Mushroom for improvement: a model for the circulation of fanfiction sub-genres

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the circulation of fanfiction sub-genres across fan communities as starting point for further inquiries into fan object movement among fans. Fan studies has long been interested in the circulation of fan objects, but lacks a broad understanding of how these objects move through space and time (Hills 2014). In applying Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* to describe fan communities, objects and circulatory behaviours, I analyze two case studies to propose a new model. The first tracks the circulation of a trope on Tumblr, while the second explores the movement of a fanfiction sub-genre across platforms, post types and fandoms. My proposed model is based on the radiating structure of mycelium (the vegetative part of a fungus). Mycelium's branching and agile nature provides a more accurate framework for ever-evolving fannish circulatory practice.

Keywords: circulation; fanfiction; fan studies; network analysis; mycelium; fan communities

Dedication

For fandom.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

How you perpetuate something matters. The way we share stories—how and where they move—has a significant impact on their reception and consumption (Haraway 2016). Take Donna Haraway's Chthulucene. In 2016, Haraway suggested a reframing of the way we talk about humanity's relationship with the environment in the current geological epoch. She proposes the Chthulucene, a collective-based anti-drama where "human beings are not the only important actors […] with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the Earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this Earth are the main story" (2016, 11). The Chthulucene is tentacular; it's made of tendrils and nets and networks. Haraway describes tentacularity as being, "about life lived along lines […] not at points, not in spheres," but as a webbed system composed of relationships and networks with consequences (2016, 2). Conversely, the Anthropocene assigns humanity sole agency, placing humans at the top of a rigid hierarchy (Haraway 2016). In doing so, it perpetuates a defeatist and overly simplified geologic narrative: humanity exerts force on the Earth (ex. burning fossil fuels), and because humans have not ceased fossil fuel production, humans are doomed (Haraway 2016). How we tell stories, then—whether they are from a tentacular or hierarchical framework—affects how they're received, which in turn has a significant bearing on how they move through time and space (Haraway 2016).

Though fanfiction ("fanfic" or "fic") and geological epochs don't seem to have much in common, both are centered around questions of story and reception. Fic is the source material received, retooled and retold to achieve a thousand different ends, though fan studies scholars' interest in questions of circulation and reception are relatively recent, and understanding how fannish[1] objects are perpetuated within their own communities is a vastly under researched area of study. Fan studies requires a "greater sense of fans' 'contagion of affect' […] as popular culture's inherent intertextuality can lead fans from one object to another" (Hills 2014, 19). As a response

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[1] "Fannish" refers to anything that relates to fans or fandom. A "fannish object," for example, refers to a fan object like fanfiction, fanart, podfic, etc.

to this need, I propose the mycelium model, whose agile approach to circulation provides a more comprehensive framework of how fanfiction sub-genres circulate.

In order to properly analyze the circulation of fanfiction sub-genres, we must first understand the state of fannish circulatory research. The term "spreadability" is defined in contrast to "stickiness" as a way of contextualizing how the circulation of media has shifted over time: where stickiness describes a system that requires content and viewers to stick to one place, spreadability understands the importance of circulation in audience engagement. Jenkins, Ford and Green's *Spreadable Media* describes the circulation of media and fan objects as top-down and bottom-up (2013). The former describes the traditional broadcast media circulation strategy, where a single piece of content is distributed through regulated, official channels to the masses. Conversely, bottom-up refers to the mass circulation of content through unofficial channels, with or without permission from content creators. In other words: bottom-up circulation refers to instances when demand outstrips official supply so greatly that an audience copies, creates and/or shares content amongst themselves. *Spreadable Media* uses this compound model to describe how online content moves, rounding it out with Cory Doctorow's dandelion metaphor to specifically speak to indie creators and their online circulatory strategies (dandelion-style strategy); Doctorow uses the random dissemination of individual dandelion seeds to describe the circulation of online content.

A comprehensive fannish circulation model will do away with the terminology and framework of the broadcasting era (top-down, bottom-up) and provide a more flexible model to describe the movement of fan objects. It must reframe the narrative and take into account both the temporal and spatial implications of fannishness. Fans are bound by the online platforms where they gather just as they operate on various temporal axes—the hour, day, month and year all have a significant effect on how and which fannish objects circulate widely. Keeping the complex nature of fannish circulation in mind, I use the circulation of sub-genres across fan communities to propose the mycelium model, which acts as an alternative to the frameworks available in existing scholarship. The mycelium model describes an ever-expanding, temporal-spatial network, which resembles mycelium radiating outward from a single node, self-perpetuated by the collective creation and consumption of content by fans and their communities.

Haraway is right: how you perpetuate something does matter. Whether it be the stories we tell to describe our relationship with the Earth, or personal tales that explore self-identity, how a story is told—how it is crafted, how it lives and breathes as it moves through time and space—makes a difference. In the case of fanfiction circulation, studying how genre and content is perpetuated can provide insight into how genre is refined and consumed among fic creators and consumers. A new model will also allow scholars to study platform modification, migration and use, which will provide more insight into fan community dynamics.

1.1. Chapter Breakdown

I begin this thesis with a chapter defining a few key terms. Chapter one establishes how I define the fan, fanfiction and fandom, and situates my project within the fan studies discipline. Chapter two focuses on providing the reader with important background and context, which acts as the foundation of my argument. Here, I provide context for fanfiction sub-genres by establishing fanfiction and fandom as possessing both rhetorical and literary genres and sub-genres. Having familiarized the reader with fanfiction genre and sub-genres, I move on to present findings that demonstrate that the generic organization of literary works increases their circulation. I argue that this implies the same correlation between creation and dissemination of fanfiction sub-genres; circulation increases when we use generic nomenclature as a literary taxonomy. Next, I describe the fannish gift economy as central to fannish circulation, introducing De Kosnik's concept of "digital repertoire," which is foundational to the mycelium model's conception (2016). I then use Bahktin's *heteroglossia* to establish fanfiction and its circulation as multivocal and thus too complicated for the circulatory frameworks of existing scholarship, before reviewing those frameworks.

In chapter three, I describe my case studies, beginning with my methodological approach and limitations, including some background on fan tagging practices and the reasoning for my decision to use autoethnography in my analysis. I move on to my two case studies, based on collected data from popular fanfiction archive website Archive of Our Own (AO3), Fanfiction.net, microblogging platforms Tumblr, Dreamwidth, and Livejournal, as well as Twitter. The first case study analyzes a fandom-neutral, Thanksgiving-themed Tumblr post that acted as a fanfiction trope within the larger "holiday fic" sub-genre; I use this case study to further explore the intricacies of fannish

circulation on Tumblr, as well as the behaviour of a fandom-neutral post across space (fandoms) and time (time of year). Next, I analyze the circulation of an established sub-genre across platforms, fandoms and post types over time. Together, these case studies provide a picture of fanfiction sub-genre circulation that allows us to see the radiating and rote nature of fan circulation practices. I finish this chapter with a summary of Tumblr user thursdaysfallenangel's ongoing survey, which explores the reading and engagement behaviours of fanfiction readers and writers on AO3 and Tumblr. This survey supports the findings of my case studies.

Chapter five presents the mycelium model for fannish circulation. Mycelium is a network of fungal communication and growth and therefore extends indefinitely, creating new frontiers in an impressive display of circulation and dissemination. Its existence across the temporal and spatial axes, as well as its ability to form cross-connections, change its environment, and communicate across large distances are elements that are similarly foundational to fannish circulation. As such, mycelic circulation is the basis of my proposed fannish circulatory model, which is tied back to De Kosnik's digital repertoire and the case studies in the previous chapter.

In the conclusion I reiterate the need for a new model that describes the circulation of fan objects, before stressing my hope that the mycelium model act as a tool for further fan studies scholarship.

1.2. Ethical Considerations

Before I begin my argument in earnest, I'd like to situate this project within a larger ethical framework. At first glance, the ethical considerations of this project are few: I have chosen to analyze the movement of online objects rather than the objects themselves, and in doing so, appear to have distanced myself from involving any human beings in my study. Online environments, too, have been largely deemed public spaces by academic institutions unless they are password-protected or behind a firewall (Kelley 2016; Busse 2018; Bruckman 2002)—this means that all data pulled from AO3, Fanfiction.net, Dreamwidth, Livejournal, Tumblr and Twitter do not require consent from the original posters at all, let alone for those individuals to be informed regarding the details of the research conducted. Furthermore, SFU's Research Board of Ethics states that although informed consent is always desirable, it is not always essential. If the

research involves minimal risk to the participants, then such consent is not ethically required. Though this might be technically true, digital humanities scholars agree that definitions of private versus public in online spaces are more complex and nuanced than research ethics boards across the globe make them out to be (Sugiura, Wiles and Pope 2016; Zimmer 2018). As the definition of private and public is intimately tied to standard practices regarding informed consent, academia fails to understand the nuances present in online research at an institutional level. Such a simplistic view of the digital landscape disregards the plethora of distinctive communities in existence across the web as well as their specific behavioural norms and etiquette. For example, a study by Hudsen and Bruckman found that participants in online chatrooms felt that consent was paramount to any and all data collection, despite the fact that their ethics board did not require consent from participants (2005).

Informed consent becomes even more important when doing research that "makes the personal political and academic" such as in queer studies, feminist studies and fan studies (Busse 2018). Fannish cultures of creator acknowledgement and crediting further highlight how informed consent is imperative to good research practice within the community, as does the complex relationship between fan communities and the general public (Kelley 2016; Nielsen 2016). While the nature of fan communities indicates that fans post with the knowledge that their work may be taken up and analyzed (Black 2005), it is understood that this analysis is expected to remain within a fannish context; posts about fandom might travel to different fan circles, but they will very rarely leave them. I feel this way about my own work: any fic I write or post I make may be critiqued, analyzed, lauded and travel to the farthest reaches of fandom without my permission, but I would be shocked and upset to find its analysis in an academic context without the researcher having obtained my prior consent. This is true regardless of if the researcher is studying generic circulation patterns, interviewing fans, or performing a close reading of a fic.

Despite the fact that entertainment companies currently look to fan communities as sources of free labour (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013; Stanfill 2019), the stigma against writing and consuming fanfiction has yet to disappear from the general public (see Hills 2005; Hax 2020; Chung 2021). Thus, to remove a work from its fannish context for any reason is to "out" or expose a fan and their work to a non-fannish audience, and thus to potential censure (Kelley 2016; Busse 2018). Fannish interaction

on public forums, then, carries an understanding of privacy—content is often "posted as a private act in a public space" (qtd. in Kelley 2016, 3.2). Password access is especially laughable for fan studies scholars like myself (aca-fans), who simultaneously identify as fans while pursuing research interests pertaining to our own community. In these cases, researchers may have access to information otherwise unavailable to outsiders, and thus hold a certain amount of privilege: we claim copyright of our academic findings despite the fact that fanworks are not copyrighted (Nielsen 2016), and benefit from fan labour in a way that can easily become exploitative if ethical concerns are not a deliberate part of our own practice (Busse 2018).

As a fan myself, I am intimately aware of the fact that these communities experience social media platforms as more private, community-centred spaces. When pulling data from fan communities, I wanted to ensure I did so as ethically as possible. I made sure to obtain explicit consent for all individual public posts whose content involved creative production or specific references to creative work, as well as all posts that did not fall under the category of general community discourse or PSAs. Though informed consent was not possible for my specific project due to its lack of direct-naming, I posted on both my Tumblr and Twitter accounts informing the community what I planned to gather and the option to opt-out should a user be uncomfortable with their work being mentioned or used as a part of my study. Busse points out that obtaining informed consent may not always be possible, due to not only discomfort but also abandoned accounts and a lack of ability to reach out privately and ask for permission (2018). I was unable to obtain informed consent to mention the names of authors of fics Take Clothes Off As Directed (TCOAD) and Coming Home due to abandoned LiveJournal accounts and lack of identifying information. Both fics are part of the canon of Stargate: Atlantis (2004-2009) fanfiction, the authors' Journals are still live, and each fic has its own Fanlore[2] wiki entry. As I will not mention fic content beyond their contributions to the BDSM Universe genre, I concluded that disclosing the title of the fics and names of the authors was not a breach of fan etiquette, nor of ethical boundaries.

In order to acknowledge the community at large, my acknowledgements section also specifically mentions fans and fandom, and I plan to make this project available to

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[2] Fanlore is a wiki project run by the non-profit *Organization of Transformative Works*, whose aim is to archive various aspects of fan history and culture in an encyclopedic form.

fans through all my personal and fannish social media accounts once it's completed. In recent years, the circulation of fanworks has become something of a point of interest within fan communities on Tumblr, especially. Though the primary audience of this thesis is fan studies scholars, it is my hope that visualizing and presenting a potential theory for how online fannish content circulates will also be interesting to fans. Similarly, people working in publishing may find this project useful; understanding how fan objects circulate provides insights into how to grow and connect to a fannish audience, though I am actively concerned about the ethical implications of this knowledge being seized upon and monetized.

Chapter 2.

Definitions: fan studies, the fan, fanfiction and fandom

2.1. Fan studies

Before presenting my own fannish circulation model, it is helpful to contextualize where within fan studies this study is situated, as well as to define a handful of key terms. Fan studies can be described as having three distinct waves.[3] The first wave attempted to legitimize fans and fandom by way of academic defense (Hall 1976; Hebdige 1979; Bourdieu 1984; Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1992; Fiske 1987; Busse and Gray 2011). The second wave critiqued the sweeping generalizations of the first, more interested in fans-as-individuals than the workings of fandom-as-community (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Hills 2003; Sandvoss 2005).

Third wave fan studies—where this study is situated—is characterized by the widespread use of the Internet by both fans and the entertainment industry, and marks a departure from the focus of fandom-as-community and individual identities, turning instead to questions of conceptual audience, circulation and reception, as well as the exploration of new media (Jenkins 2006; Busse and Gray 2011; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013; De Kosnik 2016; Price and Robinson 2017; Busse 2017). Jenkins refers to this as convergence culture, which describes fannishness entering into the mainstream through an inter-connected media landscape (Jenkins 2006; Busse and Gray 2011). Convergence culture assumes content flows from industry to fans and vice versa, which results in the industry use of "affective economies": the way entertainment industries have capitalized on affective fan labour and practices in order to encourage, keep, and

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[3] From my own experience in reading scholarship and attending conferences, the issues of the third wave of fan studies—namely, those of reception and circulation (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013; De Kosnik 2016; Price and Robinson 2017)—have paved the way for more critical discussions about transnationalism, transculturalism and race within fandom, as well as within the discipline of fan studies (see *Pande 2018*). This demand for intersectionality within scholarship mimics the move from second- to third-wave feminism. As such, I've chosen to think of fan studies as being at the end of its third wave and beginning its fourth, which is characterized both by self-reflexive questions of intersectionality on the level of research and analysis, as well as within fandoms themselves.

discipline a loyal audience (Jenkins 2006; Busse and Gray 2011; see *Stanfill* 2019). As a result, mainstream media validates a particular kind of fan identity, one that only encourages industry-sanctioned ways of being (e.g. docile, consumerist, generally publicly uncritical and keep their grievances about the source material within fan spaces) (Busse and Gray 2011; Lowe 2017). Though I agree that we live in a convergence culture, I align myself with Busse and Gray's contention that traditional fan communities continue to exhibit unique social and cultural behaviours , counter to the argument that convergence culture is a serious risk to their survival (2011).

2.2. The Fan

Because this study assumes a convergence culture, it is helpful to define who exactly a "fan" refers to (Price and Robinson 2017; Hellekson and Busse 2014; Price 2017). Firstly, we must address the "casual" fan. According to Price, the casual fan acts exclusively as a consumer of the source text: reading articles, searching for images, etc. (2017).

Fan studies scholarship has traditionally tended to define dedicated fans as either curative or transformative, where curative fan practices consist mostly or exclusively of gaining knowledge about and collecting objects related to the fannish source material (i.e. reaffirming canon), and transformative fans take that same material and transform it via creative practice (fanfiction, fanart, fanvids, etc.) (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; obsession-inc 2009). Fan studies has established that male fans tend to be curative, and female fans tend to be transformative (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992), though more recent scholarship has rightly suggested that these terms do not apply to groups of fans as neatly as scholars would hope (Hellekson and Busse 2014). Based on my own experiences as a fan, I have also found gender to be an unreliable metric to gauge fannish behaviour—not in the least because fans' personal gender identities may reject conceptions of binary gender altogether. Therefore, I have chosen to define a fan as anyone who might engage in curative practice, but also creates or consumes transformative works—namely, fanfiction.

2.3. What is fic?

Fanfiction's history is directly related to how we define it as a form of literature. If it is a form of collective storytelling, then works as early as Homer's *Odyssey* would be considered fanfiction; if it is a work that transforms previously existing characters or an existing narrative, then Milton's *Paradise Lost* is textbook. In terms of easily recognizable fic to contemporary eyes, the earliest transformative works can be found in 19th Century Holmesian pastiche, or in pieces of literature that build upon Jane Austen's works (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jamison 2013; Hellekson and Busse) 2014. These examples of fanfiction not only transform their source texts, but their pop cultural, entertainment media contexts; fan studies scholars tend to define fanfiction as sometimes deliberately critical literature that transforms a media text (Hellekson and Busse 2014). This definition of fic has the genre growing out of 1960s science fiction fandom and its zine culture, with women eventually forming their own fandoms around 1970s television media[4]—in part, as a response to the sexism and elitism foundational to literary sci-fi fandom (Hellekson and Busse; Jamison; Jenkins; Bacon-Smith).

A 2017 survey by academic podcasters Flourish Klink and Elizabeth Minkel (*Fansplaining 2015*—) investigated how fans define fic. Klink and Minkel conclude that definitions of fanfiction are oriented in many different ways depending on who is doing the defining[5] (Klink 2017). These range from formalist to social to affective to socio-economic (Klink 2017). Coming to a single definition of fanfiction is therefore difficult, even among non-scholars—all 3,564 respondents were only able to unanimously agree that fanfiction is based on a previous work (Klink 2017). For the purposes of this study, I am choosing to define fanfiction as a sometimes deliberately critical form of collective and community literature and storytelling, which transforms its source text.

This definition is in line with Busse's conception of fic. She has extensively written on fanfiction as a highly experimental, multimodal text "understood as a form of exemplary embedded community writing that may be more (or only) comprehensible when understood in its particular context" (2017, 141). Unlike traditional fiction, fic readers and writers require specialized, multimodal knowledge: due to the fact that

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[4] *Star Trek* is the most famous example of these. See *Jenkins (1992),* and *Bacon-Smith (1992).*

[5] For an example of one such definition, see *Appendix, Figure A1.*

fanfiction spans multiple online platforms, technological know-how is essential for reading and posting fic. Authors and readers must also be well-versed in the genre's wider intertextuality: fanfiction is in constant conversation not only with its source text(s), but also with the body of fanfic as a whole, both within and across fandoms (Busse 2017). It is this constant conversation that creates new fic (prompts, private chats, message/tweet threads), canonizes more established stories, creates tropes and sub-genres,[6] and establishes fic as a community writing project wherein all works are interconnected and creatively indebted to one another; each is one facet of a larger conversation about the source text, romantic pairing, sub-genre, etc. For this reason, fic reading practices rely on the mass consumption of and engagement with works; fans must read widely to understand the fandom's cultural context and practices, and they must provide emotional and/or creative labour to encourage the production of new works. All fic benefits from its fannish cultural context once posted: the author benefits from the emotional labour of their peers through comments and enthusiasm about the work.

