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Imagining Queerness / Queer Imagination: Online Slash Fiction and

Radical Fan Productions

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Imagining Queerness / Queer Imagination: Online Slash Fiction and Radical Fan Productions

by

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Abstract

Imagining Queerness / Queer Imagination: Online Slash Fiction and Radical Fan Productions

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The subject of inquiry for my thesis is slash fiction, a subset of fanfiction which creates queer identity, romance, relationships, sex, or desire where it was not ostensibly present in the proto-text. I divide my thinking into a non-linear model of five nodes in order to open up multiple in-roads towards examining the queer work of slash without crystalizing into a comprehensive theory that would efface its nuance and particularities. These nodes figure under notions of failure, embodiment, archives, temporality, and hybrid body erotics.

The current, motion, and energy running through all of these nodes is what I call critical queer imagination. Critical queer imagination is not an overarching theory that explains slash (or queer creative works in general), but rather a gesture towards the impulse behind queer activism as well as a signal towards queer futurity. It is ultimately this queer critical imagination that allows me to argue for slash fiction as part of a larger queer project that is necessarily engaged with queer potential and political imagination.

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INTRODUCTION

"And when I cry out, what will you do then, Samwise? Will you hold me in your arms until I'm sleeping again?"

Sam flinched. Frodo was staring at him as if he were setting a challenge he did not expect Sam to overcome. "I'd do whatever would ease you, sir," Sam murmured.

Frodo kept looking at him for so long Sam thought he might blurt how he'd wished to hold Frodo close in his arms for years now -- and then Frodo might pitch him straight into that blackberry bramble and it would serve him right. But finally Frodo started walking again. "As you like, Samwise."

> *"The Last Shreds of Autumn" — merripestin*

      I love stories like the one quoted above. Even now that I'm no stranger to stories like this, it feels good to read them; it feels important. Importantly subversive, importantly creative. When I read stories like this, I feel something very different than when I read or watch or listen to the other stories that provide the grounds for these stories. This has been the drive behind my academic work. Taking these feelings, and analyzing them, translating them to workable ideas, is the labor of this thesis.

      My subject of inquiry is a subcultural production called slash fiction — and therefore requires a bit of foregrounding in order to engage in an accessible and productive fashion. To begin, fanfiction[1] is a (sub)cultural practice in which fans of a popular text create new and different stories related to that text. However, this definition

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[1] Also stylized as "fan-fiction," "fan fiction," "fanfic," "ff," and various other permutations. Personally, I often use "fan fiction" to denote the practice and discourse at large, and fanfic or fic to talk about singular works.

casts too large of a net: what I refer to in the rest of this thesis as fanfiction is somewhat more specific. There are two points that signal for me "media fandom" that refers to a certain type of fanfiction.

First, fanfiction takes as its starting point a popular text that is singular in some way. Whether that means privatized, copyrighted, or belonging explicitly to a person or entity, this point differentiates between practices of communal storytelling and fanfiction's unique mode of interacting with one text (or a group) and the canon it puts in place.

Second, fanfiction is often not for profit. I won't rule out all for-profit productions as a type of fanfiction, but it seems to me that capital changes both the intent and the reception of what the fan produces. For instance, although the BBC television series *Sherlock* can be traced back to a singular group of popular texts (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories), it has different systems of meaning than, say, "Performance In a Leading Role," a fanfic by Mad_Lori which takes the character/izations of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson from the BBC series and weaves a new story about the two men's lives. Both *Sherlock* and "Performance In a Leading Role" are stories about a singular popular text (*Sherlock* drawing from Doyle's books, and "Performance" from the television show) but they ultimately produce different meanings.

When I speak of fanfiction, I posit the use of the term "proto-text" to refer to what otherwise might be called the "original" text from which the fanfiction relies.[2] I make this effort to move away from the word "original" to complicate our understand of what the definition might mean when applied to creative works of any kind, and also to undermine

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[2] I draw this term loosely from Anton Popovič's conception of metacommunication, where his notion of *prototext* is "a text which serves as an object of inter-textual continuity. Every text can potentially be an object of such continuity" (226).

the arrangements of values that follow binaries such as original/derivative, primary/secondary, or principal/appropriative.

Slash fiction[3] is a subset of fanfiction. While some fans and academics use the term to refer to any or all fanfics that include gay themes, I propose a slightly different definition. For the purposes of this project, I find it useful to think of slash as fanfiction that creates queer identity, queer romance, queer desire, or queer sex, where it was not ostensibly present in the proto-text. This means that a fic that ships[4] Captain Jack Harkness and Ianto Jones from the *Doctor Who* spinoff *Torchwood*, would not constitute slash fiction under these terms because Jack and Ianto are already sexually/romantically involved within the canon of the television show.

By making this distinction, in part, I am making the claim that while slash fiction and fanfiction in general share defining characteristics, there is also something importantly unique to slash. This constitutes the crux of my thesis. What I argue in the following pages is that slash fiction is currently and must be recognized in the future as part of a larger queer project that engages with queer potential and political imagination.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam understands an "argument for antidisciplinarity in the sense that knowledge practices that refuse both the form and the content of traditional canons may lead to unbounded forms of speculation" (10). This seems more useful the more I study slash fiction. Rather than more answers, a project such as this (that deals with subcultures, digital technologies, inconsistent or hard to know structuring forces) might produce more questions — unbounded speculations.

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[3] Sometimes referred to as just "slash."

[4] "Ship" is a fannish word (likely from the word "relationship"), meaning either a (romantic, usually) pairing between characters, or in the verb sense to support, desire, or be a fan of a pairing.

Halberstam also interprets Michel Foucault's posthumous collection of Collège de France lectures, *Society Must Be Defended*:

> [Foucault] provides a context for his own antidisciplinary thinking and declares the age of "all-encompassing and global theories" to be over, giving way to the "local character of critique" or "something resembling a sort of autonomous and non-centralized theoretical production, or in other words a theoretical production that does not need a visa from some common regime to establish its validity" (6). (10)

In a similar manner, I am aggressively disinterested in trying to produce a theory that encompasses all of slash fiction — because I simply don't believe fans and the texts they create and interact with work in that way. Neither do fans and their texts (proto-texts as well as fanworks) remain still or static long enough to have such a theory be of much use. Foucault continues (in the same lecture that Halberstam quotes from) to say that a "historical knowledge of struggles" is what is at stake in "subjugated knowledges," which he explains as both "buried scholarly knowledge and knowledges that were disqualified by the hierarchy of erudition and sciences" (8). In order to enact and engage with subjugated knowledges, I take Halberstam's advice to "resist mastery" (11). By refusing to settle in one academic discipline, rejecting the idea of a single entry point, and collecting dissident approaches together, I work towards Halberstam's notion of "conversation" as a "way of being in relation to another form of being and knowing without seeking to measure that life modality by the standards that are external to it" (12).

Review of Literature

It is daunting to survey the landscape of slash fiction for a few reasons. First, the landscape is vast. I don't mean to imply that research and writing on fans[5] is so copious or abundant that it is unwieldy. Rather, the way in which this work has emerged has oftentimes been discrete, disparate, and with contradicting trajectories — making it hard to *see* the landscape, much less survey it in any systematic manner.

Another reason comes out of the first — the inconsistent terrain can obscure connections and genealogies. So far spread out, and sometimes operating in completely different disciplines, works that are deeply related to one another can appear so different that they barely seem to be in conversation with each other. Like navigating a map that is patchy and spotted with holes, the lines of connection falter.

A final reason is more personal and concerns in general how I as a fan and an academic or others as fans and/or academics approach the field. Fan studies in general has perhaps fewer book-length monographs than other fields (or when they are produced, they are often in the form of anthologies with scopes sometimes as wide as the field itself) which suggests the difficulty of sustained work. Keeping in mind how the landscape of slash fiction (and fanfiction, fandom, and fan studies as well) converges as vast and one that challenges connections, it is probably not a stretch to say that approaches to this field are largely based on chance — and I would argue more so than other fields.

What follows is more an act of constellation than cartography as I lay out my genealogy of encounter with fan studies. In a constellation, we can afford ourselves as

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[5] Or fandom, or fanfiction, or slash, or digital literatures, or any of the intersecting and somewhat arbitrary categories my project could fit into.

academics the permission to recognize groupings, assemblages, and designs that may not be traditionally complete.[6] This is useful for me as I present my orientation to previous work, drawing lines, and making sense of those lines. I don't intend to write a history of slash fiction, as that has already been done by many other people in many iterations.[7] Instead, I want to provide a sense of existing theory that surrounds me.

As arguably the most popular text in fan studies, many scholars include Henry Jenkins's 1992 monograph *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* as foundational. Karen Hellekson calls it "the single most important early text contributing to the field now known as fan studies" and cites its usefulness and resonance with fan experience as reasons "most fan studies scholarship takes [it] as read" (1-2). Of particular importance for this project, Jenkins has one chapter devoted specifically to slash fiction titled "'Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk': Slash and the Fan-Writing Community." In it, he provides a succinct etymology of slash drawing from Khrys Nolan: "the colorful term […] refers to the convention of employing a stroke or 'slash' to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters (Kirk/Spock or K/S)" and slash "originated as a genre of fan writing within Star Trek fandom in the early 1970s" (175).

Jenkins continues to theorize how slash fiction operates. In many ways this can be seen as an extension of the way he theorizes fanfiction in general operates. Some of what I argue later on pushes against this, so I will lay out here my interpretation of Jenkins's understanding of slash. He states that slash "represents a reaction against the construction

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[6] This concept of course draws from Walter Benjamin's thinking on constellations: It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (462).
[7] See Francesca Coppa's "A Brief History of Media Fandom," or Bronwen Thomas's "What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?"

of male sexuality on television and in pornography" which is in line with his conception of fans as active interpreters of texts.[8]

Utilizing De Certeau's concept of textual poaching, Jenkins claims that "fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions" and that through this hermeneutical process they become "active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings" (30).

Slash in particular though is "not so much about sex as it is a genre about the limitations of traditional masculinity and about reconfiguring male identity" for Jenkins (178). It seems important for his conception of slash that the genre[9] works against conventional masculinity, revealing "the erotics of male friendship" and assisting with "the realization of homosocial desire" (191). And it may well be that this model of slash speaks to a different oeuvre than today's slash scene, as *Textual Poachers* was written over two decades ago now. The texts and voices that Jenkins encounters seem to privilege the homosocial over the homosexual. For this project, I focus more on queer romance and non-straight identification as potentially radical sites of imagination.

Constance Penley's work was one of the first to take slash (in specific, Kirk/Spock slash) as a serious matter of feminist inquiry.[10] In a move that resembles that

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[8] We can imagine here that slash fiction might operate in similar (although not the same) fashions for other popular media texts, such as books, movies, graphic literature, etc.

[9] Jenkins refers to slash fiction as a genre here ("specifies a genre of fan stories […]" "originated as a genre of fan writing […]"). Earlier in the chapter "'It's Not a Fairy Tale Anymore': Gender, Genre, *Beauty and the Beast*" Jenkins suggests that "genre represents a cluster of interpretive strategies as much as it constitutes a set of textual features" (169). It seems that "genre" is a somewhat problematic method of theorizing slash then, as the work of imagining a text differently necessitates a fracturing of "interpretive strategies." Although slash fics attend to similar rubrics of disrupting heteronormativity, they assemble together on a platform that subsumes genre (as they shift, rework, converse with, and use traditional and alternative genres) — a supra-genre of sorts. For the most part, I try to speak of slash as a sub*set* of fanfiction in order to still speak toward the manner in which slash comes together in a meaningful way.

[10] See also Penley's "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture."

of Jenkins, she argues that erotic slash fiction is a type of "guerrilla erotics" that retools masculinity through both the male psyche and the male body (*NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* 101). She goes on to argue that K/S fans go beyond "consuming in tactical ways that offer fleeting moments of resistance or pleasure" by producing "zines, novels, artwork, videos" in a way that "more than illustrates de Certeau's claim that consumption is itself a form of production" (105).

Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, and Biltereyst do the important work of summarizing previous work on slash fiction and its subsequent interplay with queer theory in academia in their article "Slashing the Fiction of Queer Theory: Slash Fiction, Queer Reading, and Transgressing the Boundaries of Screen Studies, Representations, and Audiences." They see slash as embodying "a transgression of the boundaries to practices of queer reading and the theory of queer" (345). Their article is significant in its call for academia at large to pay more attention to the way slash works as praxis of queer theory and what insights this might have into film studies and media studies. I am working towards a parallel goal as theirs, in that I call academia (as well as thinkers outside the academy) to take slash into consideration for queer politics at large, and for critically imagining ways outside of oppressive and normalizing forces.

