(En)Gendering Difference:

A fourth-wave account of K/S fanfiction as a

literature, performance, and community of affect

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I, Audrey Jean, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This study investigates how female and queer *Star Trek* fans use fanfiction on Kirk and Spock (K/S) being lovers to experience feminist feelings of belonging within fandom spaces. It is based on textual analysis of popular K/S fanfiction texts, fan writer in-depth interviews, fan reader structured short interviews, and observations of writers and readers through textual comments left on K/S fanfictions. The research's analytic focus explores norms and practices around fans' dealing with gender, sexuality, literacy and affect through K/S. Situated at the intersection of fourth-wave feminism and fourth-wave fan studies, this thesis draws new insights from an interdisciplinary approach to slash fanfiction practices (literary theory, gender performativity, affective discourse). By conceptualising slash as an affective-discursive, queer feminist gendering practice, the subsequent feelings of belonging to the fandom make visible the relationship between community and identity. Fans develop inclusive discourses as a social practice to provide respite from hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, as well as offer reworkings of it. Building on earlier research about fanfiction as literature, gender performativity, and affective gift economies, the findings show *Star Trek* fans use Kirk and Spock to develop new normative gender and sexuality discourses. Fan writer interviews illustrate how writing K/S uses media literacy to teach discourses of equality and queer positivity. Textual analysis of fanfictions and interviews of writers illustrate how K/S enables specific discourses around 'good' queer relationships and 'true' (as opposed to harmful) masculinities. Observation of reader-writer interactions in comments left on fanfictions, as well as reader interviews, illustrate how fans experience feelings of belonging to the *Star Trek* fandom through the use of specific feels culture discourses—based upon an affective gift economy. K/S fans build a network of relationships through writerly practices: this thesis exposes how fandom becomes a site of fighting against social injustices together.

Impact Statement

This study of queer and feminist fan writing, as a practice conducted within a community of like-minded people in relation to a source media from popular culture, has benefits that can be brought about both inside and outside academia. First, this thesis is adding to the still-developing scholarship of fourth-wave fan studies and fourth-wave feminism. Its inter-disciplinary theoretical approach (using affect, queer, gender, and literary theory) is a stepping stone to the future of fan studies. Moreover, its unique methodology (combining interviews with fan writers, interviews with fan readers, analysis of fic texts, and digital observation of comments left by fan readers and writers) offers a multipronged approach to fan studies combining qualitative research and textual analysis with online observations to better understand the experiences of the fandom community around key fandom artefacts. The academic impact of conceptualising slash as a hybrid genre (performed literature), of having discovered 4 types of affective discourse within fic paratexts (comments), and of having defined 7 norms around the performance of gender and sexuality in slash will be brought about through dissemination of this thesis as book, which I hope to publish.

Second, the benefits this thesis can offer outside academia are also vital. Fanfiction research is inherently connected to user communities and this research and others have found that fans want more diversity on the screen, as well as more social equity in storyline, and they attempt to remedy it by writing and reading fanfiction. TV series creators and filmmakers are already finding inspiration in writing content that is more tailored to fans—like the recent adaptations of *Heartstopper* (Alice Oseman's 2016 webcomic to a 2018 publication as graphic novel to a 2022 TV series) and *Red, White and Royal Blue* (Casey McQuiston's 2019 book, adapted in 2023 as a movie) which portray queer slash relationships front and centre, re-using tropes from slash fanfiction and putting the characters in a feminist light. This thesis shows how fanfiction is involved in the advancement of social rights and diversity; therefore, recognising slash communities as consumers and becoming aware of a source media's potential to further their cause, is important. In my current role as Research Analyst in Media and Entertainment I am feeding these insights into the industry. This process is about recognizing demand and using insights to show how diversity in representation is both socially just and profitable. This thesis shows the demand not only for gay representation, but in representation of intersectional identities, which I will continue to disseminate through podcasts and blog posts. There is a need to generate dialogue between media makers and media consumers when it comes to diversity in storylines and characters, which this thesis argues, and which I will be aiming to continue. In addition, collaborating with non-academics, I plan on using the findings of this research to develop fourth wave fan studies and connect with my identity as aca-fan, to disseminate the thesis insights within the communities I am a part of; making an impact.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1

Sobre and Scaah (2021). *Illogical: A Spock Odyssey — Inktober 2021* [Ink drawing]. tumblr. https://lejoursobre.tumblr.com/post/682558539398529024/new-trektober-done-with-scaahart-yes-were-late

Figure 2

Sweet-Sugarcubbe (2023). *Nocturnal* [Digital drawing]. Archive Of Our Own. https://archiveofourown.org/works/46627711

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Figure 1
Illogical: A Spock Odyssey — Inktober 2021

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1)   Problem Statement

Fandom is born out of the mixing of two words: 'fan' is the abbreviated form of 'fanatic' and 'dom' comes from 'domain' (Jenkins, 1992: 12). Fandom involves a fan community, which focuses its attention on a person or an object, and as a result fosters specific discourses that fans choose to take part in—as a community. Indeed, discourse here means a "socially shared way of talking about a particular issue or object", and "different fandoms are associated with different kinds of discourse" (Duffett, 2013: 19). Following this, a 'fan domain' or fandom—as a social entity—happens when fans partake in specific practices and, through these practices, develop discourses that use the object of their passion as vector. In this thesis, I am entering the *Star Trek* fandom, and more specifically its main vector: the relationship between Starship Captain James T. Kirk and his second in command, Science Officer S'chn T'gai Spock. There are specific discourses at play around these characters and the *Star Trek* futuristic universe at large such as gender equality, utopic desires, diversity and inclusion politics, rejection of toxic masculinity, or queer subversion which this thesis argues are essential to the understanding of fandom as a queer feminist social practice.

(En)Gendering Difference: A fourth-wave account of K/S fanfiction as a literature, performance, and community of affect is a qualitative study of fan experiences of literary, gendered, queer, and affective practices within the *Star Trek* fandom. Through textual analysis, interviews of fans, and online observation, I investigate how the K/S subculture developed writerly practices interpreting Kirk and Spock (the male, main characters of *Star Trek*) as being romantically and sexually involved: the basis of fan writing practices called fanfiction. This thesis thus looks at K/S fanfiction, inscribing itself in the large corpus of academic works on *Star Trek* since the 1970s.

Initially aired from 1966 to 1969, *Star Trek* has ever since amassed a quantity of spin-offs, side shows, movies, remakes, and sequels which all have contributed to the creation of a meta-universe still watched and evolving as of today. K/Sers have created the term 'slash'

(the first published slash fic in a zine, and named as so, was *A Fragment Out of Time* by Diane Marchant in 1974), as they used a **/** as a synonym for romantic involvement between K (Kirk) and S (Spock). Today, fans use the term and symbol 'slash' as standard for all queer romantic pairings or 'ships' within fandoms, be they *Star Trek, Harry Potter* or other media. Thus focusing on fanfiction as queer feminist social practice, *(En)Gendering Difference* has been informed by two lines of enquiry: How does fanfiction challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality in mainstream media content? What does the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction?

1.2)   Overview of Methodology and Design of Study

I chose to study this particular fandom (*Star Trek*) and relationship (Kirk and Spock) because of their rich history (considered as the first contemporary media fandom and first slash pairing in fan studies), ongoing popularity, personal involvement, and because of the feminist discourses at play within K/S fanfiction practices. Using Kirk and Spock as a focus in my research allowed me to fill gaps in slash fanfiction knowledge, notably adding to discourses of affect, gender, and literature in slash.

My study took place over a 6-year period; my qualitative methodology was based on the development of a digital ethnography and the theoretical stance of analysing fan texts as literary artefacts (and hence the fans as literary producers) through critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2016; Gee, 2001; Jones, 2012; Wodak and Savaski, 2018; Fairclough, [1995] 2013). I focused on the fan subject's positionality (from where are they taking a stand?), embeddedness (how are they involved in the community?), and situatedness (what can their position reveal about their experience?). Indeed, "the integration of (critical) discourse studies with ethnography allows insight into the complex working of many spontaneous discursive practices in various institutional and other sites in ways that go far beyond the use of just one methodology when analyzing the impact of [micro-interactions]" (Wodak and Savaski, 2018: 107). Following fourth wave fan studies and their turn to intersectionality and 'inter-disciplinarism', I argue the mix of methods for data collection—

along with CDA and a turn to affect (Wetherell, 2012) in digital ethnography—contributed to a better understanding of slash fanfiction experiences.

To this end, I have combined in-depth interviews of 5 fan writers, structured interviews of 15 fan readers, textual analysis of 5 fanfictions, and observation of fan writer-reader exchanges through textual analysis of 84 comments left on said fanfictions (32 threads and 19 standalone comments). I privileged digital collection in order to stay in the communicative mode of the fans, i.e., chatting—where I was able to account for multiple data inputs, immersed in online fandom culture.

To begin with, I found 5 fanfictions that were amongst the most popular on AO3 (the go-to online fanfiction-hosting website, publicly available) within the K/S section: *Sha Ka Ree* (by Liss), *The Truth* (by FalsePremise), *The World Well Lost* (by Anna), *When The Stars Align* (by Pensive), and *strive seek find yield* (by Waldorph). I then undertook a semi-structured chat interview with each of these fanfiction writers, based in Europe and the USA. Going further, I selected 84 comments left by fans on one of these 5 fanfictions, as observation of the dynamic between fanfiction readers and writers. Then, from these 84 comments, I selected 15 fanfiction readers and did a structured interview over email with them. The texts, observations, and interviews were cross-analysed in order to trace the queer, affective, and feminist experiences and discourses that took place through writing, reading, and commenting within the K/S community.

With this analysis I make claims about K/S practices around gender, affective economies, and professional writer identities. I argue there is an under-theorisation of fic as literature, an under-theorisation of comments left on fic as affective-discursive practices, and a gender-essentialist theorisation of fic that sees Kirk and Spock as perfect/tender men (Penley, 1997 in particular) in a 'male' body—neglecting the insights of queer theory and Butler's theory of gender as performance. Butler's theory, I offer, can illuminate fic as a 'gendering practice', a place where the performance and trouble of gender is highlighted. In the field of fan studies, it has been often said that slash is subversive and feminist (Russ, 2014; Penley, 1997; Hellekson and Busse 2014). My research offers an analysis of slash fanfiction as a literary work situated in feminist pedagogies, and re-centres fics within the fields of affect and queer studies—which look beyond slash as making perfect/tender men.

Moreover, slash fandom has been labelled (through extensive ethnography from Jenkins, 1992, Bacon-Smith, 1992, and Penley, 1997 especially) as being almost-exclusively

made by heterosexual female fans. More recently queer men and women, lesbians, and non-binary fans have been recognised as being an important part of slash fandom—through the work of Anne Jamison (2013)—yet their identities and contributions remain underrepresented in fan studies (Jamison, 2013; Busse, 2017). My thesis explores slash through queer and affective frameworks, using Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity ([1990] 2007) and Wetherell's concept of embodied affect (2012) as key references, but also connects these frameworks by combining theories of feminist fanfiction and fourth-wave feminism (Russ, [1985] 2014 and slash as feminist porn; Hannell, 2020 and fandom as intersectional; Cochrane, 2013 and intersectional feminism). Bringing up the evolution in fan studies (from being seen as a space populated by straight female fans to a space populated by diversely queer fans) fuelled the evolution of fic scholarship (from being seen as a straight feminist practice to being seen as a queer, intersectional practice). This is why I argue that inter-disciplinarity is needed, and why it is the foundation of *(En)Gendering Difference*—to really understand the richness of the diversity in fan experiences.

1.3) Background and Significance of Study: What is fanfiction? Why does it matter?