2.4. Fandom

Because this study defines fanfiction as a form of transformative community literature, providing clarification with regards to the community in question—fandom—is also essential. The word "fandom" describes the fannish way of referring to both individual fan communities and the fannish community at large. For example, *Doctor Who (UK TV show)*, *The Untamed* (*Chinese TV drama*), *The Song of Achilles* (book), *Boku No Hero Academia* (manga) and Mamamoo (K-Pop) are all fandoms. At the same time, these individual communities may be generally referred to as "fandom". Context is vital to understanding which meaning of the word should be used or understood. Regardless, the underlying meaning of "fandom" is always the same: it describes a community of fans. Because this thesis explores the information behaviours of transformative fans, my definition of fandom refers to fan communities that produce

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[6] Note that these can be pan-fandom or can be fandom-specific. For example, Monday After fic is exclusive to *The Breakfast Club* fandom, and specifically explores the aftermath of the events in the film.

fanworks. These may be a group that revolves around a single source text, or multiple communities with many source texts.

I acknowledge that the term "fan community" is too simplistic for what it describes: every fandom possesses its own culture and behavioural norms, hierarchies and specialized terms. In BTS fandom (K-Pop), for example, translators possess significant cultural capital; as BTS has an international audience, fans who do not speak Korean rely on these translations for content they can understand. Conversely, in the *Supernatural* fandom, translators were briefly extremely important (as I'll explain in a later section), but generally and historically has had very little social currency because *Supernatural* is an American show with an overwhelmingly English-speaking following. Though too simplistic, "fan community" or "fandom" as umbrella terms are unavoidable: whether referring to individual communities or fans more generally, they are still the common nomenclature (Price 2017). Unfortunately, the assumption of fandom as a homogenous community of like-minded consumers exists partly because of the lack of understanding of fandom as an umbrella term.[7]

In defining the terms above, we can see that malleability is sewn into the very fabric of what fannishess is and entails. Even among fans, there is no one-size-fits-all definition for fanfiction, and scholars cannot agree on how to define individual fans. By understanding these terms, and by acknowledging that malleability is foundational to talking about fans and their communities, we can better devise a circulation model that better represents fandom, and thus more accurately describes the movement of fan objects.

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[7] For scholarship that explores why industry views fans as homogenous and simple audiences, see *Hall* 1976; *Hebdige* 1979; *Bourdieu* 1984; *Jenkins* 1992; *Bacon-Smith* 1992; *Penley* 1992 and *Fiske* 2002.

Chapter 3.

Background and context

3.1. Fic as genre

Thus far, I've defined key terms in order to situate this research in the context of fan studies and its nomenclature, and have touched upon the need for terminological flexibility as a way to better describe fans and their communities. The need for flexibility also underpins this chapter, where I provide the background and context that act as the basis of my argument. This section will provide a brief introduction to genre theory and establish fanfiction as a genre, which will later provide the foundation for the mycelium model's circulatory scaffolding.

According to Price, a fan community exhibits the characteristics of all four of Armstrong and Hagel's community types: transaction (e.g. capital for fannish artefacts, a gift economy, information via blogs, forms and Wikis); interest (in the source text or the community, itself); fantasy (e.g. role playing); and relationship (e.g. forging bonds with like-minded people) (2017). The networks created from these relationships allow for the transaction of informational goods as well as material and digital objects among community members, some of whom belong to multiple fan communities and therefore cross-pollinate content (Price 2017).

Discourse communities, as defined by Swales and redefined by Devitt, are groups "that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals" (Swales 1990, 398). They need not be homogenous in cultures or people, may be comprised of experts and novices, and include the spectrum of participation (Price and Robinson 2017). Discourse communities are constructed in part by the genres developed within them: "Not only is genre embedded in the community, but the community is defined by genre, and, in a kind of symbiosis, genres may evolve to meet the changing needs of a group as it develops" (Price and Robinson 2017, 5).

This project is concerned with literary and rhetorical genre as they apply to fanfiction. According to Price and Robinson, literary genre is stylistic and generally associated with entertainment industries and media, while rhetorical genre "is a wider set

of conventions that guide both the production and consumption of communication, including social interactions" (2017, 5). In other words: genre is the social guidelines that emerge out of recurring situations, underpinning the semiotics of all communities we're a part of. Because fanfiction is a genre that involves mass creation, consumption and little gatekeeping, its literary and rhetorical forms evolve at breakneck speeds (Sandvoss 2017). For fanfiction, then, it's most useful to consider genre "a rhetorical and essentially semiotic social construct", rather than a formal classification system—why texts are the way they are, and what actions they accomplish, rather than the minutiae of the texts themselves (Devitt 1993, 573; Miller 1984). Genre develops as a response to repeated encounters of literary or rhetorical situations by the constant interaction with community members, despite the fact that these community contexts evolve over time (Miller 1984; Devitt 1993). Implicit in this understanding of genre is that it is learned; that writers are constantly exposed to various situations through community engagement—reading and writing—and these situations are then reproduced ad infinitum until they become established and known community-wide.

Both rhetorical and literary genres can be found in fan communities. According to Price, each fandom actively creates and re-creates its own unique blend of rhetorical and literary genre to serve the needs of the community (2017). Fanfiction is understood as fragmented because it's a form of collective storytelling, and intertextual because of its self-reflexiveness and transformation of its source text. By definition, then—and in reference to the above works of Devitt and Swales—fic is its own genre of literature. Fanfiction "works to promote and organize intertextual relations," while "serv[ing] as a key to understanding how to participate in the actions of the community" (Fiske 1987, 114; Miller 1984, 165). Straddling the line of the literary and the rhetorical, fanfiction is most easily understood through Miller's conception of typified rhetoric and genre hierarchy (1984). For example, a student understands the genre of "lecture" due to the typified rhetorical situation, or the type of situation in which this rhetoric is used: its context. However, typified rhetoric fails to explain how and why a person immediately understands the subtext and meaningfulness of, say, a eulogy. Or how a fic-reader understands the inherent intertextuality of fanfiction as a transformative work, its source-textual subtext, the deliberate fannish characterization of certain characters in ways that are canon-divergent, etc. Miller argues that there are levels of generic hierarchy, so to

understand fanfiction, fans must be familiar with the genre on both the literary level of genre—its current tropes, conventions, styles—as well as its rhetorical underpinnings.

Miller argues that a community's sense of recurrence of the rhetorical situation determines where it sits in his generic hierarchy (1984). For example, we might define fanfiction as a genre, but we might also define Alternate Universe (AU)[8] fic as a genre. Alpha/Beta/Omega (ABO) fic—set in an AU were humans take on lupine social dynamics and varying degrees of their physical characteristics—is the most famous of these fanfiction genres both within and outside of fannish circles. Fiske refers to this kind of genre-within-a-genre as "secondary"; understanding such sub-genres allows for a deeper understanding of authorial goals, "the forces at work" in generic generation and regeneration and more broadly, the dominant ideologies within the community (Fiske 1987, 581). ABO fic, for example, overwhelmingly explores and subverts themes of sexuality and gender, which are at the forefront of fanfiction as a whole. I have chosen to refer to genres within fanfiction as "sub-genres" due to their unique existence within fanfiction-as-genre, as well as their secondary positions within Miller's generic hierarchy (1984).

Fic is unique in its ability to cycle through and refine genre conventions and tropes very quickly. Writing about television genre, Fiske maintains that, "a genre seen textually should be defined as a shifting provisional set of characteristics which is modified as each new example is produced. Any one program will bear the main characteristics of its genre, but is likely to include some from others" (1987, 111). The same can be said of fanfiction. Fanfiction tropes circulate until they develop into recurring rhetorical situations, establishing them as fanfiction sub-genres. These sub-genres are then written and rewritten until they are refined, overturned and then overturned again. ABO, for example, began as a prompt on a Real Person Fanfiction (RPF) forum for Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki, the stars of WB's (now the CW's) *Supernatural* (2005-2020) ("Alpha/Beta/Omega" 2021). Though the prompt was originally widely interpreted as sexist erotica that feminized one male partner and characterized the other as aggressively hyper-masculine, the sub-genre has since subverted its original purpose and gone on to explore themes of sexism, sexual assault,

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[8] Alternate Universe (AU) fic is any work which is set outside the canonical universe as the source text. Note that the setting must be totally separate—in recent years, Canon Divergent has become the nomenclature of AU fic taking place in the canon universe.

gender stereotyping, and queerness (particularly genderqueerness). The prompt evolved into a trope, and then into a canonized[9] sub-genre that traveled pan-fandom.

Thus, implicitly, fandom community members are fluent in fandom-specific genres as well as the genres of the larger fan community; members may belong to more than one fandom and therefore be fluent in more than one genre (Price 2017). It's this fluency in specific and general fannish genre that builds a network between fandoms and community members across platforms, creating a web-like structure for the sharing of discourse (Price 2017). The formation and maintenance of this structure is aided mostly by individuals who belong to and interact with fans from multiple different fandoms/communities (multi-fandom accounts). As we'll later see, these accounts sometimes act as lynchpins within the web-like structure, allowing for rhetorical discourse and literary genre to spread across fandoms.

For fandom and fanfiction, then, genre and circulation are directly correlated. We can clearly see the relationship between the two in genrefied physical libraries, where genre has been established as a metric for the circulatory study of literary objects. In a 1998 study conducted by Rhode et al., 80% of library patrons preferred a genrefied collection (qtd in. Potter 2016). In 2011, middle-school librarian Leigh Collazo reported a 36% increase in the circulation of all books after generifying her library (Martin 2019). Genrefication is so effective that not only has there been an increase in genrefied libraries, but *Publisher's Weekly* reported on various services to aid in the process of switching from the Dewey Decimal system to something genre-based (Witteveen 2019; Maughan 2019). A genrefied library additionally aligns itself with the dominant organizational system among bookstores, further simplifying the book-finding process for readers. Thus, there's precedent for using genre to study the circulatory study of literary objects, and as fanfiction is its own literary genre, it is the obvious choice for the circulatory analysis of fic.

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[9] Canonicity, here, refers to the widespread (roughly above 50%) use and recognition of a particular sub-genre. This may be within a single fan community, or across fandoms.

3.2. The fannish gift economy

Previously, I argued that genre is the structure upon which fannish systems of exchange rest—or, acts as circulatory scaffolding. But this kind of generic structure is useless without a force that perpetuates circulation. In the following section, I establish the fannish gift economy as what sustains circulation. The fannish gift economy functions through the gifting of works, time and engagement. According to Hyde, "the spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation," meaning that gifting and re-gifting an object establishes relationships and therefore interconnectedness among all involved, especially when this gift circulates within a community (1999, xiv). He describes this interconnectedness as "decentralized cohesiveness" (Hyde 1999, xiv).

The fannish gift economy is characterized by three actions: to give, to receive and to reciprocate (see *Appendix, Figure A2*) (Hyde 1999; Hellekson 2009). Though some scholars place the fannish gift economy at odds with commodity economies, they function symbiotically (Scott 2009)—when my friends and I crowdfunded a fanfiction anthology, we allowed contributors to post their work to AO3 six months after we finished product fulfillment, satisfying both the commodity and gift economies. Scott points out that "grassroots production is inspired by the consumption of commercial media texts" (2009, 1.4), but fans are similarly inspired to re-consume old media, or consume new content due to the circulation of fanworks from unfamiliar fandoms. In my experience, a fan will enter a fan community already primed to engage with its creative works, which may be due to an intense and shared interest in its source text, or less commonly, an interest in the fandom itself.[10] Fans will gift works directly to each other by sending content through private channels, as well as posting and tagging the recipient, or simply posting for the fandom at large. The recipient then accepts the gift before engaging with the work. This engagement manifests through sharing, liking or commenting on the work in question, either through private or public channels.[11] These specific actions make up

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[10] Though it is rare that a new fan enters a fandom because of the community itself, it is not unheard of. More common, however, is a loss of interest in the source material and a continued interest and engagement in fannish activities.

[11] Hellekson writes that even the exchange of physical objects or money within fannish contexts are viewed as exchanges of gifts. She refers to these as "object gifts", citing that even in commercial exchanges, money is presented "less as a payment than as a token of enjoyment" (Hellekson 2009, 115). Examples of this include: payment for commissioned fanart or fic, payment for fanzines or anthologies, donations to support fannish archives, etc.

part of fandom's rhetorical genre, and are thus repeated ad infinitum. Fans learn and re-learn behaviours specific to digital fan culture—liking, commenting on or sharing a work—until these become part of a repertoire of movements specific to the digital fan environment (De Kosnik 2016). These digital repertoires are passed from fan to fan, and constantly evolve to suit the needs of the community. In turn, this creates a kind of "digital collective memory" (De Kosnik 2016). It is important to note that every stage of this process becomes a part of the fandom metatext: whether it be a creative work, a rant about a character or simply engagement with a piece, these actions are small parts of a larger, on-going conversation (Hellekson 2009). Furthermore, the negotiation of these actions results in social interactions (and cross-connections) among fans, creating Hyde's decentralized cohesiveness.

3.3. Fannish multivocality: Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* revisited

As I've established, fans use a digital collective memory to perpetuate circulation in a multi-level generic structure. These multiple levels demonstrate a need for a model that can easily change its scope depending on the circulatory context. Thus, a new model must be flexible enough to consider a range of registers, or voices, from the specific to the general. This section uses Mikhail Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* to explore fannish multivocality. Establishing fannishness as heteroglot will allow me to later point to the limitations of current circulatory frameworks within fan studies, as well as provide background and context for the kinds of flexibility I propose for a new model.

Bakhtin postulated that there are two kinds of narratives: monologic and polyphonic. The monologic novel's content is wholly "a determination of the single consciousness of the author" (Renfrew 2015, 92; Belova et al. 2008). According to Hayes, monologic discourse presents a single perspective that prevents the further dialogue, often arising in statements that claim universal truths (qtd. in Nesari 2015). Conversely, polyphony "indicates the presence of many voices (or parts) in a given composition" (Renfrew 2015, 92; Belova et al. 2008). If polyphony refers to the overall concept of a multi-voiced narrative, heteroglossia describes how multi-voicedness comes to be. Meaning "diversity of speech," heteroglossia "is Bakhtin's way of describing the internal condition of any language, its variation and stratification, produced as individual speakers and social groups interact with and against an abstract 'standard'

language"[12] (Renfrew 2015, 94). Stratification, here, runs the gamut from social dialects, group behaviour and generational cultural practices, to languages that serve the socio-political purposes of the day or year (Renfrew 2015). Bakhtin describes language as "ideologically saturated": steeped in the speakers' views, opinions, and the "conceptual horizons" that make up various groups (Renfrew 2015, 95). Every utterance has its own specific cultural and socio-politico-economic context, which is made up of type (based on the speech context), style (accent/handwriting), vocabulary and temporality (specific to trends, generational cultures, etc.). These utterance types are formed by a push-and-pull of centripetal ("working with," ex. grammar) and centrifugal ("working against," ex. linguistic dialects) forces.[13] All come together to form a stratification of language which in turn is called heteroglossia. Thus, all globalized language is heterglot, but to varying degrees. Professional languages, for example, work against heteroglossia; the desire for a single, uniform language across a stratified people results in insular characteristics (such as jargon) that are monologic in nature.

Though Bakhtin upholds the novel as uniquely receptive to heteroglossia, fanfiction is perhaps the heteroglot condition of language embodied. Novelistic in its own right, it too can be defined as "a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (qtd. in Renfrew 2015, 101). Between canon, fanon[14] and the various socio-ideological backgrounds of fic creators and consumers, fic is a corpus of different voices and social speech types, all artistically organized. Just as language is stratified, so too is the collective organism of fanfiction: fic is all at once a collection of different fandoms, ships, and socio-ideological stratifications all exerting centripetal and centrifugal forces on one another.

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[12] According to Bakhtin, monologic language describes the first forms of human communication, wherein groups of people would communicate only to those in their own groups (Renfrew 2015). As humans began to acknowledge the existence of and interact with the Other (other groups), language became heteroglot (Renfrew 2015). We might think of monologic language as that of a child: primarily self-referential and involved.

[13] For a rapidly spinning object, centrifugal force pushes outwards from the centre of the object, while centripetal force causes the object to continue spinning (i.e. exerting a lateral force that is akin to pushing "inwards").

[14] "Fanon" refers to fan theories and conceptions of the source text widely accepted by the community as fact (canon). Fanon Castiel, for example, is pale and lithe where actor Misha Collins is not.

The channels for traditional literary publication tend to act as a unifying body that imposes grammar, style and structure upon a text atop the centripetal forces already at play within authors and their use of language and story. Fanfiction, however, must only grapple with the latter. Similarly, traditionally published works have set networks and distribution practices; as we'll see, fic's dissemination is far more fluid. However, this is not to say that fandom and fanfiction are completely free of centripetal forces. Though AO3's folksonomic tagging[15] practices prove that the Archive isn't consciously and deliberately acting to unify language,[16] some regularization is accomplished regardless due to tag wrangling, which consists of human volunteers merging creator tags under a back-end over-arching tag or concept. For example, if three works are tagged "BDSM!AU", "BDSM Universe", or "Directedverse", all three would retain their front end appearance, but be linked to the overarching "Alternative Universe – BDSM" AO3 tag. If a user were to look up any permutation of BDSM Universe in an AO3 search, or simply to browse the "Alternative Universe – BDSM" tag, all three fics—and indeed any other fic involving a tag where it is mentioned that the setting is a BDSM alternate universe— would be pulled. This makes for the easy retrieval of information without sacrificing the meaning of the original tag, and also demonstrates that a certain level of centripetal force is essential for searchability and therefore circulation on a whole.

The linguistic evolution of the "Alternative Universe – BDSM" tag is proof of a centripetal force unifying three opposing terms (BDSM!AU, BDSM Universe, Directedverse), but at no point does the Archive force the user to use a centralized language. AO3 consistently attempts to provide readers with further customization so as not to impose a singular experience on all users, with varying levels of success (see *Zeenah 2020*).[17] Similarly, platform constraints exert unifying forces on the objects

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[15] As AO3's tagging system is an important aspect of my research methods, I will explore this more deeply in the next chapter.

[16] Note that fannish archives sometimes exercise extreme centripetal force on their fandom: Teaspoon, a Doctor Who fanfiction archive, would not allow the posting of fic if there were too many British grammatical errors. An archivist would be tasked with looking over every prospective piece of fic before posting, and authors were not told the threshold for grammatical mistakes.

[17] Because AO3 was founded as archive made by fans, for fans, it is particularly concerned with "agency, inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment" (Fiesler et al. 2016), though it struggles with regards to inclusivity and diversity (and therefore, empowerment) (Zeenah 2020). Despite this, Fiesler et al. argue that the Archive fulfills all criteria of Shaowen Cardzell's Feminist Human-Computer Interactions (HCI). According to one volunteer, "we [AO3] always try to garner use cases from as wide a fannish spectrum as we can. A feature shouldn't work better for people in a fandom for an American TV show than for fans of an Argentinian soap or a J-Pop band or an

circulating within them; fic on Twitter must adhere to its character limit or be shared through pictures, AO3 cannot host video or audio files, Tumblr's incredible flexibility in its allowance of mixed-media and long text posts is overshadowed by its propensity to break links and hide new works from tag searches.

For fannish objects, then—and for fic especially—the act of circulation is stratified; it's a cacophony of platforms, voices, fandoms, content and utterances just as fic itself is a collection of social speech patterns, ideologies, fandoms, pairings, and tastes. The following sections explore the larger elements fannish heteroglossia more deeply in order to devise a circulation model that more accurately represents fandom.

3.4. Fannish heteroglossia

3.4.1. Angling towards affect

What a person chooses to circulate via their online presence is a heterglot utterance. Like speech, like literature, what and how content is shared is dependent on temporality: culture, politics, trends, and as we'll see later, even the year and time of day greatly affect what is being shared and how far it circulates. The following sections explore how the temporalities of affect, taste and hierarchy greatly influence the movement of fan objects, and how we might incorporate the heteroglot nature of fanfiction and fandom into a new circulation model.