In something of an opposition to concurrent scholarship, in "Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts" Catherine Tosenberger challenges the "claim that slash is intrinsically more transgressive/subversive of a given text than other forms of fiction" (188). In part, Tosenberger is warning against assigning a heteronormativity to the proto-text that it "may not possess" (187). I would argue that the hope that she as well as other fans and academics perhaps hold here — that the proto-text might already contain queerness, that the canon *might actually* already be queer — comes from a similar genesis of imagining queerness.

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Nathan Rambukkana argues in "Is Slash an Alternative Medium? 'Queer' Heterotopias and the Role of Autonomous Media Spaces in Radical World Building" against both Jenkins's model as well as Tosenberger's resistance to slash as necessarily subversive. Instead, he applies Foucault's concept of heterotopic space to slash fiction networks in order to argue that, while "[m]arginal to the already-marginal fan fiction world," slash fiction writing can be seen as a practice that produces an even more rarified space: that of a "queer" heterotopia (71). This line of thinking shows an emerging emphasis on the role of power as a constituent of fan practices.

Side-stepping the model of foundation and reply, Abigail Derecho locates fan fiction in distinct literary tradition in her chapter titled "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction." In order to analyze fanfic "not as cultural phenomenon (as fan fiction has been studied by most fan scholars to date), but as an artistic practice" Derecho turns to Derrida's work on archives, as well as poststructural theory from Deleuze and Glissant (61). From this, she is able to extract a role that fanfiction plays in actualizing potentialities. This idea of actualize potentialities then allows her to substitute the model of hierarchy for a flexible site of meaning-making within the archive of fanfiction.

Another example of working without Jenkins framework as a centering device is Lothian, Busse, & Reid's "'Yearning Void and Infinite Potential': Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space." By drawing on personal fannish experience and "the open-ended theorizing in which fan fiction writers and readers participate," these scholars move forward from how slash works, and instead what it might do (103). Sara Gwenllian-Jones also forms alternative frameworks for thinking about fanfiction in "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters," where she directly questions some of the conclusions of Jenkins and Penley. She asks "Do slash stories contradict and resist the

texts that inspire them, or do they simply extend certain narrative logics into the realm of sexuality?" (81). She posits instead that the incorporation/resistance model that underlies Jenkins's theorizing does not offer suitably complex explanations of fan creations (which she cites as having a wider range of erotic possibilities and narrative directions).

The tensions underpinning most of this scholarship on fanfiction and slash in particular can be seen as coming from a queer basis. The proto-text, the fan's text, the fans themselves, and the communities of fans are significant for this thesis to the extent that they interact with queerness. In staying true to this point of orientation, I insist on decentering fan behavior/identity as well as the fanwork as an artifact without personal (fannish) context. I hope that by doing this — paying close attention to the multiple aspects of the phenomenon of slash — I can take up slash fiction as a polyvalent practice, a discourse, and a way of being in the world.

How to Read this Thesis

In lieu of traditional chapters, I divide my thinking into a non-linear model of nodes in order to open up multiple in-roads towards examining the queer work of slash without crystalizing into a comprehensive theory that would efface its nuance and particularities. I like to think of these five nodes as mobile, discrete meditations that nevertheless are deeply interrelated and in conversation with one another.

One node {Failure} focuses on queer failure, where I extend Jack Halberstam's model as a way of realizing slash fiction as not only necessitated, but constituted by sorts of failure. Another node {Embodiment} curates aspects of cyberfeminisms and queer theories of embodiment in order to understand the relation of the corporeal to the digital space of fan production. The node labeled {Archives} explores what is at stake for conceiving fanfiction as an archival project, and how slash functions in terms of documentation and preservation. A node on werewolf and merman sex {Hybrid Body Erotics} extends models of cyborg erotics to slash fiction. A final node {Temporalities} analyzes the way queer temporalities structure meaning-making in subcultural productions like slash.

The current, motion, and energy running through all of these nodes is what I call critical queer imagination. In a final fragmented section, I suggest critical queer imagination not as an overarching theory that explains slash (or queer creative works in general), but rather a gesture toward the impulse behind queer activism as well as a signal toward queer futurity.

These nodes offer several ways of thinking through slash fiction, and part of their value is that they function as multiple and distinct points of entry. They offer the luxury

of choice as well as the understanding of manifold perspectives. But they are also closely interconnected. Already in current scholarship, these theoretical turns are in conversation with one another — it can even be difficult to do work on one without engaging another at times. So part of what building this thesis out of discrete nodes then does is to focus an unnatural attention to one thread of a tapestry. By pulling and following this thread, we can see its color and length and particular pattern.

But also, by pulling and following this thread, we do so at the expense of following other threads that make up the fabric. In this sense, constructing these nodes unravels, disassembles theoretical fields. It's in this disassembly that we can then realign and reimage how intertwined forces come together and apart, in other words - it allows us to interrogate the critical movement that happens in slash fiction.

I have written them in a way that I hope lends itself to a method of reading that derives its motivation from desire and interest, and draws its pace from leisure and attachment. This means that these deliberately non-numbered nodes are not meant to be read in any one order — the limitations of traditional scholarship have a flattening effect here, forcing me to put one after another in a single document.[11]

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[11] Tara McPherson argues that, "Faced with a variety of threats (both real and perceived) to the humanities, scholars tend to hold on to established modes of working" and advocates the experimentation with and development of "emerging genres of scholarly practice" ("Scaling Vectors: Thoughts on the Future of Scholarly Communication"). This thesis is in conversation with the bold line of thinking McPherson is working toward.

Illustration 1 A traditional reading of nodes.

I chose to begin this particular sequence with queer failure to foreground different ways of conceiving fanfiction. Failure as an entry point allows us to ask questions about how the remaining four nodes may (or may not) have an element of failing already embedded in them. Reading about the erotics of hybrid bodies before the embodiment node forces the reader to reckon with the way a werewolf's sexual body might relate to a fan's body and her computer. Reading about archives and temporalities together presents a connection between history and preservation or loss.

But the order that the nodes are presented within this thesis is only provisional. I encourage the reader to start where they feel most interested (or least), to follow whim, skip nodes, go out of order, circle back, give up, go backwards in order to find different ways of dwelling within this text.
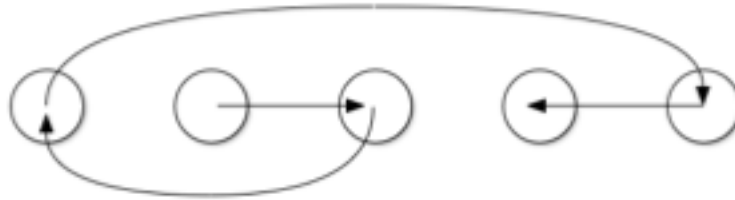
Illustration 2 Example of alternative reading of nodes.

When we do this, we find different entry points, different questions become important to us. While both the node on archives and the node on failure deal in large part with a fanwork titled *The Shoebox Project,* reading {Archives} first points us towards the context of the story and its life online as a cyber project. We might ask then how the failure of *The Shoebox Project* to be safely preserved and intact — the failure of LiveJournal to be a protected and safe cyberspace for fanwork to exist — impacts thinking of slash as a queer project rooted in failure. If we read {Embodiment} last, how do the objects fans are oriented toward (computer, screen, keyboard, mouse, trackpad) resonate differently?

A friend once gave me an old, yellowed gamebook (often referred to casually as the trademarked *Choose Your Own Adventure* series) titled *Vampires, Spies and Alien Beings* written by R.G. Austin that campily leads the reader along any number of possible adventures on a Hollywood movie set. What sticks with me about this cheap paperback is the sincerity (however corny) in its explanation of how the book should be read. In the front matter, before page 1, a page titled "Attention!" proclaims: "*Which Way Books* must be read in a special way. DO NOT READ THE PAGES IN ORDER." Austin continues in breathless thrill: "There are many possibilities for exciting adventures. Some of the

endings are good; some of the endings are bad. If you meet a terrible fate, you can reverse it in your next story by making new choices." It iss with the same spirit that I ask the reader to engage with these nodes. This experimental labor is a collaboration between reader and writer. I ask the reader to participate differently: to imagine with me or against me or beside me, but most importantly to imagine.

NODE: {FAILURE}

The picture that constitutes the post titled "Happy 3 month anniversary, shoeboxers!" (along with the descriptive subtitle "One Undated Page from One Old Journal") shows a handwritten journal page. Remus Lupin's measured script is loosely dignified, with a few dramatic swoops descending into the lower lines. The writing begins abruptly: "Have decided to keep certain bits & bats (for posterity, not, as Sirius put it, frilly-namby-pamby nostalgia that only girls and Remuses ever indulge in) from various Hogwarts adventures, just in case." In this sentence, we find the impetus for Jaida and Rave's polymedia fanwork, *The Shoebox Project*. Along with his anxiety about being perceived as effeminate — especially by his handsome and rebellious friend, Sirius Black — we see explicitly Remus's urge to collect and preserve his own queer history.

The queerness of his urge to keep "for posterity" is thrown into relief against the obstacles he faces in order to do so. Although Remus would rather have the more enduring (and, for him, respectable) "leather suitcase of mysterious quality," he settles on a shoebox. "One must make do," he confides to the journal. His droll tone as he grumbles about his friends not appreciating his efforts belies the intensity of his project. He collects blindly, not knowing the endpoint of such an undertaking — "Who knows?" he asks himself, "Perhaps, some day, someone will thank me." And further, Remus collects artifacts and ephemera in immediate opposition to the threat of hegemonic het policing of his friends. Just two lines down from his fantasy of being recognized and thanked (in the future, of course) for the documentation of history, Remus muses that now he must "make sure no one ever finds out about it" because he'll "never live it down, you know."

Have decided to keep certain
bits & bats (for posterity, not, as
Sirius put it, frilly-namby-pamby
nostalgia that only girls and
Remuses ever indulge in) from
various Hogworts adventures, just
in case. I would have preferred some
manner of leather suitcase of mysterious
quality but there was only a shoebox
to be had. One must make do.
    Who knows? Perhaps, some
day, someone will thank me.
        (Though it won't be Sirius
or James, ungrateful basturds.)
            Now I just have to make sure no
one ever finds out about it. I'll never
live it down, you know. "What were
you thinking?" the lads will demand,
and "A bloody shoebox?" Well. I
am not frilly, namby or pamby,
despite rumours to the contrary, and
if you believe everything one Sirius
Black tells you, you'll find yourself
in the third floor girl's lavatory with
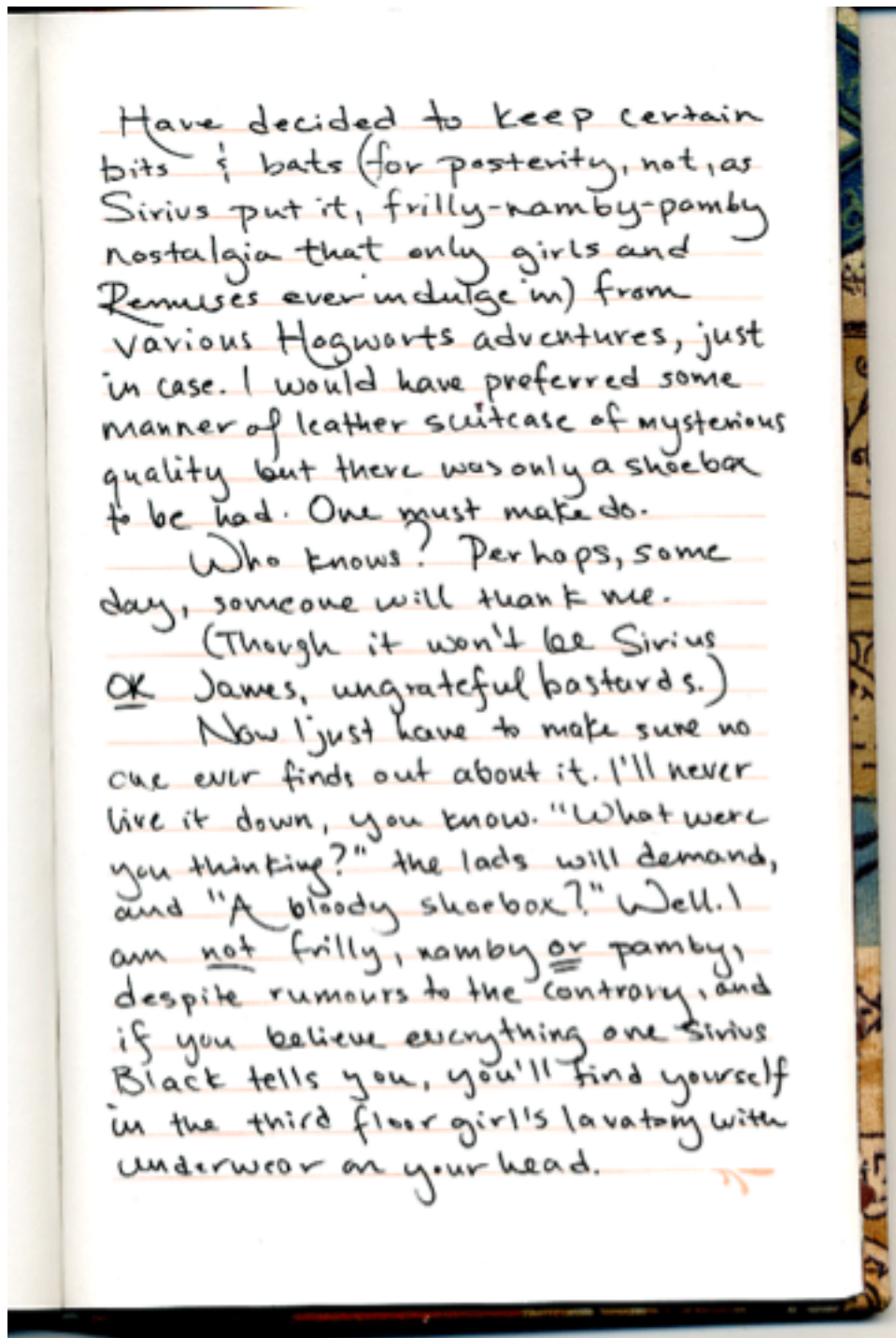underwear on your head.

