in television show *30 Rock* (2006–), whereas co-stars Liam Neeson, Matt Damon and Cate Blanchett are probably better known for their film roles. In their use of what I have discussed elsewhere as 'star constellations' (2008), Disney have begun to promote Studio Ghibli films as prestige productions with transcultural appeal to the markets for American film and television, as well as to the markets for animation and anime.

In making anime more American, the case of Disney and Ghibli highlights how post-production creative work can alter the cultural appeal of anime texts. This can also be seen in the work of American distribution companies in translating and redubbing anime television shows for broadcasting and release online and on DVD. However, the picture is bigger than this suggests, with American and Japanese companies now beginning to work more closely with one another to produce purposefully transcultural products. It would seem as though the American market is still beyond the reach of Japanese producer-distributors at times, given that their partnerships tend to end at core media products, rather than extending to the merchandising and direct promotion so important within the domestic Japanese market.

This has been so much the case that a recent boom in global anime distribution and fandom, which has its highest-profile examples in the late 1990s distribution deals between Disney and Studio Ghibli and the successful distribution of the *Pokémon* television series (Denison 2006; Tobin 2004), has seen American non-anime producers begin to involve themselves more actively in anime production. High profile examples of the former can be found in the anime inserts into films like *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003) and in straight-to-DVD ancillary products such as *Batman: Gotham Knight* (2008) (which was animated by some of Japan's most famous studios including Madhouse Animation and Studio 4°C). However, perhaps the best and most extreme example of recent transcultural industrial convergence is one that inverts the distribution norms of anime: *Afro Samurai* (2007, 2009).

Born out of anime studio Gonzo's desire to penetrate the American marketplace, the concept of *Afro Samurai* was reportedly taken by one of their American-born executives to American producers (Strike 2007). Subsequently, cable channel 'Spike TV' picked up the option to produce the series, but only after Samuel L. Jackson announced he would be involved as the voice of the central character, and as an executive producer for the series. Transcultural production in this instance at least has been reported to be a result of key creative personnel coming together in Japan and America (Takashi Okazaki, the creator, and Jackson, the performer). *Afro Samurai* first aired on 'Spike TV' in America, and also on their website, taking ten months to filter through to Japanese distribution on 'Fuji Television' in October 2007, thereby inverting the usual distribution pattern for anime that begins in Japan and usually takes considerable time to reach secondary markets outside Asia (Strike 2007; for more co-productions, see Clayton and Ciolek 2008). While international creative convergence is not unusual in animation production, with Japanese and South Korean firms regularly doing 'in-betweening' work on American animation, the flow in the opposite direction is less well mapped. *Afro Samurai's* distinctiveness, therefore, can be seen in the circularity of creative flows that went from Japan to America and back again.

High profile examples of this kind of transcultural, or at least inter-cultural, creative planning are becoming increasingly common. Two trends are becoming visible within creative intercultural planning: first, moves by American companies to hire Japanese creative talent and to reproduce Japanese aesthetic styles; and in examples where creative work from Japan is bought-in by American entertainment businesses.

Where *Afro Samurai* might offer an example of the latter, the former can be found, for example, in the Japanese arm of Disney television (Walt Disney Television International Japan) entering into a co-production deal with the high-profile Toei Animation studio in order to produce new CGI-led content. These new anime-inflected shows by Toei are now being shown as a 'local' product on Disney's Japanese television channels, such as 'Toon Disney'. One such show, *RoboDz Kazagumo Hen/RoboDz* (2008), though it first aired in Japan, is more properly perhaps a transnational anime project, having also been screened in the United States, with its shorter title *RoboDz* and American-language dub.