According to Keane, "apart from simply watching, fans purchase, engage with, appropriate, share, communicate, debate and create. They pre-view and constantly re-view their chosen texts. […] In short, they are regarded as more actively active than mainstream audiences" (Keane, 2007: 83). By taking part in communal practices (to engage with chosen texts) and experiencing a belonging to the fan community, a fan is involved in a continuous process of reading, sharing, viewing and, for some, writing. Fans experience, through these practices, a communal feeling that is a marker of fandom and that sets them apart from mainstream audiences. There would be no fandom without a dedicated interest in, and love for, the object or topic at hand: in this case, the *Star Trek* universe. Going further, "fandom [is] a specific kind of participatory culture with its own history and traditions" (Scott, 2013: xxii)— fans indeed participate in and add to the culture of their fandom, inscribing themselves in the history of their community, feeding into a network of people sharing the same interests. In this thesis, the concept of *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2006) is key: how fans are active participants and builders of alternative cultures (such as the *Star Trek* fandom) and use 'poached' elements from the mass media to re-work them (Jenkins, 1992, 2006). My goal is

to contribute to the fan studies corpus through an exploration of new specific norms and fan-led traditions which have developed in the *Star Trek* fandom. As Scott argues, "fan communities were among the first to experiment with ways they could pool knowledge, build on each other's expertise, and trade insights within networked communities" (Scott, 2013: xxv). Within the *Star Trek* fandom, I look at a number of ways knowledge was pooled and insights have been created—in the last decade—and I explore this through a queer and affective lens which previous fan scholars have not. Indeed, I draw upon Butler's theoretical framework of the heterosexual matrix, gender performativity and its subsequent troubling; as well as develop a theoretical framework around fandom's affect economy (combining Jenkins's gift economy, 2006, and Wetherell's discursive affect, 2012).

This thesis looks into a practice of *Star Trek* fandom in particular: that of fanfiction. Fanfiction is also traditionally called fan fiction in academia, as well as fic or fanfic in fandom spaces. I chose not to use the space between fan and fiction, hence calling it *fanfiction*, as a deliberate choice to bridge the gap between the identity of *fan* and the inherent theoretical frameworks around *fiction*, as well as to follow fan vernacular instead of academic praxis— indeed, I was part of the *Star Trek* fandom well before I started my doctoral studies.

As Hellekson and Busse (2014: 1) note: "Anyone who has ever fantasized about an alternate ending to a favourite book or imagined the back story of a minor character in a favourite film has engaged in creating a form of fan fiction." As the name indicates, fanfiction is a form of fiction created by fans for fans, based on pre-existing story-worlds (such as *Star Trek*) and characters (such as Kirk and Spock), telling a new story about these, often focusing on a specific relationship between two characters—a romantic couple. Each fanfiction adds to the corpus of fan writing, highly networked and remixed by the community. Fic, according to fan scholar Abigail Derecho, is a subgenre of a larger, older genre of literature that is generally called "derivative" or "appropriative" (2006: 63). It is the creation of fan text in the form of a story; the fan writer, member of a fandom, responds to the canon by using its universe and characters in a fan retelling of the media: a derivation or appropriation. It is "entertainment and analysis, original and derivative" (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 20); "fic authors posit the question 'what if' to every possible facet of a source text" (Derecho, 2006: 76), thus creating multiple alternative universes where different stories can be played out. In effect, "fanfiction writers often see themselves as participants in world building, adding to the wealth of narratives about their favorite characters" (Graham, 2014: 131).

Fanfiction is thus the creation of a story appropriating the characters and story-world of a given media. It takes a variety of forms (short story, novel length, saga) and is often organised by specific rating (explicit, mature, teens, general audiences) and labelling systems (what type of relationships, which tropes, which specific story-world…). Its core elements, though, boil down to the relationships between the characters, called pairings or ships (from relation*ships*). Shipping is "supporting certain pairings at the expense of others" and ships are "forceful segmentations of a fandom or fan fiction community," longing for the concretisation of a particular relationship (Driscoll, 2006: 85) which is often not part of the canon (or more rarely about already established canon couples). These segmentations of stories depending on a couple, or 'ship', in turn segment fandoms into sub-communities: for example, you could be a part of the Kirk/Spock fandom or of the Spock/Nyota fandom, both belonging to the *Star Trek* fandom. "Many authors write their fandom's OTP, or "one true pairing", exclusively" (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 11). Fanfiction writers and readers have created precise terms to better classify the fan works and tropes at play in the stories, thus helping the reader find what they look for in a fanfiction—especially on fanfiction hosting websites, which have an arborescence that organises fics into specific categories.

Key fandom scholar Henry Jenkins has discussed fandom in length and, more particularly, what can be called the 'media fandom'—"an amorphous but still identifiable grouping of enthusiasts of film and television which calls itself 'media fandom'" (1992: 1). I have dedicated my research to the *Star Trek* media fandom, itself composed of a multitude of sub-communities (depending on 'ships', specific canon storylines, etc.) that fans opt in or out of depending on their preferences—indeed, as Jenkins states and which is a key tenet in fan studies, "fandom remains constantly in flux" (1992: 3).

My focus in this thesis revolves around brash, kind, smart, rebellious Starfleet Captain James Kirk and his Science Officer, clever, logical, emotionally repressed (Vulcan) Lieutenant Commander Spock. On the TV show and films Kirk and Spock are seemingly not romantically involved, yet nurture a deep bond often labelled as friendship. Ever since Kirk (played by William Shatner, then Chris Pine) and Spock (played by Leonard Nimoy, then Zachary Quinto) crossed paths on the USS Enterprise, Kirk's starship, many fans have interpreted their relationship as something more than what was shown on TV: instead of friends, couldn't they also be lovers? Hence the beginning in the late 60s of transformative works called slash fanfiction: in the worlds of the fans, Kirk and Spock could be together—not just that, but also

undergoing dangerous trials, warzones, loss and pain on the flip side of thriving, feeling love and building a family—and, like in Diane Marchant's original work (1974), take pleasure in each other.

Ratings and "tagging" systems are very important in the categorisation of fanfiction, both for archive purposes and to inform the reader of its contents. On the most used fan fiction hosting website, AO3 (*Archive of Our Own*), ratings are the following: General Audiences, Teen and Up Audiences, Mature, and Explicit (with adult content such as violence or sex). Tags (or hashtags), used to describe the content of the fan work, often label the type of relationship and the various tropes or subgenres within the fan fiction. A fan reader may, thus, orient their research by looking for the tags they like best. Subgenres of fan fiction as constructed by Hellekson and Busse include: Hurt/Comfort (a character is injured and another character comforts them), deathfic (major character death), Alternate Universe (where familiar characters are dropped in a new setting), crossover (where characters from one fandom are dropped in another fandom's world), PWP (porn without plot, or plot? what plot?), and various other subgenres such as kink-related ones with BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism) (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 10-11). These categories all exist on AO3.

Slash fanfiction stories "posit a same-sex relationship" based on perceived homoeroticism in canon, according to Hellekson and Busse (2006: 10, a stance on homoeroticism that has been debated since the beginning of fan scholarship and that will be explored in this thesis). It is the pairing of two characters, often male, and the depiction of their story as seen through the fan writer's eyes. *Star Trek*'s Kirk/Spock fic is known by fans and scholars as the first 'ship' (following zines published in the 1970s, such as *Grup)* and hence has been academically discussed at length (Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Penley, 1997).

Fan activities are, nowadays, spreading on the Internet through blogging platforms and social networks such as Tumblr. Yet, "the fan-run not-for-profit *Organization for Transformative Works* (OTW) protects the cultural and legal legitimacy of fandom and fan creative work" (Stein, 2015: 131) with its famous website *Archive of our Own*. By hosting the majority of fanfictions written on fandoms and pairings since its beta launch in 2009, it now assembles the most popular corpus of fanfiction ever made—its predecessor, FanFiction.net, being launched in 1998 yet less user-friendly and having experienced a purge of adult content in 2012, has lost its appeal to many slash fans (Pellegrini, 2012).

As of May 7th, 2023, AO3 (Archive of Our Own) is comprised of more than 57,900 fandoms, 5,757,000 users, and 11,070,000 works. *Star Trek* is itself composed of 95,659 works and K/S of 16,698 works; ranging from more than 500,000 words to just a few words. These numbers show just how popular and influential fanfiction is in today's fan digital landscape. K/S fic, often mature or explicit, depicting scenes of queer sex and intimacy, perpetuates a sacrosanct premise: Kirk and Spock are in love and desire each other.

This focus on K/S, constant since the late 1960s, birthed an uncountable number of fanfictions—in paper zines before the arrival of the World Wide Web, and not all of them published—which inspired today's openly available corpus of fics on AO3. While fanfiction has been extensively studied and theorised, I argue it has been very rarely been studied as a corpus of literature (Derecho, 2006, Stasi, 2006, Kaplan, 2006) alongside other published, recognised professional novelists. In this thesis I position fans as literary producers *alongside* professional authors as creating important, valued affective contributions. Indeed, often seen in mainstream culture as being a women's practice, similar to romance novels and rom-com films, fanfiction has had issues being taken 'seriously' by non-fan, non-queer, non-female scholars. There is a lack of scholarship on fic being akin to professional literature: fan studies have studied fic as in relation to its source media, taking out the possibility of fic being analysed by itself and on its own terms. The quality of fic as literary work (different to the source media) is not seen as socially relevant. This is problematic, as many fans claim fic is similar to published novels and short stories (as is evident both in my interviews and through my own fandom experience), that is to say, recognised literary works.

My thesis aims to make three types of contributions. First, while slash fic is often dubbed feminist work (Jenkins, 1992, Jamison, 2013, Hellekson and Busse, 2006, 2014), it is so because it showcases a gay relationship and is written by women (or minorities) for women (or minorities). My thesis fills a gap as it analyses in more depth the norms around gender and sexuality, how they are being reworked, and whether this disrupts heterosexuality and gender binaries or not (Butler, [1990] 2007, 2001, 2016). Second, we have also seen a turn to the economies of slash fic; such as Jenkins' gift economies (Jenkins et al., 2013), and how affect is explored in fans' reaction to transformative works (Stein, 2015). Building on this scholarship, I argue there remains a gap in how fan writing practices are indeed affective. My thesis addresses this gap by looking at affect as a discursive, embodied practice (Wetherell, 2012) in slash fic. Third, given the online nature of today's fic it is important to explore issues of

authorship, professionalism, and writerly intent; yet, there is no scholarship concerning slash as a genre distinct from traditional professional writing and publishing that does not relies on the concept of transformative work. I draw upon Coppa's insightful take on fic as drama (2017) and Derecho's theory of fic as literature (2006) in order to explore how fic is akin to a professional writing practice, yet fed through affective economies of feedback, hence operating in a parallel kind of economy to professional writing and publishing; also, how this contributes to new feminist worlds.

1.4)   Organisation of Thesis and Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 is my literature review. In this chapter, I argue that as fan studies have progressed through four phases since their inception in the 1980s; the gaps around slash fic (in terms of gender, affect, and literary theory) I found in each of the first three phases can be addressed in the current, fourth wave of fan studies (Hannell, 2020, Busse, 2017). While fan studies have evolved, so has feminism, and I support Hannell's claim that fourth-wave feminism and fourth wave fan studies are interconnected. I use this to draw a framework of analysis based on intersectionality: intersections of fandom with other social spheres such as culture or politics, fan labour, pedagogy, and activism (Busse, 2017). Because of this I use gender, queer, literary, and affect theory alongside fan scholarship to develop my argument around the fourth wave's theorisation of fic. Indeed, the turn to affect has been missing from fan studies; I argue that looking at fandom through a turn to embodied affect specifically—in relation with gender, sexuality, and pedagogy—furthers the insights offered by the fourth wave. Additionally, the question of slash fans' desires is already deeply enmeshed in feminism (Russ, 1985; Penley, 1997; Lamb and Veith, 1986). The fan experience deals with desire in gendered ways; while involved with feminism, it can also be illuminated by new perspectives offered by contemporary queer theory, which I apply in this thesis. With this in mind, why do current fans enjoy writing and reading about K/S? I undertook this thesis in order to develop answers to this question.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical frameworks shaping this thesis. I argue that an understanding of fandom's fourth wave needs to focus on an intersectional, intertextual framework that analyses fic as text, performance, and community. I thus unfold here the interweaving of fan, affect, literary, gender and queer studies that inform this thesis: seeing

fic as literary text, as gender and sexuality performance, and as affective community. At first, I present my understanding of affect—which is at play throughout the entire thesis—as embodied and discursive practice, building up on Margaret Wetherell's work (2012). Developing this theoretical framework, I focus my thesis on feelings of belonging: how fans experience their belonging to the K/S fandom, how this affect is interlinked with texts, which are in relationships with other fans. To this end, I adopt Debra Ferreday's work in *Online Belongings* (2009)—taking online interactions as texts. My addition to this theoretical framework is that these texts can be analysed through critical discourse analysis, and read as affective-discursive practices (fanfictions, comments, even my interviews) that are normative. I then lay out the other theoretical framework that works in tandem with embodied affect: Butler's notion of gender performativity, and how—by reading fan discursive expressions of gender and sexuality in fic—the heterosexual matrix can be troubled ([1990] 2007). My intersection of theoretical frameworks works then with fan studies theories of feels culture (Stein, 2015), gift economy (Jenkins, 2006), interpretive communities (Busse, 2017; Fish, 1980) and decoding (Woledge, 2005; Hall, 1991), then fic as literary or dramatic archive (Derecho, 2006; De Kosnik, 2015; Coppa, 2006).