Fig. 1 Image from "Happy 3 month anniversary, shoeboxers! (One Undated Page from

One Old Journal)"

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The performance of this journal entry taps into a queer mode of knowledge production importantly rooted in failure. In what follows, I will attempt to deploy Jack Halberstam's understanding of failure as a way to conceive of the practice of slash fiction (production, engagement, sustainment). If we take the term *fanfiction* to denote a new creative work that makes use of pre-existing characters, settings, and/or plots from a proto-text, I reiterate the following definition for *slash*: a subset of fanfiction which creates queer romance, queer identity, queer sex, or queer desire where it was not ostensibly present in the proto-text.

Operating under these specific meanings, Jaida and Rave's *The Shoebox Project* offers us a useful example of both terms. The two creators, who go by Livejournal usernames LadyJaida and Dorkorific, respectively, began collaborative work on the fic in 2004. *The Shoebox Project* has as its proto-text the series of Harry Potter novels by author J.K. Rowling (which was still in production as Jaida and Rave created their fic), but taking place completely in the history of the Harry Potter fictional universe. Starting in the summer of 1975, the story tracks Harry's father's group of friends through their last two years of school at Hogwarts and into the beginnings of their postgraduate careers until 1978. Remus Lupin serves as the central figure in the story as he archives and memorializes the group's adventures as well as his queer attraction to and eventual relationship with Sirius Black. *The Shoebox Project* is particularly productive for this line of theory as it not only lays bare the desires and impulses that structure collecting/producing queer histories/stories, but foregrounds them in its archival construction.

FALLING/FAILING, OR RE-MEMBERING THE SHRIEKING SHACK

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam posits that, in "a basic desire to live life otherwise," failure maps onto queerness in useful ways (2). Importantly, Halberstam does not argue in his book for simply reevaluating the way success and failure are conventionally upheld — which is through a heteronormative, capitalist society. Instead, the book "dismantles the logics of success and failure with we currently live" (2). In other words, Halberstam is embracing failure as a site of opportunity that interrupts hegemonic ways of being and knowledge production.

Drawing on James C. Scott's conceptualization of "the weapons of the weak" which recognized activities that are sometimes coded as indifference or submission, Halberstam situates failure as a similar resistance to dominant order. He writes that "As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded *already* in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent" and that "failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities (88, emphasis mine).

The impulse to imagine queerness manifests itself explicitly in the production of slash. Part of the reason for this is located in the failure of the proto-text to present queerness — whether it's a failure to present in a pleasurable way, enough, in the desired characters, or even at all. Both Remus Lupin and Sirius Black are presented as heterosexual in Rowling's books through the absence of clear homosexual markings and, in Lupin's case, his relationship later in the Rowling's series with a woman.

The failure of the proto-text sharpens in comparison to the slash prose in *The Shoebox Project*. In Part Four: Halloween, 1975 (subtitled "Four Photographs. Two Memories. Four Stories.) the four friends spend the night in the Shrieking Shack. The ties to the proto-text here are explicit to readers: the Shrieking Shack is both a named place and a plot device haunted by its history in the Harry Potter novels. Silent for over a

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decade by the time of Harry's school years, Rowling's novels later reveal that the rumors of the Shack's haunting were instituted by Headmaster Albus Dumbledore in order to provide cover for Remus Lupin's lycanthropic transformations while he attended Hogwarts. Jaida and Rave's fic occupies the temporal space left open by the proto-text and imbue it with queerness.

After each doing their best to frighten the others with scary stories, they settle down to sleep. Remus and Sirius stay awake scaring one another, which turns into horseplay:

> Sirius's knee smashes into the banister; Remus yanks at Sirius's hair. Sirius yelps and flips himself away, and then he abruptly remembers that they are at the top of the stairs. There is a little moment of dread. They glance at each other, and then gravity, as it inevitably does, kicks in.

The two boys end up at the bottom of the stairs, Remus sprawled across Sirius's body. As they attempt to disentangle themselves, unnamed queer desire extends through their movements. Sirius feels Remus as "warm, still, a pressing-down that is both strangely heavy and strangely comfortable." Their eyes catch and "for no reason [Black's] stomach twists hotly." Seconds after they pry themselves apart, Black silently "remember[s] the rise and fall of their chests unevenly together." The scene continues on to a somewhat tender, but mainly jocular conclusion. After a text break, the italicized words "*Remus was here*" appear along with a digitally manipulated photo of a Wizarding-brand chocolate bar.

The unexpected physicality of the collision between the two teens reminds us (and presumably them) of the sexual capacity of their bodies. Sirius worries aloud as they lie in a heap about the "whomping great splinter" which is pressing into his ass. "'One inch to the left,' Sirius murmurs. His laugh is as half-hearted as the joke." By conjuring not only the image of the phallus, but of anal penetration, Sirius effectively charges the

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encounter with embodied affect. (The fact that he subsequently discovers that the splinter is in fact his wand, underlines the association and adds an echo of masturbation when in the prose "he closes his fingers around [it].")

Not only does the failure of the proto-text to register queerness provide the driving thrust for imagining the characters in new, queerer ways, it recognizes the always already embedded alternatives (to borrow Halberstam's language) in the dominant — in this case, proto — narrative. The reconstruction by Jaida and Rave of the actions in the Shrieking Shack as (partly, covertly, and unselfconsciously) queer activates an embedded alternative. *Remus was here*, we understand, in a queer way. The queer affect and desire at work in the scene get folded back into the proto-text: scenes at the Shrieking Shack in Rowling's novels now bear a further inscription that haunts in the form of a counter-history.

The cluster of affects including loss, disillusionment, isolation, exclusion, fear, and disappointment associated with the failure of the proto-text offers us "more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (Halberstam 3). The "world" here being polyvalent — that is, not just the fictional universe world of Harry Potter that J.K. Rowling created, but also the pedestrian world, where we read Rowling's books and wonder and hope privately or aloud or online what exactly the sex lives of beloved characters might look like.

FORGETTING, OR PLATFORM 9 ¾ AGAIN

A recurring scene in Rowling's proto-text is of Harry and his friends depart for or arriving home from school on the Hogwarts Express, the train that runs from the wizarding school to Platform 9 ¾ at King's Cross Station in London. The platform,

accessible only to magic folk is perhaps the site where we see most prominently the nuclear het family as the dominant social formation. The mother and father unit (sometimes in tandem with siblings) function as a point of orientation around which a range of affects shapes normative (hetero)sexual behavior.

Part Twelve: June, 1976 ("Career Counseling, End of Year Photographs Both Official and Un-Official, One Game of Poker, and a Goodbye") returns us to Platform 9 ¾ again, before Harry's story. At the end of their penultimate year at Hogwarts, the four boys ride the train back to King's Cross for the summer months. Peter's mother (alone) "arrives to whisk him away" from the group, earning a comment from James: "That woman is a nutter." The single mother here is depicted as dysfunctional in essence: she is manic and neurotic, being only one part of a two-part unit. James's parents appear from the crowd to his deep pleasure and theirs: "James whirls, a grin splitting his face […] 'How's my *darling?'* James's mother yelps. She rumples his hair and straightens his collar as James cringes." Even their arch nemesis, Severus, is busy with the display of heterosexual kinship. Sirius points across the station and comments "Mama and Papa Snivellus, come to take their precious bundle of ooze home for the summer."

The platform here becomes a stage for the normative white family, spotlighted by its foil in Peter's failed family (i.e. the single mother). The moments of reunion echo the ones presented in Rowling's proto-text. Peter's experience tracks along with Neville Longbottom's as the incomplete family with only one guardian, James's experience tracks the Weasley children with their present and accounted-for mother and father, and even Snape's experience tracks Draco Malfoy as the subject of hate and scorn who nevertheless completes the public performance of het family.

In his discussion of stupidity and losing, Halberstam posits that, for queers, "forgetfulness can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and

the ordinary" (70). In this instance, the normal and ordinary are illustrated through the exuberance of familial reunion. The smooth operations, however, remain less visible in the scenes of Platform 9 ¾. These are normalizing forces, which by definition work to remain unseen and undetectable *as* forces. The smooth operations relegate queerness as a non-category, deny homosexual desire to make itself known, and limit imagined and real possibilities of ways to be in the world. "Queer lives seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance," Halberstam writes, moving us toward why forgetting (the failure of memory) can be useful.

After the other two boys reunite with their families, Sirius "grabs Remus by the wrists and tugs him behind a stanchion, into its shadow, and sets his bags down." In order to forget Platform 9 ¾, they must disassociate, although they still remain in its space and place. The stanchion works to not only shield them *from* the view of the public with its shadow, but also to obscure their view *of* the public.

While Sirius tries to convince him to visit over the summer, Remus sits on his suitcase attempting to explain why he can't. Tired of arguing, Sirius finally kneels down and says "trying to talk to you is like smashing my head against rocks." (At this point in Jaida and Rave's fic, neither boys have made moves to act on or even realize their desires.) As Sirius struggles to convey his feelings, James's voice interrupts calling to them that he's leaving. Sirius answers shortly, "flicking up his chin in a clear dismissal" and when he turns back to Remus "his voice takes on an unfamiliar urgency." The disruption challenges the performance of forgetting, but Sirius is determined: "He puts his hand tentatively against Remus's jaw, two fingers resting against Remus's ear." Both characters forget where they are, that they are (if out of sight) still in public. They forget that this public is determined by a heteronormative logic. More awkward back and forth continues between them, before Remus makes the connection: "I get it. I'm rocks." Sirius

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then "makes a noise that's kind of a laugh and kind of a groan and then presses his lips against Remus's."

The queer act of two boys kissing scrambles the logic of nuclear het family units. Not a public display of bravery, as ostensibly, no one in the crowd sees the kiss, it is instead an act of forgetting that offers a different relation to being in the space of Platform 9 ¾. Halberstam writes:

> We may want to forget family and forget lineage and forget tradition in order to start from a new place, not the place where the old engenders the new, where the old makes a place for the new, but where the new begins afresh, unfettered by memory, tradition, and usable pasts. (70)

There is an opening up that is activated and amplified by breaking with heterosexual narratives and modes of sense-making. In terms of the organization of bodies and desires on the platform, the actions that just happened — the awkward argument, the touch, the first kiss — cannot make sense. The failure of memory, the forgetting of het logic, allows an alternative form of knowledge production — in other words, a new mode of making sense.

In *Disidentifications*, José Esteban Muñoz offers a theory of disidentification "meant to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which queers of color identify with ethnos or queerness despite the phobic charges in both fields" (11). I foreground this statement of purpose in order to refuse the hegemonic draw to again relegate race to the footnotes as I utilize parts of his theory in a fanwork that effectively assigns whiteness as the bodily norm. It seems here, as Muñoz himself anticipates, that disidentification might not be an "adequate strategy of resistance or survival" for queers or fans of color (5). However, the act of disidentification as Muñoz conceives it can still be useful for thinking about the impulse for imagining queerness in *The Shoebox Project*.