Even more complex examples of transcultural exchange can be found in the many American Marvel comics currently being adapted into anime by Japanese producers. Marvel has a long history of transcultural television production in Japan, going back at least as far as the *Supaidāman/Spider-Man* series that the company licensed to Toei's live action television production unit in Japan in the 1970s (now available through the Marvel website at http://marvel.com/videos/watch/563/japanese_spiderman_episode_01). More recently, Simon Phillips, from Marvel International, announced that the Japanese anime company Madhouse would be 'reimagining the back stories and redesigning the look of Marvel's stable of characters to reflect Japanese culture. "It will create an entire parallel universe for Marvel"' (Gustines 2008). In this way, the American Marvel superheroes, as in the 1970s television series, will be localized in an attempt to make these originally American superheroes appeal across cultural borders. Additional special projects like *Heroman*, written by ex-Marvel head Stan Lee, for the Japanese Studio Bones, indicate further trends towards creating new American comic book-style products for the Japanese marketplace ('News' 2009). As these examples suggest, convergence

in the anime industry is not a simple case of Americanization, but a wholeheartedly complex mix of transcultural exchanges, from stylistic exchanges to at least partial exchanges in personnel and graphic art-based cultures. What the preceding industrial considerations cannot show, however, is the extent to which such exchanges in style as cultures result in new forms of anime.

TRANSCULTURAL TEXTS: POSITIVE OCCIDENTALISM WITHIN ANIME

Kotaro: 'Does that mean you are a foreigner?'

No Name (Nanashi): 'Who knows? ... But nobody points me out now that I've learned to dye my hair'.

In 2008, Studio Bones released their first feature film anime, *Sword of the Stranger*, which was a *jidaigeki*, or period, samurai action film. During the dialogue quoted above, the nameless hero dyes his hair from its natural red, back to a more usual, Japanese, black. The scene questions what (national) kind of masculinity is most effective, as No Name's archetypal Japanese hero is here effectively unmasked as a cultural 'Other'. Villainy is also westernized in *Sword of the Stranger* in Luo-Lang. Speaking both Chinese and either English or Japanese, depending on which version of the film is watched, antagonist Luo-Lang is a Caucasian swordsman seeking to find his equal in battle. His hybridized cultural identity is again rich with potential meaning. For example, it would be easy to read Luo-Lang as a transcultural villain whose lack of fixed nationality or cultural identity implies a lack of trustworthiness. Essentially an inversion of No Name, Luo-Lang has too many potential identities to be heroic. As this example demonstrates, it is possible to find discourses on (trans)national identity in anime themselves, discourses that suggest creative practices aimed at making anime relevant within transcultural markets.

This, despite claims for anime as *mukokuseki*, or stateless (Napier 2005). Koichi Iwabuchi reads the term somewhat differently: '*mukokuseki* is used in Japan in two different, though not mutually exclusive ways: to suggest the mixing of elements of multiple cultural origins, and to imply the erasure of visible ethnic and cultural characteristics' (2002: 71). While he states that the second definition has been the one most commonly applied to anime, it is telling that the term can also mean something very close to the idea of the transcultural. Here, I want to rethink this conceptualization of anime in relation to what Millie R. Creighton has discussed as Japanese culture's positive take on occidentalism (1995). Unlike more negative discussions that incorporate jihad and the politics of aggressive political resistance to perceived westernization (Buruma and Margalit 2004), positive occidentalism enables ambivalent, ambiguous representations of cultural others that inherently and creatively mix 'elements of multiple cultural origins' within anime. This section examines examples of anime that represent England in order to analyse how positive occidentalism manifests within anime as part of the creative practices of Japanese animators. The examples analysed were chosen to contrast with existing work on the relationship between Japan and America, already discussed elsewhere (Napier 2007), introducing a nation more frequently associated with debates around orientalism and occidentalism: England.

There are, then, at several distinct representations of Englishness frequently visible in anime. First, Englishness is often literally visible in anime in representations of famous English brand name goods from fashion to food

cultures, and in demonstrations of Japanese mastery over complex European art cultures. Second, England is often narratively represented as a locus for tourism (perhaps particularly London), with famous English sites deployed as sites to be toured by anime characters. There are also nostalgic representations wherein anime highlight locations now lost or unused in contemporary England, either because buildings no longer exist or because they have been turned into tourist attractions. Finally, there are class representations used as storytelling devices, most commonly with characters falling in love despite class divides. Given the focus of this article, the examples below will expand on just the two most central of these areas: the representations of English branded goods and the touristic visions of England offered in anime.