My methodology is in **chapter 4,** where I investigate affect and community in online spaces: through documentation of fic texts, interviews with fic writers and readers, and observation of fan interaction through comments left on fic. Indeed, interviews with fans have been lacking in fan studies, with fan scholars taking already available data (online threads, zines, fics…) almost exclusively. Then, as an aca-fan myself, meaning fan (since 2008) and academic, I describe how my involvement in the *Star Trek* fandom and in K/S fic communities (since 2012) has shaped this thesis. This chapter explains how that shaping took place, and I go in depth into how my research methods and methodology are relevant and original by using insights from my own fandom experience. Using digital ethnography and analysing my findings along Critical Discourse Studies helps me make sense of the various discourses at play in K/S: between the characters and between the fans. It circles back to affect as I follow Margaret Wetherell's theory of affect as discursive (2012)—a practice, a repeated process, which allows me to understand fan 'affective discourses' through their fic practices. I also look into the ethics and reflexive nature of my work, which is indeed crucial as I am dealing with sensitive content (many of the fics sampled contain explicit sexual situations).

Chapter 5 sets out a discussion of fic as intentional writing practice, focusing on 5 fic writers and their in-depth interviews. Considering the theoretical divide (Busse, 2017) on fic as a specific textual genre, either 'drama' (Coppa, 2006) or 'literature' (Derecho, 2006), I ask how fans consider their own writing practices, and then define fic writing practices in the light of cultural theory. I argue, in chapter 5, that understanding slash fic as a hybrid genre of 'performed literature', a bridge between drama and literary novels, allows me to uncover fans' creation of an archive of performances (De Kosnik, 2015) within the K/S fandom. Through this archive, I make visible what kinds of pedagogies and politics are embedded in popular K/S fic as 'performed literature'. By theorising a bridge between drama and literary novels, I accessed features that pushed my enquiry further: the importance of bodies in space (embodying gender performance) and the production of certain kinds of viable bodies (Butler, 1993), through the hybrid nature of storytelling and characterisation—making visible what are considered 'good' norms (Woledge, 2006) around the decoding of Kirk and Spock's relationship on screen, and re-encoding of them in fic writing (Hall, 1980; Woledge, 2005). I argue that the K/S fandom is an interpretive community (Fish, 1980), where repetition of 'good' interpretive norms and polysemy of voices enables a meta-archive—registering reader-writer contracts (Busse, 2017) through fic. I then argue that fic writing practices, with these reader-writer contracts, are pedagogical: slash, as a political practice, teaches fans about media literacy, or how to read *Star Trek,* to then approach literacy in gender performativity and what makes up 'good' relationships. This goes beyond issues of resistance to subtext (whether K/S is visible in the original media or just a purely imaginative premise: Gwenllian Jones, 2005; Jenkins, 1992). Through the 5 fan writer interviews, I argue that there are various stages of comfort and awareness when fan writers are confronted with the pedagogical nature of their work (ambiguous, discreet, or self-aware and politically motivated). I conclude that fic, as a communal practice within an interpretive community, creates a "sense of identification" (Ferreday, 2009: 30) in the fan—as they develop and/or enable skills of media literacy along other fans, feeling that they belong due to their participation in an archive of K/S performances.

Chapter 6 maps out how the performance of gender and sexuality (Butler, [1990] 2007, 1993), as unfolding in the 15 fic texts I sampled, is creating norms (Ferreday, 2009) about 'good' gender and 'good' sexuality, purposefully positioning Kirk and Spock as a relief against hegemonic/toxic masculinity (Connell, 1995). In effect, gender and sexuality are produced

within slash texts through specific practices and processes, sometimes clearly referencing authorial intent, and sometimes outside of what has been self-reflected in the writer interviews. In this chapter I argue fans translate and retheorise gender (and sexuality) into something pleasurable, building their community around new kinds of normative knowledge about identity, gender, and feminism. By doing this, fans are creating what they call 'true' masculinity, which Kirk and Spock embody. I look at slash fandom through a repurposed concept of 'intimate publics' (Berlant, 2008), with fans writing for pleasure against hegemonic violence not 'in proximity' to the political (Berlant's theory implying that the political is managed by elites reproducing their superiority) but as a feminist 'political practice' itself (hence shifting the understanding of the political into a subversive process). In effect, I claim that the fans' personal experiences with gender—moving away from slash spaces as cishetero female only—emulates with the way gender is created as a result in fic. I conclude there is a set of norms around what fans call 'true' (good, healthy) masculinity and 'good' (queer) relationships. By looking at how fans blend normative and non-normative concepts to create a take on K/S that shows a multiplication, challenging, and questioning of gender categories, I draw upon: instances of hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007 and Paechter, 2018), homonormativity (Duggan, 2002, 2003), self-perception and labelling, issues around consent, the queer gaze (a take on Mulvey's male gaze, 1999), and how sex roles can be challenged during K/S sex—ending with the case study of a fic's gender dissidence in the Ashtahli (a fan-created alien race with sequential hermaphroditism). By writing Kirk and Spock in this way, I argue fans reject body-violence; a violence perpetrated by entities such as the state, gender, race, sexuality, and all facets of hegemonic power. They are creating new ways of talking about gender—assigning it, performing it (Butler, 1988), doing it—along a queer axis: I claim the normative discourses fans enact by doing this gendering need to be analysed to make sense of current experiences of K/S slash.

In **chapter 7**, I study the relationship between the fan readers and fic writers—taking my sample of 15 fan reader interviews and 51 fan comments as basis for my theorisation of affect in slash spaces, echoing Ferreday's "online belongings" (2009). I argue that texts' ability to affect and be affected, be it fics or comments left on fics, is directly linked to Stein's 'feels culture' (2015) or fans making public their intimate emotions. Highlighting norms in the materialisation and circulation of affect within fandom as it appears in comments, chapter 7 argues that the coming together of Jenkins' gift economy in fandom (2013) and of Margaret

Wetherell's affect economy (2012) can show how Stein's initial feels theory encompasses four specific types of feels culture practices. It concludes that taking part in these practices creates feelings of online belonging. By focusing on how fans were writing their experience of fic reading, how they interacted with each other to express affect as a digitally discursive practice, I outline these four types of discourse fans use to convey their 'feels': feelspeak, dramafeels, truefeels, and profeels. Feelspeak, I argue, is similar to Stein's initial concept of feels: a very effusive and highly performative discourse, using punctuation, capitalisation, and emojis as key vector for affect. Now moving on from Stein's initial theory I argue that dramafeels convey affect by performing it: there is a dramatisation of both bodily reactions and overwhelming emotions in response to a fic. Truefeels, then, are serious tokens of appreciation: they use a specific 'feels discourse' to convey thanks by relating the reading experience to personal circumstances (sharing intimate; 'true' moment of their lives and how they were impacted by the reading of the fic). I finish with profeels, or a discourse of professionalism: acknowledging the labour around writing, and using literary/social commentary of the story to convey that the fic has affected them. With this last analysis chapter, I conclude that what appears within comments and fan texts, as an exchange of reasons why fans liked a fic, or an exchange of thanks, or an exchange of reasons why they transform the original media, is in fact a vehicle for the circulation of affect—which is inherently tied to the spreading of media, circling back to feelings of belonging (Ferreday, 2009).

With this outline of key enquiries under investigation in my thesis *(En)Gendering Difference: A fourth-wave account of K/S fanfiction as a literature, performance, and community of affect*, the design of my methodology and theoretical framework, information about the background of the study, and to finish a section on the organisation of my thesis, I now move forward onto my literature review.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review is organised around the four waves of fan studies, looking at the key influential concepts which have informed this thesis and considering these waves alongside feminist theory. First, there was a stretch of time between the beginnings of media fandom (including the airing of *Star Trek* from 1966 to 1969) and the beginnings of fan studies (in the mid-1980s) which gave the *Star Trek* fandom time to organise around communities of shared practices (developing zines and conventions for example) later studied by fan scholars. *Star Trek* was the starting point of fandom in the contemporary sense, of fanfic, and of fan studies, as communities of fans organized around the TV show—putting this thesis within the continuation of fan studies.

In this chapter, I look into each wave of fan studies and how they allow me to use specific concepts that make sense of my data, alongside waves of feminism. The first wave of fan studies, from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s (around the overlap of second and third wave feminism), started debates around gender and sexuality—as well as feminism—in slash fic. Building upon cultural studies which examined the audience response to popular media by fans during the 1980s and early 1990s, fan studies draw on work by cultural theorists Stuart Hall (1980) or John Fiske (1992). Going further Joanna Russ, in 1985, inscribed slash (taking the term created by fans into academic discourse) in sex positive feminism as 'pornography for women by women', which informs this thesis: I look at fourth-wave sex positive feminism to conceptualise gender and sexuality in chapter 6. Fic has also been theorised as a gendering practice, which I argue created norms around the fostering of 'good' relationships: initiated by Lamb and Veith ([1986] 2014), fan scholarship has interpreted Kirk and Spock as a couple of equals (male and male). I also use this wave of concepts in my discussion of the performance of gender (chapter 6) as I look at which norms Kirk and Spock currently embody—showing what it means to be in a 'good' relationship today through specific fan embodiments of gender. Then, the last concept from the first wave of fan studies important for my thesis is Jenkins' textual poaching (1992): a conceptualisation of the fan practices

bridging relationships between canon and fanon[1]. Jenkins' analysis of slash introduces the practice (alongside fan scholars seeing slash as female pornography, as androgynous romance, as fantasy identification, or as homosocial desire), which I build upon to construct my approach to the relationship between canon and fanon in chapter 5.

The second wave of fan studies, from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, asserted slash as a queer practice that was becoming mainstream (Gray et al., 2007). These were the first steps of fan communities into the digital world, requiring fan scholars to conceptualise community and fan interaction, like Hellekson and Busse in 2006. I look into these fan interactions in chapter 7. The second wave of fan studies also enabled me to think about fic as a feminist, but also queer gendering practice, especially with Constance Penley's future men (1997): she theorised Kirk and Spock as queer men because women in media are too scarce—and it is difficult to imagine a future where female bodies are equally powerful as male bodies, with the weight of the heteropatriarchy on today's female bodies. 'Future men' are Penley's response to why K/S is relevant today. I look into this in chapter 6. To finish, the second wave also sustained fan scholars like Elizabeth Woledge. She introduced the concept of *decoding* in fan studies*,* after Stuart Hall (Hall 1980; Woledge, 2005), in order to focus on the interpretive strategies of fans, which are made visible through fans' transformative texts (fic). This underlines my rationale for chapter 5 where I look at fic texts through the lens of pedagogy: how fic writers use interpretive strategies to teach readers about gender and media literacy.

The third wave of fan studies, from the mid-2000 to the early 2010s, saw an updating of Jenkins' account of participatory culture: looking at the connectedness of media, he conceptualised the convergence of media across digital platforms and how that pertained to fan communities (2006). This is useful for understanding my discussion of the relationship between reader and writer (chapter 7), as it looks into the gap between community practices (writing fics online) and affective discourses unfolding across platforms (about online fics). Another concept that I have built upon is Woledge's notion of intimatopia (2006), and how this hybrid of intimacy and erotica has taken Joanna Russ' initial 1985 conceptualisation of fic as sex positive feminism into the mid-2000s.

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[1] Knowledge based off unofficial sources, unlike canon. Fanon is widely accepted amongst fans, often creating tropes which are massively used in fandom.