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Muñoz writes that "To disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (12). The re-imagining of Platform 9 ¾ as a space of queer sex scrambles the logics of nuclear het family units, but only to an extent. As characters, settings, and plots reassemble in the space of *The Shoebox Project*, the logic of invisible whiteness remains unexamined. We can imagine here the ties of whiteness between heteronormativity in the proto-text and homonormativity in the fanwork. Thinking about disidentification helps to make evident the limits of hermeneutics as this "shuffling back and forth between reception and production" reproduces normalized white bodies. Muñoz reminds us that "although the various processes of identification are fraught, those who are hailed by more than one minority identity component have an especially arduous time of it" and that, further, "[m]inority identifications are often neglectful or antagonistic to other minoritarian positionalities" (8). The failure in this instance of slash to live up to its unspoken utopian promise is only useful if it is not allowed to be a point of stoppage or unexamined telos.[12]

ASHES, AFFECT, EPHEMERA

The Shoebox Project is a fanfic spanning 35 parts loosely organized around segments of time, thought in various scales — "summer" or "Christmas" or "June." These parts are constituted by various media and genres: photographs, prose text (sometimes referred to as "memories" in the subtitle) letters, sketches, sketches of photographs, scraps of parchment, notes, essays, maps, and invitations. The way Jaida and Rave present the fanfic it is quite explicitly as an archive. The artifacts and

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[12] And indeed the production of fan "meta" — a form of fannish production that talks explicitly about fandom, fanfic, and fans — is one way that utility can come from this secondary failure.

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documents often partially constellate into a narrative, but the non-textual elements do not serve as mere illustrations to a piece of fiction. This is an important distinction to make because archives preserve history in a way that often refuses (or at least resists) coherency. We see disjuncture and contradiction even in Remus's own drive to remember: "I like to remember everything […] as it was" he says, "Because when all the moments come together, when all the songs meet up with one another, you get something whole and complete and wonderful" (Part Eleven: May, 1976). He says this after smoking a joint with Sirius, wistfully decrying photographs or moments on their own. But his archive, his collection of photographs and moments, doesn't match the fantasy of wholeness he wishes for. Instead it pushes against wholeness and completeness, and offers us a different method for dwelling in memory.

In her article "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture" Ann Cvetkovich suggests that "understanding gay and lesbian archives as archives of emotion and trauma helps to explain some of their idiosyncrasies, or, one might say their 'queerness'" (110). The emotions and traumas of *The Shoebox Project* manifest themselves perhaps most clearly in the inclination to preserve a history — that is as much about Remus as it is about his friends — through collecting and archiving (thinking on the level of fanwork production as Jaida and Rave create and collect these artifacts, and also on the fictional level of Remus as the agent who does the collecting). In the terms of librarians and archivists, most of these artifacts would be called *ephemera*, unofficial publications, paper documents or physical objects that fall under the miscellaneous category as they are catalogued. Cvetkovich writes that by "insisting on the value of apparently marginal or ephemeral materials, the collectors of gay and lesbian archives propose that affects — associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma — make a document significant" (112).

If ephemera is "interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things" as Muñoz states, we are then lead to speculate on the rest of the archive of *The Shoebox Project* (10). If Jaida and Rave's fic is constituted by ephemera, how does it relate to the proto-text? I want to suggest thinking of ephemera as a mode of failure. If Rowling's proto-text forms an "official" archive of documented action, the ephemeral nature of Jaida and Rave's fic is the response written in the failed mode of "unofficial" evidence.

SLASHING FAILURE

In her article "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters," Sara Gwenllian-Jones shrewdly observes that "studies of television fan cultures have often proposed slash fiction as a radical instance of resistant reading," going on to cite Constance Penley and Henry Jenkins as two foundational scholars in fan studies that contribute to this interpretation (80-81). Jones goes on to interrogate and trouble the conception of slash fiction as "resistant," theorizing that:

> slash fiction has been valorized as a rebellion *against* the text, a scavenging for textual crumbs that become the raw material for an alchemical creative reworking. But cult television series are already 'queer' in their constructions of fantastic virtual realities that must problematize heterosexuality and erase heterosexual process in order to maintain their integrity. (89-90)

Here, Jones is making the case for reinterpreting slash as a mode of reading that actualizes aspects of the proto-text, rather than one that finds itself in fundamental opposition to the proto-text. In the rest of this concluding section, I want to retool her thesis to operate on a broader level that doesn't rely on the the inherent queerness of the proto-text. I propose that, in following with Halberstam's notion of failure, the embedded

possibilities of a failed proto-text operate as the latent and queer textual element that is then taken up by creators of slash.

Reading along the grain of the proto-text, rather than in violent opposition to it, offers us a way to negotiate the slash creator's relation to the proto-text as polyvalent object choice as well as to parse the impulse to imagine queerness. In this orientation, I still argue for the subversiveness of slash fiction as a project that scholars have advanced before, but for different reasons. Unsettling the dichotomy between "original" creative work and fan "response," we should attempt to see fanwork as extensions of proto-texts *in that they dwell in spaces of failure as a point of genesis*.

It's useful here for us to return to the page of Remus's journal that opened this paper. The urge Remus displays to collect, keep, archive, and (eventually) share becomes something of an avatar for Jaida and Rave's own drives to imagine queerness in J.K. Rowling's universe. The stifling and oppressive heteronormativity of the proto-text is part of what *necessitates* the creation of queer manifestations, but at the same time heteronormativity-as-failure *constitutes* the project. Remus's anxiety over the "frilly-namby-pamby nostalgia that only girls and Remuses ever indulge in" makes visible the failure (initiated by the proto-text) that both he as well as *The Shoebox Project* itself dwell in.

NODE: {HYBRID BODY EROTICS}

In her article "NEW VOY 'cyborg sex' J/7 [NC-17] 1/1: New Methodologies, New Fantasies" Julie Levin Russo demonstrates a methodology for encountering slash fiction that removes itself from the field of audience studies/reception studies as a historically delineated ethnographic foray. To help us understand why she makes this move, Russo maps her understanding of Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers*. As it is the closest we have to an authoritative text on fanfiction, Russo reiterates Jenkins's major thesis in the book: that fans engage in active, resistant readings of mass-produced texts, and that through this participation they construct and produce culture themselves.

Russo's reading importantly shows us that these are two discrete propositions. Tracking Jenkins's use of de Certeau's metaphor of "poaching," she highlights the pessimism inherent in a model that only theorizes the ways that poaching allows its subjects to "elude or escape institutional control" (to use de Certeau's own words). For Russo, the approach that Jenkins puts forth "disregards the possibility that [fans'] tactics might have any effect on these dominant institutions — readers are poachers, not guerrillas" (11).

This is extremely significant for my argument that fanfiction, slash fiction, matters outside of its own creation. There seems to be some doubt as to what production really is in Jenkins's analysis. Russo elaborates that "it is not clear whether he wants to ultimately adhere to economic definitions of consumption and production that privilege the commercial, or whether he is proposing that fan activities could radically redefine these terms" (11).

In her methodological departure from *Textual Poachers*, Russo weaves a framework from Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" as well as Lauren Berlant and

Michael Warner's "Sex in Public." From Haraway, Russo draws on the figure of the cyborg as embodying the breakdown of stable boundaries which constitute human, and from Berlant and Warner, she draws on the concept of queer counterpublics as sites of resistance to hierarchical dominations because, she paraphrases, "these dominations are founded in large part on the constructed private space of heterosexual intimacy" (15).

The resulting framework — which I will attempt to utilize and build in the same spirit — offers an imagination of queer resistance through sex. The idea that slash fiction's explicit eroticism can be a valid, legitimate, and culturally salient end in and of itself is a conclusion that isn't allowed through Jenkins's line of thought.

Here is where I depart from Russo's theorization (although hopefully in the same trajectory).[13] In her "Manifesto" Haraway defines a cyborg as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (291). I want to paint with broad strokes, and imagine the repercussions of cyborg theory for hybrid bodies (such as werewolves and merfolk) in slash fiction. These hybrid bodies I see as similar to cyborgs in that they are still a "creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" although without the machinic element. Even Haraway herself places the non-cyborg hybrid body of the chimera in conversation with her conceptualization of the cyborg: "In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse and in daily practice, we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras" (313). And while the cyborg and the hybrid body seem to bear a useful proximity to one another, we should keep in mind that they likely operate in different ways. For Haraway, the cyborg "skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense" that schools of thought such as Marxism and psychoanalysis depend on to produce

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[13] As well as her application of her theory, a nuanced and powerful reading of a (femme) slash fic in the *Star Trek: Voyager* fandom that pairs Captain Janeway and the cyborg Seven of Nine.

individuation and history as a discourse (292). Werewolves and merfolk seem to transgress the myth of original unity not by the quantum leap the cyborg makes, but with a faltering sidestep (onto other myths, legends, stories, fictions — their tellings and retellings) that fractures the monolith even as the figures avoid contact.

So we can get to similar places with non-cyborg bodies, even though the routes sometimes lead in different directions. I want to cast a voyeuristic eye here towards what I find most useful about Haraway's corporeal imaginings and look at the hybrid body erotics of two slash fics: "Salutations or Something" by ragingrevolution in the *Teen Wolf* fandom and "Out of the Deep" by riseofthefallenone in the *Supernatural* fandom.

WEREWOLF SEX

Chapter 30 of "Salutations or Something" marks the point where Stiles Stilinski finds out that werewolves exist, and that his love interest Derek Hale happens to be one. The plot and setting of the fic differ drastically from the *Teen Wolf* television show, but the characterizations of both Derek and Stiles remain faithful to the proto-text (including the fact that Stiles is human and Derek is werewolf).

After Derek bluntly reveals that he as well as his family are indeed werewolves at the dinner table of the Hale house, the two men retire to Derek's room to talk one on one. Stiles, remaining dubious, asks Derek to prove himself and demonstrate his hybrid body:

> suddenly something happened. It was like his skin rippled across his face and instead of the ridiculously handsome grumpster Stiles knew and sort of wanted to punch, there was a-
>
> "Jesus Christ you're a werewolf," Stiles breathed out, floored.

This act of self-revelation unsubtly mirrors a type of traditional queer coming out narrative, starting in secrecy, moving through deliberation and anxiety, and cumulating in

an intense moment of vulnerability and pride. But what takes us into truly transgressive space is what follows.

> "Dude," [Stiles] said quietly, noticing how the other man's pointed ears twitched at the sound, "Seriously, though, can I touch you?"
>
> Derek nodded reluctantly, his werewolfy face pensive.
>
> Stiles continues thinking to himself as he touches Derek's face:
>
> Fuck, there probably was something profoundly wrong with Stiles' brain, but the feel of the surprisingly coarse hair under his fingers as he traced the hot skin of Derek's jaw was doing all kinds of things to him. Sexual things, as it were. He even had a hard time caring about all the bullshit from before and he was suddenly desperate to know what else changed about Derek when he shifted.

Here is where we see the way that Stile's sexual desire for Derek's (now explicitly) hybrid body is always already configured as criminal, "profoundly wrong."

The "wrongness" of this desire is not limited to the bestial sensibility of Derek's wolfish body. The figure of the hybrid body is already one that begets hazard as it, like Haraway's cyborg, is essentially "*about* transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (295, emphasis mine). The affect of criminality, of profound wrongness here taps into our perception of larger systems. In her chapter "Subversive Bodily Acts" from *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler understands that "[i]f the body is synechdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment" (375). The werewolf's body, being the unstable point between human body and wolf body, presents us (through Stiles's desire) with the charged potential for uncharted and therefore unregulated "bodily contours" (375). The potential, bound up in Stiles's libido is actualized when the two decide to engage in penetrative intercourse after a round of foreplay:

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> the werewolf put an arm around the small of Stiles' back and lifted him up, knee-walking across the bed, then standing and moving to the other side of the room toward the bathroom and oh, the dresser, where he set Stiles down, and, after one last moment of hesitation, slowly rested his dick against the loosened ring of Stiles' ass […]

> Derek surged forward, bottoming out with a grunted "Stiles" before he could regain control of himself and stop but Stiles didn't care because he was too busy nipping and sucking and clawing at him, trying to fuck himself on the amazing dick inside of him and nearly weeping at the incredible sensation of fullness.

The ecstasy of their fucking foregrounds physical pleasure over almost any other aspect of the narrative. But that's really the point. The author, ragingrevolution, presents hybrid body erotics in a spotlight, with an intensity that borders on melodrama. This intensity, these specific erotics, are what makes this part of what Berlant and Warner might call the "building of nonnormative or explicit public sexual cultures" (553). The generosity of the text to take pleasure and name as important this scene of boundary crossing pushes against the way heteronormative conventions of intimacy make "sex seem irrelevant or merely personal" (553).

MERMAN ANATOMY

In riseofthefallenone's "Out of the Deep" we find another hybrid body. Set firmly in an alternate universe than its proto-text of the television show *Supernatural*, the fic transposes the character of human supernatural-hunter Dean Winchester to a human shipmate on a research expedition, and transposes the character of an angel (in human corporeal form) named Castiel to a captured merman. What is exciting about this fic is the explicit transformation that occurs through the medium of slash. Not only do we find queerness writ large in difference from the proto-text, but we see the way even bodies become transmuted.