Emma: A Victorian Romance (*Eikoku Koi Monogatari Emma*, 2005 and 2007, hereafter *Emma*) is fairly unusual for an English-set anime in that it is a rather straight romantic fiction. It has been selected here because it offers an intriguing set of practical and creative choices that, it will be argued, made it a transcultural text from its inception in Japan. Sharon Kinsella (1995), in 'Cuties in Japan', outlines how many of the maid-style Victorian-inspired fashion trends in Japan grew out of interest in more general infantilization of women's fashion, known as *kawaii* or cute culture. It is from this milieu of Victoriana and romance-inspired fads and trends (Mulhern 1989), and fantasy anime that focus on women's domestic work [notably seen in Hayao Miyazaki's films, perhaps most obviously *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004)], that the manga for *Emma* (Kaori Mori, 2002–2006, 2006–2008) emerged in 2002. Adapted into an animated television series in 2005, the series has become popular enough to merit international distribution to America, though not yet, officially, to the United Kingdom.

Kaori Mori, the series creator and manga artist, has been quoted as saying, 'I was drawn to the Victorian English designs' (Nozomi Entertainment 2008: 44) of English architecture and interior design. Playing into the first category of branded Englishness, this borrowed iconography lifts details from English history and re-imagines them in this anime as part of an overtly consumerist discursive repertoire. For example, in *Emma* differences in households are represented through numbers of servants and the types of beverages served to visitors. Moreover, shopping, as pastime for the rich, and job for servants, is frequently depicted in *Emma*, which includes lingering sequences in antiques stores, department stores, markets and other sites of consumption. More explicit branding also occurs in other anime set in England. For example, in *Kuroshitsuji* (*The Black Butler*, 2008–2010, not yet released in the United Kingdom), there is often a 'cake of the week' and a tea, including teas from high-status retailers like Fortnum and Mason. Consuming Englishness in anime thereby becomes intermingled with contemporary Japanese consumption practices (often of prestige brands like Fortnum and Mason), class divisions and aspirations, and with Victorian manners, etiquette and fashion, suggesting a consumerist imagination at work in these depictions of English culture by Japanese creative industries personnel.

A branded imagination of place is also apparent in the use of famous tourist spaces within anime like *Emma*. The Crystal Palace offers a good example of this trend. Japanese cultural objects were included for the first time at the 'London Great Exhibition' in 1851, announcing the breadth of Japanese cultural achievements to the world well before Japan was forced to reopen to international trade in 1868. Joy Hendry has shown how influential this Great Exhibition was, writing that the exhibition was so popular that 'it was

displayed again in 1853 in the exhibitions of Dublin and New York' (2000: 54). The venue for that Exhibition, the Crystal Palace, appears in a variety of anime, including the high-profile film *Steamboy* (*Suchimubōi*, 2004) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Installing_Japanese_character_sets by Katsuhiko Otomo. The now lost site of the Crystal Palace plays a significant role in *Emma*, appearing repeatedly across the two seasons, and providing the central characters with a fantastical space in which they shed their class distinctions (William is a rich and aspirational merchant's son while Emma is a working-class maid) and enjoy their romance publicly. The choice of the Crystal Palace by Mori and the Japanese animators is therefore important because it provides an easily nostalgized, romanticized and 'othered' space in which the central romance can unfold. The Crystal Palace is, therefore, simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar as an inaccessible, past world space.