To finish with, the fourth wave of fan studies—from the mid-2010s to today—has inscribed interdisciplinary approaches into scholarship. Following fourth-wave feminism, Busse (2017) and Hannell (2020) consider intersectionality at the centre of their conceptualisation of fanfic: contemporary slash fic is a direct participation in fourth wave fan studies and operates as a form of fourth-wave feminist practice. This current wave has also identified a gap in the evolving demographics of fandom. Anne Jamison (2013) has theorised on how queer, male, female, people of colour, and non-English speaking fans have been actively present in current online fandoms in contrast to traditional participation in fandom (previously conceived of as white straight male for non-slash *Star Trek* fans and white straight female for K/S). My own sample for this thesis' data collection reflects such a change in both perception and makeup of fandom: two of my writer participants are lesbians, one is non-binary, one is straight, and one is bisexual.

Coming back to the origins of fandom, fan behaviours can be dated to the early 1900s with Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, where "avid readers helped to create the very modern practice of fandom" (Keishin Armstrong, 2016: 1) by publishing pastiches. After *Sherlock Holmes*, the birth of the star system in Hollywood during the 1910s attracted the first 'official' fans (Duffett, 2013: 6). Then, when Hugo Gernsblack—who was the founder of the seminal sci-fi magazine *Amazing Stories* and other pulps—began to print letters from readers in his publications in the 1920s (Lampley, 2014: 193), fans started to self-identify as such. Then, the rise of TV and cinema came to define fandom 40 years later. Media and sci-fi fans organised communities with like-minded people, slowly developing and expanding, especially with *Star Trek* which aired on US television from September 8, 1966, to June 3, 1969. They created mailing lists (to circulate zines and fics) and coalesced physically by attending conventions around media fandom. Yet, alongside this development of fandom into its current contemporary forms (thanks to the circulation of media hugely enabled by the Internet), academic interest has also developed into a branch of social sciences: fan studies. Fan studies have evolved alongside fandom since their inception in the mid 1980s (coming out of the movement of cultural studies which examined the reception of popular media by fans) and have led to the development of a variety of theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon of fandom, which, I argue, follow waves as fandom grew into the social phenomena it is today. In this literature review, I will show how each wave of fan studies can be linked to the theories I employ for an understanding of my own *Star Trek* K/S data—to support my arguments

regarding today's K/S fic as a queer, affective, feminist practice. First, I look into how *Star Trek* was key in the emergence of fan scholarship; then, how the first wave of fan studies started debates around gender, sexuality, and feminism in slash. After this, I look into how the second wave of fan studies asserted slash as a queer practice, then how the third wave of fan studies developed discourses of fandom as digitally networked, personal, and intimate. Eventually, I look into how an interdisciplinary approach to fandom (with fourth wave fan studies) allowed insights on slash along fourth-wave feminism.

2.1) A liminal space between the beginnings of media fandom (late 1960s) and fan studies' first wave (mid-1980s): how *Star Trek* was key in the emergence of fan scholarship

The stepping-stone in media fandom is the creation of the *Star Trek* fan community in 1966 (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 43) as the show was being broadcast. Fans organised around *Star Trek* as something they had in common to form communities of mutual care—female *Star Trek* fans created a 'social network' which allowed them to meet and support each other (Duffett, 2013: 204) from the late 1960s onwards. This is why *Star Trek* has such a central place in fan studies, as they started around analysis of *Star Trek* fan behaviours in the mid-1980s (then including Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Penley, 1997). *Star Trek* attracted early academic attention as it was the most famous and widespread, prolific fandom in terms of zines and other fan practices. Men, dubbed geeks and extreme (Jenkins, 1992), were seen as the public face of the Star Trek fandom while its women members developed, in turn, a myriad of activities that compose the basis of fandom behaviour today: with, as the most popular transformative and subversive activity, the creation of slash fanfiction, or pairing of two (almost always male) characters (McArdle, 2016: 1).

The inception of fan fiction is not clearly established: as said in the introduction to this chapter, transformative works based on canonical texts have been around for centuries. But the concept of fan fiction as "derivative amateur writing—that is, texts written based on another text, and not for professional publication" can be traced to the Holmesian pastiche in the early 1910s and refer to contemporary extensions of Jane Austen's universe (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 5). Yet this stance, that is, understanding fic as derivative amateur writing,

will be the stepping stone into chapter 5's analysis of fic as a literary practice. Going further, the origins of slash fanfiction (as analysed in both this thesis and fan studies) are said to go back to 1967 with the Star Trek fanzine *Spockanalia* (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 75), and more officially in 1974 with the story *A Fragment Out of Time* by Diane Marchant. Constance Penley explains that K/S was the first slash writing and dominated the field for many years (1997: 102), and that "the idea did not begin with one person who then spread it to others, but seems to have arisen spontaneously in various places" (1997: 101). This shows how essential K/S was for the inception of fic, and how community was what made slash possible as a subcultural movement in the first place: this idea of community is indeed key to my arguments in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Star Trek became thus the first properly organized fandom and the first community analysed within fan studies. Fan studies were, first and foremost, an "institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts [were] proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers [could] speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (Jenkins, 1992: 86). This is why, being a very popular subject in fan studies, I oriented my own analysis to the widely debated field of K/S fanfiction, which inscribes this thesis in the historical development of fan studies.

2.2)   "Fandom is Beautiful": how the first wave of fan studies (1980s/early 1990s) started debates around gender, sexuality, and feminism in slash

The first wave of fan studies, starting in the 1980s and dubbed "Fandom Is Beautiful" by Jonathan Grey, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (2007: 1-2), had the task of legitimating and highlighting fan behaviours and subcultures as something worthy of academic analysis. Taking inspiration from de Certeau's (1984) distinction between "the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the disempowered" (Gray et al., 2007: 1), first wave fan scholars used theoretical frameworks of power relations and social subversion to define the "guerrilla-style tactics of those with lesser resources" (Gray et al., 2007: 2). This allowed Othered female fans (compared to the straight, geek, white male face of *Star Trek* fans) and their fan media production to be seen as authors of social practices deserving of

analysis. This view of fans following 'tactics of the disempowered' is a basis of this thesis. Indeed, by looking at fans' practices as queer and feminist, which are shared through pedagogical tactics (chapter 5) to empower other fans, I argue that first wave fan studies enable theorisation of marginalised fan strategies. While this thesis aligns with the fourth wave of fan studies, it honours the foundations of the first wave by exploring tactics of the disempowered.

Works such as Camille Bacon-Smith's *Star Trek* subculture ethnography *Enterprising Women* (1992), Henry Jenkins' influential *Textual Poachers* ([1992] 2013) analysing Trekkers, and Jenkins and John Tulloch's book *Science Fiction Audiences* ([1995] 2005) on *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* fan cultures laid down the foundations for the first wave of fan studies—with a focus on *Star Trek* fandom. Fandom, then "Othered by mainstream society," (Gray et al., 2007: 3) was analysed by these scholars into an Other/mainstream binary, taking inspiration in psychoanalytic theory. This thesis goes beyond such a dichotomy, following the next waves that deconstructed the Other/mainstream binary to present a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between dominant media and fandom.

Indeed, the first wave, as the original point of entry to current fan culture academic conversations, has made belonging to a fandom de facto *political* and *subversive* due to its quality of *sub*culture, most notably due to the rejection of previous stereotypes of Trekkers as geeky, nerdy men and its illumination of the female groups of fans producing (queer) media from *Star Trek* (Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992). This thesis goes further by using first wave political undertakings to look at slash fic as a political practice, not because it is against the mainstream media (following the Other/mainstream binary), but because it is queer and feminist.

First wave scholars focused on early fan activities such as going to cons (conventions), hard-copy zine publishing and fanfiction writing, filking (making songs) and vidding (making video montages), training new members (especially in Bacon-Smith's account of female Trekkers, 1992), and initiating letter campaigns to advocate for a TV show renewal for example. These scholars worked towards dis-identifying these behaviours as excessive or "pathological" and re-identifying them as "productive" and "creative" (Gray et al., 2007: 3). Yet, by doing this much-needed work to reveal fan studies as a worthy academic field of study, these scholars painted a rather binary representation of fan communities ('us' versus 'them'), relying on the Other/mainstream dichotomy. I argue that despite the importance of analysing

slash fic as political, first wave fan studies needed to open up to other necessary discussions such as social practice, discourse, literary theory, and affect within fandom—which would arrive in the second wave onwards.

2.2.1) How first wave fan studies' take on slash as pornography made by women for women inscribed fic in sex-positive feminism

Joanna Russ' celebratory aca-fan 1985 essay on K/S fic, reprinted in Hellekson and Busse's 2014 book, celebrates fanfiction and is known for her defence of slash as pornography for women by women (2014: 12). For her, slash fanfiction, due to its explicit nature, allows for a feminist re-appropriation of the canon where women can experiment with their sexuality. By analysing and claiming slash as feminist due to its own sexual content, Russ was the first to inscribe slash fanfiction practices into sex-positive late second-wave feminism. This movement of sex-positive feminism, initiated by Ellen Willis' essays *Lust Horizons* from 1981 and *Toward a Feminist Sexual Revolution* from 1982 (both re-published in her book *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* in 1992), has shaped fan studies' take on slash as a feminist social practice—a stance that sees female pleasure, helped through male desire, as bodily autonomy.

Typical in its fan studies first wave perspective, Russ "emphasizes the empowering nature of sexual fantasy, especially when combined with a community of women—women as writers, editors, and readers—free from commercial restrictions" (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 77). Writing erotic fiction about two men together seems subversive and empowering because it gives agency to women: they can voice their desires, interact with slash for their own pleasure, and write about men from their own perspective. 40 years after such early debates around feminist pornography and fan studies' own belonging in sex-positivity, this thesis updates Russ' analysis, as both feminism, fandom, and fanfiction have evolved into more intersectional practices.

Indeed, while Russ' radical statement is vital, fan demographics need to be put in perspective. Anne Jamison claims, in her 2013 book about fic, that "male/male erotic romance by straight women for straight women was just the beginning. Fanfiction transforms assumptions mainstream culture routinely makes about gender, sexuality, desire," and adds that "fic provides a venue for all kinds of writers who are shut out from official culture,

whether by demographic or skill or taste" (2013: 19). While Russ' point stands, my aim is to go beyond the initial 'pornography for women by women' praxis ([1985] 2014) and dig deeper towards other ways in which fanfiction can be feminist but also queer, analysing Russ' tendency to objectify gay men while using a heteronormative framework (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 77).

2.2.2) How first wave fan studies have sparked the analysis of slash (and K/S) as a gendering practice and as a fostering of 'good' relationships

Similar points of view, started by Lamb and Veith ([1986] 2014), have been reused between Penley ([1991] 1997), Bacon-Smith (1992), and Jenkins (1992) during the first wave. They all suggest that fanfiction is feminist when it showcases equality through a male/male relationship: it is analysed as a relationship of equals, undisturbed by gender hierarchies. Slash, for them, is challenging the usual mechanisms of the romance genre by creating a situation where the two members of the pairing are male, thus having presumably more equal footing. Jamison, looking back into first wave fan studies, adds that slash explains how "women fans wanted to explore the possibilities of a romantic or sexual pairing in the context of a long-term, complex relationship between equals: a structure mainstream culture was nowhere offering" (2013: 86).

Indeed, Lamb and Veith think that "female slash writers use and subvert the traditional gender paradigms, thus allowing female readers and writers to identify with both characters as they are writing a pairing of equals" as Kirk and Spock display masculine and feminine characteristics ([1986] 2014: 105). This hence diverts from heterosexual romance occurring between people who are "inherently not equals," a man and a woman (Hellekson and Busse on Lamb and Veith, 2014: 78). According to them, in K/S, the union of the two male characters is made utopic and erases the gendered sense of self, in a way, to allow the fostering of companionship divested from inherent cultural constraints and unequal power relations. Lamb and Veith, by looking at gendered norms in the portrayal of K/S, claiming Kirk and Spock show a blend of feminine and masculine qualities, started the understanding of slash fanfiction as a gendering practice and as a showcasing of 'ideal' relationships. By quoting Lamb and Veith, I build upon their analysis to look at these gendering practices almost 40 years later. Indeed, by describing K/S as an ideal relationship, I decided to look at gendered norms and

'good' queer relationships myself: how this presupposed equality in male/male couples, due to a specific gendering of the characters, has evolved into today's understanding of slash as a queer feminist practice.