What makes this transformation so radical is not merely that it changes a human into a being that is not fully human, but how it works to disassemble hetero constructions of gender and sexuality. Part of this happens through confusion, unknowing, and newness of the hybrid body:

> Dean reaches between them and under his legs, his fingers almost too warm where they touch Castiel. He can't stop the little cry when a tight heat presses against the head of his penis. Despite the preparation, there is still a little resistance before it finally gives way and Castiel sucks in one sharp breath, mirroring Dean's own. […]

> Dean keeps making little breathy noises against Castiel's side-fan and his skin is burning under Castiel's hands. Everything is heat and warmth and Dean. The scent of his arousal is thick in the stifling air of the bed-cave and it's intoxicating.

In this explicit moment of hybrid-bodied sex (as well as in previous chapters that contain scenes of professionalized anatomical surveillance and examination by various other characters — which echo in the background of this moment), it becomes discernible how the merman body scrambles the logic of both Castiel's and Dean's physicality. The merman's side-fan is new to the sexual formula, and even Dean's body becomes differently perceived as he gives off a scent of arousal that the merman can detect. We are also confronted, as readers, to imagine the positions, the bodies, the ranges of movement differently — and because of that, with an elaborated sense of deliberateness.

> They shuffle and slide around the bed until Dean is hunched above Castiel, sitting over his stomach. He hits his head a few times trying to kneel high enough and every time he curses and ducks back down. By the third time, Castiel wraps his arms around his shoulders and pulls him down until they are chest to chest.

> *(Stop hitting your head.)*

> "Kinda hard not to." He mumbles against Castiel's neck, hands inching lower down his stomach. "Angle your hips more – just a little bit."

We are even asked to reimagine the sexual exchange, the penetration of orifice, and reception of phallus:

> Castiel knows he could hurt Dean if he's not careful. He's not completely shaped like Dean is used to and if Castiel hurts him, he'll never be able to forgive himself.

Employing some amount of descriptive restraint, riseofthefallenone encourages the reader to imagine a penis otherwise — and beyond that, to imagine being fucked by an otherwise penis. As Butler theorizes, "the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions and erotic possibilities" going on to say the "deregulation of such exchanges" (a human being anally penetrated by a merman's cock, for example) "accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all" (375).

The work that these two stories do is to render apparent the worlding project at stake in the writing, reading, and associated practices of slash fiction. The pressure points that fics such as these two discover and push against importantly show us the shape and form of hegemonic regimes that — even when explicit — become unwieldy and vast and move in insidious ways. In "Salutations or Something" and "Out of the Deep," hybrid bodies are both an act of imagining and a movement toward further imagining. The erotic hybrid body apprehends and brings into focus the heteronorms that it subverts, actively producing further knowledge of them in its wake.

NODE: {EMBODIMENT}

Before you enter Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's archival cyber project "Programmed Visions," there are a few external pieces of text that you have the option of reading: the Editor's Introduction, the Author's Statement, and the Designer's Statement. The editorial staff of Vectors Journal begin their piece by saying: "The opening screen of "Programmed Visions" promises its users an archive, and an archive it delivers. But this archive will most likely defy and resist any predetermined notion of the archive you bring with you to the project."

When you click on the bold red "VIEW PROJECT" hyperlink, you are taken to a screen with a light blue background with the title of the project and the author and designer's name. "You are the mouse," reads the grey text in the upper left corner of the window. Suddenly the text seems to glow and turns white — at the same time another bit of text slides into your periphery on the bottom right corner of the window: "Assemble and read the archive."

White text in the shape of three paragraphs appears on the left half of the window. "To what extent can race be conceived as an archive?" you begin to read. Without looking you move the mouse to the first paragraph and instantly, a fourth paragraph appears translucently over the first, moving slowly toward the center of the screen. Already, you are lost. The text moves so slowly that you wait for a moment until you can read either paragraph. When the new paragraph comes to a stop, you read all four and think that this must be Chun speaking to us. With nothing more to read and the lack of navigation buttons, you click in the blank spaces, but nothing happens.

When you click on one of the paragraphs, the text slides off screen, and new text in white boxes that look like pages pan across, like you are surveying over pages

scattered across a table. Then they stop and you are looking at the middle of a text and you have no choice but to read. You start in the middle of a thought and scan the words. You scroll to the top, but realize nothing is happening and you try scrolling down and you stop and look down at your two fingers, stroking forwards and back (scrolling?) on the surface of your laptop's trackpad. Your line of vision slides to the off-white fabric of the chair you're sitting on, and at the carpet, and then at the walls and the window.

DISORIENTATION

The impetus for this node came from a moment of disorientation. I was alone, but there might have been people with me. I was online, but I wasn't — I was in my favorite chair in my small apartment in Austin, Texas. I was a white man, but I was the small arrow of a mouse on a computer screen. None of this caused my disorientation. These conditions are pedestrian for me; they happen almost every day. Instead, what jolted me from my previous orientation was the unexpected navigation of Chun's "Programmed Visions."

UTOPIA

This moment where I "stop and look down" away from the screen is a stoppage, a breaking, a disruption. It *feels like* the illusion of the screen falters, my body flickers back into existence. We might speak of *coming out of* and *back into* the corporeal world. So *where* was I, then? I want to come back to this stopping moment of disorientation, but first I want to explore the background and consequences of cyber disembodiment for feminism as well as queer theory.

Early discourses on cyberspaces tended toward the utopian, explains Jessica E. Brophy, with the logic running something like this: if we recognize corporeality as a site of oppression and violence, and the emergence of cyberspace represents a means to escape the corporeal state, then the utilization of cyberspace "creates an egalitarian online experience, devoid of the discrimination attributed to the embodied experience" (929). This seems like an easy enough line to follow.

But Brophy points us toward the fact that:

the cyberutopian theme relies primarily on the principle of disembodiment. Leaving behind the body – and its associated sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, and so on – frees the user to be judged solely on their online presence, which they are able to carefully construct. (930)

That is to say that in order for this cyberutopia to work, one's body must necessarily be split from the online presence. In this way, the discourse of online utopia makes the body into a burden. The corporeal weight of color and class drags one down, singles one out for oppression. The gender identities and iterations of sexuality become heavy, bearing down on the individual. Cyberspace, this thinking might suggest, lets us drop that baggage.

Brophy suggests that cyberutopia presents a danger that when online disembodiment disconnects the "user from her or his site-specific socioeconomic location, all users are *assumed* to represent the dominant (sex, race, class, etc.)" (931). If every anonymous internet user becomes a middle-class hetero white man, it seems like the dis-embodied becomes re-embodied in a particularly violent manner.

Mark Graham, in "Geography/internet: ethereal alternate dimensions of cyberspace or grounded augmented realities?" usefully complicates this line of thought further as he traces the term "cyberspace" itself as a geographic metaphor that shapes our understanding of the internet and the way we engage with it. While a somewhat dated

term, Graham identifies its continued usage by policy leaders as well as related metaphors in common usage (we navigate to a website, or we go on the internet). He argues that "Imagining the internet as a distinct, immaterial, ethereal alternate dimension ultimately makes it more challenging to think through the contingent and grounded ways in which we consume, enact, communicate and create through the internet" (181).

However, in fanfiction as well as in slash, the real necessity of space in the cyber — space to store, archive, access, and hide material and information — challenges us not to completely abandon spatial metaphor.

THE UNBEARABLE HEAVINESS OF BODY

I now turn us towards Btihaj Ajana's insightful tracking of Enlightenment's epistemology of the body — specifically the Cartesian split of mind and body. I do this not in the spirit of detour, but rather in order to do two things. First, it will further explore the "weight" of the corporeal body and what it might mean for the embodied self (that is necessarily raced, gendered, and sexualized) to be imagined as "baggage." Second, it will serve to introduce an alternate way of thinking about cyber space and place — namely, phenomenology.

This epistemology of the body is where we can track the origin of the unbearably heavy body — the body that contains class, gender, race. The body is that which contains via the markings on itself, Enlightenment would tell us. Ajana asks us to consider the Cartesian split of body and mind that entails "the systematic belief in the supremacy of logical reason over the illogical nature," as not part of our *self* but part of *nature* (3).

It makes sense then, that dis-embodiment becomes the pivotal concept within popular cyber discourses. In this view, the body is desirably transcend-able. If you could

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set down your burden, wouldn't you? If you could leave behind the site of violence, wouldn't you?

Brophy reminds us that this Cartesian dualism is part of what makes the problematic idea of cyberutopia not only possible, but easy to slip into. She states that the internet "is interpreted as an equalizing platform and space, where the necessary/naturalized complications of 'the body' are removed. This interpretation denies that the body is necessary for participation online" (933).

LOOKING DOWN AT YOUR HAND

That moment of disorientation is not a singular event. It happens again and again — after many of these moments, it is not so jarring. And it is not without purpose. Chun's project does important work, drawing you away from the screen, making you look down at your hand. In order to think about this important work, I want to look at Ajana's theorizing about phenomenology in cyberspace, and Ahmed's theorizing on orientations.

First, it is useful to see the Ajana's gloss of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as it lays out the grounding of her phenomenological claims:

> As such and insofar as we understand and perceive the world via our body, perception can only be embodied, hence, the production of knowledge, whether subjective or objective, can only exist within a corporeal reality that is itself embedded within an implosion of specific contexts and situations. (4)

If this is the jumping off point for a phenomenology of cyberspace, then it would imply that even in the virtual reality online, one is still in some way embodied. We have evidence in the archives of fanfiction and the mediated interactions between fans on websites such as FanFiction.Net that *can only exist within a corporeal reality*. This is a huge step to make: locating perception as the location of knowledge production

"overrides the entire concept of consciousness" that is necessary for the Cartesian episteme.

The next step, Ajana posits, is a "re-examination of the body as yet a phenomenological experience, but this time not in terms of its relation to the physical space but the virtual one" (9). This is the importance of looking down at your hand — it is a way out of the Cartesian split, a way of introducing the phenomenal body. Ajana draws on Merleau-Ponty's example of the blind man's stick:

> Therefore, virtual tools cease to be external objects and become part of our phenomenological corporality, just as the blind man's stick becomes an extension of his sensorial activity. […] The body in this context is no longer seen as the obsolete object or the inert container of the mind, but an integral entity, which is reassigned with an indispensable role, that of the medium. (11)

This move capitalizes the necessity of the body even in contexts where the environment (read: cyberspaces) seemingly effaces it.

SCREEN, KEYBOARD, CURSOR

To what directions does the embodied, everyday aspect of typing, clicking, navigating, and reading on a personal computer orient the fan? Ahmed's work provides a link between this phenomenology of the cyber and beginning to think how the everyday input devices used by the participants in a fandom might be important. What might it mean that these bodies perceive identical or at least intensely similar objects (namely the text of fanfiction) in the myriad of ways people engage with the online?

As she questions what objects might appear within phenomenology as a field, Ahmed writes:

> We are turned toward things. Such things make an impression upon us. We perceive them as things insofar as they are near to us, insofar as we share a

residence with them. Perception hence involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things. (27)

To take up this thinking, we might say that those who are participating in cyberspaces are turned toward certain things: a laptop or a desktop computer, a table or a desk or a workspace, a keyboard and its particular keys, a computer mouse or a trackpad on a laptop, a touchscreen. Being orientated in this way might imply that you are more inclined to "do somethings rather than others" — in our case we might imagine being turned toward a keyboard would make the individual more inclined to type, and if that individual is reading fanfiction, that typing might take form as reviewing or commenting on a story (30).

In this application of fans participating in a fandom, how are we to think of the objects of the screen, keyboard, and cursor as *taking the shape of the work they do*? If the work of fans is, at least in part, to create and constitute a fandom, then these technologies become more than simple tools. They represent the boundaries of creating online identities and the ways in which those identities might encounter one another.

CYBER DISPLACEMENT

So *cyber displacement* is what I'm calling that moment of looking down at your hand. Cyber displacement is a discursive turn, a corporeal shift, that pushes or pulls one out of the Cartesian split. It is a productive moment that problematizes disembodiment in online arenas. It is a moment, meaning it is not permanent — it does not always reposition you in lasting ways.

Cyber displacement is necessarily disorienting. It disrupts and unsettles the way you were previously oriented; it can make you dizzy. It re-embodies you. In some ways, it is a reminder (or perhaps an interrogation): *you weren't transcending your body out*

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there in cyberspace, you were merely extending it. Perhaps we can think about the dizziness of cyber displacement as a reaction that comes about when the neutrality of the body/mind bifurcation is challenged.

But cyber displacement is not without limit; indeed, it may only be the first step to reimagining embodied praxis in online discourses. We can think of cyber displacements that happen in seemingly common ways: when an internet connection is suddenly lost or slowed, when technologies like keyboards and screens cease to function in the way we expect them to, when the computer gets too hot on our lap or our wrist begins to hurt from our hand's position, when someone calls our name from the other room, and when we experience extreme affect such as laughter, horror, revulsion, tears, surprise, or desire. These moments all act as cyber displacement, a push or pull from the disembodied illusion of the cyber, but without a new orientation, we settle back into the same. In these instances, cyber displacement seems to be only a hiccup, an aberration that can be easily lost or dismissed.