Affect in general, and positive affect in particular, is central to fannish engagement, and thus to the workings of the fannish gift economy and the circulation of fannish objects at large; affect drives circulation. Though circulation is sometimes fuelled by dislike or hate, I have found that the sharing of fanfiction relies almost exclusively on love. This is a word I use pointedly. While Mark Duffet proposes a new set of keywords to describe fannish love (2015), and while love is admittedly an abstract term, it is inappropriate to use any other word to describe fan feelings; the word love is what we

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obscure Russian book" (Fiesler et al. 2016, n.p.). AO3 supports works in over 20 languages, ensures the multi-lingual translation of all official posts and updates on their own blog, and allows users to suggest new site features. Still, while its built-in folksonomic tagging system ensures that the database itself makes no value judgements on its content, its hands-off nature has recently (and rightfully) come under scrutiny for its lack of anti-racist and decolonial infrastructure (Zeenah 2020).

fans use ourselves, and it is not the place of academia to redefine this term. Love is thus the thrust of the fannish gift economy, which drives fannish circulatory practice.

If fans organize their circulatory practices around love, we can assume that a new circulation model will have to take individual and community feelings into account. As such, any appropriate circulation model will have to be robust and flexible. After all, feelings are subject to change, which greatly affects the rate or path of circulation of a given object. De Kosnik describes fic archives as simultaneously universal, alternative and community archives. She maintains that these archives allow fans to "refuse any temporal regulation of their performances by […] the culture industries" (2016, 160). Fannish archives are therefore repositories of affect—of love—inherently aware of their own temporality. Fan archives aim to collect and preserve works at the same time as communities migrate, technology evolves (and code breaks), and works are constantly created/deleted. Affect and temporality, then, are not only linked, but play a role in the circulation of objects:

> Objects are sticky because they are already attributed as being good or bad, as being the cause of happiness or unhappiness. […] Groups cohere around a shared orientation toward some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight. If the same objects make us happy—or if we invest in the same objects as being what should make us happy—then we would be orientated or directed in the same way.

(Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 35)

This orientation can potentially happen even before interacting with a given object: when we enter a room, the "atmosphere" we feel might depend on "the angle of our arrival" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 37). Conversely, we could say that the "the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 37). For example, if I'm a Xena fan and a Xena post floats across my dashboard, I would be angled towards a favourable reception of that particular object. Thus, when "happy objects" are circulated, it is my *orientation towards* those objects, rather than the feelings themselves, that circulates (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Fanfiction is the epitome of this theory: as a genre whose content consists mostly of happy endings, fic's general predisposition as a positive object means that it is itself often considered a source of happiness, which means it circulates as a social good before we encounter it (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Fic as a source of happiness is similarly in line with De Kosnik's claim that archives have affective abilities and incite powerful emotions (happiness, elation,

relief, belonging, a sense of community, etc.) (2016). We are already angled toward thinking of fanfiction as a happy or safe object, and thus are predisposed to furthering its circulation. Social context plays yet another role in angling fic towards re-circulation; because fandom operates within a gift economy, and circulation is a part of gifting, fans are further predisposed to passing on a work. In thursdaysfallenangel's Tumblr survey, for example, over half of the 305 respondents said that they like and reblog a work to show their enjoyment of it.

Ahmed similarly argues that while we may be oriented towards a particular object reception, "affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (Ahmed 2004, 120). She pushes this theory even further than Gregg and Seigworth, arguing that "some signs […] increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more they circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to 'contain' affect" (Ahmed 120). So, not only are we angled towards viewing any fic as a happy object, but the more it circulates, the more affect it accumulates. This is especially obvious when observing fanfiction canon: widely circulated fic—which gains affective value—is often raised to canonical status based solely on its popularity and therefore its circulatory reach. Fans with larger followings (and thus larger amounts of cultural capital) have increased visibility and greater chances for wider circulation, orienting their works towards larger affective value (and potential canonical status). Here, canon is based on the circulation of the work and its growing affective value as a direct result. This can be so disheartening for burgeoning writers that community members specifically assure authors with little visibility, or whose work has not been widely circulated, that large amounts of interaction are not a measure of quality (see *OldSchoolJohto 2020*; *ao3commentoftheday 2021*).

Still, though predisposition toward a happy object increases the likelihood of circulation, it does not guarantee it. A variety of other elements may overwhelm a person's affective orientation towards an online object, causing them to scroll past, click out, or simply not interact with the work, even after reading it. These elements may be tied to temporality: I might be in an emotional state that prevents me from truly engaging with the material, or an event within the community or source text may diminish its affective value—*Supernatural*'s finale, for example, caused many fans, including myself, to experience an extended grieving period, where engagement with content was highly

dependent on the individual's ability to process the ending of the show. It took me months to be in a place where reblogging GIFs and fic wasn't fueled by anger and grief, and I still cannot re-watch episodes of *Supernatural*. For many of my friends, even engaging with fanworks has been difficult. So, timing—the timing of the finale and the amount of time it has taken me to grieve since it's aired—is essential to my current affective orientation towards *Supernatural* and its fannish objects. But temporality is only a part of what affected my orientation towards *Supernatural* fanworks; personal taste, too, is a factor in angling a reader towards a particular work. If I had enjoyed the finale, it's likely that my friends and I would have exponentially increased our creation and consumption of fan objects over the past seven months. Likewise, if I come across a fic by one of my favourite authors, I am predisposed to consuming and sharing it. This doubly applies to when fans experience a "craving" for a particular fic trope, genre or pairing; when this happens, it's not uncommon to ask their following for recommendations (recs) (see *doekent 2021*). These kinds of interactions increase the affective value of potential recs exponentially, as the reader has specifically angled themselves towards happiness in receiving these objects. Thus, affect is linked to both temporality and taste. And, as we'll see in the next section, temporality and taste are also directly related.

3.4.2. Temporality and taste

Contemporary fandoms are "communities of taste" who establish themselves easily and quickly largely due to the internet (Jamison 2013). Taste (both personal and collective) constitutes a multi-vocal mix of social, ideological, cultural and economic factors that change over time, and is thus heteroglot. Tastes evolve and are therefore influenced by temporal events or factors: trends and mass culture have been proven to influence taste (Wilson 2004), and personal taste is often changed by a person's current socio-economic circumstances. Personally, I have found that my tastes in fiction have changed drastically since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic: where I used to consume new media regularly, I now almost exclusively re-consume stories I'm already familiar with, and as such have relied heavily on fanfiction—though it admittedly

made up of most of my media consumption even before the pandemic.[18] Temporality is therefore a dimension of taste: throughout the pandemic, my socio-cultural circumstances have changed and my economic situation has shifted, which has caused my tastes to pivot towards works I know whose happy endings I can rely on, rather than unknown narratives. Even where fic is concerned, I have found myself re-reading my favourite stories over seeking out new ones.

If taste and the consumption of fic are linked, then it stands to reason that taste and content production are similarly correlated. At the beginning of the pandemic, especially, pandemic AUs were common. As Busse writes, "requests shape stories and create tropes, which in turn shape our perceptions and create more stories" (2017, 46). Though she is specifically speaking to writing prompts, the principle is the same: a fan has a craving, then seeks to satisfy that craving through a recommendation, sending a prompt to a writer or producing the work themselves. Whatever the fan posts or reblogs affects what is in circulation, and aids in the establishment of a trope or sub-genre— though how well it does so depends on how far the work circulates, which is dependent on the time of posting (after work vs. on weekends), time of year (holidays, summer vacation, exam time, etc.), and current community trends. Fannish tastes—individual and collective, in all their glorious temporality—are thus cacophonous. Furthermore, fans are aware of the breadth of writing experience, talent, and author values and tastes within our often diverse and dispersed communities:

> something I think we all know about fanfic, but don't talk about because it would hurt writers feelings is that some fics are like fast food. I mean this as a compliment. I don't always *want* to sit down for a six course meal that will be a flavor experience. Sometimes I just wanna dip some fries in a frosty. Sometimes I want something homecooked and delicious and super niche, but super comforting. Sometimes I want to eat an entire dark chocolate cheesecake in one sitting even though I know Its gonna make me sick. Just. holy crap, y'all. Sometimes I don't even want fast food, I just want to eat an entire bag of chips. and yeah, I'm ashamed of myself afterwards, but at the time it was *exactly* what I wanted. So, no, we're never going to say to our fanfic writers that we consider their writing to be the equivalent of a midnight run to taco bell - and we shouldn't, feelings would be hurt by that. But writers, please, please, please, remember this. You

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[18] My tendency towards fic during the pandemic is not uncommon. According to a survey conducted by the podcast *Fansplaining,* fic readers have heavily relied on fic as a method of self-care during the pandemic, though their consumption of it has not necessarily increased (2020).

don't need to create a six course meal if you don't want to. You don't have to make something complex and homemade if you don't want to. You don't even have to finish cooking it - because someone will be thrilled that you brought a bowl of cookie dough and a spoon, because they cannot even consider sitting down and having a proper meal right now. It's okay writers, whatever you decided to make. Someone was happy to have it. You gave them what they needed. You made them happy. You did good.

(striving-artist 2020)

Here, the words "fast food" seem to imply a wider circulatory reach: fast to make, consume and therefore to circulate. Though verifying this implication is beyond the scope of this project, the mere concept of "fast food" fanfiction raises the question of what kinds of fic tend to circulate and do so widely. This question has plagued entertainment industries and scholarship alike, and while scholars have established that open-ended media that invites interpretation tends to be shared more broadly (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013), the motivation behind sharing content is ultimately the result of taste formations. Though Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) argue that users "appraise" a media object (negotiate commercial and personal value systems) before making a judgement on it,[19] appraisal and taste are synonymous when referring to the online circulation of fannish objects. Because there is no agreed upon appraisal system for the valuing of fannish works, the motivation for object circulation is based in the negotiation of constantly evolving personal values (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013): Do I agree with this? Do I enjoy this? Do I want this to be publicly associated with my online presence? Do I want this associated with this particular account? These kinds of questions converge with those of personal values and tastes—do I like this trope? This pairing? The way this is written?

Taste is directly tied to the temporal on a sliding scale of hours to years, and the relationship between the two greatly influences the creation and consumption of fanworks. The correlation between temporality and taste results in community trends that can shift the fannish landscape more broadly (e.g. pandemic AUs, reading older works instead creating and consuming new ones). Temporality therefore has a significant impact on how fans engage with fandom, which in turn affects the movement of fan objects: the mass re-circulation of old works reinforces their place in community canon,

[19] An ancient coin, for example, must be weight for its financial, historical and cultural worth (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013).

rather than canonizing new ones. Furthermore, online content can be shared simultaneously, and is very often shared to public or semi-public spaces, which then serve the dual function of an archive; though my blog is organized by date, with the newest content appearing first, it is easily searchable as its own archive, allowing for the re-emergence of old posts. In essence, the internet has strengthened our relationship with the past because all this old content is relatively easily accessible, and therefore can be reintroduced into circulation and given renewed importance (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013).

3.4.3. Temporality and hierarchy

No social media website embodies the link between temporality and taste quite as well as Tumblr. Cho describes the platform as a myriad of "user-created emotional/temporal prisms that span its multiplicity and simultaneously help define it as a set of urges, wants, and hurts, refracting affect through the rhizome in a nonlinear and hardly literal way" (2015, p.52). Unlike Twitter, Tumblr's capacity for multiple reblogs of a single post allows for the infinite recirculation of content at any time. Its queue function allows a user to queue up to 500 posts, with options of posting 1-50 times during any hourly range (1hr to 24hrs). Blogs thus remain active even when a user is not online. This allows the (re)sharing of old content to a potentially different audience (in other timezones) and creates a deliberate kind of multi-voicedness: still carefully curated as per the socio-ideological views of the user, and present even when that user is absent from the online environment. Furthermore, Tumblr's lack of timestamps[20] gives posts "a specifically timeless quality. They can take on mythical status as they propagate, retaining attribution while gaining collaborative additions via endless reactions and notes" (Rosenberg 2020). Cho refers to this effect as reverb, choosing to describe these circulatory behaviours as sinusoid rather than cyclical or in terms of exponential growth: "a post lingers until it hits a popular Tumblr, then takes off, dies down again, and takes off again, almost like a breathing thing" (2015, 53-4). It's a way of understanding the "flows of affect"[21]—how archived content gets re-discovered and re-circulated.

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[20] XKit, a modding extension created for Tumblr allows users to view post timestamps, but this requires the download and use of a browser extension.

[21] Note that these affective flows are directly related to the affective economies of convergence culture.

Tumblr's disregard for any kind of linear temporality brings its archives right up against newly published content. Tumblr's search function may leave much to be desired, but its emphasis on community and sharing has almost made up for this deficit. I may not be able to search the entirety of Tumblr using its search bar, but I can follow and search archiving blogs for content—*heritageposts* is dedicated to collecting iconic and important Tumblr posts through time, and small fic archiving and recommendation blogs serve much the same function.

Folksonomic tagging[22] is incredibly important, here, because it acts as an avenue for good searchability while maintaining the mutli-voicedness (i.e. heteroglossia) that is so important to fan communities. Even on platforms without tag wranglers, community tags are created, picked up and circulated: think of trending tags on Twitter, or ship tags on Tumblr (e.g. destiel, merther, villaneve, etc.). Though some users may opt not to tag, or tag for commentary, others may do so excessively—Price found that Tumblr users in particular use tagging as a form of self-expression in and of itself, as well as to credit, opine on and describe content (2017). Therefore, tagging is also multi-voiced. Temporality is another dimension of that multivocality: tag use ebbs and flows with its timeliness and popularity, and can be interpreted as a kind of digital ephemera—on Tumblr it disappears with the next reblog, while Twitter's fast-paced timeline cycles through multiple trending tags daily. The temporal greatly effects how fans access, learn and circulate a sub-genre: I was first introduced to domestic!fic through a tag of the same name, but know older fans who were first exposed to it as curtainfic and tagged as such upon circulation.

The time of year similarly contributes to fannish multivocality. This is especially relevant where fic is concerned; though fans are most definitely affected by the timelines of the entertainment industry, fan communities additionally run on their own schedules. De Kosnik refers to this as Media Time (e.g. the serialized schedule of a TV show) and Fan Time (e.g. the schedule of fan fests and challenges), respectively. This distinction is helpful, as not all fans pay attention to developments in source material canon; many are content to exclusively run on Fan Time. For those who do pay attention to developments within the source material (i.e. balance Media and Fan Time), new canonical content is

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[22] Folksonomic tagging refers to the classification of online content through user-generated tagging practices.

often a catalyst for creative production, which may occur immediately or require a digestion period (2016). Fannish infrastructure allows for fans to create their own creative timelines, which in turn adds to perpetual fannish multivocality; there is always something being written or posted (De Kosnik 2016). This sustained activity—in conjunction with and sometimes more than source textual developments—fuels further fannish creative production (De Kosnik 2016). De Kosnik's Fan Data web scraping project found an example of how fan activity prompts production:

> There is consistently a New Year's spike on AO3 […] but this spike did not occur on FF.net [Fanfiction.net]. [They] speculate that this may have to do with AO3 being the site for fan challenges that take place during the year-end holidays, incentivizing fans to write and post fan fiction during the last week of the year. Several 'fic challenges' use AO3 as their primary archive, while FF.net is not generally associated with fan-organized writing challenges.
>
> (2015)

As we'll see, holiday-themed fic may have also contributed to this spike. Certainly, there are times of the day, month and year when fic production increases: in the hours after a work day ends, on holidays, when popular fests and challenges finish, in the hours/days/weeks following the release of new source material… even current affairs can dictate an increase in fanfiction production (see *letslipthehounds 2021*). These spikes lead to an intensification of fannish multivocality, and sometimes even recruit new members to the community.

A fantastic example of the link between temporality and fannish recruitment is the 2020 renaissance of the *Supernatural* fandom. A queer love confession (and the subsequent killing of the confessor) in episode eighteen of its final season (entitled "Despair") resulted in a massive surge of new and returning fans, both because of *Supernatural*'s known history with queerbaiting (Gennis 2019), and the show's coinciding with the 2020 US election. So many users were online during this time that learning about world news developments through *Supernatural*-related content became a meme in and of itself (see *Hunter 2020*). Furthermore, *Supernatural* fanfiction production increased exponentially in the days following the episode. Though *Supernatural* is one of the most active fandoms on AO3, posting rates spiked from 57/day before the season aired to 87/day during airing to 193/day between November 5th and November 14th, 2020 (destinationtoast 2020). These fics were overwhelmingly tagged to indicate reference to

the episode directly, with Destiel (Dean Winchester/Castiel) content jumping from 38% to 60% of the fandom's total works (destinationtoast 2020). The temporal is therefore inextricably tied to fanfiction production and to recruitment, which both result in waxing and waning bouts of multivocality. For *Supernatural* in particular, so many voices joining or re-joining the community caused such a heteroglot surge that significant friction formed between long-standing community members and those who joined or returned after the confession. This friction was due in part to misunderstandings regarding platform-specific fan etiquette (e.g. understanding the appropriate codes on conduct on Tumblr vs. Twitter), as well as the fact that old posts, and therefore old discussions, were suddenly re-entering circulation (see *casthewise* 2020).

The multivocality of the *Supernatural* renaissance caused discomfort among established community members partly because the surge of new and returning fans overwhelmed the number of veterans. These veterans did not have time to pass on community knowledge. In living through the resurgence myself, many new fans joined the fandom having watched the confession in addition to a handful of other Destiel-heavy episodes. Because *Supernatural* aired for fifteen years, its codes of conduct are well-known and established among its fandom, but the lack of new fans' knowledge of both the source text and fan etiquette meant that old content and analysis re-entered circulation quickly and effectively. Content from new fans often involved conversations and feuds the fandom had collectively decided to remove from circulation, or behaviours considered breaches of the fannish social contract (i.e. sharing fan-made content with actors).

Despite the fact that multivocality can provide greater opportunities for (re)sharing and (re)circulation, in instances like the *Supernatural* renaissance, centripetal force must also be applied to prevent community collapse: fans need to be inculcated into established fandoms in order for the heteroglot nature of fandom to remain manageable. When studying soap opera fandoms, Jenkins, Ford and Green explain that "the entirety of the narrative's history cannot ever be completely learned or understood by one person," thus demonstrating that established community members help newcomers understand relationships between characters in the source text (2013, 130). Kompare also mentions that seeking more information about a fannish object always requires consultation with other fans who either directly or indirectly help guide neophytes further into the community (2018). These take the form of:

[…] [E]ncyclopedic media (e.g. discographies, episode guides, universe indexes, and the like), that have routinely been a part of fandoms for decades, and are particularly prevalent today (e.g. in the many wikis maintained by active fans); suggested canon (e.g. which albums to listen to next), which critically guide the new fan further into the fandom (i.e. their second, third, and beyond episodes); and fan gatherings, which could be physical (ranging from small meetups to large conventions), but have also always been active at a distance: over mail, phone, and online.

(2018, 107)

Communities that produce transformative works are similarly reliant on the labour of veteran fans to indoctrinate newcomers: neophytes must learn the community fanon, fanfiction canon, fic tropes and sub-genres most relevant and popular within the fandom, etc. These are typically learned through direct or indirect contact with more established fans who have a deeper understanding and knowledge of the fandom and its source text (Kompare 2018). Usually (though not always) someone older, the "mentor" role may be filled by an individual, group or collective, whose expertise is organized in a way that prioritizes the education of new members (Kompare 2018). These individuals are likely Big Name Fans (BNFs),[23] and their status as recognized curators and gatekeepers may aid in the establishment of emerging fandoms, should they choose to migrate to or join additional communities (Kompare 2018). Kompare appropriately reminds us that the ability to gatekeep holds influence over who is admitted into a fandom, (particularly with regards to identities of gender and race) and how that fandom is subsequently mapped out for them (Kompare 2018). As I've mentioned, BNFs are an important piece of the fannish circulatory system; Price has found that fan gatekeepers tend to be less exclusive in their gatekeeping than traditional industry, simply because, "knowledge capital is the mark of a well-seasoned fan, and this by extension implies social capital" (2017, 296-7). Fans are thus motivated to share their knowledge and insight (Price 2017), resulting in community growth through a kind of online mentorship where etiquette is passed on and codes of conduct are learned until they become rote. For example: the act of reblogging a fic upon reading it. Through either direct or indirect fannish mentorship, first contact with a fannish object immediately causes a fan to begin

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[23] Big Name Fans (BNFs) are named for their big followings and, often, their ability to act as gatekeepers of community history, knowledge and cultural practice. As we'll see, though are pillars in the fannish circulatory structure, they are not comparable to online Influencers.

learning the appropriate behaviours that that will allow them to sustain and become an active member of the community.