There is indeed a need for an updating of Lamb and Veith's theory. As they have analysed slash fic as the great equaliser of power in relationships, they have also made Kirk and Spock androgynous by labelling their masculine and feminine qualities. By asserting that "K/S stories remove gender as a governing and determining force in the love relationship" and that these stories "are not about sex or gender" nor "about male homosexuality as such," indeed providing a "new way of loving" (Lamb and Veith, [1986] 2014: 114), I argue contemporary writings of Kirk and Spock have specific practices about gender performance and relationship building, making it about sex and gender in different, political ways. We cannot dissociate slash practices from more encompassing issues of power within the gender and sexuality of the characters—indeed, Kirk and Spock trouble their performance of gender (Butler, [1990] 2007). Going beyond the established fan scholarship of slash as androgynous, I research how do slash practices actually do gender and how that informs 'good' relationships (as opposed to toxic or harmful). This will be the focus of chapter 6.

2.2.3) How first-wave fan studies have named and theorised the relationship between canon (original media) and fanon (fan-made content)

There is a distinct trend in the behaviours of fans inside media fandom that has been theorised and held as cornerstone of fan studies: Jenkins' concept of 'poaching' and 'participatory culture'. As a first wave fan studies scholar, Jenkins argues that "fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths" (2006: 267). 'Poaching' works is defined as the "[raiding of] mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions" (Jenkins, 1992: 18). In his famous book *Textual Poachers* (1992), re-edited in 2013 for its 20-year anniversary, Jenkins offers a textual analysis of media fandom behaviours amongst fans and texts. The poaching concept coined by Jenkins has been widely accepted as a base for fan studies, until he developed the concept of 'participatory culture' in third wave fan studies. Nevertheless, this first foray into the relationship between fans and the original media they interact with, here described as poaching, has informed this thesis by prompting

my research into more depth, and into practices around such a relationship. These practices, which I have analysed as pedagogy around literacy (how to read media, how to analyse media, how to create new media as a result) and pedagogy around queer feminisms, are the centrepoint of chapter 5. Linking back to sex-positive feminism, Jenkins' concept refers to the foundational idea that fans are repurposing media for their own needs, in this case queer and sexual, which is subversive.

As other scholars of first wave fan studies, Jenkins had a tendency to idealise and celebrate his object of study—something many scholars did to establish authority and legitimate fannish practices—and did not go beyond a textual analysis, indeed limited by his desire to legitimise the practice within *Textual Poachers*. He focused on how fans respond to popular media within a site of pleasure, as a counter-argument to oppose William Shatner's *'Get a Life!'* (Kirk's actor publicly asking *Star Trek* fans to stop 'obsessing' over Kirk during a *Saturday Night Live* episode in 1986). Claiming that the fannish identity is producing new cultural material, he analysed slash as something textually innovative and as creating new literary tropes. Bridging homosocial desire to homoerotic passion (Jenkins, [1992] 2013: 186, inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), slash is portrayed as textual poaching from fans' desire to rebel against the source media and its representation of masculinity—which is key to this thesis' understanding of slash as a practice to provide respite from toxic masculinity and heteronormativity. Fans are portrayed as active producers of meaning as they consume media. I analyse exactly what configurations of *Star Trek* characters fans produce, especially concerning norms around specific iterations of queer gender identities, through Kirk and Spock but also alien species (i.e. like FalsePremise's Ashtahli, sequential hermaphroditic aliens). Jenkins' analysis of slash is more of an introduction to the practice (slash as female pornography, as androgynous romance, as fantasy identification, and homosocial desire), and this thesis offers an updated perspective.

2.3) "Towards the Mainstream": how the second wave of fan studies (mid-1990s/early 2000s) asserted slash as a queer practice

Fan studies' second wave built up from an incorporation/resistance paradigm (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998) and established a corpus of work while fandom became

more visible in the mainstream. Scholars such as Chad Dell (1998) and Cheryl Harris (1998) highlighted the "replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan- and subcultures," which opened a field of fan studies where fandom, no longer a de facto resistant, empowering, and subversive space, is instead a space where fans maintain "social and cultural systems of classification and thus existing hierarchies" as well as where academics upheld frameworks that "unmask the false notion of popular culture as a realm of emancipation" (Gray et al., 2007: 6).

Fandom was thus, during this second wave, taken off the pedestal of cultural autonomy and active resistance (Gray et al., 2007: 6) established by first wave scholars. Yet, alongside this second wave mainstreaming, Gray et al. explain that from the mid-1990s onwards "rather than ridiculed, fan audiences are now wooed and championed by cultural industries, at least as long as their activities do not divert from principles of capitalist exchange and recognize industries' legal ownership of the object of fandom" (2007: 4). Being a certain kind of fan was appreciated, as long as these fan practices remained within the borders of acceptable mainstream activities and hegemonic opinions: fitting the media industries' marketing strategies (Gray et al., 2007: 4) to keep on consuming media profitable to the industry.

Yet, while this second wave eased fandom into the mainstream—following the development of digital spaces and media—and offered a more critical vision of subculture spaces as resistant spaces, it did not explore other enquiries set by the social and cultural hierarchisation of what it means to be a 'good' fan. As Gray et al. ask, the individual motivations, enjoyment and pleasure of fans when they interact with the source media were under-theorised in the second wave. In effect, we need to look at fandom as a social yet personal practice; everyone does not experience fandom in the same way.

2.3.1) How second wave fan studies have taken fandom's first steps into the digital to theorise about community and fan interaction

A turning point in fandom comes in the late 1990s with the development of the Internet: indeed, technological tools affect "not only dissemination and reception, but also production, interaction, and even demographics" (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 13). In the pre-internet days, one of the main ways that fans could communicate with each other was through

"independent and ephemeral publications called fanzines" (Duffett, 2013: 184). Fan communities thus migrated from physical activities such as fanzines, mailing lists, and conventions to a digital database of fan works and an online web community. Early digital fandom used GEnie (electronic correspondence) then Usenet, where fans could subscribe to electronic discussion boards and fanfic updates, as ListServ technology allowed emails from a specific server (eg. on *Star Trek*) (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 13). As fandom developed an internet infrastructure, this allowed for the development of fan writing, especially meta and fanfiction, as well as more easily accessible vidding (fanvid making) and more easily shared fanart. This development is key to this thesis, as I have based my methodology upon digital means of communicating within the *Star Trek* fandom: chat and email interviews, online fics, online comments left on fics.

As fandom evolved into the blogosphere in the early 2000's, with LiveJournal blogging especially, fan-created spaces grew out of source-media-specific emailing and into multiple-fandom blogging. In effect, people who blogged were "just like that: people (who are fans) who blog" (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 14), where the act of blogging turned fans into self-published, online writers. As a result, individual journals became "a mix of fannish and other topics about that fandom, thus including not only fiction, fan art, and commentary on the source text, but also real-life (RL) rants, political discussion, and non-fannish musings [which encourage] interpersonal interaction" (Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 14). These ways of curating fannish content and interacting with other fans, creating grassroots communities of care and political commentary, has now permeated into all spheres of social media; nevertheless, this early second wave approach to digital relationships has been important in my process of understanding fan interactions. That is to say, this was how fandom became political: not because fans were against the mainstream doing things that were unique, like first wave fan scholarship had claimed, but rather because actual political stances (on queerness, feminism, capitalism, and so on) were beginning to be mixed into fan writing practices. This thesis especially looks into the relationship between fan interactions and political learnings; be they feminist, queer, or other, how they are exchanged through and around K/S fic.

2.3.2) How second wave fan studies enable theorisation of fic not only as a feminist, but also as a queer practice

Building up on the first wave's work of Lamb and Veith, I also found relevant theories in the second wave's work of Constance Penley. Her account of *Star Trek* fan culture, *NASA/Trek* (1997), analyses the relationship between US identity, NASA, and Kirk/Spock fanfiction—the second part, on *Star Trek* slash, is indeed an updated version of her article "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology" (Penley, 1991) recording her own involvement in *Star Trek* fandom. As an established cornerstone of fan studies and key text on *Star Trek* slash fic, *NASA/Trek* looks at the genesis and motives around gay erotic K/S texts through feminist psychoanalysis (Busse, 2017; Penley, 1997).

In *NASA/Trek*, she especially claims that "the K/Sers are constantly asking themselves why they are drawn to writing [and] their answers range from the pleasures of writing explicit same-sex erotica to the fact that writing a story about two men avoids the built-in inequality of the romance formula, in which dominance and submission are invariably the respective roles of men and women" and wonders why "these futuristic bodies […] must be imagined and written as male bodies" (1997: 125). Unlike Bacon-Smith (1992) and Jenkins (1992), Penley offers an adjacent theory that emphasises the original gender of Kirk and Spock—they are "clearly meant to be male" (1997: 126)—and thus rejects an androgynisation or femininisation of the characters. For her, fans are mostly female and alienated from their own bodies which results in slash. They are concerned with writing 'real men', as being a woman in the 20th and 21st century means having a body that is fraught with power relations and unrealistic standards of perfection—thus making very difficult the writing of female bodies (1997: 126). They are "making do" with the source media (full of men) and their current bodily and cultural autonomy, aiming to retool masculinity through slash (1997: 127). They are writing "future men" (1997). Penley has been crucial in my understanding of K/S as 'gendered' characters following 'gendering' interactions. She sees them as 'real men', which prompted me to explore the notion of 'true' or 'real' men (as opposed to toxic/harmful) in relation to queer scholarship. This has been the focus of chapter 6.

While Penley distances herself from Jenkins and Bacon-Smith when it comes to gendered practices and performances embodied by Kirk and Spock, all three seminal texts have had an important impact on the later waves of fan studies, especially about fanfiction; I

argue that the performance of gender and the use of plot devices (to further the K/S relationship) has evolved, since the 1990s, alongside our own understanding of gender. Second wave attempts to record and analyse fan slash practices, as illustrated by Jenkins, Penley, and Bacon-Smith, have ramifications for fan scholarship still relevant today; I will especially look at intersections of slash with feminism, or how slash has evolved alongside changes in feminist discourse, and how intersections between the two are revealing new insights about K/S.

2.3.3) How second wave fan studies have shifted the relation between text and fan into a queerer interaction based on decoding and re-encoding

A major point in the concept of transformative fan works is the incorporation/ resistance paradigm. Jenkins (1992), Bacon-Smith (1992), and Abigail Derecho (2006) believe in an incorporation/resistance reading, an act of subversion similar to Jenkins' concept of "poaching" (as analysed in Hellekson and Busse, 2006: 18). In effect, they see slash fiction as a "radical instance of resistant reading" where Jenkins proposes slash as "an explicit critique of masculinity" that attempts to "establish an homosocial-homoerotic continuum as an alternative to repressive and hierarchical male sexuality" (as analysed in Gwenllian Jones, [2002] 2014: 117-118).

Nonetheless, Sara Gwenllian Jones thinks that the incorporation/resistance paradigm rests upon "an understanding of the text as an inviolable and discrete semiotic surface, its "preferred" or "dominant" textual meanings [being] accepted, negotiated or opposed by the reader. By this rationale, slash fiction, which contradicts the source text's preferred meaning of heterosexuality, must be the product of subversive or "deviant" reading" ([2002] 2014: 118-119). But the incorporation/resistance paradigm, according to Gwenllian Jones, "offers limited and clumsy models that do not account for the deeper textual strategies of cult television, for its engagements with the fantastic, its function as a species of virtual reality, its emphasis upon the implicit, or its invitation to immersive and interactive engagement" ([2002] 2014: 118-119). I argue that while the incorporation/resistance framework helped scholars give agency to fan writers, as creators of cultural transformative texts, it did not account for the intricacies of media literacy. By opposing the source media to the fan media, it separates them and isolates fan works in a place of subversion and resistance that is not always legitimate. In

effect, in the light of my own data, the reading of a source text in relation to slash texts reveals that slash is not always against its source media. It does not always, for example, resist heteronormative media: some elements of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007) can be repurposed, reworked, and re-interpreted in K/S. I refer to Gwenllian Jones in this literature review because of the ways in which it allowed me to build upon Jenkins and dive into the relationship between fan interpretation and original media: queering the reading of a text. This is why a later work in the second wave of fan studies, Elizabeth Woledge's 2005 essay on fanfiction, also fits here as a stepping stone into a queerer, more interactive relationship between fan media and original media.