I want to suggest that cyber displacement can be a tool for re-orienting, and that slash fiction is an example of this tool in use. Perhaps we can think of slash as production that provides an immersive experience that reorders our thinking on how digital technology intersects with everyday politics of narratives and sexuality. In "Virtual Reality and Cult Television," Sara Gwenllian-Jones images virtual reality as "an alchemical effect of text and imagination, a species of willed hallucination that transports the reader into another realm. It is not a passive experience; the reader must play an active part in creating and sustaining its integrity, drawing on memory as well as imagination to reinforce its perceptual substance" (84). She calls to mind the activeness,

work, or labor inherent in fan practices like slash fiction — that cyber displacement utilizes both the "virtual" *and* the "corporeal."

Ajana states that "it is the body that bears the scars and reveals the marks of our being-in-the-world, it is the body that takes us to places where we may find or loose ourselves, and it is the body that carries our memory and with it our identities" (13). Therefore, we must stop seeking to go "beyond" the body, and instead recognize the way phenomenology allows us the extension of the body through various corporeal and cyber apparatuses.

To do this is to ask for a critical return to the corporeal in our conceptualizing of cyberspace. Jenna Sutela's living media project "New Degrees of Freedom" exemplifies this ethos, provoking: "Did cyberspace mix up your circadian rhythm? Have you lost your mind to the global brain?" Sutela's project, a collaborative work of performance art, theory, and web design asks us to imagine "real-life avatars." She states that "If the body cannot be emancipated online—indeed the Internet has proved to be not virtual enough— let us imagine new modes of existence in the physical world." Future research should continue on this path and further explore concrete strategies for members of fandoms and participants in fanfiction discourse. This move is important in order to situate and more fully realize slash fiction as part of a project that works toward understanding of certain violences and uncertain futures through our engagement with popular art and with each other.

NODE: {ARCHIVES}

[In my thinking on archives and the archival turn in feminist and queer theory, I turn to a numbered format as a mode of experimentation. In the larger interplay of these nodes as discrete-while-connected, mobile, and nonlinear, this node becomes deliberately disciplinary. The first reason is to perform a certain reflexivity in the construction of this node as an archive itself; I create an archive of texts and artwork as a method of knowledge production. The second reason is to be able to leave critical space between propositions/documents/texts. Allowing each numbered section to "stand" on its own, we are called to interrogate the fissures and voids between them and to listen for echoes that the archive experiences but cannot contain. A third and final reason is to signal what Jacques Derrida considers a key aspect of the archive: that it augments itself. These numbers as a sequence point not toward a telos, but rather towards more, towards aggregation. Derrida states that the "archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future" (68).]

1) In discussion on transgender archives in *In a Queer Time and Place*, Jack Halberstam states that "The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity" (169). Extending this logic, the way I conceive the queer archive is not simply a repository of queer objects (or objects belonging to queers); it is also a way to theorize about queer potentiality and futurity.

2) I'm concerned here with coming up with a suitable definition of a queer archive that would accommodate slash fiction in order to convey why fanwork might have an impact beyond its own creation.

3) Slash seems to me to act as a queer archive in that it collects and preserves queer feelings in a way that is both rooted in and transcends these feelings' fictional genesis.

4) If we think of *The Shoebox Project* by Jaida and Rave, we can recognize how the queer feelings of a young Remus Lupin spring forth as he turns us toward the insistence of his urge to document his "adventures" stating simply that "One must make do."[14]

5) Jaida and Rave's figure of Remus Lupin owes a debt to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in its genesis in a similar way that the torn page of a journal or a sketch of a photograph is indebted to Jaida and Rave's *The Shoebox Project*.

6) However, the affect bound up with an imaginary object owned by an imaginary figure is not an imaginary affect. The affect transcends the fictional archive, and the fictional archive transcends its own proto-text.

7) We might also think of the imaginary objects contained in *The Shoebox Project* becoming real (or at least visible) through the lens of queer desire.

8) Ann Cvetkovich's line of thinking in "Photographing Objects: Art as Queer Archival Practice" is enlightening here — she says that "when objects are animated by feelings, they may demand alternative or experimental archival practices" (57).

9) If imagined and imaginary objects (such as Lupin's diary or the fire-damaged photograph) are necessarily animated by the feelings which conjured them in the first place, the discourse of fanfiction as a whole lends itself to alternative archival practices.

10) Digital fandom, Alexis Lothian posits, "makes ephemera endure by virtue of its status as digital media, but it is also characterized by specific archival practices and processes" ("Archival Anarachies" 4). These archival practices are directly related to the cyberspaces fans utilize and curate.

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[14] From section titled: "Happy 3 month anniversary, shoeboxers!: One Undated Page from One Old Journal"

11) Specifically, this demand for 'other' archival practices is triggered in *The Shoebox Project* where we see the translation of ephemera and artifact between various media. In other words, there is a certain creative archival act of 'carrying across' objects that seems to be linked to fannish work.

12) For example, from the physical diary that Jaida and Rave wrote on with Lupin's handwriting through the glass of the scanner and onto a computer. Or from a photograph to a sketch, or a sketch to camera, back to the computer, or a word processing document to a LiveJournal post.

13) Drawing on Derrida, Abigail Derecho puts forth a new vocabulary for fanfiction: archontic literature. For Derecho, this terminology relates the Derridean drive of the archive (which is always necessarily self-augmenting) to the way that fanfiction "are not lesser than the source text, and they do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather they only add to that text's archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it" (65).

14) I have a similar impulse to Derecho's, in that I want to distance myself from recreating hierarchies of value and implications of ownership or property rights when theorizing about fanfiction.

15) But if an archontic text invites fans "to enter it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive," then perhaps we have lost some of the radical and subversive power that other conceptualizations of fanfic — and slash, more specifically — allow (65).

16) A conceptualization of fanfiction that has the proto-text uncritically and comfortably subsuming all the subsequent productions seems at worst, unrealistic — and at best, unwieldy.

17) "The Text is plural" writes Roland Barthes. "The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination" (159).

18) The claim Barthes makes speaks towards the subversive power of fanfiction, without losing the messy and overwhelming plurality that Derecho guides us toward.

19) For me, that sense of "messiness" is one that appears when looking at fandoms — though it goes in and out of focus depending on my positionality.

20) Lawrence Grossberg sees a difference between a consumerist sensibility and the sensibility of the fan. "For the fan," Grossberg posits "certain forms of popular culture become taken for granted, even necessary investments. The result is that, for the fan, specific cultural contexts become saturated with affect" (59).

21) Grossberg isn't alone in thinking of fannish activity as laden with and moving through affect. Catherine Driscoll states that "fan fiction realism is not an agreed degree of accuracy in representation, but rather a registering of affective power" (89).

22) Perhaps the queer affective state of slash fiction is part of what refuses its place in the archive of Derecho's archontic literature.

23) In the final chapter of *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Ann Cvetkovich turns our attention to queer archives. "The stock-in-trade of the gay and lesbian archive is ephemera," she says — ephemera like notes passed during

History of Magic class,[15] holiday party invitations,[16] handwritten schedules,[17] or childhood photographs.[18]

24) Cvetkovich continues: "The archive of feelings is both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time, resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records" (244).

25) *The Shoebox Project* flickers between material and immaterial as it documents the fiction Jaida and Rave create. In "Part 16: Halloween 1976," we move from "live action" (for lack of a better word) photographs of Hogwarts's secret passages to pencil sketched photographs of Remus and Sirius in front of a suit of armor — still presumably exploring the school's labyrinthine passages.

26) Even then, these imagined objects that constitute *The Shoebox Project* remain imaginary, or virtual, as they are mediated through a computer screen.

27) Except for when they aren't. We can take as real, physical, corporeal, the actual stairs that were photographed to simulate Hogwarts, or the handwritten notes created by Jaida and Rave before being digitized. The text becomes explosive once more, as it troubles the boundaries between fictions and realities.

28) Alexis Lothian, drawing on Derrida's concept of the *anarchive* (the drive for destruction that the archive works always against and with), sees the "doubling of

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[15] From section titled: "Part Seventeen: November, 1976: One Esteemed Person's Birthday, a Photo-Album, Thirty-five Notes of Various Import, a Banner, A Benjy, and a Raven."

[16] From section titled: "Part Fifteen [sic]: December, 1976: More Letters, a Dream Diary, and the Facts of Life." (Although eighteenth in sequence)

[17] From section titled: "Part Twelve: June, 1976: Career Counselling, End of Year Photographs Both Official and Un-Official, One Game of Poker, and a Goodbye."

[18] From section titled: "Part Twenty-One B: March, 1977: Aftermaths, Coves, Tragedies."

destruction and preservation [as] the paradox of digital storage's enduring ephemera" ("Archival Anarachies 12).

29) In June of 2004, Jaida and Rave created the Livejournal account that would house their entries for *The Shoebox Project* under the account name shoebox_project. Ten years later, I am not able to access the full Livejournal site or the original content posts after the space was hacked.

30) Rave, through a separate Livejournal account[19] on November 12, 2008 writes: "evidently dorkorific got HACKED. motherfucking HACKED!! AND TOOK SHOEBOX DOWN WITH IT!!! i don't even know what to say! I mean, like, I haven't even looked in that journal in like months and then Jaida was all 'what the hell' and then i saw it." Later in the same post, Rave adds: "UPDATE: sent a hysterical report to ljabuse, still freaking out; all those entries are gone, y'all, the closest thing I have to a diary is just…gone."

31) The one remaining post[20] on the shoebox_project Livejournal, written by Rave under the sashayed account warns readers about being hacked, security, viruses, and online safety. Rave also points us to what remains the primary resource for accessing the content of *The Shoebox Project* — lomara's .pdf archive of the fic.

32) On this separate website,[21] lomara explains that the archive began "as a way to bring the Shoebox Project with me when I was away from the internet" and that after the Jaida and Rave's space was hacked, she shared the archive with the two creators and with the community. "Little did I dream my little experiment would become vital in the preservation of this wonderful project."

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[19] sashayed.livejournal.com
[20] http://shoebox-project.livejournal.com/14280.html
[21] http://shoebox.lomara.org/why-pdf/

33) In an article on the development of "Archive of Our Own" (a communal, nonprofit online space for archiving fanworks) Lothian explores the politics of fannish archives. "[w]hile fandom may be an archive culture," she writes, "its cultural specificities can't be traced only by looking at the archives designated to be the subculture's public face" ("An Archive of One's Own" 4).

34) The archive lomara put together of *The Shoebox Project* has become in a practical way a type of "public face" — despite its inception as a somewhat personal and intimate endeavor. For all that is painstakingly, thoroughly, and lovingly conserved in lomara's archive, the digital ephemera of creation, loss, and community resists the archive.

35) While much of *The Shoebox Project* might be thought of as archival ephemera (the photographs, the scraps of paper, the doodles, etc.) we should also attend to the ephemera of the cyberspaces that slash can exist and perpetuate in.

36) José Esteban Muñoz states that "[e]phemera includes traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies long after these structures of feeling have been lived" ("Ephemera as Evidence" 10-11).

37) The ephemeral text that Rave typed in 2008 has embedded in it the experience (and performance) of fannish affect. When Rave writes "the closest thing I have to a diary is just…gone" we are confronted with the loss of memory and the memory of loss.

38) As important and useful as it is to think of fanwork as archontic, Lothian warns that "if we want to take seriously the possibility that ephemeral conflict and online sex might function to undermine dominant sexual, gendered, racialized, and economic ways of being, both on- and off-line, we cannot restrict fannish politics to the easily archivable" (7).

NODE: {TEMPORALITIES}

THE QUEER TURN

We might think of some recent work[22] in queer studies as clustering around an intentional examination of time, a temporal turn. In the introduction to a special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* on queer temporalities, Elizabeth Freeman suggests that if we "reimagine 'queer' as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, or see the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities," we enter into the realm of "a more productively porous queer studies" (159). In other words, the queer temporal turn attunes us to ways in which queer theory interacts with notions of race, class, ability, and colonialism as well as calling us to feel along the contours and explore the depth of the gaps that exist within the field of queer studies.

"[L]iterally and figuratively, normative time is straight time in that its basic structuring principle is linearity, continuity and progression" states Gary Needham (150). By thinking queerly about time and temporality, we are also thinking about straight time. Thinking otherwise about time — the alternatives, the interventions, the tensions that queer theory might lead us to — brings into higher resolution time as a normative construct.

In what follows, I establish a case for thinking temporally about slash fiction and fandom, in that it enables us to ask certain questions about experience and meaning-making specific to the (slash) fan.