The roles a BNF occupies vary by fandom. For example, in K-Pop, J-Pop and Anime fandoms with large Western audiences, the role of translator is essential to English-speaking fans' enjoyment of the source material, and so may rise to BNF status. Conversely, an English piece of media with a primarily English-speaking fandom must contribute something else to the community to achieve community recognition—as mentioned, this most often consists of some kind of transformative work (fic, podfic, art, gifs, edits, role-playing, etc.), meta analysis, satirical content, or encyclopedic knowledge of the source text and/or fandom. It's possible, however, that a previously unimportant role may rise to prominence due to fannish, paratextual and/or source textual temporalities. The Mexican dub of *Supernatural's* episode "Despair" featured Dean reciprocating Castiel's love confession, which was absent in the English episode that aired the previous month (November). In the wake of Dean's reciprocation, Spanish-speaking users' popularity grew exponentially as fans scrambled to understand the Spanish script and get in touch with the translators, director and actors of the Mexican dub. When it was eventually revealed that the Mexican dubbing team had independently made the decision for Dean to reciprocate, the translation became less important[24] and these accounts lost some if not all the cultural capital they had previously gained.

Temporality is essential to understanding the role of BNFs in fannish circulatory practices; how accounts rise in popularity is dependent on a variety of temporal and socio-ideological factors that reflect the current values and concerns of the community In *The Tipping Point* (2000), Malcolm Gladwell argues that because previous studies have shown that human beings generally have six degrees of separation between one another,[25] therefore the best way to reach a community is to find those prominent people who influence most members of a given group (in Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). This strategy does not work for fandom, though we can apply the general idea: when someone with a larger following shares content, that content reaches a wider audience. Unfortunately, because the movement of fan objects is so dependent on the multivocal

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[24] This is due to conceptions of English versus international canon.

[25] The notion of sex degrees of separation grew out of Stanley Milgram's 1967 study on the "small-world problem" (Morse 2003), which was then re-run by Watts (see *Watts 1999*).

and the temporal (the heteroglot), singling out BNFs won't reach the community at large—especially not when fans are such a critical and discerning group of consumers. Because fannish hierarchy changes so rapidly, all users have the potential to become popular gatekeepers or influencers while at the same time acting as influenced consumers. Granular levels of ever-changing influence and popularity mean that the line between who is considered a BNF is not clear-cut; my opinion of who qualifies and how many followers they have may not align with the opinions of other fans. Furthermore, because many fans are both creators and consumers—influencers and the influenced—they may still act as gatekeepers no matter how large their following is. My own fannish mentor had a modest following, but still acted as a gatekeeper.

In sum, fannish circulation stretches across the spatial and temporal axes, which causes circulatory stratification. The heteroglossia inherent in online fan practices involves a complex mix of centripetal and centrifugal forces, but it's this complexity that allows for a stronger overall community. The mix of multivocal affect, taste and hierarchy ensures the perpetual movement of fan objects, which results in a healthy gift economy and ensures the survival of fandom in the face of evolving terms of service agreements, source textual developments, and ever-changing fan community membership. A circulation model that accurately describes fan culture and community must therefore be similarly agile.

3.5. Existing circulation models

In light of the complex elements that make up fannish circulatory behaviours, it's helpful to review existing scholarship relating to the movement of fan objects. This section will briefly outline current models before delving more deeply into the specifics of relevant frameworks of fannish circulation and circulatory behaviours in order to establish the need for a new model.

Jenkins, Ford and Green's *Spreadable Media (2013)* and Price's *Serious leisure in the digital world (2017)* both explore information behaviours of fans and the circulation of objects within fan spaces and communities, though neither speaks directly to the online circulation of fan objects within fandom. Jenkins, Ford and Green, whose study is specifically about the circulation of media objects among industry and fans, does not conceptualize a model beyond describing the movement of fan objects as a mix of top-

down and bottom-up circulation. De Kosnik's *Rogue Archives* uses quantitative data as part of her study, but focuses on the roles of archives in fan culture; she does not venture into further questions of circulation. Jung and Shim's study presents fantastic findings on circulation and transnational fandom while coining the term *social distribution*, but ultimately reproduces a mixture of top-down and bottom-up movement; they do very little to explain the mechanics of these sharing and re-sharing behaviours, and do not explore how trends and behaviours disseminate cross-fandom (2016). Finally, Cory Doctorow presents a dandelion model that, while perhaps the most apt in describing the movement of fannish objects, removes all agency from the fans doing the circulating.

Jenkins, Ford and Green use "spreadability" to define online media circulation (2013). According to them, "'[s]preadability' refers to the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content over others, the economic structures that support online circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's motivation for sharing material, and the social network that links people through the exchange of meaningful bytes" (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013, 4). This term is in response to the "stickiness" model as well as the reference to fast-circulating media as "viral".[26] Stickiness privileges content hosted in a single location, prioritizing a website's analytics above other valuable forms of engagement and participation (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). Jenkins, Ford and Green argue that the stickiness model is no longer the sole form of media circulation on the web (2013).

Spreadability recognizes that word of mouth is extremely important to media consumption habits and behaviour, and so emphasizes interconnectivity, ease and simplicity as essential to content-sharing (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). Spreadability also understands that a successful media text will appeal to various audiences for various purposes in various contexts—the text must be flexible enough to move freely, but not so flexible it becomes meaningless (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). In

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[26] Because the etymology of the word "virality" paints audience as a passive, mindless entity rather than an intelligent, complex community with a myriad of tastes, habits, personal networks and levels of engagement with the content in question, it will not be used in this thesis (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). Furthermore, in my experience, fans do not use virality to describe posts that are widely shared—they "blow up" or "take off." Though virality most definitely applies to other kinds of circulation, fan sharing practices are not one of them.

summary, spreadable media refers to a myriad of content—from the widely circulated to those with a niche audience—and assumes that repositioning is inevitable once the content in question enters a new community. Jenkins, Ford and Green write that, "fan communities have been among the first to embrace the practices of spreadability" (2013, 9).

Spreadable Media argues that the circulation of online content follows a mix of top-down and bottom-up circulation, where grassroots intermediaries help "shape the flow of messages through their community" instead of relying exclusively on top-down dissemination from producers through official channels (2013, 7). Conversely, bottom-up circulation refers to audience-created content and its eventual circulation to source text producers. Jung and Shim echo the mixed top-down, bottom-up framework in the context of transnational fandom, referring to their model as "social distribution." Author Cory Doctorow, however, prefers to think of circulation as a dandelion dispersing its many seeds:

> Take the dandelion: a single dandelion may produce 2,000 seeds per year, indiscriminately firing them off into the sky at the slightest breeze, without any care for where the seeds are heading and whether they'll get a hospitable reception when they touch down. [...] If you blow your works into the net like a dandelion clock on the breeze, the net itself will take care of the copying costs. Your fans will paste-bomb your works into their mailing list, making 60,000 copies so fast and so cheaply that figuring out how much it cost in aggregate to make all those copies would be orders of magnitude more expensive than the copies themselves. [...] What's more, the winds of the Internet will toss your works to every corner of the globe, seeking out every fertile home that they may have—given enough time and the right work, your stuff could someday find its way over the transom of every reader who would find it good and pleasing.

(2008)

Though it is perhaps the most apt existing analogy for online circulation, Doctorow's model removes all agency from those who circulate content—"copying costs" and "paste bombs" imply a mechanical, mindless or behaviour that is not present in fan sharing behaviours. While the model understands that author control is forfeit once in the hands of the public, it does not account for the fact that online content does not circulate indiscriminately (qtd. in Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013)—as we've seen, affect, taste and hierarchy all have a significant impact on how, where and when an object is shared. Scholarship has additionally established that audiences are shrewd in their engagement

with and sharing of content (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013), to say nothing of the careful curation inherent in online fan spaces: fans may curate for their ship and/or specific character(s), themes, form (art, fic, podfic, gifs, edits), etc. in addition to the potential and over-arching curation of content exclusive to a given source material. Careful curation is thus related to personal taste, and both have a significant effect on how a given fannish object circulates: in December 2020, I posted a nsfw[27] fic to Tumblr that received, on average, significantly fewer notes than the non-explicit works I normally publish. I had expected this, in part because of the longer length of the post, as well as the fact that such explicit works tend to circulate less widely; in a comment on their reblog, one user wrote that they debated sharing the work because it was nsfw.

After analyzing each of these frameworks, it's clear that a more complete conception of fannish circulation must encompass the dandelion model, as well as the top-down, bottom-up patterns Jung and Shim, and Jenkins, Ford and Green describe. The combination of these three is imperative to a full and nuanced understanding of fan object movement. Any new model must be as flexible as the community it was conceived to describe; size, number of members, varying ideologies and values are all factors that make up personal taste, which then drives the process of curation and therefore, of circulation. Circulation is therefore no longer "a movement of people, commodities, ideas, and images from one place to another", but a cultural process demarcated by its forms, practices and internal dynamics (Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003, p.391). These come together to form cultures of circulation, which may be identified by their circulating objects but may not be reduced to them (Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003).

The movement of fan objects is a multivocal symphony of the spatial and the temporal, reaching across affective tendencies, tastes and hierarchies. Space and time are dimensions of these heteroglot touchstones and allow us to fully grasp the nuances of fan culture and its circulatory practices. In exploring multivocality within fandom, this chapter has laid the groundwork for a new model that uses fandom's interconnectedness across the spatial and temporal fields as a its greatest strength, while demonstrating why

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[27] NSFW stands for Not Safe For Work and is used to describe any work that is explicit. This is the newest of a handful of terms that have been used to describe explicit works throughout fan history: lime, lemon, smut, etc.

previous circulatory frameworks lack the ability to present the movement of fan objects accurately.

Chapter 4.

Putting in the "sub" in sub-genre: cas studies

In the last chapter, I reviewed existing scholarship on fannish circulation and established fannish multivocality through the exploration of fan affect, taste formations and hierarchies across the temporal and spatial fields. A representational model of fan object movement must be capable of describing rapid changes in community structure due to waxing and waning membership, quick shifts in fannish trends, and the ever-evolving relationship between the centripetal forces acting on the community and the centrifugal forces the community exerts. The following chapter begins to conceptualize a model that accurately depicts the circulation of fan objects through the exploration of two case studies. The first follows the movement of the *Mad at Your Dad* (MAYD) trope as a subset of the "holiday fic" sub-genre on Tumblr, while the second tracks the *BDSM!AU* sub-genre from its conception to January/February 2020 across platforms. Each case study begins with a definition of the trope or sub-genre in question before presenting visualizations and auto-ethnographic analyses of my collected data. The insights provided by each analysis not only reaffirm fannish heteroglossia, but also present the visual patterns that literally structure a new fannish circulatory model.

4.1. Research methods

Before presenting my data, it's helpful to understand how both studies are constructed and what their limitations are. In designing this thesis, I chose to use a mixed methods approach of case studies, archival and desk research paired with auto-ethnographic analysis. Each study is accompanied by visualizations which allow readers to better envision trope/sub-genre movement in space. As someone who has been embedded in fan communities for sixteen years, I have the lived experience and subsequent insider knowledge required to complete an auto-ethnographic analysis of this kind.

In fan studies, auto-ethnographic analysis has been used to understand community hierarchies and behaviours (Lamerichs 2018). According to Lamerichs, "auto-ethnography is a type of insider's ethnography that reflects on the life history of the

researcher and thereby provides tentative conclusions about certain historical, social or artistic issues" (2018, p.50). Because auto-ethnography is the study of oneself within a particular community, and because this study is interested in the circulation of genre across fan communities, I analyze circulation as fan practice. Aligning with Minar and Greer's assertion that all communities work towards a common goal (1969), this study assumes that circulation—as a function of community survival—is a common goal of fandom.

I have chosen to do an auto-ethnographic analysis of fan practices relating to the circulation of the *Mad at Your Dad* (MAYD) trope and BDSM!AU sub-genre. Both trope and sub-genre were chosen for their familiarity and extreme novelty, respectively, as well as their rich and traceable histories. The MAYD trope is a non-fandom prompt that became part of the "holiday fic" sub-genre, and therefore provides a sense of how content that is not fandom-specific enters Tumblr fan spaces and travels among them. I focused exclusively on Tumblr when analyzing data for this trope, both because it's where the MAYD circulated most visibly (hundreds of thousands of Tumblr notes[28] compared to a handful of AO3 fics and Tweets), and because Tumblr's status as a popular platform[29] makes it worthy of closer study. Conversely, the BDSM!AU sub-genre provides insight into the movement of a sub-genre beginning in one fan community and radiating outwards across fandoms, platforms and post types.

According to De Kosnik, the volume and rate of fan production is affected by a platform's attractiveness and popularity (2016). Therefore, I chose to focus my project on: Archive of Our Own (AO3), LiveJournal, Dreamwidth, Fanfiction.net, Tumblr and Twitter.[30] Based on my own experiences in (Western) media fandom, these platforms are where fanfiction can be found most easily. Though I had originally planned to search

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[28] Tumblr "notes" refer to a combination of likes, reblogs and comments on a particular post. Note that throughout this thesis, comments refer to using the comment box on the post itself, and does not refer to a user's comment attached to a reblog.

[29] Note that Tumblr is known among fans as a platform for the circulation of fannish objects. This may be in part due to the relatively wide range of content Tumblr supports, as well as known the lack of celebrity and industry presence on the platform (see *Rosenberg* 2020).

[30] Though Wattpad is a very popular fanfiction platform, especially among younger fans, I have chosen not to include it in this study. The site's search function is limited at best: there is no option for advanced search, and its regular function does not allow for single phrase searches. Though this is no doubt to encourage readers to read widely and in larger volumes, it makes collecting data near impossible.

for content based entirely on post tags, it quickly became clear that apart from AO3 and its human-based tag wrangling system, individual tagging practices varied too widely to be useful on a macro scale. Paired with their dismal search function, Tumblr's folksonomic tagging abilities and lack of back-end organization made the retrieval of information almost impossible.[31] In light of varied tagging practices, I used a combination of platform search functions and Google (using a combination of search terms, including "term + platform") to gather data. I also consulted Fanlore, a wiki run by the non-profit Organization of Transformative Works, for fannish historical records.

I created all visualizations using Gephi and Tableau. Note that for both case studies, all blogs were characterized as non-fandom/fandom/multi-fandom based on how the blogger identified in their blog summary, or, if such information did not exist, through a close reading of the content, itself. Within these three groups, I chose to group fandom blogs dedicated to a variety of anime and video games as simply "Anime" and "Gamer" rather than multi-fandom, as communities self-identify as gamers or anime fans due to distinct cultures surrounding the source material and its form. Thus, a "multi-fandom" blog may encompass anime or gaming content, but anime/gaming blogs, despite exclusively engaging with various animes/games, are not multi-fandom.

4.1.1. Study limitations

The availability of content was limited to those that could be found through a third-party web search (i.e., Google), where time of posting was often unavailable. Therefore, if a sub-genre moved multiple times during a single day, I had to guesstimate which post occurred first based on other information available (other posts, reblogs, comments, etc.).

Dead usernames and pseudonyms were another issue to consider. Tumblr is the main platform I use to study fan circulatory practices, but the platform does not allow users to track username changes. It's therefore impossible to know whether or not a username has changed unless you are: following the user at the time of the switch, the user informs their followers (via a post or in the tags of their subsequent shared content,

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[31] See *mistertotality (2020)* for a discussion between users regarding the best way to retrieve information on Tumblr while bypassing its pitiful search function.

e.g. "previously X"), or the user leaves a breadcrumb trail to their new username (Tumblr specific).
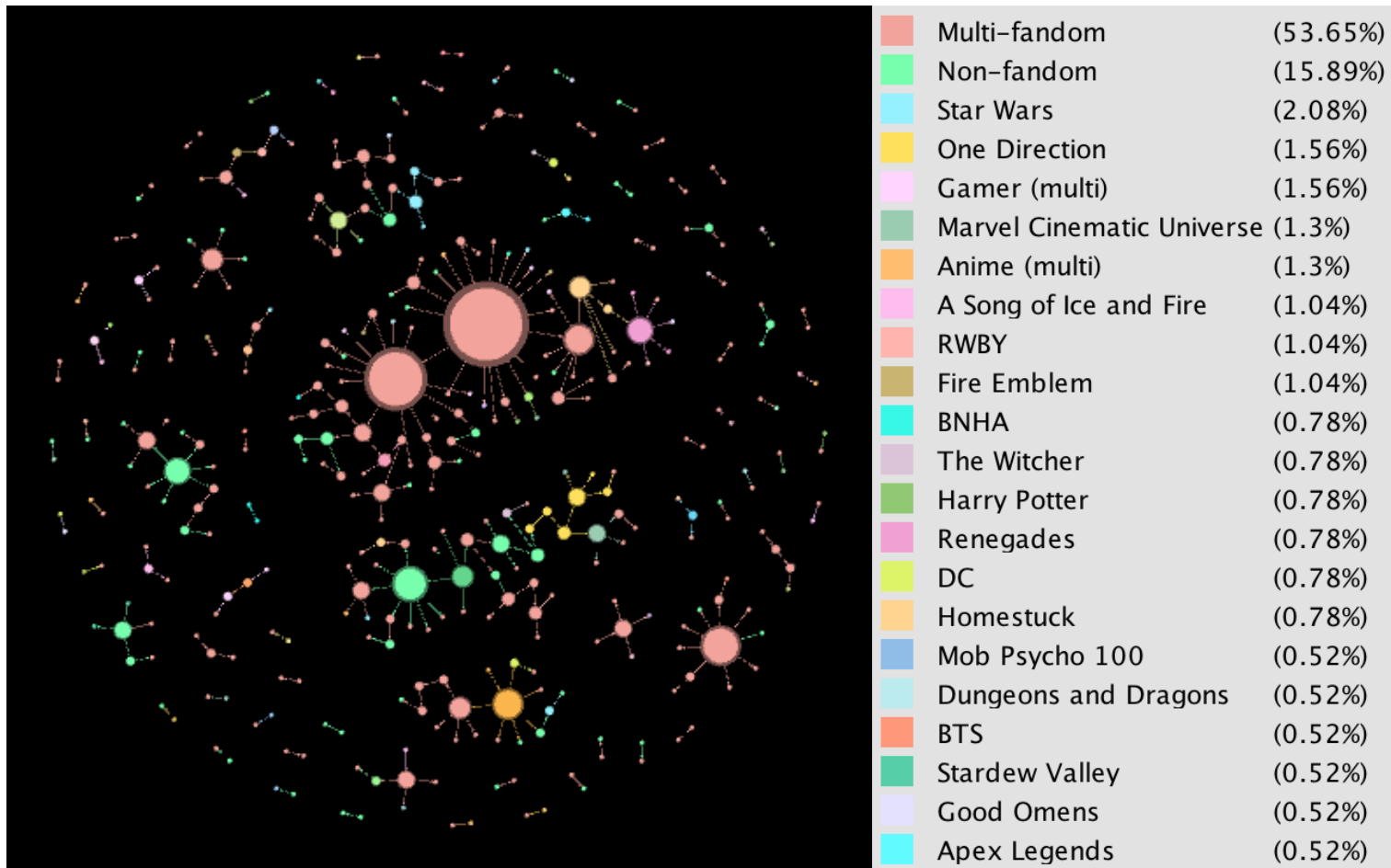
Choosing only two case studies is yet another study limitation. The sample size of the original MAYD post comprised of 300 of the most recent reblogs (0.05% of total post notes and 0.094% of total reblogs). As this is a small sample taken six years after the original posting date, it's possible that these data points are not indicative of the entire life circulatory cycle of post—social media content tends to circulate very rapidly at the beginning of its life, and then taper off into a long tail. It's also possible that some data points may have larger amounts of engagement outside my collected data.