Beyond Jenkins and Gwenllian Jones, I used Woledge and her take on 'decoding' media as a blueprint for chapter 5. In Hellekson's and Busse's edited book on fanfiction (2014), scholars such as Gwenllian Jones indeed argue that instead of an incorporation/resistance paradigm, fic is elicited through the reading of "subtext" ([2002] 2014)—unlike Jenkins, who thinks that the homoerotic reading is a purely subversive one. Hellekson and Busse think that "rather than viewing the media sources as heteronormative texts that are consequently queered by imposing same-sex romance, many fan writers regard their reading as simply teasing out the subtext" (2014: 76). It is this notion of subtext that is important to analyse.

In her 2005 essay on K/S, Elizabeth Woledge also refers to fic creation as teasing out the subtext and builds up on Gwenllian Jones' 2002 article. She diverts from first wave Bacon-Smith's analysis of slash as "fans' naïve mis-readings" (Woledge, 2005: 236) in terms of the way they "read those framed images" (Bacon-Smith, 1992: 233); that is to say fans' self-delusion with their false readings of the original media. She also diverts from first wave Jenkins' analysis of slash as a representing "a particularly dramatic break with the ideological norms of the broadcast material" (Jenkins, 1992: 221) because it "suggests that he views the production of K/S as a unidirectional interpretation in which the fans' needs influence the text, but the text has little influence on the fans" (Woledge, 2005: 237). However, according to Woledge, "the high degree of reference to the Star Trek narrative within K/S stories" as well as "the status of K/S as the first slash fandom" suggest that, in fact, "the text of Star Trek played an important part in inspiring K/S" (2005: 237). That is to say, a purely resistant reading of the original media (here *Star Trek*) as something that was never queer nor feminist, and a dissociation of the fan text from the original text (putting analytical distance between the two), does not fully fulfil account for the nuances of fanfic. Against a reading of *Star Trek* slash

as being inspired by the exaggeration of elements, and for a reading of *Star Trek* slash as actualising homoerotic subtext, Woledge introduces the concept of *decoding,* after Stuart Hall (Hall, 1980; Woledge, 2005). In effect, for Woledge, "rather than focus on unconscious motivation, which is extremely hard to substantiate in any visible fannish practice, any analysis of K/S fiction's relationship to its source needs to examine the interpretive strategies practiced by fans and available via the texts they produce" (2005: 238). This stance, seeing slash as a decoding then re-encoding of the original media, juxtaposes both texts (*Star Trek* and fics) and makes the fan enter a relationship of active participation in media literacy. It is further analysed as a theoretical framework in chapter 3, and is the analytical focus of chapter 5.

2.4)   "Modern Fandom and Everyday Lives": how the third wave of fan studies (mid-2000s/early 2010s) developed discourses of fandom as digitally networked, personal, and intimate

The third wave of fan studies emerged around the mid-2000s, building up on the first and second wave, to focus on a concept yet to be defined: fandom as a fabric of our everyday lives, a cultural practice where specific modes of fan consumption are not taken for granted (Gray et al., 2007: 9). It follows the shift from physical to digital fandom spaces and practices, with the boom of personal connected devices and the Internet; viewing fan activities as engagements with media across everyday life. "In so doing, it moves away not only from viewing fans as intrinsically subcultural and oppositional but also from regarding fans as parts of a specific group" (Busse, 2017: 8). Fan academic works such as Matt Hills's *Fan Cultures* (2002) and Cornel Sandvoss's *Fans* (2005) "examine the fan as an individual unit—or rather, they redefine the larger whole as a function of the individual" (Busse, 2017: 8).

Henry Jenkins, whose *Textual Poachers* (1992) was influential for first wave scholarship produced a further key work in *Convergence Culture* (2006). This focuses on the "various intersections between industry and viewers/fans and the way contemporary audience behaviors ever more resemble traditional fan behaviors in this changing media landscape" (as analysed in Busse, 2017: 8-9). At the heart of *Convergence Culture* (2006) is the question of fan identity, the embodiment of fandom and how such a space is defined: asking if being a fan is a question of enacting the right behaviour, or experiencing an all-encompassing lifestyle.

Jenkins redefines participatory culture by stating the audience is not just consuming media as a subculture, but also contributes and produces through active participation across multiple media and platforms, as an inherent part of their lifestyle. Fans became a driving force in transformed media circulation across mediated systems and platforms, across borders, across cultures (Jenkins, 2006).

Fans are seen as actors of behaviours navigating a spectrum of fandom extremism—the turn towards fans as extreme viewers and away from fans as a subculture, in this third wave of fan studies, is pushing an agenda of mainstream acceptability in fan behaviour. Nevertheless, the identity of fans taken out of their subculture risks a misrepresentation of said identity if we ignore the subtlety of Jenkins' participatory culture. We cannot look at fan behaviour without taking into consideration their culture as something that makes them and enables them to carry on being fans in meaningful ways, independently from the source media and media creators.

Trying not to build a single narrative of fan research, Gray et al. thus offer a definition of third wave fan studies around patterns of fan consumption (2007: 9), the focus being on the emotional engagement of the fan in various settings—not only with *Star Trek* or sports for example (2007: 10). Third wave was all about "how we interact with the mediated world at the heart of our social, political, and cultural realities and identities" (Gray et al., 2007: 10). This is why I look at slash fic through such a lens: how do fans of K/S interact with not only *Star Trek* but the wider world, where politics of the heteropatriarchy are normalised, and where fourth-wave feminist identities are expressed in creative ways (eg. fans making Kirk and Spock queer feminist men).

The digitalisation of fandom further evolved as in the early 2010s, as the Internet created and normalised the use of social media instead of blogging-specific websites such as LiveJournal. "As early adopters, media fans rapidly shared information through new social media platforms" (Duffett, 2013: 13), which furthers Jenkins' concept of media convergence across digital platforms (2006). According to Louisa E. Stein, "fans use digital networks like LiveJournal, YouTube, Tumblr, and Polyvore to build communities and to share and respond to their creative work" (2015: 4), as well as share their interest in Facebook groups. Tumblr, especially, is a social media microblogging platform that is popular for these new, shifting fandom spaces. As fan culture was defined through the "appropriation and transformation of materials borrowed from mass culture," third wave has documented how "the Web has

brought these consumers from the margins of the media industry into the spotlight" (Jenkins, 2006: 257). This has been especially important in the genesis of this thesis; indeed, I have been on Tumblr since 2011. I started experiencing fandom through this medium at the same time as third wave opened theoretical understandings of fandom to social media. This positionality in the social world has informed this thesis in its sampling for data collection (I have found participants through AO3 and Tumblr). Third wave understandings of fandom have also informed this thesis by adopting a digital network that saw community belonging as key to the personal fandom experience. The main theoretical standpoint from third wave underlining this thesis is Jenkins' third wave account of participatory culture (2006), which understands fanship as a lifestyle that transforms fan media across multiple platforms, alongside non-fan media.

2.4.1) How third wave fan studies have developed new theories on slash fic as intimate practice

An additional take on feminist fanfiction has been developed by Woledge in 2006, bringing her from second wave to third wave fan studies: the notion of 'intimatopia'. According to her, "romance novels and pornography, although in different ways, both work to separate sex and intimacy" (2006: 99). She proposes that slash fanfiction is an 'intimatopic' text. They "work to connect [sex and intimacy], and this is why they need a separate genre all to themselves" (2006: 99). Woledge adds that in the case of explicit works, "this weaving of the sexual plot into wider plots allows sex to be used to enhance the intimacy that the story puts in place" (2006: 105).

I quote Woledge here because her theoretical framework allows a reconciliation between affect and identity/sex/gender. It is also inscribed in the sex-positive strand of feminism into which fan studies were born, and furthers the theory of slash as pornography by going further and creating a hybrid kind of affective 'feminist' porn. I am using this intimatopic concept to understand why fans want to see Kirk and Spock having sex and loving each other, in order for fans to have affective pleasure.

This intimacy between two men might thus, I argue, reveal broader discourses pertaining to intersectional feminism, gender performance, and relations of power. This thesis is informed by how slash creates men fuelled by female/queer desires, thus acting as a

repository for feminist/queer affect. Fanfiction, according to Woledge, allows fans to write men that transcend heterosexual masculinity's boundaries: "in intimatopia, […] homosocial bonding [as theorised by Sedgwick] is depicted as directly supportive of homosexual activity" (2006: 100). Yet, taking inspiration from Penley (1992), which claimed that fic allowed depictions of an intimacy where "the two men are somehow meant for each other and homosexuality has nothing to do with it," Woledge argues that intimatopia is a tool used to enhance intimacy (2006) with plot devices such as sex scenes or scenes of emotional bonding. While Woledge distances herself from 'homosexual politics' (2006) in her essay, I argue slash and feminism intersect (within fan studies) either at pleasure (pornography by and for women), performance of gender (male/male relationships), and affect (through intimacy). Nevertheless, I claim there is a gap in the notion of gender performance (Butler, 2007) within the field of K/S fic studies, which this thesis will approach through fourth-wave feminist theory.

2.5)   Towards a fourth wave of fan studies (mid-2010s/today): how an interdisciplinary approach to fandom allowed insights along fourth-wave feminism

The fourth wave of fan studies (Busse, 2017) is being developed, I claim, alongside fourth-wave feminism (see Hannell's PhD thesis, 2020; Cochrane, 2013; Munro, 2013). Taking roots in Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1989), fourth-wave feminism is digital and connected (Zimmerman, 2017), using social media to bring attention to issues pertaining to women's rights (thus alongside LGBT+ rights, anti-racism, and anti-ableism for example). Sparked by the use of social media and blogging platforms, fourth-wave feminism is characterised by a "sharing of voices", an "engagement with global politics" and a "focus on intersectionality" (Ringrose and Lawrence, 2015: 2).

Feminism has been made mainstream in the last decade (Cochrane, 2013: 58) with the advent of social media, aligning with the previous waves of fan studies and fandom's own growth socially. As fourth-wave feminism has prioritised polyphony and intersectionality, fandom and fan studies have also evolved to use the greater possibilities of connection and community enabled by technology. Online fans are now given an "unprecedented platform for participatory engagement with feminism in its offering of unique pedagogical platforms

and spaces" (Ringrose and Lawrence, 2015: 3). In effect, fans have been among the "most articulate critics of web 2.0 because they have such a long-standing and well-defined understanding of participatory culture" (Scott, 2013: xxii), thus using social media as a tool to voice their ideas and demands alongside revendications peculiar to fourth-wave feminist discourses.

Online activists and bloggers use media to transform popular culture into a tool for social change—just as analyses of fans changed over the first three waves of fan studies, perceptions of young women online are transformed from passive pop culture consumers to engagers and makers (Martin and Valenti, 2012: 13). In an interview for *Textual Poachers*' 20-year anniversary, Jenkins explains that "there is much we still need to understand about ways that fandom may operate in relations to patriarchy and heteronormativity" (Scott, 2013: xix). This fourth wave of fan studies, alongside feminist concerns, entices us to analyse fandom (and fanfiction) as a definitely socially and politically embedded practice, working away from the understanding of fandom as a monolith of fans—even if those fans are, according to the first wave, resisting; according to the second wave, consuming; or according to the third wave, digitally networking—and towards an "interdisciplinarity, expanding methodologies, and transnationalism" (Busse, 2017: 9).

For example, Jenkins' collaboration with Sam Ford and Joshua Green, in *Spreadable Media* (2013) "models how the media industry can make use of […] behavioral shifts in useful and economically successful ways" (as analysed in Busse, 2017: 9), giving us the useful concept of digital media being spreadable across an economy peculiar to the fans. Fan economies are a key element in chapter 7 of this thesis, where I build upon social media and online networks to follow affective practices in fandom. Following Busse, recent work ranges from "broad and inclusive overviews (Duffet 2013; Chauvel, Lamerichs, and Seymour 2014; Duits, Zwaan, and Reijnders 2014) to highly focused and in-depth readings" (2017: 10) such as Louisa Ellen Stein's study of millennial fan cultures (2015). I will also use Stein's work in chapter 7 of this thesis, linking fan writing practices with an affect economy within the K/S community.