Reading the Englishness of *Emma* as 'Other' to Japanese society is especially difficult given the confusion here between vision and sound displayed in the text. Both within Japan and beyond, *Emma* has yet to receive an English-voice dub, remaining a linguistically Japanese text throughout its distribution thus far. In tying visual representations of Victorian England to Japanese language, which still retains hierarchical status markers and differing levels of politeness to a greater degree than contemporary English language, the distinctions between the English 'Other' and Japanese 'Self' are emphatically hybridized. Consequently, the fetishization and commodification of Victorian Englishness that works to 'other' England in *Emma* is domesticated for Japanese audiences through its soundscape. However, the reverse is true in its international circulation, where its subtitling and retention of that aural landscape create a temporally and culturally distant version of the local for UK audiences. This decision by Nozomi Entertainment is especially interesting given that its parent company's Right Stuf, has been producing English-language dub tracks for DVD since 1997 (<http://www.rightstuf.com/rssite/main/animeResources/individual/?ForumThreadName=FT0000001529>). It suggests either that the American recreators of *Emma* did not think that an expensive English dub was viable, or perhaps more simply that English-accented voice actors were not available to the company.

Where these linguistic and pictorial juxtapositions create distance in the transcultural markets for *Emma* at one extreme, contemporary horror texts demonstrate more wholehearted adoptions of a transcultural set of creative Anglo and European aesthetics at another. While quite dissimilar on many levels to a text like *Emma*, Japan's vampire anime do have in common with it a shared European set of source materials and a rich European generic iconography. The transculturalization and hybridization of Japanese horror is especially easy to discern in one prominent set of characters, namely, vampires. Japanese renderings of vampire mythology offer hybridized, if not fully transcultural, figures. For example, Christopher Bolton argues that vampires are a relatively new addition to Japanese culture, featuring first in Japanese literature in the 1930s. He argues that in *Blood: The Last Vampire* (Hiroyuki Kitakubo, 2000,) at least, we can read the vampire as a metaphor for cultural imperialism and miscegenation of post-war Japanese culture (Bolton 2007). Interestingly, however, the word used to describe the vampire in *Blood*, when it is not chiropteran (meaning of the bat family), is a traditional word for demon, *oni*. In the creative choice use of traditional names for these new monsters, we can see a localizing of this potentially foreign set of villains, one that might make them all the more transcultural.

The 'true' vampire in Japanese vampire anime is perhaps an even more culturally ambivalent figure than this suggests. Like *Blood's* chiropterans, horror anime frequently make use of doubled vampire 'Others', vampires that come out of new generic collisions within anime texts. There is another common generic collision between science fiction and horror in vampire anime. The chiropterans offer an ambiguous example, but the 'vampires' of *Trinity Blood* (2005) or *Black Blood Brothers* (2006) offer more straightforward examples. In the former, vampire is the name given to an invading race of aliens, and in *Black Blood Brothers*, villainous vampires are called Kowloon children, after Kowloon Bay, where a war was fought between what we might think of as traditional vampires and a new set of more 'contagious' vampire villains. In all three of these examples, traditional vampires like Saya in *Blood: The Last Vampire* and Jiro Mochizuki in *Black Blood Brothers* become heroic figures who hunt and kill other vampires. The links between age, tradition and European cultures embodied within the vampire-hunting vampire hero in these anime suggests a different sort of positive occidentalism at work, wherein literary vampiric figures are juxtaposed heroically against newer, Japanese-invented or innovated monsters. This shift in genres and the monstrous nature of Japanese anime's vampires works to produce a set of deeply ambiguous characters, whose creation is a product of transcultural industrial and textual exchanges.

A clear-cut example can be found in the utilization of the Dracula myth in the *Hellsing* Original Video Animations (OVAs: 2001–2002 and 2006–) in which a character called 'Alucard' (Dracula spelt backwards) works for the company founded by his nemesis 'Hellsing'. Here the famous Dracula character is recuperated as an anti-hero, but denied his easily recognized name in both English and Japanese versions of the text, the latter of which further localizes the character with the name 'Arucãdo'. Positive occidentalism in anime can be seen, through examples like these, to resonate with audiences within and outside Japan, appearing across genres, markets and character types in order to produce a strong sense of transcultural flow, of a feedback loop of sorts, working between European and Japanese media cultures. This sense of transcultural flow beyond Japanese borders has been led by fan demand as much as by industries attempting to create or corner global animation markets.