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[22] In no particular order, some important works: J. Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Carolyn Dinshaw's *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*, Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, and José Estaban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

FAN AS AMATEUR

In *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* Carolyn Dinshaw puts forth a conceptualization of queer temporality oriented around the position of the amateur, and how time for the amateur works differently than for the professional. And while Dinshaw's work is concerned with medieval instances of queer asynchrony — which she defines as "different time frames or temporal systems colliding in a single moment of *now*" (6). I find her notion of the amateur also useful for theorizing about the queer temporalities of present-day media fandom.[23] She reminds us that "professionals are paid for their work" and that the temporality of this work is "clock-bound and calendrical, regulated abstractly and independently of individuals" (21). The hours and minutes are solid and fungible for Dinshaw, like coins that can be held in your hand and counted, gained, spent, lost.

Amateurs, on the other hand "are not paid — and defined as such they are not remunerated for work" — or said another way, the hours and minutes of the professional become somewhat illegible (22). Key to Dinshaw's impression of the amateur is the temporal zone they operate in that is essentially different than the professional's:

> amateurs' activities do not require punching a time clock and do not follow a predestined career path, since they are not wage labor. Amateur temporality starts and stops at will; tinkerers and dabblers can linger at moments of pleasure when the professionals must soldier duly onward. (22)

Not only does this logic speak towards the way that the amateur encounters (or *feels* in an embodied sense) the passage of time, but also to the way the fan interacts with objects that they come into contact with. This is where the link between amateur and fannish sensibilities of time become most apparent; the constant attachment to these objects of

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[23] Indeed, Dinshaw herself even notes Ika Willis's work analyzing fanfiction as an amateur knowledge production (23).

attention (in all their multiple, refigured, contested, and erotic valences) warps straight time into something noticeably queer.

Freeman suggests that "supposedly postimperial nation-states still track and manage their own denizens through an official time line, effectively shaping the contours of a meaningful life by registering some events like births, marriages, and deaths, and refusing to record others like initiations, friendships, and contact with the dead" ("Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography" 58). Queer, fannish sensibilities of time seem to push against this historiographical het logic by intervening in the fictional realities of proto-texts, marking other events as historically significant. The historical consciousness that is behind at least some of the driving force in creating slash fiction is embedded in the fan's constant attachment.

There is something radical in the amateur way fans dwell with the proto-text that has little to do with *what* they subsequently do with it, but rather has much with to do with how they spend time with it. Owain Gwynne articulates a view of fannish waiting in "Fan-Made Time: *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*" that is "filled with meaningful activities. It is active, rather than passive waiting" (78). The anticipation for a text that has yet to be released is not what makes this waiting different, but how the future time becomes temporally loaded with action, intent, and desire. And while this time of waiting becomes "active" it is not necessarily condemned to the realm of the efficient (or productive in a capitalist manner). Freeman conceives of *chrononormativity* as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (*Time Binds* 2). She explains that apparatuses such as calendars, time zones, and schedules transmute institutional forces into seeming "somatic facts." It is partly against this normalizing field of power that the practice of slash (and possibly fanfiction in general) finds its sharpness.

A PHOTOGRAPH

"Part Twenty-Four: June, 1977" concludes with a black and white sketch of a photograph. The photo is candid, capturing Remus and Sirius sitting together alone. Sirius is turned towards Remus: he watches the other boy's face from under his messy dark hair, his mouth is caught open (possibly speaking) in a smile, and his arm is slung around Remus's back, thumb resting on his bicep. Remus looks forward in profile, neither at the camera nor at Sirius. He has a toothy grin and his body leans toward Sirius. It seems like a genuinely happy moment. Perhaps what is most striking about the sketch/photograph is its condition. Fire damage has destroyed the bottom left third of the photo, as well as a punctured a small hole next to Remus's head. There is a faint crease line running horizontally across the photo, and one of the corners is lightly dented. Some ashy residue can be seen on whatever surface the photo is sitting on. Beneath the photo is the caption: "Kept pristine, later burned, later salvaged."

Fig. 2 Image from "Part Twenty-Four, June 1977 (Four Final Days, Some Socks, One Photograph, Sneezing, a Note and a Map)"

I find this photograph/sketch heartbreaking. I read into it. I dwell on it. I circle back to it. For me, it's an object with an odd gravity. It moves me, pulls me forward and pushes me back through time; it forces me to imagine queer romance, queer relationships, fire, betrayal, and redemption. But to borrow language from Muñoz in "Ephemera as Evidence," I believe it is more productive in this paper to gesture to the work that this photo does, rather than what it might say (6).

This artifact is unique in *The Shoebox Project*. In no other artifact in the whole fic do we see with as much clarity the mapping of queer affect over a temporal distance. The realness of anecdote and the evidence of affect is imprinted in the photo, and re-imprinted in its damage (and possibly re-imprinted again in the pencil strokes of Rave as it came into being as a sketch). "Ephemera," Muñoz notes, "is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself" (10). In this case, multiple performances are enacted in the same document. The visual medium is significant here as a mode of housing layers of evidence simultaneously.

The multifaceted *now* that such an artifact elucidates forces us to take seriously lives lived in other kinds of time, including the fictional. Other kinds of time collapse into each other: Harry Potter's time, J.K. Rowling's time, Remus and Sirius's time, Christmas, June, autumn. By fostering temporalities other than the narrowly sequential, Dinshaw's notion of the amateur illuminates the relation between imagined object and the fan's sense of time. The amateur temporality that she lays out collapses in on itself and extends organically, with the object of desire situated as the variable, the hinge, the center from which the amateur's time starts and stops.

Jaida and Rave's work is shaped from Rowlings proto-text by its definition as fanfiction, but it is also characterized by an impulse to document queer love, queer desire,

and queer sociality. When we view the burned photograph of Lupin and Black as an axis from which temporalities extend and impend, we perceive how an archive of other such imagined-objects-made-visible denotes a peculiar mode of attachment. It's this constant attachment which permeates an archive like *The Shoebox Project* that brings us intimately close with queer potentiality in a historical sense as well as in futurity.

GIF/GIF/GIF/GIF/GIF

In online media fandom, a common element of fannish practice is the animated GIF — a filetype acronym for Graphical Interchange Format. Around since 1987, the GIF is a visual medium indebted to the time it came from, initially becoming popular for the ability to load in-time with web pages over slow bandwith. According to Daniel Rourke, it wasn't until the 1990s that "web hackers managed to crack the code of GIFs" in order to "encode animations within a single GIF file." What remains is a fairly unique medium of (somewhat) low-quality, looping, moving images.

Perhaps the most common usage of the GIF in media fandom is the screen-grab (or frame-grab, or video-capture) in which a film clip is transformed into a short (restricted by file size), silent loop. Sometimes a few screen-grabs are collected into a GIF set in order to show a longer scene than one GIF would allow, or assembled collage-like to be viewed as a whole. Following Hito Steyerl's analysis of the poor image, the GIF as a discrete, compressed medium by its very definition moves its users to "become […] editors, critics, translators, and (co-)authors" (6).

What's interesting for me about GIFs in fannish spaces is how they quarrel with temporality. GIFs illustrate and animate the queer temporal register of slash with a good dose of lucidity. Quite easily a fan can capture a fleeting moment between two characters

as a video "clip" and subsequently she can set it on repeat ad infinitum in a modality that facilitates viewing, sharing, and remaking on multiple platforms. Other fans can view this GIF on their own screen as many or as few times as they like. Often, on sites like Tumblr, the GIF is already looping as it comes into appearance on screen, meaning the viewer begins in the middle or end of the film clip the GIF is derived from.

Fig. 3 Derek and Stiles *Teen Wolf* GIF sourced from

Tumblr: *http://sherlhobbits.tumblr.com*.

Giampaulo Bianconi argues in "Gifability" that "[t]heir existence as a fragment doesn't serve as a preamble to the restoration of the whole: it perpetuates a continuation of the fragmentary, as emphasized by its endless looping, its pure existence for its own moment without a need to desire to belong to another stream of narrative." We can think of GIFS as an intervention into the narrative structure of films and television — a useful tool for writers of fanfic, and especially for writers of slash. Embedded in a GIF of Derek Hale threatening Stiles Stilinski by pinning him to a wall (*Teen Wolf* television show) is a unflinching and deeply voyeuristic gaze at the bodily interaction between the two young men. In essence, the GIF takes the moment out of context of the narrative and even out of the context of the aural — isolating the moment in its own context. In a move that echoes

Halberstam's reading of new queer studies as "feed[ing] off of and back into subcultural production," we might say that the queer temporality of this GIF feeds off of and back into the subcultural production of the Sterek (Stiles/Derek) slash pairing in multiple manifestations.

Critical Queer Imagination

Critical queer imagination names an underlying incitement in the work of slash fiction. It is with this apparatus that we can begin to make claims about the political resonance and worlding capacities of fanwork.

On being critical

Henry Jenkins perceptively warns about polemics: "Readers are not *always* resistant; *all* resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings; the 'people' do not *always* recognize their conditions of alienation and subordination" (34). This has particular valence in terms of what makes queer imagination critical. Not all queer work is useful, and not all work about queers is subversive. In a parallel line of thinking, we might conceive that work performed and created *by* queers may not be useful in and of itself to this worlding project, as well as the corollary that fanwork produced by non queer-identifying people has potential utility.[24]

It's possible and perhaps common to be able to radically reimagine a text that results in fanwork that reiterates the oppressive forces embedded in the proto-text.[25]

Queer critical imagination is the hallmark of fanwork that — in its act of imaging — makes visible the shape and form of hegemonic regimes without eliding or effacing other sites of struggle either in the proto-text or the text of the world. In *The Limits of*

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[24] See "Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking: Selections from *The Terra Nostra Underground* and *Strange Bedfellows*" by Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins, and Henry Jenkins for a useful aggregation of fannish dialogue about slash and the politics of female interest in gay male sexuality.

[25] See Mel Stanfill's "Doing fandom, (mis)doing whiteness: Heteronormativity, racialization, and the discursive construction of fandom" for a nuanced and thorough analysis of the way fandom comes to be constructed as the property of white bodies.

Interpretation, Umberto Eco proposes that to "interpret means to react to the text of the world or the world of the text by producing other texts" (23). For Sara Gwenllian-Jones, scholarship on fans and fandom tends to focus on only one part of this definition: how fans react to the world of text. As she suggests, fans — especially queer fans and fans of queer texts or queer ships — use the proto-text as a "textual conduit that allows them to rethink history itself and, in particular, its inscriptions of marginalized identities" (406).

Exploding the inward-facing loop that circles many fan studies, Gwenllian-Jones demonstrates that fanfiction moves beyond itself in the lives of fans.

On writing, naming

In certain ways, queer imagination resists being written about. In her "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag explains that "there is something like a logic of taste: the consistent sensibility which underlies and gives rise to a certain taste" (275). Queer imagination (and in particular, the strain I'm interested in — a critical queer imagination) is not quite a taste, but more along the lines of an impulse or a will. Perhaps it has something like an underlying sensibility as well. She continues: "To snare a sensibility in words, especially one that is alive and powerful, one must be tentative and nimble" (276).

Speaking about queer critical imagination is in some sense a naming project. In this instance, my hope is that nomenclature does not circumscribe its subject, but rather that it tentatively (and nimbly) makes it more possible for us to feel its presence.

On shipping

The fan who ships slash pairings engages in an act of queer imagination. She articulates the unarticulated by tracing along paths of hints and dropped hairpins. She has a sense of perception that moves beyond the quotidian oppression of hegemonic regimes of sexuality. Her articulation of desire subverts in the instant it manifests.

Her superior perception allows her to see and create simultaneously. She sees her own creation in order to create it. She creates it in order to see. The two acts collapse in on each other.

On failure and repairing

Slash fiction is a reconstructive project. By definition, slash re-constructs the proto-text, adding to the architecture, remodeling, scrapping entire floor plans, and relocating it (among myriads of other building construction metaphors). But is slash a reparative project? Perhaps in some ways or in some moments slash fiction seeks to repair.

I'm wary of claiming that slash acts as a fixative, because that would imply that it must capitulate to a simple reevaluation of success and failure. If failure is an art, "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique," then fixing, ameliorating, or repairing would only work to shore up narratives of success (Halberstam 88).

Instead, we should understand slash as at once necessitated and constituted by failure, moving us towards alternative relations to the world. Slash fiction operates by

utilizing failure as a method of accommodating, amplifying, and actualizing the impulse to imagine queerness.

On augmenting realities

Sometimes I like to think of slash fiction and augmented reality as concepts that go well with each other. It's as if they move along a similar trajectory — they're pointed in or point to similar directions. Alan B. Craig defines augmented reality as a "medium in which information is added to the physical world in registration with the world" (15). I appreciate his capable (if rote) description here. A few sentences later he expresses a slight anxiety over how the term is "being bandied about very widely" in popular and scholarly uses and narrows his definition.