Additionally, following fourth-wave feminism's focus on intersectionality, Kristina Busse explains that "studies have begun to focus on the intersections of fandom with other areas of culture, politics, and economics, such as the function of materiality in fan engagements (Steinberg 2012; Geraghty 2014; Rehak 2014), an interest in fan labor (Stanfill and Condis 2014; Busse 2015), and a focus on pedagogy and fan activism (Black 2008; Jenkins

and Shresthova 2012)" (2017: 10). The kinds of foci that I am myself using are based on pedagogy (chapter 5), gender and sexuality studies (chapter 6), and performance alongside a turn to affect (chapter 7). According to Busse, fan writing practices offering fanfiction show "the process of writing, disseminating, and reading [which] may not ultimately be different from other fiction, but all of these processes are openly visible online" (2017: 10). These processes, which I argue are socially, discursively, and affectively embedded, are analysed through building upon concepts from fourth wave fan studies such as feels culture (Stein, 2015), and gift economy (Jenkins et al., 2013).

2.5.1) How fourth wave fan studies have shed light on the evolving demographics of slash fandom

Before the Internet and online communities, fanfiction was published in hard-copy zines either available through mail-order or at conventions: whereas Jenkins and Bacon-Smith "had to find a way into the community, go to conventions, and mail-order hard-copy fanzines that collected fan-written stories and artwork, college students today have grown up with fan fiction easily available on the Internet" (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 4). Essays written during these times look outdated now, with practices that have changed; even during the rise of Internet culture, because another revolution happened during the 2000s-2010s: the spreading of social networks and microblogging platforms. "Newsgroups and the small amount of fans and traffic seem quaint compared with today, when some fandoms create thousands of Tumblr posts and hundreds of stories every single day" (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 23). This creation of an online, digital archive has simplified the spreading of fanfiction, both making it easier to create, share, and read.

With the change in behaviours also came a change in demographics. At the beginning, fanfiction and most importantly slash fanfiction was written almost exclusively by straight women for women as a way to subvert the male dominant canon and provide alternative storylines. But now, "gay, lesbian, bi, and trans fans, fans of color, queer fans— all are now vocal and visible, and fan fiction, particularly slash, can no longer be considered the aegis of straight white women" (Hellekson and Busse, 2014: 80). "The too-easy identification of slash as straight women writing gay men has served to mask the extent to which the sexual pleasure is created by women (of all genders/sexual identities) for women (of all genders/sexual

identities). The general perception today is that a larger proportion of lesbian, bisexual, and other queer women are writing in many of the fandoms than was the case in earlier years" (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid, 2006: 201). Anne Jamison (2013: 19) has also explained how slash fandom demographics have evolved, with now (more than ever) queer, male, female, people of colour, and non-English speaking fans being actively present in current online fandoms.

Using Jamison, Busse, and others I will show how the demographics of fanfic have evolved from older perceptions of K/S as a purely white, heterosexual female endeavour; this thesis explores and uses the relationship between fan studies and gender theory, to understand how the diversity in fans brings a diversity in K/S content.

2.6)   Conclusion

To conclude, there have been four waves of fan studies: 'fandom is beautiful' (1980s), which had the task of making fandom 'acceptable' within wider cultural studies and as an area of study itself, pioneered by Jenkins; 'towards the mainstream' (mid-1990s), which established a corpus of work where fandom could become mainstream and visible by non-fans, aiming to make the identity of 'fan' more respected; 'modern fandom' (2000s), which saw fandom as a part of our everyday lives, with the risk of taking fandom out of its position of subculture and collectivity; and 'intersectional fandom' (2010s) which is, alongside fourth-wave feminism, focusing on studying fandom through an intersectional lens. I inscribe my research in the fourth wave, aligned with participatory engagement and social change, taking feminism's focus on intersectionality to the experience of fic so as to analyse fandom through a diffracted lens: I turn to affect, gender studies, and literary studies. This kind of analysis is still in its early stages; recent examples include, Rukmini Pande (2018), who looks at the intersection of fandom and critical race studies, Briony Hannell's PhD thesis (2020) on fourth wave fandom, and Kristina Busse's book tackling fourth wave (2017) in a way that emphasises intertextuality and intersectionality (with the use of gender and feminist theory in conjunction with fan studies).

Indeed, the nature of fandom has drastically evolved since its inception in the late 1960s: from zines and conventions it has become largely digital. The advent of Tumblr and Archive of Our Own (AO3) has shaped fandom into a rhizomatic assemblage, where all works, blogs and experiences are interconnected and interconnecting. Yet, apart from Louisa E.

Stein's ground-breaking work on 'feels' (2015), the turn to affect has been severely underdeveloped in fan studies—hence why I focus on affect circulation and gift economies in chapter 7.

First, there was a liminal space between the beginnings of modern fandom (around the late 1960s) and the beginnings of fan studies (around the mid-1980s) where fans organised around physical fandom (zines, conventions…) and developed strategies to sustain communal experiences of *Star Trek*. Then, the first wave of fan studies (early to mid 1980s/early 1990s) started debates around gender, sexuality, and feminism in slash. Indeed, Russ ([1985] 2014) inscribed slash in sex-positive feminism by labelling it as 'pornography for women by women'. This allowed me to inscribe this thesis in the historical sex-positive feminist movement. Additionally, first wave scholarship sparked the analysis of slash as a gendering practice and a fostering of 'good' relationships. Lamb and Veith ([1986] 2014) suggested that slash fic was feminist because it showcased equality in a male/male relationship, answering to society's harmful gender hierarchies between men and women. This prompted my consideration of what good 'men' and good 'relationships' meant in slash. First wave fan studies also named and theorised the relationship between canon and fanon, with Jenkins' concept of "poaching" (1992). Fans' desire to work around the source media is key to this thesis' understanding of slash as providing respite from toxic masculinity and heteronormativity.

Going further, the second wave of fan studies (mid-1990s/early 2000s) asserted slash as a queer practice. Second wave enabled understanding of fandom as political not because fans were against the mainstream, as first wave fan scholarship had claimed, but rather because actual political stances (on queerness, feminism, capitalism, and so on) were beginning to be mixed into fan writing practices. This built up to Penley's claim of K/S being real men (1997), and how this showcasing of real men was indeed based on media literacy including how to read *Star Trek*, further theorised by Gwenllian Jones (2002) and Woledge (2005). Woledge introduced the concept of *decoding,* after Stuart Hall (Hall, 1980; Woledge, 2005), and this is key to chapter 5: how second-wave made reading K/S queerer.

Then, third wave fan studies (mid-2000s/early 2010s) developed discourses of fandom as digitally networked, personal, and intimate. Third wave scholarship opened up theoretical understandings of fandom in relation to social media. This perspective informed this thesis in its sampling for data collection; the third wave also enabled me to adopt an interconnected theoretical framework (a digital network) that saw intimate community belonging as key to

the personal fandom experience. This coincides with Woledge's notion of 'intimatopia' (2006) which helped me reconcile affect and identity/sex/gender. It is also inscribed in a sex-positive strand of feminism, creating slash as a hybrid kind of affective 'feminist' porn. These are ways in which the practice of slash writing and slash reading can meet feminist and queer politics; yet I claim notions of fourth-wave feminist politics expressed through fandom, relating to gender performance, have been missing from the field of K/S.

Finally, I finish this chapter on the emergence of fourth wave fan studies (mid-2010s/today), and how its connection to fourth-wave feminism allowed a fully interdisciplinary approach to fandom. The fourth wave entices us to analyse fandom and fanfiction as socially, politically embedded practices which highlight behaviours such as fan economies (Jenkins et al., 2013) and affective practices (Stein, 2015). These are key elements in chapter 7, where I build upon social media and online networks to follow affective practices in fandom. For this, I use specifically the concepts of feels culture (Stein, 2015) and gift economy (Jenkins et al., 2013). Additionally, fourth wave fan studies have shed light on the evolving demographics of slash fandom. No longer the aegis of white, straight women (Jamison, 2013; Busse, 2017), slash scholarship needs to offer more work on queer voices within fandom, which this thesis sets up to do.

To finish, there have been several theoretical frameworks in the analysis of slash-related desires: slash as feminist pornography (Russ, [1985] 2014), slash as equality in male/male couples (Penley, 1997, Bacon-Smith, 1992, Lamb and Veith, [1986] 2014, Jenkins, 1992, and Jamison, 2013), and slash as a hybrid genre of intimatopia (Woledge, 2006) where K/S is a way for sex to experience further intimacy. Out of these three main frameworks, I suggest that the question of slash desires is deeply enmeshed in fourth-wave, intersectional, sex-positive feminism and that the fan experience deals with desire in gendered ways. This thesis looks into why fans enjoy writing and reading about K/S, where they stand on the debates around resistance, subtext, and what can that tell us about the fan experience of slash in terms of literature and media literacy. Building upon the four waves of fan scholarship, my research explores the link between affect, intimacy, and fandom experiences of belonging.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework: A turn to the affective-discursive with fic as text, performance, community

In this thesis, I address gaps in fan studies as highlighted in chapter 2 by implementing fourth-wave feminist and fan methodology: an intersectional, interdisciplinary use of theory. Indeed, as explained in this chapter, I have focused on K/S slash fanfiction through a specific gender, queer, literary, and affect theoretical lens. To start looking at how this thesis is theoretically framed, I claim a turn to affect is necessary: a turn that is embodied and discursive. It became vital, after data collection, to pursue affect as a discursive practice for a relevant conceptualisation of my data. Indeed, the very digitally textual nature of fandom called to look at the fan experience not only through affect, with feelings of online belonging, but in terms of how this affect was shared and embodied through the use of specific discourse. My approach is based on an understanding of discourse as something that both discloses feelings and that allows feelings to be navigated.

On top of this, the conceptualisation of fic as text taps into debates within fan studies as to whether fic is literature or drama, and as to what fic's archival nature can tell us about fic as a text. This is why, in this theoretical framework, I consider in depth theories around fic as a textual archive. By this, I mean how fic texts can be conceptualised and how this conceptualisation (e.g., an alternative understanding of fic as archive or as archontic literature which creates its own ever-renewable archive) can reveal new ways of understanding literacy within fandom. The concept of literacy is important here, as it links back to earlier debates around reading Kirk and Spock's relationship as lovers in the original media (merely as subtext or rather as a resistant reading, Jenkins, 1992). By drawing the conceptual theory used in this thesis to understand fic as a text, I can analyse how fics can make fans more literate in media analysis, gender theory, sexuality, and 'good' relationships (as opposed to harmful/toxic). That is to say, how this literacy is indeed a tool to escape toxic masculinity and heteronormativity, giving fans the potential to experience feminism through the discourses at play within K/S.

Going further, this chapter also explores the gender and queer theories which can be used to conceptualise discourses of gender and sexuality, as they are being taught to the fan reader through K/S. Indeed, I claim literacy in gender and queer theory is being acquired as fans write feminist stories of Kirk and Spock, opening their texts to what is considered 'good' masculinity and 'good' relationships (non-harmful). In this chapter, I lay the basis of the theoretical framework I use to analyse such discourses: Judith Butler and her concept of gender performativity. The way Kirk and Spock are gendered in slash has been a key debate in fan studies since its inception; I suggest using Butler to look at K/S is a solution to the often essentialist theories of gender that see Kirk and Spock either as 'truly' male (Penley, 1997) or 'male and female'-coded (Lamb and Veith, [1986] 2014). I argue that by using gender studies such as Butler's theoretical framework of gender as performative and dialectical, we can go beyond essentialist interpretations of K/S. It allows us to delve deeper into Kirk and Spock as vessels for exploring identity; not as strictly male or female or a mix of both, but as a combination of performances. Performances that allow fans to deconstruct gender (learning to be literate in gender theory) and re-build their ideal version of K/S, through gendering practices (use of affect and discourse that create fic texts) turned into norms (e.g., the 'right' way for people, especially in male-coded bodies, to behave among others; and other norms including practices and representations as well as behaviours). These norms, analysed in chapter 6, are there to allow fans to become more literate and to provide them with respite from toxic masculinity and heteronormativity—a way of practising feminism. It is crucial for my thesis to consider these three strands (affect, gender, and literature) as interrelated, forming a three-dimensional framework (as explained in this chapter) which allows new understandings beyond previously considered binaries (affect/discourse, gender performance/gender binary, original literature/transformative works).