FAN CREATIVITY IN TRANSCULTURAL ANIME PROSUMPTION

Many of the examples cited above were first made available to fans through fan distribution networks online. Like older, analogue grey markets for anime distribution, new digital technologies are enabling greater levels of access to Japanese culture outside Japan, at least in countries with relatively high-speed Internet connections and sufficient computer technologies. While fans of anime texts have long translated and subtitled the Japanese texts that they could not otherwise access (Leonard 2005), the relationship between this group and the industries producing anime is now shifting. The phenomenon of 'digisubbing', the production of fan-subtitled anime via digital reproduction technologies, is also changing the relationship between fans and anime texts considerably. While on the one hand enabling greater fan creativity in the reproduction of anime texts, it is also enabling a vast increase in the illegitimate flow of anime outside Japan. One of the major changes relates to re-production, that is to say, to the now decentralized nature of anime fansubbing (Pouwelse

et al. 2008). Digisubbing allows the process of subtitling to be divided up into separate tasks that can be undertaken in geographically dispersed locations (Peréz-González 2007). While many fan subtitling groups do meet face-to-face, Internet Relay Chat groups online, messaging and website forums now mean that they do not *have* to do so to work together effectively. The effect is that fansubbing groups follow a flexible and diversified production and distribution model, and that the finished product of one group can be taken up by other groups and re-engineered into ever new languages, spreading across geo-linguistic borders. However, in practice, due to the technological requirements (high-speed broadband Internet connections, potentially some server space depending on dissemination technology and personal computers with significant memory capacity), and pre-existing geographical concentration of anime fandom, there is an apparent bias towards groups being based in the United States (Hatcher 2005), which may help to explain why a high proportion of the groups subtitling do so originally in English.

In addition to being decentralized, anime fansubbing has also become cheap and creative. Groups can buy or download relatively inexpensive technologies to help them re-produce their fansubbed versions of anime, like the open source (free) Aegisub program that most use to append subtitles to audio-visual anime files (<http://www.aegisub.net/>). The cheap technologies, and speedy availability of raw footage from Japan, coincide to help fansubbers produce 'speedsubs', fansubtitled versions of anime produced under race-like conditions as groups battle to produce the best, fastest subs (Berstch 2008; <http://www.dattebayo.com/>). Moreover, the use of digital technologies enables greater creative impact by fan groups, who can use outlandish fonts and 'karaoke'-style texts that bounce across the screen, and can even create group logos that can be placed in close proximity to those of the original Japanese creators. The heightened emphasis on speed ensures that fansubbed versions of new Japanese titles are available long before the industry has typically been able to negotiate for the right to re-dub them, and the greater creative freedom also ensures that the works of particular groups can be easily recognized by their fans. It has been the speed of fansubs, therefore, along with the large numbers of shows available online, and the ease of their distribution, that has placed the fansub community in conflict with the industry. More than in the past, too, fansub groups are bringing individuality to their productions that promotes their own work sometimes as much as that of the original creators.

For example, *Soul Eater* (2008–2009), chosen here because it follows a pattern largely typical for recent anime series and was the most high profile release from Japan at the 2008 'Tokyo International Anime Fair', offers good examples of the visible invisibility of fansub groups and their creative practices. In relation to its viewership, *Soul Eater* was being discussed by fans on the Anime News Network website (a central industry and fan source online) within six hours of its initial broadcast in Japan. These were, however, fans who had viewed the raw (Japanese language) version of the episode, and not a fansubbed one. A fansubbed version was announced on the forum two days later, though fans questioned its quality (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/bbs/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=54204&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0>). However, over 50 groups eventually subtitled *Soul Eater* in a wide range of languages (see: <http://anidb.net/perl-bin/animedb.pl?show=anime&aid=5610>). One of the most visible groups subtitling *Soul Eater* was Rumbel Subs. Despite the grey, (il)legal nature of their creative

work, Rumbel Subs have their own public website (<http://www.rumbel-subs.com/>), which includes a discussion forum and information about their releases.