As Joanna Drucker writes, information visualizations "embody specific dynamics of positionality" (2017, 903). Drucker maintains that power dynamics and bias are inherent in the presentation of all information including visualizations: what is visualized has an impact, and visual aids exist to tell specific stories (2017). Therefore, I have done my very best to note my own biases—that I, myself, am a fan who regularly circulates fannish objects—and work through them in order to provide visual aids that allow a more complete understanding of my collected data. The following section delves more deeply into this study's limitations.

4.2. Mad at your dad?

The previous sections outlined the methodology and limitations of this study. Below, I present the results and analysis of my two case studies, which provide the foundational data for a new fannish circulation model. The *Mad At Your Dad?/Craigslist Thanksgiving* (MAYD) trope is based off of a Nashville Craigslist ad posted on November 20th, 2014. Poster Nick Schmidt, a "felon with no high school degree", offered himself up as a deliberately terrible Thanksgiving date (McCormack 2014). Entitled "Alone at Thanksgiving? Mad at Your Dad?", Schmidt's post outlines all the ways he's willing to make his date's father and/or family uncomfortable in exchange for a free meal. The post went was shared widely, with coverage by online news outlets (Daily Dot, Business Insider, Daily Mail) and a truly incredible response on Tumblr. Though the MAYD trope lacks substantive elements of the lower levels of Miller's generic hierarchy—it is purely stylistic and static in its conventions—the trope's almost immediate popularity resulted in its placement within the larger "holiday fic" sub-genre,

which allows users a safe and positive experience of any given holiday—or simply provides the excuse for further celebration. Because fic can double as a tool for escapism, it's not uncommon for genre themes to revolve around stressful times of the year, as is proven by the existence of secret santa exchanges, and spikes of fic around the holidays (see *Appendix, Figure A4*). The canonization of the MAYD trope provided a potential structure for new Thanksgiving fic, one that allowed for family drama in a controlled setting with a guaranteed happy ending.

	Multi-fandom	(53.65%)
	Non-fandom	(15.89%)
	Star Wars	(2.08%)
	One Direction	(1.56%)
	Gamer (multi)	(1.56%)
	Marvel Cinematic Universe	(1.3%)
	Anime (multi)	(1.3%)
	A Song of Ice and Fire	(1.04%)
	RWBY	(1.04%)
	Fire Emblem	(1.04%)
	BNHA	(0.78%)
	The Witcher	(0.78%)
	Harry Potter	(0.78%)
	Renegades	(0.78%)
	DC	(0.78%)
	Homestuck	(0.78%)
	Mob Psycho 100	(0.52%)
	Dungeons and Dragons	(0.52%)
	BTS	(0.52%)
	Stardew Valley	(0.52%)
	Good Omens	(0.52%)
	Apex Legends	(0.52%)

Figure 1   Circulation of the MAYD trope across fandoms
An extracted sample (300 reblogs) of one of the two MAYD screenshots posted to Tumblr. The post had 562,796 notes at the time of writing. See *Appendix, Figure A5* for a complete list of fandoms.

A screenshot of Schmidt's ad circulated almost exclusively on Tumblr. It was uploaded twice, in two individual screenshot posts by two separate users. In order to understand how tropes and fandom-neutral generic content circulates on this platform, I chose the post that circulated the most for analysis. As of February 17, 2020, the post had 562,796 notes. I analyzed a sample of the most recent 300 reblogs (at the time of collection).

Based off the MAYD post, I constructed a network where every node represents a post and every link represents a reblog. Node size represents the level of post engagement per user reblog; if I reblog a post and 400 users in engage with it, the node representing me will be far larger than if 10 users interact. The result is the network above, labelled Figure A1. The original MAYD post circulates based on a complicated social network wherein blogs with presumably larger or more engaged followings radiated outward and have a farther reach. These larger nodes highlight the existence of tastemakers within the more general Tumblr community, which creates the power dynamic that helps drive circulation. At the same time, this power dynamic is contradicted by the recirculation of content: i.e. when tastemakers reblog the post for a second or even third time with or without additions from a follower. Though there is an element of social and cultural capital at play here, the general circulation pattern suggests that movement is characterized by an individual's taste rather than the need to follow tastemakers within the community.

Colour coding represents the fandom of each blog. It's extremely rare to find a trope's original post, and one with so much data readily available. In observing the pattern of circulation from fandom to fandom, we can clearly see that in addition to the popularity-driven dissemination pattern, the circulation of this particular post was mostly driven by multi-fandom blogs. Scholarship analyzing literary and cultural networks has explored the important distinction of which groups appear to dominate community demographics, and which drive circulation. In their case study of the *Fabian News*, Jana Smith Elford concludes that though the community was dominated by men, circulation was propelled by women who went largely unrecognized for their contributions (2015). Elford's case study presents an interesting parallel: Tumblr does not make follower numbers public, but personal experience has taught me that niche blogs tend to gain larger followings and thus have more dominant circulatory reach. Though conventional wisdom within Western fandom speaks to requiring a niche/specialized subject in order

to achieve BNF status (i.e. community recognition), this visualization clearly demonstrates that it's the multi-fandom blogs—those that are not part of a niche—that aid the trope in disseminating more widely. Like Elford's work, this case study presents a situation where the conventionally thought of "dominant group" does not drive circulation.

The MAYD prompt post was shared rapidly, which resulted in a tangled, complex network wherein content is shared at varying rates. User A might share the post and then have two practically simultaneous reblogs by users B and C, but where B's post continues to be steadily reblogged throughout the day, user C's reblog sees no engagement for a week. Again, because Tumblr allows users to turn off its algorithm and view posts chronologically, this means that the time of posting is significant. If engagement is important to a given blogger, they must gauge when they believe most people are online and posting during that window. Fridays at around 2pm PST, for example, tend to work better for me than Wednesdays at any time of day.

At the same time, the visualization above—in conjunction with my own experience circulating fanworks for over a decade—suggest that fandom blogs (or blogs with similar content) tend to cluster, and it doesn't always take a multi-fandom blog to push the trope to another fan community. The clustering of fandoms makes a lot of sense when we consider Tumblr blogs as carefully curated online spaces; though what appears on a given blog may be rigorously vetted by each user, who the user follows is hidden and thus may encompass a wider range of fandoms. The jump from *Kingdom Hearts* to *Multi-fandom* to *Supergirl* to *Comics (Spider-Man)*, for example, is akin to this post floating across my own dash by way of a *Sense8* blog and my decision to reblog it anyway. Here, circulation and circulatory reach are heteroglot, based on both cultural capital and personal taste.

This visualization additionally demonstrates how fandom blogs tend to cluster, implying that blogs with similar themes and content tend to follow each other in larger numbers than blogs that greatly diverge in subject matter. For example, the jump from *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* to *BNHA* to *Hunterpedia* are all anime fandoms, while the jump from *Supergirl* to *Comics (Spider-Man)* are within the DC and Marvel superhero universes, respectively. In understanding that a non-fandom post still tends to cluster by related themes or subject matter, we can make the logical leap that a fandom-specific post will tend to circulate mostly to other blogs of the same fandom.

Showing the first 166 reblogs   That's it.

destielfanfic root post

#destiel #fic rec #thanksgiving #Happy Thanksgiving
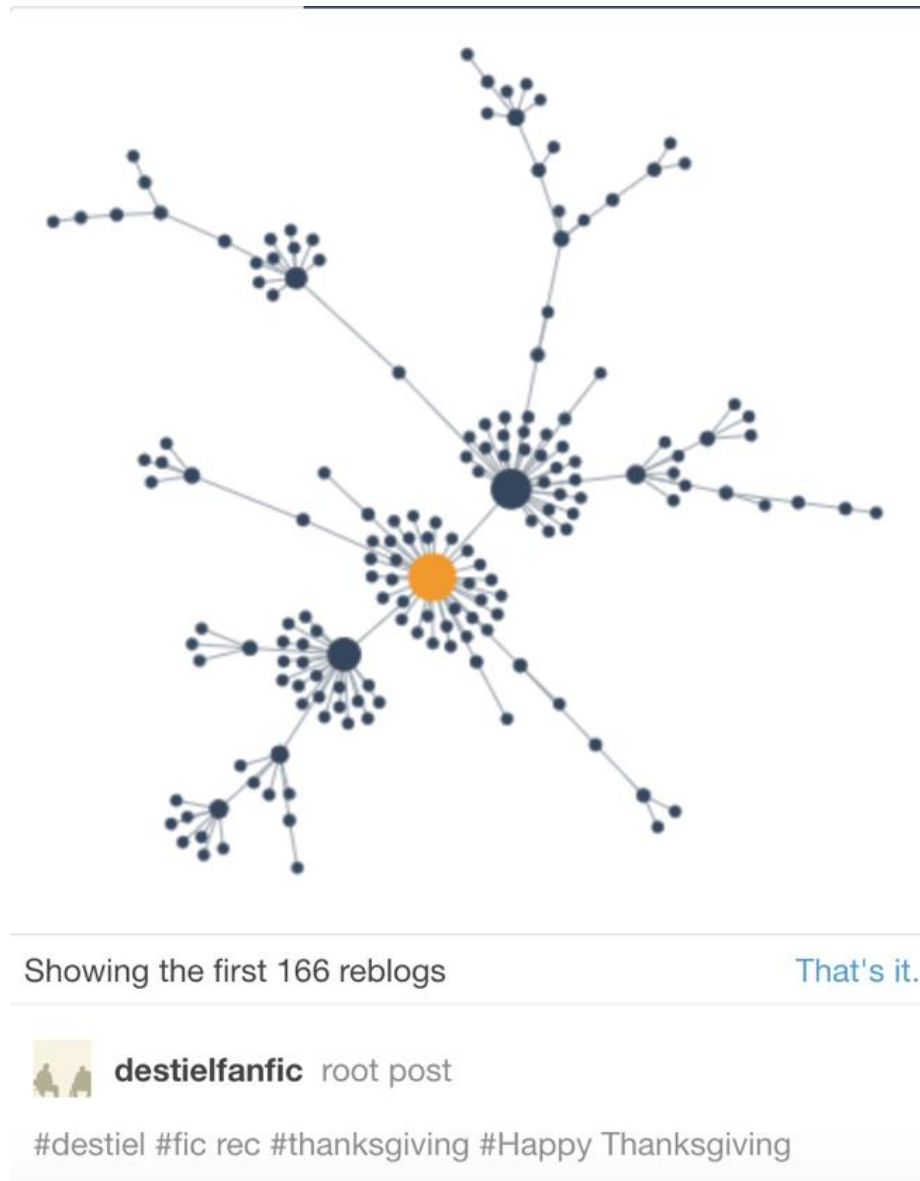
Figure 2.   destielfanfic's MAYD rec post
The reblogs of destielfanfic's MAYD Thanksgiving rec list post.

   The Destiel Fanfiction Archive, a Tumblr blog dedicated to recommending and
sharing fanfiction featuring *Supernatural*'s Dean Winchester and Castiel (Destiel),
shared a Thanksgiving-themed post centered around the MAYD trope in 2017 (see
Figure 2). As expected, this post stays almost exclusively within
the *Supernatural* fandom or moves to multi-fandom blogs; only one reblog moved to a
blog completely dedicated to another community.[32]   *Figure 2* is directly from Tumblr,

_____

[32] Moved from SPN to TV show *Sanders Sides* from Youtuber Thomas Sanders.

where the website very briefly supported a feature that generated network visualizations on every post. The yellow node represents the original poster, while all blue nodes correspond to subsequent reblogs. It's clear that despite the change to fandom-specific content, this post circulated in a similar way to the MAYD prompt in general; it simply had a smaller audience due to the fannish, Destiel-specific content. The same circulatory patterns present in the circulation of both a specific post and the original MAYD screenshots imply that form has little bearing on Tumblr fannish circulatory practices: content radiates outward from the initial post and fandoms tend to cluster, with more influential fans/bloggers driving circulation among subject-specific content.

4.3. The BDSM Universe and Directedverse

My second case study traces the circulation of the BDSM!AU from its conception in 2006 to January/February 2020. The analysis of this sub-genre is broken down into three sub-sections. In order to portray the clearest possible picture of sub-genre circulation more broadly, each presents an analysis of the BDSM!AU migration through time (read clockwise, 2006-2020), with the parameters of platform, post type and fandom. These parameters were chosen to demonstrate the heteroglot nature of fanfiction sub-genre circulation, as well as to explore patterns in sub-genre movement—do fandoms continue to cluster when looking at genre instead of single posts? Does the genre of a post have an impact on its pan-fandom circulation? As we'll see, the BDSM!AU continues to be written on multiple platforms for a variety of fandoms and referenced in posts that can be classified as fic, fic promotion, and sub-genre education, among others.

The BDSM!AU sub-genre describes a universe wherein sexual identity is understood based on the BDSM roles of dominant and submissive rather than gender preference. This dynamic then spills over into the overall structuring of society, where dominants might enjoy privilege in comparison to submissives similar to the way men (and white men, especially) currently enjoy their privilege. This AU normalizes BDSM dynamics and often portrays romantic partners in 24/7 kinky relationships. Its conception can be traced back to Livejournal (LJ) in 2006, when fic writer Xanthe posted a slash fic of John Sheppard/Rodney McKay in the *Stargate: Atlantis* (SGA) fandom. The fic, entitled *Coming Home*, captured the attention of fellow SGA fan helenish, who wrote a responsefic entitled *Take Clothes Off As Directed (TCOAD)* on LJ nine months later.

Responsefic by its very nature is written in response to something, and usually takes on a critical lens[33] ("Responsefic" 2021). Though *TCOAD* was written in the exact same universe as *Coming Home*, and with the same slash pairing and characters, *TCOAD* is deeply critical of the potential power dynamics, imbalances, and opportunities for discrimination in such a world. It prompted much discussion of these dynamics as well as larger questions of fannish authorial ownership and subsequent permissions and demonstrate an instance of fan genre-making (see *"Take Clothes Off As Directed" 2021*).

helenish's status as a BNF within the SGA fandom[34] increased the reach of the more critical interpretation of the 'verse. These interpretations were thus referred to as part of the "Directedverse" (based off of *Take Clothes Off As Directed*) rather than the BDSM Universe. The use of either term became associated with the way a writer would engage with the fictional setting; if it was through a critical lens they would tag for Directedverse, if not, BDSM Universe was appropriate.[35] The pointed circulation of works tagged Directedverse or BDSM Universe was therefore a way for community members to distinguish which side of the argument a writer was on, and then make the decision to read or pass on the work. Defining oneself as one thing in order to distance oneself from something else is common within and across fandoms, and represents an instance of what Cohen refers to as contradistinction: how a community differentiates itself from another community. Contradistinction is therefore an important part of circulatory practice; tangled up in affect and identity, how a fan defines themselves in relation to their community (i.e. I am X because I am not Y) has an impact on what circulates and how far it moves. In instances like the BDSM Universe, contradistinction can result in the creation of new community practices (i.e. a sub-genre) that are then widely shared, creating a kind of circulatory reverb.

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[33] Because of this, responsefic is sometimes referred to as "critfic" (see *"Responsefic", Fanlore*).

[34] Though Xanthe was not necessarily a BNF before *Coming Home*, she became one soon after the fic's proliferation and the controversy that accompanied helenish's responsefic.

[35] This statement, while true for many fic writers, is a generalization. Tags were most definitely used pointedly at the conception of both the BDSM Universe and Directedverse, but as both became more popular and circulated to fans both in and out of the SGA fandom (who had not heard of the discourse regarding helenish's responsefic), it is more than likely that the Directedverse tag was used simply because it was an author's first exposure to any kind of BSDM!AU.

Due to the limited scope of this study, I have chosen to focus on the circulation of Directedverse, and only analyze the circulation of the BDSM Universe pre-2010. This time frame follows the posting of the first AO3 fic tagged "Alternate Universe – BDSM" in 2010. AO3 uses the term "Alternate Universe – BDSM" as a neutral umbrella tag under which all other BDSM!AU fics are nested. Unassociated with either Xanthe or helenish's interpretations of the BDSM setting, the "Alternate Universe – BDSM" provides little information regarding which universe the author is writing in unless explicitly stated. Furthermore, for a neophyte unaware of the controversy surrounding early use of the 'verse, the "BDSM Universe" tag could easily be shorthand for "Alternate Universe – BDSM" instead of referencing Xanthe's fic. In order to bypass this issue, I chose to collect all data tagged Directedverse from 2006 to 2020, but only collected BDSM Universe data post-2010 if Xanthe or their BDSM Universe were specifically mentioned in work tags or author's notes.

Though Directedverse is not from the contemporary moment, its circulatory patterns remain relevant to the study of fandom and online circulation. The nature of the current internet landscape has prioritized the archiving of publicly accessible content, leading to the re-circulation of old works on websites like Tumblr, Livejournal and Dreamwidth. Similarly, Archive of Our Own is first and foremost an archive, where users may filter and sort their searches by any number of criteria. Because fans have a history of platform migration,[36] navigating old websites in order to read or download fic is not uncommon; LiveJournal may not currently be used as a fannish space, but fans may (re)read, bookmark, or even create a print-to-PDF file of a particular work—I most definitely have. These practices have remained the same for over a decade, and thus demonstrate that the study of older fannish information behaviour practices remains relevant.

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[36] Fannish migration in light of the 2018 Tumblr porn ban is the most recent of these.