But there's something to the queer enjoyment I get from bandying around the term augmented reality. What resonances rise to the surface when we play fast and loose with strict definitions of augmented reality — and what would it mean to pose slash fiction as a technology of augmented reality? Importantly, this would assert a primary function of slash as something meant to be understood in necessary dialogue with the world(s) outside the world of the proto-text. In the same way that the medium of augmented reality shows a digital overlay of information onto the current temporality or geography of the user, slash (particularly in media fandom that takes place in cyberspaces) can be seen as an overlay of a certain type: it projects information in the manner of affect, desire, onto the world of the proto-text. But it also continues one step further: in the act of reading, writing, and circulating of slash, fans also overlay the queer imagination of the fanwork onto other worlds — the worlds they live in.

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On utility

Critical queer imagination is importantly constituted in part by its utility — it shuttles us from one place to another. In a way, it has the magic of translation, of carrying across.

But it extends: not only does it carry us across from point A to point B — it also *creates* point B. It is both the bridge across and view of the other side, both transport and port.

On creating the otherwise

To paint in broad strokes, critical queer imagination is a manner of creation. It imagines things otherwise, and in that imagining creates queerness.

Rather than a theory that arches over instances of work and play that imagine queerness and attempts to explain them into sequence and order, critical queer imagination directs us toward a current that runs through them.

In "Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking: Selections from *The Terra Nostra Underground* and *Strange Bedfellows*" Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins lay down what they see as the major differences in how fans and academics talk about slash. They write: "Academic accounts have tended to be univocal in their explanations of why fans read and write slash, looking for a theory that can account for the phenomenon as a whole.

Slash fans, on the other hand, are interested in exploring the multiple and differing —

sometimes even contradictory — motivations that led them to this genre" (11).

I find the concept of a critical queer imagination turned in a different direction

than that of these two options. While it doesn't seek a unifying theory of everything, it

also doesn't dissolve into multiplicity. Instead, it looks at the moment of impact. Rather

than trying to rationalize by tracing lines of causality, critical queer imagination halos the

act of incitement, dwelling in the space and meditating on its direction. It is the current

and the wave, the pulse and the signal.

On dark corners

Often when I explain my research to those who are not familiar with slash,

fanfiction, or fan culture in general, I find myself using the phrase "the dark corners of

the internet." I'm not sure where I picked it up, but I find myself circling back to it

constantly. Partly, I think I use it because it injects some levity into the conversation by

foregrounding the "weirdness" (the subculturality of the subcultural production) of

fanwork. It gives us common ground in some sense, or at least orients us in the same

direction: *there's the internet in all of its cyberspace and then there's the other spaces of*

the internet — the dark corners.

But there's also something that rings decidedly true to me in this phrase. To think

corners is to think *walls* and *structures*. To think *corners* is to think *lines* and the ways

those lines connect. To think of the *dark* is to think *secret* and *other*. But to think of the

will to inhabit or use or create meaning within and from *dark corners* goes beyond these meanings.

CONCLUSION

Tan Lin's book-length poetic work *Heath Course Pak* has five subtitles: "plagiarism/outsource Ed. Rev.," "Notes Toward the Definition of Culture," "Untitled Heath Ledger Project," "a history of the search engine," and "disco OS annotated." The pages are a mess of internet screen shots (Wikipedia, Amazon), Courier font that sometimes slips into HTML ("and therefore something in their faces / is missing / <space> </space> </CT> / they are un-specific with sand"), and transcripts of banal email dialogues and online message boards that retain original font and color of the hypertext.

For all that Lin's book seems to meditate (among other things) on how readers encounter the object of the book itself — how reading happens (or should or shouldn't happen), *Heath Course Pak* also engages with fixation, appropriation, and affect:

[…]it

would not render

readers who are writers working in a domain of

what relaxed copyright advocates call @copyleft

and so they decided because everything is

plainly beautiful and

indiscriminately ugly in unlimited distribution,

Lin's writing grasps for the edges of the politics of use and reuse. Slash fiction doesn't have the opportunity to reach in this way; slash is always already embroiled in politics. By taking a text and using it for something queerer than what popular logic deems its intended use ("consuming") participants in slash enact political resistance to straightening

and normalizing forces. "Unlimited distribution" become both a terrifying and hopeful sentiment, capable of world-building creation through destruction. A few pages later:

> Somebody said you were already dead so stop
>
> singing
>
> somebody said you were already transparent so
>
> stop glistening
>
> HEATH
>
> you have become a very beautiful thing in some
>
> other version of a thing. or you have become a
>
> very beautiful climbing apparatus in a program
>
> about something,
>
> HEATH
>
> you are being held, you are "a very beautiful
>
> and you would make your hair into wallpaper
>
> slash

Actor Heath Ledger's death in 2008 frames and acts as a lodestone for the ideas in *Heath Course Pak*. In this moment, intersections of cyber archives, death, desire, and fandom bubble up. How do we mediate grief, how do we reckon with desire? How does my desktop wallpaper become a political negotiation? The publisher, Counterpath, describes the book on its website as in part "an examination of SMS and GMS technologies as distribution networks for human sadness." Perhaps it can be useful to think of slash as a technology of queer distribution. As slash fics circulate, disseminate, are shared and linked to, networks of queerness assemble and reassemble from confusion and solitude into patterns of knowing.

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Different artifacts allow us to think differently about the queer project of slash. The (non-slash, non-fannish) texts I engage with in this conclusion serve to actualize the idea that slash fiction's political import spirals outward — that slash matters in *and* outside of it's own creation. For example, in Bruno Schulz's story *The Street of Crocodiles* we might see a passage of prose like the following:

> The passersby, bathed in melting gold, had their eyes half-closed against the glare, as if they were drenched with honey. Upper lips were drawn back, exposing the teeth. Everyone in this golden day wore that grimace of heat—as if the sun had forced his worshipers to wear identical masks of gold. The old and the young, women and children, greeted each other with these masks, painted on their faces with thick gold paint; they smiled at each other's pagan faces—the barbaric smiles of Bacchus. (Schulz 26)

This moment tells us a story, or at least part of one. It's a story about people in public, people in the sun, people with other people. But a corresponding passage from Jonathan Safran Foer's erasure-based book *Tree of Codes*, shows us another story embedded within the first:

> The passersby had their eyes half-closed. Everyone wore his mask. Children greeted each other with masks painted on their faces; they smiled at each other's smiles (Foer 8)

This story, written with the same words (minus a good number), in the same order shows quite a different scene. This still might be a story about people, but it is also a story about secrecy, identity, and people resisting being with other people. The art of erasure is not a new poetic technique. What makes Foer's book useful is the physicality of it. Using a specialized printing process, each book is printed on die-cut pages that literally cut out the words Foer erases from the proto-text. The result is a text that bears its lacunae into tactility and visibility in an arresting fashion. The aesthetic exercise *Tree of Codes* asks us to perform is the labor of working through notions of creation and destruction.

When asked if the book was Schulz's or his own, Foer answered: "This book is mine. His book is a masterpiece, this was my experiment" (Wagner).While Foer's book doesn't necessarily map onto the production of slash — it lacks the urgency, the critical queer imagination necessary to be in conversation with slash works — it does bring us to the grounds of difference. What is *different* about fan works? What distinguishes them from the proto-text, and at what point is that difference enough for the slasher to claim (or at least feel) ownership of the fic in the way that Foer does?

Fannish language points to where this issue comes up perhaps most predominately: in relation to canon. A fic can be AU (alternate universe) which in most cases disregards most of what is interpreted as canonical to the proto-text, or it can be canon compliant, meaning that it adheres closely to the plot, time, and setting of the proto-text. Of course this is on a scale, and it wouldn't be uncommon for a fic to be prefaced with "canon compliant before season 3" or something similar to demarcate the point of departure that the fic might take. Ika Willis, in "Keeping Promises to Queer Children: Making Space (for Mary Sue) at Hogwarts" (drawing on an account by Roland Barthes of a Brechtian supplementation of text) argues "that fan fiction can be understood (as it often is, both by academics and by fans) as 'filling in the gaps' in canon. For these gaps may only become visible — may only , indeed, *be* gaps — when the text is read from a position that refuses the illusion of continuity" (158). Ultimately, I believe this question of difference is something of a red herring — a question that doesn't make sense to fans. Foer's text may show these (or at least similar) gaps in a novel manner, but it is useful mainly as an illustration of the process by which slash fiction comes to be.

Amanda Borsuk's *Between Page and Screen* contains 16 poems, but besides front- and back-matter, the pages contain no words. Instead, to read the poems, you hold

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a page containing a black and white symbol in the scope of your computer's webcam, and through the help of a designated website, the text of the poems appear on your computer screen as though it is hovering right above the page you're holding. This augmented reality poetry constitutes a dialogue between *P* and *S* interspersed with effectively simple animations that shuffle letters and words around. One example:

> Page, don't cage me. Why this mania
>
> to name what's between us? That
>
> way is carnage, carnal carnival. We
>
> share text's fleshy network—your
>
> trellis and my tendency to excoriate,
>
> your fang and my carnassials. We
>
> like leather. You have ivy, I've a
>
> bouquet of charnel carnations,
>
> carrion incarnate. Don't shoot the
>
> currier, ace. You're cute awry.
>
> —S

Ostensibly the voice of "Screen," the speaker pleads to Page: "don't cage me." Just this first line lays bare the anxiety of the two figures: Page has the power to suppress, trap, or subdue Screen's expansiveness. What's more, there is inherent "mania" in the exacting of "what's between" them.

I like this poem because I think it has special resonance with the relationship between fanwork and proto-text. I like to imagine here the way that "Page," the analogue, and the proto-text exhibit useful similarities in the way they are afforded certain types of value — value which is affixed to their static shape, their permanency, their normality.

Likewise, "Screen," the digital, and the fan-produced text are denied value in a similar manner — through their perceived secondary nature, their ephemeral and non-corporeal manner, their queerness.

In this physical book of pages, the screen oddly enough gets the spotlight. It is, after all, where we actually read the poems. So there is a fabulous decentering going on here: Screen's voice is privileged to begin with. Still, we see Screen's infatuation with Page: "You're cute awry." Importantly, Screen looks at Page askew, crookedly; Screen thinks Page is "cute" when Page is off kilter. It's the work of mediation then, that Screen does to "share text's fleshy network" — Page remains a static trellis that Screen can "excoriate."

As the webcam remediates and augments the reality of *Between Page and Screen*, so does slash remediate and augment its proto-text. I think it's worthwhile to dwell on the medium of slash fiction situated in the digital or cyber (or, earlier in zines and zine culture) as a potentially queer medium. In "Can Digital Humanities Mean Transformative Critique?" Alexis Lothian and Amanda Phillips state "If humanities scholars in critical media and cultural studies, queer studies, ethnic studies, disability studies, and related areas are doing work in and with the digital, we should lay claim to our place within digital humanities" (3). Digital spaces are potent, but Lothian and Phillips remind us that labor is still necessary to be critically competent. In other words, it takes work to queer technology. Slash fiction is doing some of this work.

This thesis explores the myriad ways in which slash fiction operates and follows the veins of queer force that emanate from it. In order to do this, various inroads cluster together to shed light on the tangled nature of where and how slash becomes a political project. These nodes apprehend each other while holding one another up. In the

temporalities node, I explore how time operates differently for the fan and what the effects of this queer amateur time might be. In the archives node, I register slash fiction as a project that necessitates the language and concepts underlying the archival turn in queer studies. My turn toward bodies surrounds the node on embodiment, which critically emphasizes the fan's body as one that engages with digital media and cyberspatiality, as well as the node on hybrid body erotics, which argues for the salience of fictional erotic bodies on ways of thinking non-fictional bodies. The failure node extends a model of queer theory as a possibility of (re)conceiving the impulses behind slash fiction. Finally, my development of the concept of critical queer imagination marks an apparatus that performs the bridgework of relating slash fiction to political theory and activism.

"Disidentifying with technology is an exploit" writes Zach Blas in *Gay Bombs: User's Manual*, drawing on Muñoz's notion of disidentification as a set of tactics and tools minoritarian subjects employ to negotiate majoritarian publics (15). Blas suggests we conceive of disidentification as "a hacker strategy" (16). He continues:

> If possibilities are determined by technical standards, then a locus of power must reside within programmed hardware.The queer who disidentifies with technology locates this power within hardware as code, rewrites / hacks / infects / mutates this code, and recodes the entire technological apparatus as a result. We must think of coding here at the technical level and beyond: computer codes, language codes, cultural codes, political codes, biological codes, commercial codes. (16)

In the spirit of conclusion, I want to suggest that a critical queer imagination is a similar hacker strategy. Fans as hackers of both digital and corporeal (and the messy spaces between) call for further action, extended questioning. The questions that remain are important. What does this imagination do for queer survival? How do we deploy it? What is the promise it makes? And what are the limits, the capacities, the ranges of utility for such an apparatus? Where can it take us and where do we choose to go?

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