Rumbel is particularly interesting in terms of fansubtitling practices because they are more subtle than some of their competitors (for more on fansub practices, see Lee 2010, in this issue; Pérez-González 2007). They limit their visibility within the text by not writing their name over title sequences, as many groups do, instead placing a small brand logo in the top right corner of the screen at the end of opening credits. While this can be read as limiting their disruption of the text, their presence as fansubtitlers is signalled in other ways, and the relatively covert nature of their practice could just as easily be read as a shift towards the standardization of, and even professionalization of, anime fansubbing practices. Moreover, their use of fonts is certainly more adventurous than the off-white normally used as an industry standard (their work includes non-standard fonts, text that scrolls across the screen to create karaoke versions of opening and closing songs, in addition to non-standard colours such as red subtitles). Their presence within the anime is thus signalled through their use of what might be termed an 'amateur standard' followed by fan subtitlers. Luis Pérez-González (2007) has cited the use of outlandish fonts, placement of subtitles in unexpected positions on-screen and the translation of Japanese on-screen texts as the normal ways in which fansubtitling practices can be differentiated from those of the industry. The increasing standardization of anime fansubtitlers' practices is just one way in which the anime fansubtitlers are challenging industrial norms of creative practice, introducing new aesthetics and transcultural audiences for anime.

Improvements in home computing are similarly changing fan collecting habits (for more information on this, see Lee 2011, in this issue). They enable fans to have sometimes terabytes-worth of media product housed in their personal computers, and BitTorrent enables collecting without insisting upon fan-community engagement beyond collecting. BitTorrent's impact on the anime fan community is therefore twofold, doing away with the necessity for strong community ties between fans and fan producers, while simultaneously making anime fansubs more available for collecting. As the main distribution model for the industries in Japan and America remains DVD based, this new online collecting behaviour is placing the industry increasingly at odds with the fan community it serves. This is not to suggest that fans are only interested in viewing fansubbed anime, and many do not engage with fansubs at all, but the anime industry in America is now clear about the negative impact that these online fansubs are having (Koulikov 2008). Convergence thus demonstrably takes place along divergent interstices and when these communities come together, as in the case of media industries for anime and the participatory fandom(s) online, conflicts arise, often around claims to authenticity and legitimacy (Jenkins 2004). In the case of anime fansubs and BitTorrent, active fans may actually be creating a massified, less engaged set of viewers who do not pay for their anime texts, and who can create large stockpiles of texts that mean they never will.

CONCLUSIONS

From industrial production to fan re-production, the anime text is a mutable, shifting entity that requires a flexible set of tools for investigation. Creative practices do not align – fans produce works that are very different to those

of the industry, and even industrial practices of remediation are not uniform, with some anime titles receiving re-voicing while others are simply subtitled. The result is that the transcultural audiences for anime do not consume these texts in any sort of standardized way. Moreover, the creative practices of Japanese producers in working with companies from outside Japan, and, it seems, increasingly featuring characters and settings that work to create transcultural anime, means that these texts are becoming ever more familiar to even the global locations most remote from Japan. In these ways then, the cultural practices of industry and fans need to be viewed as a constantly changing and interacting set of creative processes, which can, but do not always, inform one another. While the result may be an increasingly transcultural type of anime product and fandom, this may not have been the initial aim; indeed, the more anime texts engage with representing the wider world, the more the Japaneseness of these texts, as with *Emma: A Victorian Romance*, may be thrown into relief. Moreover, as fans enter into more creative reproduction practices, the sense of where anime is 'made' is becoming more and more difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy. It may be then that transcultural linguistic markets provide a better means by which to understand anime's global presence than is the case with traditional regions and national markets. It may be at the level of reproduction, rather than initial inception, that anime is becoming most globalized.

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