4.3.1. Platforms
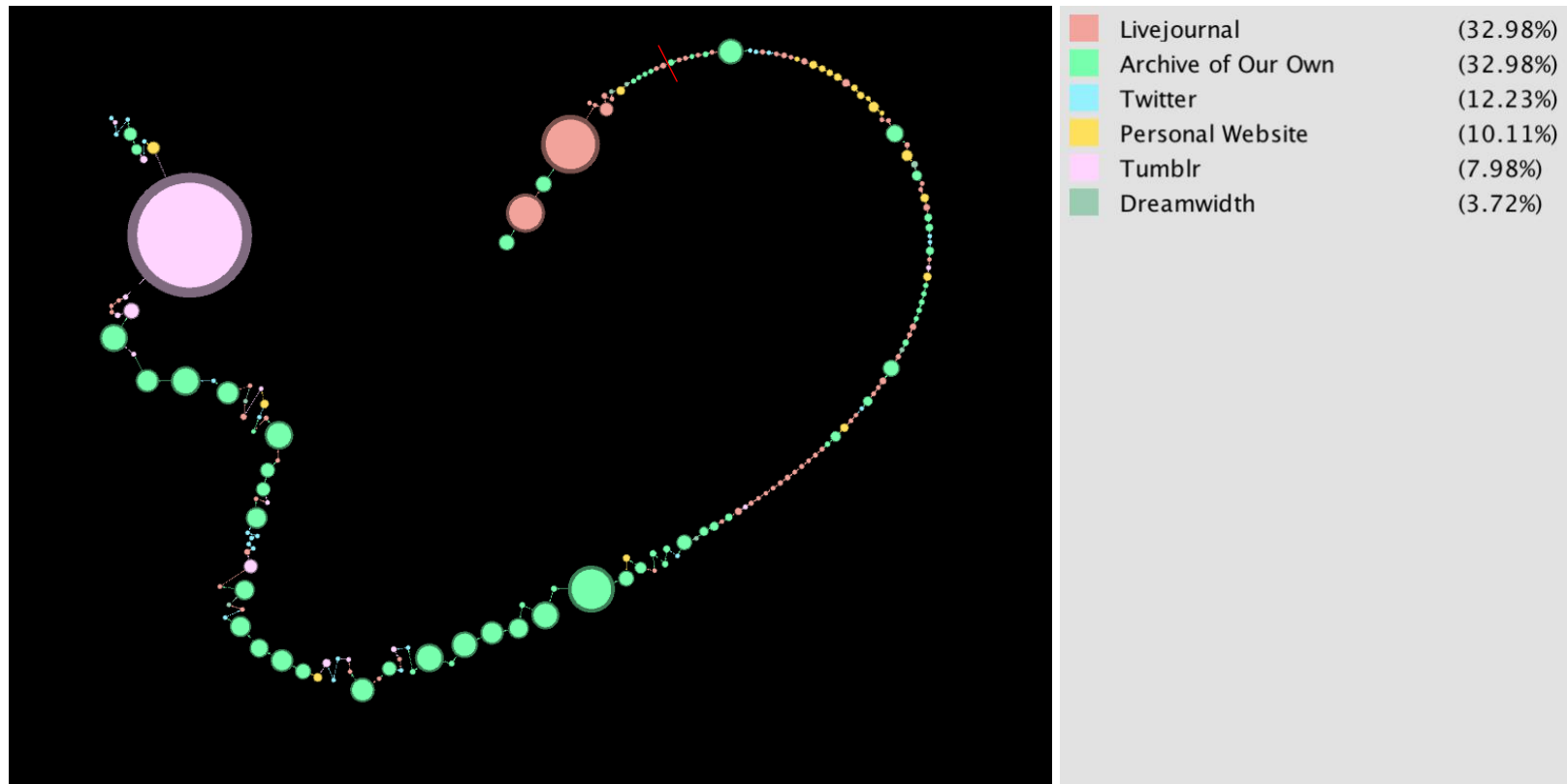
Figure 3   Migration of the BDSM sub-genre across platforms over time
The migration of the BDSM sub-genre by platform over time (2006-2020). Note that this visualization moves clockwise, beginning with the green and pink nodes in 2006, and ending with the small blue and purple nodes in 2020.

This network visualization[37] depicts the migration of the BDSM sub-genre from 2006-2020, with the red line representing 2008, the year AO3 was founded. In this particular visualization, node size is based on the number of post comments, retweets or reblogs, thus Figure 3 also seems to suggest that, in centralizing a single fanfiction Archive, findability and reader engagement increased; despite depicting an equal number of AO3 and LJ nodes, AO3 posts possess greater engagement overall. While this could be explained by AO3's exclusive archiving of fanfiction (which may generally see more engagement than education, personal or discourse posts), it's more likely that, as fic moved further into the mainstream, AO3 provided new users an easy starting point to find and comment on BDSM!AU works. The green AO3 nodes to the left of the line are therefore instances of post-dated fic; AO3 has this capability specifically for instances like these, where fic writers migrate onto the platform and wish to associate their previously written fic with their original posting dates. In analyzing the flow of information here, it's clear that there was a period of instability between AO3's foundation and subsequent wide adoption as the go-to fanfiction archive. Immediately after the Archive's launch, there are a smattering of AO3 fics and mentions of the BDSM!AU on Twitter, but Livejournal continues to make up the slight majority of BDSM!AU per platform. This is easily explainable: AO3 was a new platform fans were only just starting to flock to in light of industry's repeated attempts to commodify fic[38] as well as the constant threat of lawsuits and take-downs.[39] Even still, moving works from a previously established online space is an undertaking akin to moving houses: a fan must re-upload all works onto a different website and thus learn a different interface, build a following for themselves on that new platform, and link all their old work so current

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[37] Note the size of the biggest node in all versions of this visualization has been edited. Though its post engagement was the largest at 42,651 notes on Tumblr, it had to be reduced to 8000 to allow Gephi to accurately represent the size of all other nodes in the graph space provided. The post used humour to describe the fannish tendency to use erotica as an avenue for social commentary, philosophical and political discussion, and similarly unsexy themes and topics; one reblog maintained that Directedverse fit this description perfectly.

[38] The backlash from FanLib, the most famous of these attempts, resulted in AO3 (see *"FanLib"* 2020). Since then, Kindle Worlds (2013-18) and The Fanfic Pocket Library (2019) have similarly tried to commodify fanfiction to disastrous results (see *Price* 2017; *casthewise* 2019a; *casthewise* 2019b).

[39] Of these, the best-known where Strikethrough and Boldthrough on LiveJournal, as well as the frequent purges on Fanfiction.net. The former targeted journals with interests related to sexual crime and kink and disabled their accounts without recourse, while the latter targeted all explicit content on its platform ("Strikethrough and Boldthrough" 2019; "FanFiction.Net's NC-17 Purges: 2002 and 2012" 2019). See *olderthannetfic* 2020 for a comprehensive history.

followers have the option to read/engage with the work on the new platform. Some fans managed to avoid both the take-downs and having to move by simply creating their own personal websites. Though these were more difficult to find, they were often linked to a profile on a popular fannish platform like LiveJournal or Fanfiction.net.

In light of this history, it's important to note that all yellow nodes represent multiple fics posted by a single user with their own website. Similarly, the large number of LiveJournal works pre-AO3 dominance is in part due to a single author who posted a six-fic long BDSM!AU series. The sudden explosion of LJ fics may be due to loyal LiveJournal users suddenly flooding the platform in light of AO3's popularity, or simply that something happened within the SGA canon or paratext that revived the community on the LJ platform. Note that the large Tumblr node is not representative of a fic, but of a fic prompt challenge wherein Directedverse was among 50 AUs listed (plumadesatada 2016). Clearly, the BDSM!AU sub-genre migrated from LiveJournal to AO3 and tends to live there almost exclusively.[40] In truth, AO3's stability in light of fannish platform migrations has contributed to its dominance in Western fandom (among older and queer fans, especially). It has become the gathering place for kinky fic.[41] AO3's rise to prominence, then, not only marks a significant shift in where BDSM!AU fanfiction was posted and archived, therefore how it circulates, but presents us with an observable instance of fans actively exerting centripetal force on their own community. Figure 3 suggests that fans collectively decided to replace a handful of platforms (LJ, personal websites, Dreamwidth) with AO3 as a central Archive, thus shifting slightly lessening its overall circulatory multivocality.

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[40]It would be extremely interesting to compare all content tagged BDSM!AU on all platforms in order to explore whether or not the current iteration of the BDSM!AU is still overwhelmingly represented on the Archive. More interesting still would be to analyze multiple sub-genres across platforms to investigate whether explicitness affects which platform the sub-genre skews towards. Unfortunately, both questions go beyond the scope of this study.

[41] A google search, as well as a search on Fanfiction.net demonstrated that AO3 is the most used platform for posting BDSM!AUs. Fanfiction.net had none, and Dreamwidth and Livejournal have since fallen out of fashion. The lack of BDSM!AU content on Fanfiction.net is due to its involvement in the purges of slash and explicit content in the early 2000s. Because of this, the platform is known among fic readers and writers as a platform mostly used by younger fans, and thus is much less likely to contain kink.

4.3.2. Post Type

Post type data further demonstrates the need for a more nuanced circulation model. Fanfiction makes up an overwhelming 75% of the data I collected, with Fic Recommendation (fic rec) posts following at 13%. Education posts, whose aim is to educate newcomers on the content, conventions and history of the BDSM!AU make up 5% of all data, as do Discourse posts. The latter label represents a post that adds to the rhetorical discussion surrounding the BDSM!AU sub-genre: what its purpose should be, its wider implications for conceptions of gender and sexuality, etc. Personal posts follow at 4% and refer to content that highlights personal feelings (positive or negative) towards the AU.

Twitter boasts the most Personal posts. Though Discourse posts can be found there as well, they tended towards Tumblr and LiveJournal for obvious reasons: neither have strict character limits. Interestingly, Discourse posts were only gathered after 2010[42]—the same year that Xanthe publicly released a statement allowing any fan to use the BDSM Universe without their permission. The gathered data made no mention of permissions and discussions surrounding the ethics of writing without them; instead, this discourse overwhelmingly explores the roles of gender and sexuality within the AU, aligning the entire conversation with helenish's more critical interpretation of it.

Fic Promo posts make up 2% of my sample, and were found on Tumblr and Twitter exclusively. The glaring omission of LiveJournal is reasonable when we consider that Tumblr and Twitter are platforms where content literally circulates by way of reblogs and retweets, and these posts can be equated to advertisements floating across a feed. The final 1% of collected data makes up BSDM!AU writing prompts.

While fanfiction's dominance was expected, the variety of post type was not. The prominence of Education over Personal, Fic Promo and Writing Prompt posts suggests that fans are ultimately concerned with perpetuating the sub-genre's canonization and circulation: educational posts teach readers and writers about the BDSM!AUs generic

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[42] This is most likely due to the purging of LiveJournal accounts and content.

rules, which aids in further creation and consumption of the genre, which leads to its eventual canonization.

4.3.3. Fandoms

The analysis of post type above indicates that sub-genres overwhelmingly disseminate through fanfiction. Users write fic in specific fandoms—which aids in the genre-making process—and these works expose readers to a sub-genre, which is then recirculated through the creation of more fic. Though fic involving multiple fandoms (crossover or fusion) exists, they are not the norm: in all 7.3 million fics on AO3 at the time of writing, only 156,146 are crossovers (2%).

Thus, the BDSM!AU begins in the *SGA* fandom before migrating across a variety of different fan communities. Most often, this is directly between fandoms (e.g. *Hannibal* to *BTS*) rather than through a multi-fandom intermediary; the more fic written of a particular sub-genre, the more that sub-genre is established within the community. Sub-genre canonization is thus the result of fandom-specific content circulating to other blogs of similar themes/subject matter, with personal taste driving this movement across communities. While the MAYD prompt post tended to remain in a fandom for a short time before moving on, there are longer lead times between the BDSM!AU entering and exiting a given community. Longer stretches in the *MCU* or *NCIS* fandom suggest that the ideologies and tastes of these communities particularly align with the themes inherent in the BDSM!AU, causing the sub-genre to become more established and aiding in its canonization.

BNFs aid in the circulation process and can be essential to discussions that are pivotal in establishing a fannish sub-genre. As gatekeepers, creators and/or educators, their content tends to be specific—big accounts are usually niche in their interests and what they provide for the community, be it creative work, meta analysis, satire or as a resource and archive. With content tailored to a very specific audience, they gain a large number of followers and thus reach a significant number of potential viewers when posting or sharing content. Though it's entirely possible for a fic by an unknown writer to help canonize a sub-genre, it's less likely to have an impact than a work whose account has an established and large audience. The BDSM Universe was clearly popular before helenish wrote *TCOAD*, but this fic caused controversy, which created contradistinction,

increased exposure, and sparked important conversations that made significant strides in canonizing the BDSM!AU.

Fests and challenges are also important to the fannish establishment of genre. These involve the creation of works—usually of a pre-determined length—centered around a pairing or theme for a set deadline. These works are then posted to the fest/challenge blog and/or on AO3 to increase findability. Open to everyone, these events allow lesser known writers to participate alongside big accounts, which in turn increases their own audience exposure. They also represent instances of deliberate sub-genre, trope or pairing stimulation: it's not uncommon to find a fest centered around holiday fic, for example. In stimulating the creation and the circulation of fanfiction and its tropes and sub-genres, fans demonstrate their awareness of how dependent fan culture is on the constant creation and consumption of works—and how vital circulation is to this process. Thus, Doctorow's dandelion model—where circulated objects are like dandelion seeds on the wind—is too simplistic; fans are not only careful online curators, but create events to actively promote the creation and dissemination of particular content.

Both case studies demonstrate fannish circulatory patterns and behaviours, as well as demonstrate the heteroglot nature of fannish circulation more broadly: if we consider each platform, post type fandom and 'verse to be a different "voice", then these aspects of fannish circulation are multivocal. Furthermore, the formation of the BDSM!AU provides evidence of fannish circulation exerting centripetal and centrifugal forces on a sub-genre, resulting in the eventual formation of a canonized, hyper-heterglot mix of both narrative perspectives. This kind of stratified complexity cannot be described by referencing top-down or bottom-up circulatory patterns—fannish circulation requires a model that is far more nuanced.

4.4. Fic Reader and Writer Surveys

In 2020, user thursdaysfallenangel granted me access to two questionnaires studying fanfiction reader and writer habits on Tumblr and AO3. These surveys have circulated on Tumblr since 2018, and their results not only indicate that fans are deeply interested and invested in their own circulatory practices, but also support the findings of the case studies above.

On AO3, most respondents subscribe to an author after having enjoyed a work, while others prefer to recommend the work to friend or an official list, find the author on another platform and personally message them, or follow them on Tumblr; more than a quarter of surveyed users show their appreciation of a work by purposefully attempting to circulate it, despite the fact that the Archive's purpose is preservation, not dissemination (see *Appendix, Figure A7*). This number rises when showing appreciation on Tumblr, where more than half of all respondents both like and reblog a work (see *Appendix, Figure A3*). Correspondingly, Tumblr fic writers prefer a reblog with commentary about the work in the tags, but are also happy with direct messages, high total engagement count, gaining new followers and a high reblog to like ratio (see *Appendix, Figure A7*). On Tumblr, circulation of the work is clearly valued more highly than any other type of engagement.

Because wide circulation is so valued, it's unsurprising that both Tumblr and AO3 users have dissemination in mind when posting and/or consuming fic. When using AO3, an equal amount of authors cross-post to another more circulation-friendly location and practice specific and/or excessive tagging for easier findability (see *Appendix, Figure A8*). This is in-line with reader fic-finding behaviour on the Archive, where story and tag searches are equally as important as looking through an author's backlist (see *Appendix, Figure A9*). Interestingly, a little less than half of all respondents exclusively find fic via rec lists and personal recommendations, as well as author blogs elsewhere. On Tumblr, more than half of all fic readers find works through author, fic rec or challenge blogs, whereas more than a quarter of users search for general fic or pairing tags on Tumblr directly (see *Appendix, Figure A9*). Thus, most authors self-reblog their work a few times in order to gain more exposure, followed closely by authors who use specific and/or excessive tagging practices (see *Appendix, Figure A10*). Because Tumblr is a hub of fannish circulation, cross-posting is far less important.

All survey answers detail behaviours that contribute to the gift economy through engagement that is either circulatory (i.e. posting on multiple platforms) or non-circulatory (i.e. commenting). Thus, the mere existence of these surveys proves that fans are deeply concerned with how their content circulates as a dimension of community health. As the questionnaires demonstrate, fan approaches to fic-finding and posting are a multivocal; there are myriad different strategies to circulate fic that creators and consumers employ in varied combinations.

The most important takeaway of this chapter is perhaps the most obvious: fans are adept at circulating their own content. Fannish circulation happens quickly, often, and is guided by a variety of complex factors that are, for the most part, learned either directly or indirectly from their peers. Such varied practices make up the repertoires that form fannish etiquette. These behaviours allow fannish circulatory practice to become rote, which perpetuates the movement of fan objects and sustains the larger fannish organism. In sum, through the exploration of various aspects of fan object circulation—platform, post type, fandom, 'verse, trope vs. sub-genre, fandom vs. non-fandom content—these case studies have mapped out the fannish circulatory landscape. In the next chapter, I propose a nuanced model based on this map—one that is robust enough to contend with the ever-growing and radiating fannish structure, but still provides the flexibility that heteroglossia demands.

Chapter 5.

The mycelium model

According to Jenkins, Ford and Green, the Web 2.0 business model aims to restructure the relationship between consumers and companies in order to "harness mass creativity, collectivism and peer production" by enticing consumers to "join in the building and customizing of services and messages rather than to expect companies to present complete and fully formed experiences" (2013, 49). It's here that Jenkins, Ford and Green describe circulation as a mix of top-down and bottom-up movement. Top-down and bottom-up circulation both refer to the hierarchy of industry over fannish modes of creation and consumption: top-down refers to content circulating through both sanctioned and unsanctioned channels to reach its audience, while bottom-up refers to audience-created content circulating all the way up to industry to be consumed and re-used (2013). Though this model is meant to encompass all online media circulation, Jenkins, Ford and Green exclusively refer to the circulation of source texts to audience members (top-down) and fannish materials to source text creators (bottom-up). Jung and Shim later echo this mixed model as a way of describing the circulation of K-Pop music among transnational audiences—they refer to the dissemination of content as its "social distribution" (2014).

After analyzing the data in the previous chapter, we could adjust the definitions of top-down and bottom-up circulation for a fannish audience, referring to creators, BNFs or fans with larger followings as top-down distributors, but doing so would apply a strict hierarchy where there is none. All fannish creators—including BNFs—speak directly to and engage with their audience; they are part of the audience they are writing for. BNFs may have larger followings and therefore hold more community cultural capital, but even among big accounts, the industry terms of "top-down" and "bottom-up" are too rigid to describe how objects circulate among fans. For example, a user with a large following A posts the first chapter of a BDSM!AU fic, which causes follower B to comment on and/or share that work while expressing ideas for the second chapter. These ideas have been inspired by another user C who may or may not be a BNF themselves. This happens in conjunction with user A interacting with another BNF, who makes a suggestion for a future chapter, while at the same time, B shares to their own followers and decides to

write a work inspired by A's original fic. This fic becomes extremely popular, which causes an influx of followers to B, but doesn't necessarily rocket them to BNF status. Though an exploration of fandom hierarchy goes beyond the scope of this research, its gradient and heteroglot nature suggest that pivoting our view of circulation towards a web-like structure would allow for a more comprehensive and accurate view of community sharing practices.

When discussing online circulation within fan communities—of fic, fic sub-genres and other fannish objects—we need a way of describing circulation that not only describes these complex hierarchies and their spatial configurations, but their similarly complex temporalities; where things are simultaneously posted, leave, and re-enter circulation. This fannish heteroglossia is what forces us to reconfigure the way we talk about the spatial and structural elements of fannish circulation—and what allows me to propose a new model in the next section.

5.1. Circulatory scaffolding

Appadurai describes underground or grassroots circuits as facilitating the circulation of content often among the less affluent and marginalized[43] (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). These circuits cobble together or piggyback on older systems of exchange (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). Fan communities operate on one of these unofficial exchange networks. A quilt of various re-appropriated platforms and systems of communication—Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Dreamwidth, Archive of Our own, Wattpad, Fanfiction.net, personal text messages, etc.—is cobbled together to form a cohesive scaffolding for communication and the archiving and sharing of content. Genre (both literary and rhetorical) is inherent in the formation of this scaffolding; genre acts as the overall frame which allows fannish circulation to perpetuate itself—think of the evolution of the BDSM!AU from two separate terms to a single and canonized hyper-

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[43] It is imperative to acknowledge that Appadurai's work is very aware of the structural barriers to entry in order to participate in both official and unofficial exchange systems. Though the Web has removed many barriers to entry, owning technology and having the time and resources to learn how to use it may still be a significant hurdle (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). In fannish spaces, the learning curve is steeper, as fans must understand both the fannish and civilian behavioural norms of a given platform.

heterglot AU. The follow section establishes genre as the mycelium model's circulatory scaffolding.

In *The Bias of Communication* (1951), Harold Innis describes some media as heavy like marble: this media is difficult to circulate but preserves information long-term, and functions in a top-down model due to its heaviness. Other media, Innis says, is light as papyrus: easily transportable and so disseminated widely and often at a low cost, making circulation more decentralized (1951). This tension between marble and papyrus has determined what information has gained visibility and what has been preserved: think of feature-length films versus commercials, or books versus printed ephemera like pamphlets and concert tickets. Similarly, some fan objects are like marble, and some like papyrus; fanfiction in general is a more cumbersome media to circulate than say, a GIF—a short, moving image usually collected into sets and easily and widely circulated on platforms like Tumblr and Twitter. GIFsets are not usually terribly long, and so are made for quick consumption; they tend to showcase a single scene, attribute, or theme, and are simple and fast to access and consume: a GIFset is reblogged by someone I follow, I scroll across it on my dash, consume it, and make the decision whether or not to reblog it, myself.

Innis's concept of heavy and light media applies to fanfiction genres. Though short fic (ex. drabbles[44]) and text posts (fic rec lists, fic summaries, fic marketing posts, etc.) are made to be easily circulated by design, the latter link to the "heavier" media object. A rec list, for example, typically encompasses the author name, fic title, rating, word count, brief summary and, sometimes, a personal or starred review. A fanfiction summary post typically includes a title card/banner image which serves as a front cover, the author name, word count, rating, tags, warnings, a link to the fic in its entirety and a fic summary comparable to the catalogue copy of a traditional book.[45] The fic summary may or may not include an excerpt of the story with a "read more" that links to its entirety which may or may not be hosted on a different platform, such as an archive like AO3, Fanfiction.net, Dreamwidth, or a blog on Tumblr. Though everyone's metric of what constitutes "long" is different, the tagging of such content in the first place indicates that

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[44] As mentioned, though drabbles are formally defined as pieces of writing that are exactly 100 words, fic writers may or may not pay attention to word count, and sometimes choose to refer to any short piece of writing as a drabble.

[45] These posts are generally for fic of at least short story or novella length.

long-form, heavy content must be flagged due to the fact that it is uncommon in general circulation.

Genre, then, not only has a significant impact on object movement because of its content (i.e. BDSM!AU, Canon fic, etc.), but also because of its form (i.e. the length of the work, its formatting). Form greatly affects where a work is posted, which has an effect on circulation; as we've seen, the post type determines where content is most likely to reside—Tumblr and Twitter are the only platforms that host fic promos, while AO3 only hosts the fanfiction post type (i.e. fic). Because genre is important to circulation on so many levels, the way fandom organizes itself is based in genre. The lack of regulating bodies in fan communities results in "a wide range of ad hoc methods" to typify fic and its various tropes, sub-genres and other sundry content (Price 2017, 295). This tends to involve the appropriation and/or adaptation of existing bibliographic methods and culminates in "sophisticated and highly organised bibliographical and metadata standards. With fanfiction in particular, "a highly granular and specific ontology has been inherited by fan communities over the years" (Price 2017, 293). Based in genre, Price found that this ontology is made up of similarly granular fan folksonomies, which then cater to highly specific information retrieval (2017)—in other words, fans know exactly what kind of fic they want to read and make pointed search queries. Fanfiction sub-genres act as the basis of fan taxonomies and nomenclatures; they, "construct and are constructed by the group identity of the fan community" (Price 2017, 293).

We can think of genre (both literary and rhetorical), then, as a kind of scaffolding. Like the MAYD trope neatly slots into the overarching holiday fic sub-genre, or the eventual combining of Directedverse and the BDSM Universe into the BDSM!AU, fanfiction sub-genres, genres and the their associated language are used to identify, organize and circulate content. This content and its subsequent movement comprises the gift economy which sustains the fannish organism. In order to formulate the spatial and foundational structure of a circulatory model, we have to start small.

5.2. Mushrooms and community

The circulatory networks of fanfiction and fungi have a lot in common, but these similarities are even more startling the closer you look. Fungi circulation is perpetuated

by mycelium, which refers to the vegetative tissue of a fungus. Composed of white filaments called hyphae—the main mode of fungal vegetative growth[46]—mycelium is an underground web of perpetual expansion, where a "myriad of rummaging tentacles stretches out as an underground cloud of slow, steady inflation. Mycelium breathes and expands like chthonic lung tissue in ethereal white" (Pullen, et al. 2020, 164). Hyphae spread radially in the search for food, creating cross-connections between established filaments to form an ever-growing network across space and time (Pullen, Helin and Harding 2020). Though a hypha will only cease its search when it can no longer find nourishment, hyphal growth is not random: mycelium responds to chemical signals within the soil, which either encourage or discourage further expansion (Pullen, Helin and Harding 2020; Lepp 2013). The hyphae then excrete enzymes that break down existing complex polymers into simpler compounds before absorbing them and carrying these nutrients across the network to aid in expansion where it's most needed (Lepp 2013). Rayner writes,

> I […] regard the mycelium as a heterogenous army of hyphal troops, variously equipped for different roles and in varying degrees of communication with one another. Without a commander, other than their environmental circumstances, these troops organize themselves into a beautifully open-ended or indeterminate dynamic structure that can continually respond to changing demands.
>
> (qtd. in Pullen, Helin and Harding 2020, 162)

Mycelic growth is therefore a collective endeavour, where some shoots perish without success and others push farther into the unknown, creating a larger network where information and nutrients are transmitted to the fungal fruit (Pullen, Helin and Harding 2020). Lepp writes that rich soil areas tend to see slower mycelic growth as a way of maximizing nutrient extraction, whereas nutrient poor soil generally results in faster growth with fewer cross-connected filaments (2013). Thus, mycelium shapes and is shaped by its environment in what Pullen, Helin and Harding refer to as "metabolistic solidarity" (2020, 162). They emphasize that individualism does not exist in a mycelic system due to the fact that mycelia are "always already exposed, participating, involved and, ultimately, interconnected in more or less sustainable symbioses" (2020, 167). This collective force sustains mycelia as it would any human community (Lévy 1997),

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[46] Note that growth generally occurs in filament-bundles.

especially one as reliant upon the circulation of goods as fans and fic-readers; the community survives through its relationship with itself (Lévy 1997).

Pullen, Helin and Harding liken radical artistic and political practice to the collective nature of mycelium and maintain that such practice follows the lifecycle of this fungal organism: expansion, cannibalism, witches circle (fairy ring), and communication. Though this is not the life cycle for all fungus—cannibalism and witches circle do not necessarily apply to all fungi nor to fannish circulatory growth—these stages reflect a more complete model for the online circulation of fanfiction and fic sub-genres. Interestingly, this model mirrors Deleuze and Guattari's work on the rhizomatic versus the arborescent, aligning itself firmly with interconnectedness over a hierarchical organizational system.

5.2.1. Expansion—beyond the final frontier

As the circulation of the MAYD trop demonstrated (see *Figure 1*), fanfiction sub-genres disseminate by radiating outwards from a posted fic, summary, marketing post, rec list, etc., just as mycelium grow from a node. Like hyphae, the repetition of a digital user's actions during the circulation process is rote, based on a "collective memory of digital use" that has been transmitted from user-to-user not through written handbooks but by the self-perpetuating creation and circulation of content within the community (De Kosnik 2016, 69). This collection of movements and maneuvers comprise a kind of social canon, one that De Kosnik argues is rooted in performance (De Kosnik 2016). She refers to this canon as a digital repertoire that results in a working memory that is shared between users (De Kosnik 2016). The circulation of fic sub-genres thus presents us with a multi-limbed, multi-leveled model of expansion, where transmission of repertoire radiates outwards and allows for the creation and subsequent radial dissemination of fic and fic sub-genres. Furthermore, the constant development of new technology expands the canonical digital repertoire through the addition of further movements. This increases the agility and flexibility of the community (i.e. the fandom); though community members do not know how long specific content or platforms will last, their repertoires live on, slightly modified or added to as technology evolves and to guarantee their continued existence (De Kosnik 2016). Therefore, the digital repertoire can be likened to those of living organisms, whose canonical movements are learned to ensure their own survival (walking, swimming, climbing, etc.). It can be thought of as a

series of movements belonging to the ever-growing fannish organism: a thing composed of many voices and many limbs, in constant expansion over time.

Haraway describes this kind of multi-limbed organism as tentacular—a limb whose tentacle shape exists on the axes of space and time (see *Haraway 2016*)—but mycelic expansion better describes fannish circulation. Though the tentacular portrays radiating growth in a way that is applicable to the circulation of fan objects, it lacks the cross-connections that are vital to how fannish circulation is configured. Mycelic cross-connection occurs when a hypha branches out into a new limb, much like the branches on a tree. These connections take place when fan objects are circulated widely and can therefore be thought of as existing on multiple levels; two people might share a work from the same person, or the work might be shared across fandoms and/or platforms. The analysis of thursdaysfallenangel's questionnaires shows that fic writers are aware of the many ways readers choose a work to consume, just as fic readers are aware of the importance of object circulation. The significance of cross-connections is inherent in this understanding; fans know how many ways a work can be shared and how vital wide dissemination is to the continued health of the community—think of the number of survey responses that featured a circulatory strategy (i.e. "[s]pecific and/or excessive tagging to appear in as many searches as possible", qtd. *Appendix, Figure A8*) or fans performing additional labour to circulate fic hosted on AO3 (*Appendix, Figure A6*).

Kompare notes that the most basic form of fannish curation is "suggested canon": when fans loan, copy, or gift works to other community members (2018, 108), creating (or creating the potential) for circulatory cross-connections. This is supported by a study from Hillman, Procyk and Neustaedter, who found that 76% of all participants considered themselves to be part of multiple fandoms (around 4.2 fandoms per participant), most of whom discovered new content by way of "cross-pollination", or, through posts made or shared from other users (2014, 5). Essentially, fans noticed content from an unfamiliar source text on their social media feeds and subsequently explored that new piece of media—in some instances, users actually asked for recommendations of other fan communities to join, irrespective of their source material (Hillman, Procyk and Neustaedter 2014). These instances of cross-pollination are therefore also instances of cross-connection, where the high likelihood of a fan residing in multiple fandoms increases the probability of multi-fandom expansion, thus increasing the probability of larger circulatory reach. This is something we observed in *Figure 2*,

where MAYD trope circulation was driven by multi-fandom accounts in part due to its neutral, prompt-like content, and then taken up by specific fandoms that posted MAYD fic. Though fandom-specific content will mostly circulate to other blogs of the same fandom, we've established that even niche content contains an element of cross-connection-making across fan communities. This allows for the pan-fandom circulation of tropes and sub-genres that eventually make their way into fannish canon, as we saw with both the MAYD trope and BDSM!AU sub-genre.

Furthermore, fans who write and post fic tend to continue to do so; on the Gossamer fic archive, authors wrote an average of 5.2 stories per account (De Kosnik 2016). As mentioned above—and as shown in thursdaysfallenangel's questionnaire—fic readers look to the accounts they follow as a significant source of new fanfiction. Therefore, the more an author posts, the more likely they are to become a reliable source of content, gain followers and expand their circulatory reach. Likewise, accounts who write fic relatively consistently are primed to become BNFs in their communities, simply because they're a reliable source of new content. Whether they be other users reblogging a work or its entry into a new fandom, the more cross-connections exist, the higher the probability of wider circulation.

5.2.2. Cannibalization

When mycelium deplete all nutrients in a given area, they sometimes cannibalize themselves in order to redistribute hyphae-sustaining energy towards further expansion. When this happens, it kills all mushrooms attached to these hyphae, creating a fairy ring (Lepp 2013). This is comparable, in a way, to mass fannish platform migration: when a platform becomes inactive or is boycotted, fannish content and resources are moved to an environment where further growth and expansion may occur. Examples of this include the mass migration from Yahoo Groups, LiveJournal and Dreamwidth with the establishment of AO3 and Tumblr, as well as the migration of many fans to platforms like Discord and Twitter in light of the 2018 Tumblr porn ban.

5.2.3. Communication – when fungus talks

Circulation and expansion are key to the overall health and survival of the fannish organism. If fan-produced content ceases to disseminate between community members,

the fandom shrinks, or, in extreme cases, may even perish—though the latter can refer to the cessation of activity among a particular group of fans or on a particular platform instead of the death of the community as a whole. Evidence to support this claim is drawn from my own experience participating in fandoms of various sizes. Based on my own observations, fan communities tend to shrink or become inactive when fannish creators either leave the community or cease creating content. The latter is often due to the lack of circulatory success of their posted work; if the gift economy does not function (i.e. works are not circulated or meaningfully[47] engaged with), creators are less likely to share the gift of their content (see *kedreeva (2020)*). This give-and-take of the gift economy is in itself a form of communication, one that gains momentum when objects circulate widely, and slows under opposite circumstances—think of the spike in circulation of MAYD fic around the holidays (see *Appendix, Figure A4*), or the BDSM!AU's wide circulatory reach after helenish's responsefic. This is related to the "significant information exchange between [fan] community members," where "communal information practices take precedence over individual ones" (Price 2017, 284). Mycelia communicate in much the same way. Hyphae secrete chemicals that both change their environment and relay information back to the collective organism, which then communicates whether and how fast the limb should continue to grow (Lepp 2013). When areas are nutrient-rich, growth slows and cross-connections allow for a greater surface area to deplete these resources, whereas nutrient-poor soil requires far-reaching, fast-growing and unbranched limbs. This network of communication has been recognized for its structural similarities to digital networks and is referred to as "the internet of fungus" (qtd. in Pullen, Helin and Harding 2020, 166). It has been documented as a way trees communicate and coordinate nutrient distribution, especially during times of scarcity (Pullen, Helin and Harding 2020).

Similar to how a hypha secretes environment-altering chemicals, the co-opting of platforms for fannish use makes similar changes—though the fannish equivalent to chemical secretion manifests as actions including the modification of code and consoles, the creation of browser extensions, and the deliberate misuse of a platform for fannish purposes. As we've seen, BDSM!AU discourse posts were most often found on Tumblr

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[47] I use 'meaningful' as a deliberately vague term, here, as all creators have different ideas and feelings about what constitutes meaningful engagement. Recently, however, many fans—myself included—feel that meaningful engagement results in a sharing of the work (again, see *kedreeva (2020)* as well as the survey results above).

and LiveJournal due to their lack of character limits. Browser extensions on Tumblr additionally allow for easier tagging, which encourages the creation of further tags beyond the description of the object in question. When fans co-opted Twitter, its interface caused it to become some fans' preferred environment for Social Media!AUs (AUs that entail falling in love over social media)—which involve threads featuring images of long blocks of text intermingled with 280 character tweets. Additionally, circulatory reach is affected by an account's number of followers, multi-fandom status as well as the content's time of postage—the hour, day, month and year have bearing on a particular post's circulation.

Thus, there may be a variety of factors—both spatial and temporal—that provide a more fruitful environment for the circulation of a given fannish object. These more nutrient-rich areas enable the creation of more cross-connections, which in turn furthers expansion. Still, we must not forget that this circulatory system of communication is in the service of a collective. Just like hyphae whose nutrients still feed the larger fungal organism, all circulation feeds the larger project of fic-as-community-literature. Members are reliant upon each other for the creation and circulation of content. Every person who sees, interacts with, or shares a work is another instance of branching, which only promotes the health, survival and further establishment of the of fic-as-genre, of fic sub-genres and of the overall fannish organism, an organism to whom the temporal, the multi-vocal—the heterglot—is as indispensable as its branching spatial structure.

Hence, the issue of circulatory simplicity that plagues existing scholarship falls away in the face of mycelic adaptability. In combination with fungal circulation across the temporal and spatial planes, fannish heteroglossia is not only a non-issue, but this model's biggest strength. It is the heteroglot nature of fannishness that ensures circulatory practice will evolve to serve the ever-changing needs of the individual as part of the community. This is my model for the circulation of fanfiction sub-genres, but also, I put forth, a potential circulatory model for all fannish objects: the heterglot and the mycelic, coming together to create a multi-voiced symphony of fannishness that reaches out in multiple directions, across multiple temporal and spatial fields. It is called the mycelium model because it's indebted to fungal circulation, and because like mycelium, the huge amounts of fannish labour and love that sustain the gift economy, circulatory system and therefore the larger fannish organism very often go unseen. Even among fans, the sheer amount of labour required to create, circulate and consume fannish

content can be easy to forget. In sum, the mycelium model is steeped in caveats, made flexible due ever-changing technologies and the fan communities who use them. And it is as agile as the folks who do the circulating.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This thesis presents a new model for fannish circulation as an alternative to the frameworks available in existing scholarship. The mycelium model does away with the simplistic top-down and bottom-up industry terms that have shaped how scholarship refers to the circulation of fannish objects. Instead, it takes into account the heteroglot nature of fandom as a whole, applying the multi-vocal and temporal nature of fandom overtop the mycelic circulatory structure in order to create a flexible model, able to grow with fandom as it continues to evolve.

It is my hope that this thesis will act as a prompt for further research. The mycelium model could aid publishers in understanding how to better connect queer literature with an engaged fannish reading public. I know from personal experience that fanfiction can play an important role in the exploration of queer self-identity, and as a form of queer literature, indeed is often foundational in that regard (see Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1992; Jenkins 1992; Doty 1993; Katyal 2006; Ball and Hayes 2010; Russo 2014; Anselmo 2018; Lothian and Busse 2018; Mixer 2018; Eden 2019; Strapagiel 2019). Still, fic is considered extremely niche among even its own readers; normalizing the traditional publication of content featuring all kinds of relationships (sexual and non-sexual) will benefit both queer and straight audiences. Red, White and Royal Blue (2020), Boyfriend Material (2020), Cemetery Boys (2020)—the continued success of these queer romance titles proves that there is a reading public hungry for queer content. Therefore, fanfiction points out multiple gaps in the original fiction market: not only is the Canadian industry seriously lacking in queer Canadian titles, but it is pitiful in its representation of varied queer identities.

Fans are an engaged audience interested in consuming queer literature, which makes fannish audiences primed to consume fic-like original queer content. Therefore, as a model for fannish circulation, the mycelium model represents an opportunity to understand how to better reach fans as an audience for new queer fiction. This may be as a simple as publishing fluffy, fic-like queer narratives, or may re-introduce the concept of the Victorian serialized novel. The latter is seeing a resurgence in the publication of

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serialized web-comics on platforms like Tapas or Webtoon, which are also being pulled for print. Lore Olympus,48 Webtoon's number one comic with over 4.9 million views at the time of writing (Smythe 2021), has been picked up by Penguin Random House, while The Croaking49 (530,557 views) raised over $100,000 Canadian dollars over its month-long crowd-funding campaign (Grey 2021a; Grey 2021b). Publishing houses may also want to take note of how fans co-opt and use online platforms, and mimic the kinds of content they produce—moodboards, bannered promotional posts, Spotify playlists, etc.—as a way of speaking directly to the audience they're attempting to court. Note that choosing when to use these marketing initiatives is essential; fans are an infamously shrewd audience, so to avoid potential backlash, a fannish author of original fiction would be the most suitable choice. Using fannish tagging practices and terms like AU, hurt/comfort, angst, major character death, etc. to describe traditionally published original works by fanfiction authors would also be a way of marketing to a specifically fannish audience that is immediately recognizable (see *Appendix, Figures A12a* and *A12b*). Thoughtful marketing initiatives and mutually beneficial fan-industry collaboration could prove extremely fruitful, though an exploration of these methods go beyond the scope of this thesis. However, given the fraught and exploitative history between fans and the cultural industries (see "FanLib" 2020; Price 2017; casthewise 2019a; casthewise 2019b), I would be remiss not to touch on how future research might provide insights into a mutually beneficial partnership between them.

Potential industry research opportunities aside, my aim for this project is to further fan studies scholarship. In presenting a theoretical lens for fannish circulation, the mycelium model could be used to better understand various aspects of fan circulatory practice more deeply: the nuances of how genre is refined, for example, or how content affects circulation. More specifically, this model presents an opportunity for further research into fanfiction canonization practices through inquiries of fandom-specific fan hierarchies—how does fic become canonized in a particular community? How much influence do BNFs have over fic canonization? How fast does fic canon change? What does this canon say about changing fannish ideologies? Do these ideologies greatly

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48 *Lore Olympus* is a modern retelling of the story of Hades and Persephone. It is a straight romance which deals with themes of sexual assault and trauma.

49 *The Croaking* is a YA queer romance set in an avian world where humans have wings. It is a queer romance which dips into political intrigue, dealing with primarily with themes of racism and found family.

differ from fandom to fandom? The mycelium model would additionally act as a good starting place for research into fandom-specific circulatory practices, or further research into general circulatory behaviours; for example, the declining like to reblog ratio on Tumblr and how it affects current attitudes towards circulation and circulatory behaviours. More broadly, this model will afford fan scholars a circulatory framework when studying fan platform modding, migration and use, which in turn would provide further insight into fan community dynamics.

The mycelium model presents fannish circulation as the heteroglot network it truly is: a complex web of multi-voicedness stretching across the temporal and spatial axes, heavily reliant on personal and community context. Fans constantly push beyond the limitations set by the cultural and technological industries—we are heteroglot specialists, and experts in managing centripetal force. This is what has allowed our communities to flourish since we began organizing online, and what will allow us to self-perpetuate through whatever technological and cultural developments the future has in store. In a similar way, I hope the mycelium model will aid in pushing fan studies scholarship beyond its own frontiers.

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Appendix.

Supplementary materials

Figure A1. Fic ad
A fan manipulates an old advertisement as an ad for fic. It implies a level of dissatisfaction with source textual canon inherent in the creation and consumption of fanfiction. (Edit by ao3commentoftheday, September 18, 2018, Tumblr, https://ao3commentoftheday.tumblr.com/post/177963385843/original-ad).

Figure A2.   Fic feedback process
A fan encourages others to leave comments by creating a infographic describing the commenting aspect of the fannish gift economy. (From maevecurrywrites found on casthewise, 2015, Tumblr, https://thursdayschild.co.vu/post/127694740268/spread-the-happy).
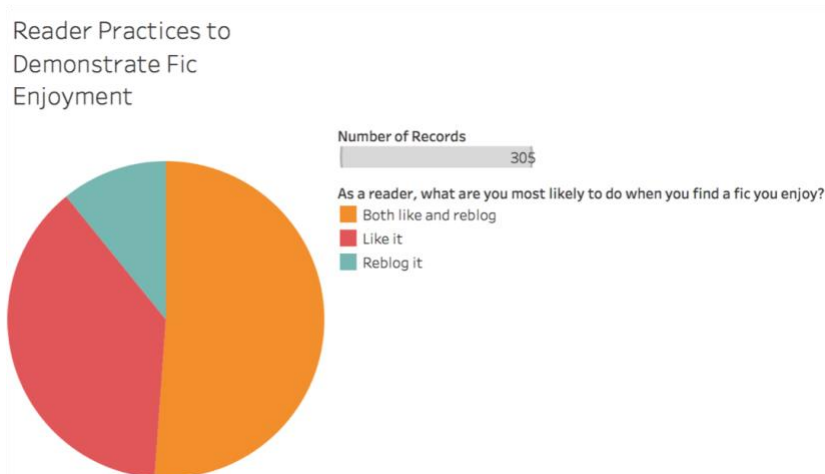
Figure A3.   Tumblr Fic Reader Enjoyment Practices
This pie chart visualizes how fic readers on Tumblr demonstrate their enjoyment of a work on the same platform. Over half of respondents said they both like and reblog a work. 38% exclusively like the post and 11% exclusively reblog.

MAYD Fics Over Time - AO3
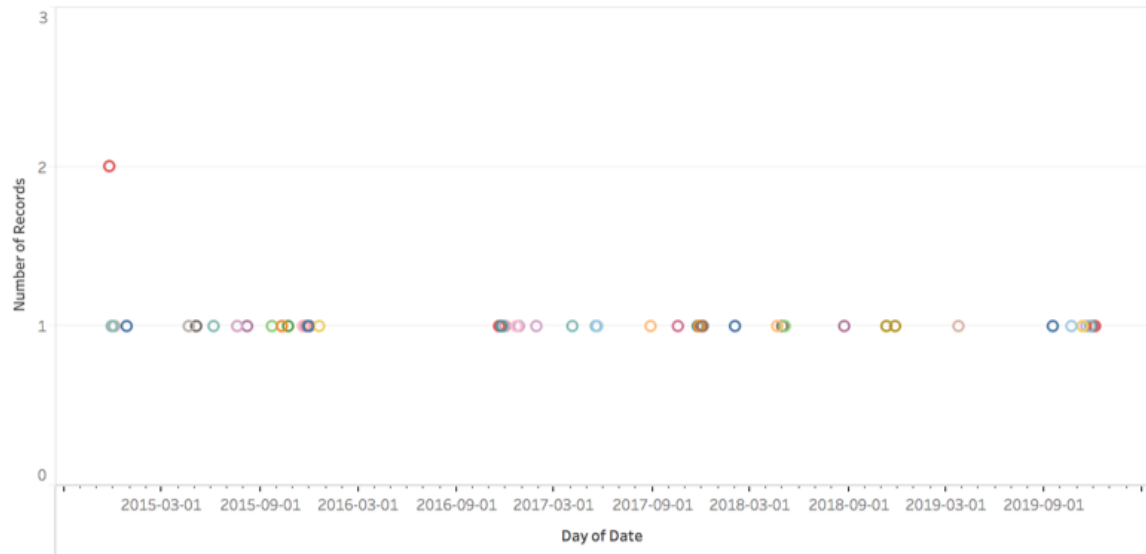
Figure A4.   **MAYD fics over time**
Posting dates of the Mad at Your Dad trope over a period of two years on AO3. Fic tends to
cluster around the fall months of September, October, November and even into December,
proving that it fits neatly into the holiday fic sub-genre.

Legend (top right):

	Fandom	Percentage
	Multi-fandom	(53.65%)
	Non-fandom	(15.89%)
	Star Wars	(2.08%)
	One Direction	(1.56%)
	Gamer (multi)	(1.56%)
	Marvel Cinematic Universe	(1.3%)
	Anime (multi)	(1.3%)
	A Song of Ice and Fire	(1.04%)
	RWBY	(1.04%)
	Fire Emblem	(1.04%)
	BNHA	(0.78%)
	The Witcher	(0.78%)
	Harry Potter	(0.78%)
	Renegades	(0.78%)
	DC	(0.78%)
	Homestuck	(0.78%)
	Mob Psycho 100	(0.52%)
	Dungeons and Dragons	(0.52%)
	BTS	(0.52%)
	Stardew Valley	(0.52%)
	Good Omens	(0.52%)
	Apex Legends	(0.52%)

Legend (bottom left):

	Fandom	Percentage
	LOTR	(0.26%)
	TAZ	(0.26%)
	Kingdom Hearts	(0.26%)
	Overwatch	(0.26%)
	nine-one-one	(0.26%)
	Fairy Tail	(0.26%)
	Supergirl	(0.26%)
	Forgotten Realms	(0.26%)
	The 100	(0.26%)
	Buzzfeed Unsolved	(0.26%)
	Magic: The Gathering	(0.26%)
	Umbrella Academy	(0.26%)
	The Foxhole Court	(0.26%)
	Pokemon	(0.26%)
	Kingsman	(0.26%)
	Comics	(0.26%)
	Doctor Who	(0.26%)
	Bungou Stray Dogs	(0.26%)
	Hakuoki	(0.26%)

Legend (bottom right):

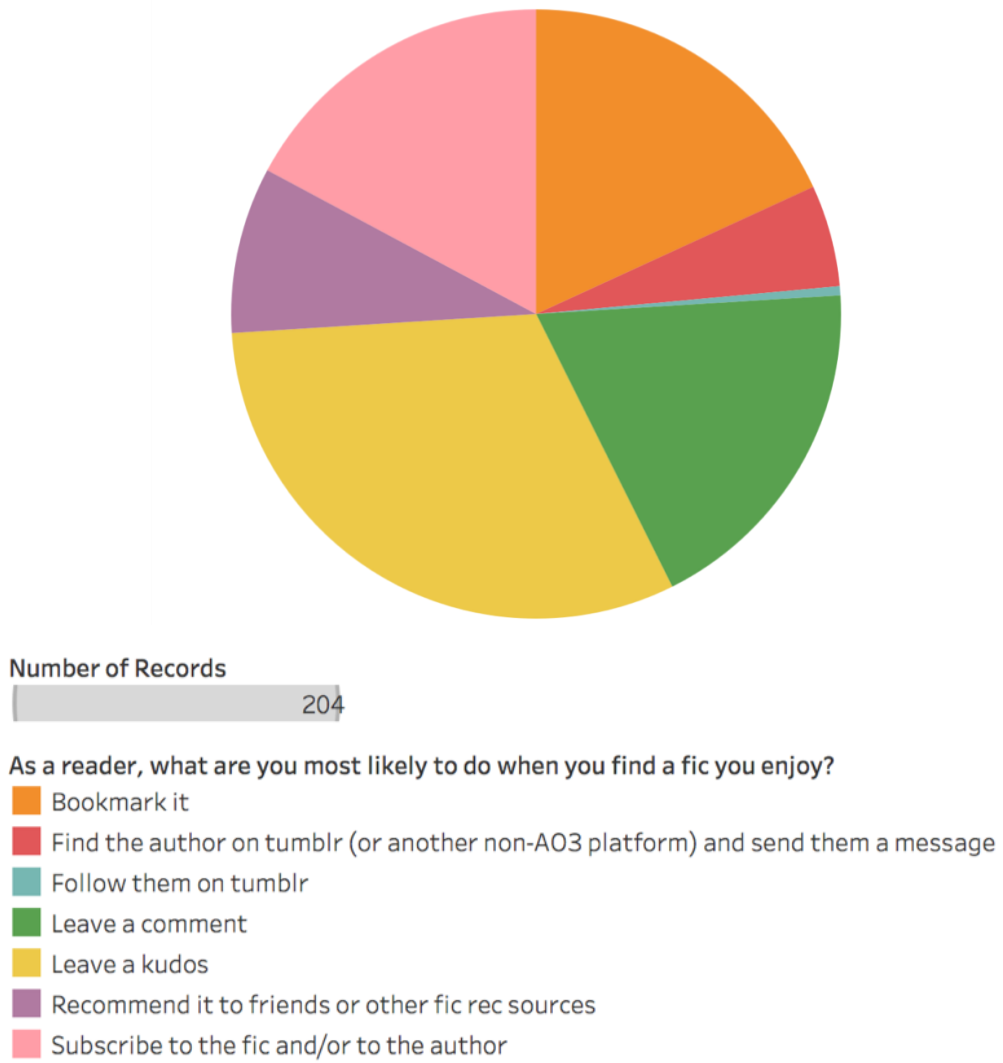|	Fandom	Percentage
	Horror	(0.52%)
	IT	(0.52%)
	The Arcana	(0.52%)
	Six of Crows	(0.52%)
	Alice in Wonderland	(0.26%)
	Servamp	(0.26%)
	Hetalia	(0.26%)
	Sanders Sides	(0.26%)
	ATLA	(0.26%)
	World of Warcraft	(0.26%)
	B99	(0.26%)
	Dragon Ball Z	(0.26%)
	Ninja Turtles	(0.26%)
	New Dagan Ronpa V3	(0.26%)
	Supernatural	(0.26%)
	Art/Commissions	(0.26%)
	Assassin's Creed	(0.26%)
	Polygon	(0.26%)
	John Mulaney	(0.26%)
	Critical Role	(0.26%)
	SKAM	(0.26%)
	ACOTAR	(0.26%)

Figure A5.   MAYD trope movement across fandoms
An extracted sample of one of the two MAYD screenshots posted to Tumblr with all fandoms listed. The post had 562,796 notes at the time of writing.

Fic Reader Appreciation Practices - AO3

Number of Records

204

As a reader, what are you most likely to do when you find a fic you enjoy?

- Bookmark it
- Find the author on tumblr (or another non-AO3 platform) and send them a message
- Follow them on tumblr
- Leave a comment
- Leave a kudos
- Recommend it to friends or other fic rec sources
- Subscribe to the fic and/or to the author

Figure A6.   AO3 fic reader appreciation practices
How fic readers personally appreciate works on Archive of Our Own.

Fic Writer Expectations of Reader Enjoyment
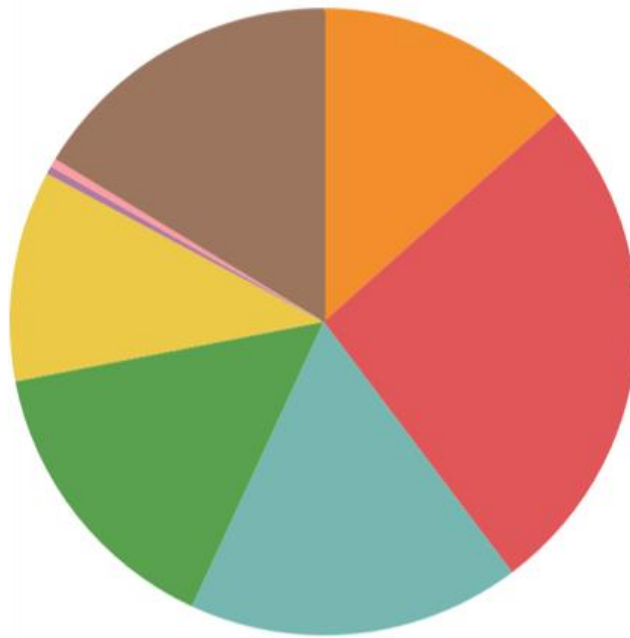
Number of Records

239

As a writer, what do you consider to be the best evidence that people like your fic?

- A high reblog to like ratio (as opposed to many likes and few reblogs)
- A lot of commentary in the tags, with compliments, excitement, etc
- Direct messages from readers (in any quantity, or an influx from what may be typical to you as a blogger)
- Gaining new followers
- Getting prompt requests (aka, proof that people want to see more of your writing)
- Reader recs
- Seeing new names in the notes
- Total note count

Figure A7.   Fic writer expectations of reader enjoyment (Tumblr)
What reader behaviours fic writers find the most flattering on Tumblr.

Fic Writer Marketing Practices - AO3

Number of Records

34

As a writer, how do you make sure your fics are seen by readers?

- My subs will see the fic or they won't; a fic/update will be seen or it won't, what happens happens
- Posts on tumblr (and other social media sites) to broadcast a new fic/update further than just AO3's searches
- Self-recs in discord channels, or other networking groups
- Specific and/or excessive tagging to appear in as many searches as possible
- Try and get on rec lists, rec blogs, or collection pages (ex.the Destiel Trope Collection; as is applicable or available at any given time, of course)

Figure A8.   Fic writer marketing practices (AO3)
How fic writers marketing their work when their primary posting platform is AO3.

Fic Reader Search Practices - AO3

Number of Records
291

As a reader, how do you best find fics to read?

- Author posts on tumblr (or other sites) advertising their new fic/update (either through tumblr searches or from authors you follow)
- Explore an author's other works after you've found and liked one of their fics
- Going through the bookmarks of people who bookmark my fics
- Going through the whole pairing tag
- Looking daily through AO3 fandom tags to see what's new; occasionally browsing fics starting from the last page of a fandom tag if I feel like it
- Personal recommendations made by friends
- Rec lists or blogs (general or matching a specific trope/tag)
- Search for fics in a pairing or story tag, sorted by an AO3 filter such as hits or kudos to find what is popular
- Search for specific story or pairing tags to fit a specific craving
- Sources for newly-posted fics such as a tumblr AO3 feed
- Specific search settings bookmarked and check it often
- Subscribe to known or favorite authors and read whatever they post

Figure A9.   How fanfiction readers search for fic on AO3.

## Reader Fic-Finding Practices
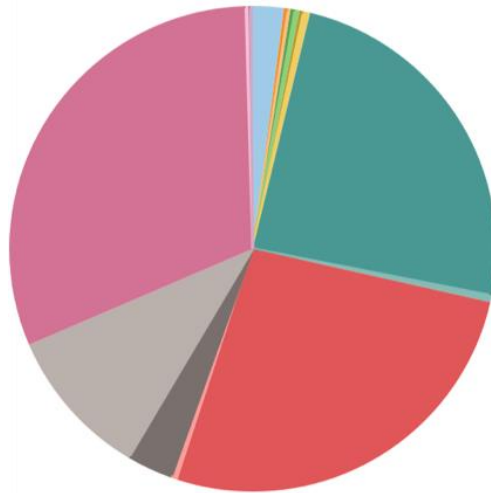
Number of Records
687

As a reader, how do you best find fics to read?

- AO3
- AO3 Tumblr Feed
- Apps
- Ask for recs
- Challenges
- Fic rec blogs
- Fic rec lists
- Follow an assortment of blogs and reading whatever is posted or reblogged onto your dash while you're online
- Follow specific authors
- Follow specific authors and reading their posted works if they happen to be on your dash while you're online
- Friend recs
- I don't seek out or read fics on tumblr
- Search fic tags on specific authors' blogs
- Search general fic or pairing tags
- Search the character
- Tagged in fics
- Wattpad

Figure A10.   Reader fic-finding practices

How Fic Writers Market Their Work
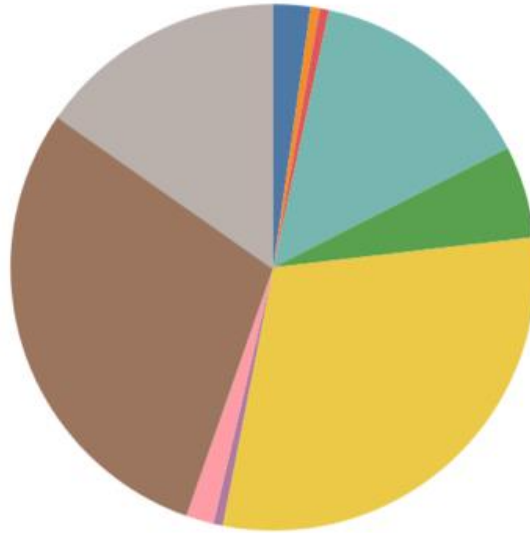
As a writer, how do you make sure your fics are seen by readers?

- ■ Cross-posting on mutiple platforms
- ■ Fic dependent
- ■ I throw links at all my friends
- ■ My followers will see the fic or they won't; I post it once then don't worry about it from then on
- ■ Network tags to be seen by a pre-set group of people
- ■ Self-reblog a few times to ensure as many followers as possible might see a new fic
- ■ Self-reblog once
- ■ Servers on Discord
- ■ Specific and/or excessive tagging to appear in as many searches as possible
- ■ Tag lists in a post to make sure anyone interested is notified when a few fic is posted

Figure A11.   How fic writers market their work on Tumblr.

katy-l-wood

I think growing up on a steady diet of fanfiction made me hate traditional book genres. Like, I don't care what the overall "theme" is. Gimme the tags. Is there character death? Sibling rivalry? Snarky best friend? That'll do way more to get me into a book than slotting it into one of a dozen strictly defined boxes that tells me almost nothing.

gallusrostromegalus

Last time I was in a bookstore I was rifling through the paperbacks going "where the hell is the Content rating? is this 'mature' or are we in for actual funtimes here? And where are the Content Warnings? whatcha got here book? You gonna get weird on me?"
So really, Ao3 has me spoiled.

wheresquidsdare

This gave me a brilliant idea for book displays at the library. #angst #enemies to lovers #plot twist

katy-l-wood

You are a good librarian!

wheresquidsdare

I only have flat shelves to work with but…. I did it.

↻ 50,834 notes   A

Figure A12a. Fic folksonomy in a library
Fans muse on genre and the possibility of organizing traditionally published books based on fannish folksonomy; a fannish librarian experiments this system in their own workplace. (Photo by wheresquidsdare, 15 March, 2018, Tumblr, https://wheresquidsdare.tumblr.com/post/171912668372/i-think-growing-up-on-a-steady-diet-of-fanfiction).

Figure A12b. Fan folksonomic tagging in book blurbs
Users argue for the efficiency and effectiveness of using folksonomic tags in book blurbs.
(lightofevolution, February 15, 2020, Tumblr,
https://lightofevolution.tumblr.com/post/190840679274/and-imagine