3.1) Affect and discourse: embodied affect

Whilst the turn to affect has been extensive in social and cultural theory, my main reference in theorising affect within this thesis is Margaret Wetherell. A discursive psychologist, she seeks to explore the relationship between affect and discourse to challenge the idea of affect as 'spooky force' (as seen in Massumi, 2002), or something pre-personal and without subjectivity. She also explores how affective-discursive practices shape embodiment.

She thus questions this notion of affect without a subject, or affect as a mysterious force (Massumi, 2002, 2015). For her, "no one seems to be able to say what the affecting forces consist of. […] Nothing seems to be added to them when they pass through human bodies" (2012: 125). Indeed, the theoretical framework for this thesis does not consider affect as 'spooky', as it accounts for the discursive practices at play within the affective fan experience. Analysing my data without reconciling affect and discourse would not allow me to look at the fan experience through the framework of feminist, material, textual practice.

For Wetherell, "the flow of affect is located in the body [and] within the flow of ordinary life. It becomes part of social interaction, caught up in social business" (2012: 77-78). In the same way, fan interactions and their social business, in the form of writing and reading K/S fanfiction, is a locus of affect that creates feelings of belonging (to the fandom and to feminism). Wetherell adds that "affective activity is an ongoing flow" (2015: 147). This thesis analyses this flow in fans' daily social life, how their ongoing relationship with K/S is in fact happening through writing practices. Wetherell focuses on 'embodied' affect, becoming visible in affective-discursive 'practices', which I follow in my own analysis of slash fic as affective-discursive feminist practice.

By affective-discursive, Wetherell argues that discourses are affective and work together to shape bodily possibilities and practices. She explains that "for many, discourse is seen as *taming* affect […]. I shall argue that it is the discursive that very frequently makes affect powerful, makes it radical and provides the means for affect to travel" (2012: 19). In the same way, it is crucial to understand in this thesis that the affect that travels within fandom does so through fan texts, creating discourses embodied by Kirk and Spock. Moreover, Wetherell's framing, which I use in this thesis, is compatible with Judith Butler's own theory on gender—which I explain later in this chapter. Butler, who sought to explore how discourses materialise gender and sexuality onto the body, is key to the understanding of affect as discursive. Indeed, fan affect—when it comes to slash—is conveyed and exchanged through the writing of Kirk and Spock as lovers. This fan affect uses Kirk and Spock's bodies to materialise specific discourses of gender and sexuality—hence the useful theoretical link between Butler and Wetherell. Wetherell provides a way of exploring these processes with empirical research data, showing how discursive processes are affective. This thesis looks at how affective-discursive practices materialise gender trouble in fan writing; I analyse how gender trouble plays out in fandom, understood as connected fan practices in chapter 6.

3.1.1) Online belongings: how fans experience community

Following Wetherell, this thesis focuses its enquiry in a theoretical framework of affect as discursive and embodied practice; going further, online communities such as the K/S fandom here pushed the enquiry into wondering how "taken-for-granted, everyday online activities might in themselves raise questions of community, belonging and subjectivity" (Ferreday, 2009: 2). This is why, alongside Wetherell's turn to affect, I will use Debra Ferreday's analysis of online belongings to inform the basis of this thesis' theoretical framework. I look into how fans belong to fandom, belong with texts, belong in relationships with other fans. Fandom, often taken for granted and an everyday online and communal activity, is itself sustained by feelings of belonging that interact with fans' feeling of the self— how they identify as fans, as queer, as female, as feminist.

Going further, I follow Ferreday's argument claiming that we should see "online interaction as reading," as she engages "with websites not as spaces of encounter, but as texts." I go on later to dismantle the opposition between 'texts' and 'spaces of encounter', following Ferreday through a turn to affect where text allows the unfolding of discourses, and these discourses reveal an affective space of encounter, making fic and fic paratexts (comments) a locus of embodied affect as communal practice. Indeed, her "engagement with that text is primarily as a reader" (2009: 16). By taking this approach, that is, 'reading' online communities through their subsequent texts produced, I claim looking at fandom 'as a reader' gives insights into fan text—and fan relationships mediated through text—which fan studies lacks as of today.

In this thesis, I took the theoretical stance of looking at fan works as literary works; which includes looking at fans as literary producers. I also look at fan relationships and how community is built through texts produced by fans: for example, reading paratexts around fic (comments) as the manifestation of online belongings and fan affect. I claim that K/S fandom should be read, because both affect and practices are mediated through writing and reading K/S fan text. In this way, fandom research has reached a new level of intertextuality: I turn to affect as mediated by discourse so as to read how fans feel, belong, and practice feminism.

This is why, in this thesis, I look at texts as normative dispositifs: texts as a benchmark of what is accepted and what is not. This includes not only the already-available fics and

comments on the fandom side, but also my chat interview transcripts. My theoretical framework is based on the understanding of text as affective-discursive which discloses norms about how fans belong, behave, feel. I thus follow Ferreday's suggestion that "by paying attention to the ways in which specific online communities create norms, and provide spaces in which their members are able to 'cite' those norms, it should become possible to explain how those communities work to produce a sense of identification in the user" (2009: 29). Creating a sense of identification amongst fans, I researched how the fans' feelings of belonging to the K/S community could disclose norms—norms that cite the 'right' way of doing gender, sexuality, affective labour, pedagogy and literacy, and how fans cite these norms to be shielded from heteronormativity and toxic masculinity and to feel pleasure. My theoretical framework for this thesis 'reads' which norms are 'cited' to conceptualise the data I have collected over time.

By reading the ways in which fans say they belong (interviews), reading the ways in which fans expressed affect (fic comments), and reading how specific norms were cited (in K/S fanfiction), I came to understand key issues in the *Star Trek* fandom for feminist scholars. These issues were: what is the nature of fic, what performances of gender and sexuality did fic privilege, and how did fans deal with the communal aspect of slash. These are the main enquiries underlining my thesis; my theoretical framework, addressing the various aspects of these enquiries, is at the intersection of gender theory, literary theory, and affect theory.

3.1.2) Feels culture: the performance of intimate emotion

In chapter 7, I turn to affect in the circulation of K/S works especially; how discourse enables the sharing of feelings of belonging, of pleasure, of relief and how that circulation works at a community level. Alongside fan studies concepts from Louisa Ellen Stein and Henry Jenkins, this thesis looks at the aforementioned feelings by reading which potential norms they cite—that is to say, what are the norms in fans expressing affect through text.

Stein, in her 2015 book *Millennial Fandom,* introduces the concept of "feels culture". A widespread concept within contemporary online fandom, 'feels' is directly linked to the affective reaction brought up by a relationship, media, story, or character (Stein, 2015). She theorises feels as follows: "millennial feels culture combines an aesthetics of intimate emotion […] with an aesthetics of high performativity" (2015: 158). By connecting intimate emotion

with high performativity, as an aesthetic, I claim she refers to the textual aesthetics that are normed within fandom. That is to say, how to properly write 'feelings' about fic and K/S, the implicit rules within the community around expression of feeling. I claim following these rules, in turn, enable a feeling of belonging to the fandom: the creation of community.

Stein explains that feels culture is a "public celebration of emotion previously considered the realm of the private. In feels culture, emotions remain intimate but are no longer necessarily private; rather, they build a sense of an intimate collective, one that is bound together precisely by the processes of shared emotional authorship" (2015: 156). Looking at affect through the lens of a discursive, citational practice, I argue feels culture feeds into this theoretical framework by, indeed, bringing an understanding of K/S fandom as a collective whose writing practices convey affect. Such writing practices cite norms, and through such norms is affect being circulated, creating feelings of belonging to K/S fandom. Feels culture is a normative, discursive, affective practice.

Stein thus creates a recognised, nuanced term within the digital fandom sphere. She inscribes fandom in a definite turn to affect with the creation of feels culture. Analysing the fannish experience, she suggests fandom is not only affective but also affectively networked: the high performativity of feels is there to be interacted with.

In this thesis, feels culture is about a networking of the 'performance' of affective relationships to K/S: the making public of what is considered private, taking a discursive materialisation within the fan comments left on K/S fanfiction. Focusing on fic comments, where fans use specific registers to convey appreciation, chapter 7 looks into which norms are being cited to create affective-discursive registers. Indeed, feels culture has highly performative aesthetics: Stein hints at the constructedness of feels, the fact that it is made visible and articulated via specific norms to become legible.

Stein focuses on feels culture as a collective culture of fan authorship; "an expansive fannish collective to which we all belong," and suggests that "it celebrates our collective belonging through images of embodied emotion" (2015: 157). Stein's foregrounding of embodied emotion supports this thesis' emphasis on embodied affect (Wetherell, 2012) and on feelings of belonging (Ferreday, 2009).

For Stein, it is this aesthetics of intimate emotion combined with an aesthetics of high performativity that creates feels culture. This kind of discursive expression inspired by Stein's work, I suggest, can be called 'feelspeak' (as a way to distinguish Stein's original theory of feels

culture from my own contribution). High performativity, in feelspeak, is materialised by the use of gifs, hashtags, images, but most of all emojis, repeated punctuation, spoken grammar, effusive syntax and text that indicate "the sense that we are accessing an author's immediate and personal emotional response to media culture" (Stein, 2015: 158). This response uses the practices above as the citational tools so specific to feelspeak.

Stein is suggesting we are familiarised with the intimate emotions of a fan; affect and feelings are 'made' through the materialisation of feelspeak; it is performative. Indeed, we do not know the actual emotions of the fan. Rather, we feel kindred to the fan through the 'opening' to a collective emotional authorship, following feelspeak rules and norms. Feels culture is material, where fans say they feel certain things according to visual and discursive rules; what is important here is that this very performance in the embodiment of affect is turned into tokens of appreciation through fan comments on K/S fic.

Finally, Stein opposes her feelspeak discursive register to a register of professionalism within fandom; a register that opposes an embodiment of celebrating collective intimacy to an embodiment of being a celebrated single author. "Although the celebratory discourse surrounding feels culture may be highly visible and seem all-encompassing, millennial fan culture does not simply celebrate the democratic collective at the expense of all else. [Such discourses] go hand in hand with an emphasis on professional skill and professional aesthetics" (Stein, 2015: 159). She even suggests that "the millennial fan collective has brought about what might be termed a backlash: a call to protect the rights and values of the individual author, and a call to value professionalized skill" (2015: 159). Stein thus opposes feelspeak, which is deemed emotional, to a more professional discursive register, which is deemed rational and asserts authority. This rationality divorced from emotion is in fact, I claim, a false dichotomy; professional discursive registers also carry affect. This thesis' theoretical framework sees these professional discursive registers of feels as 'profeels', a term I will use to conceptualise my data in chapter 7 alongside feelspeak.

The lines between collective feelspeak and individual profeels are, I argue, increasingly becoming blurred. Authors who write what other fans deem as literature can also use feelspeak, in the comments or author's notes, to convey gratitude and performances of intimacy. Fans who use feelspeak might also mix it with profeels, or even use other registers of feels to take part in the feedback loop of fic comments. Feels culture encompasses multiple

modes of expression; the plurality of these modes, as found in my data, undermine an imagined binary of high performance and high professionalism.

3.1.3) A gift and affect economy: the circulation of emotion

To complete my theoretical framework in terms of affect, the data I collected needed to be conceptualised in a way that would engage with how such affect was networked. This is why I turned to the 'economies' at play within K/S fandom communities.

In his media studies book co-authored with Sam Ford and Joshua Green, Henry Jenkins looks into the way media circulates, is "spread" across society (2013). He avoids metaphors of "infection" and "contamination" (which is reminiscent of Margaret Wetherell's criticism of contagious affect) to focus on how "audiences play an active role in "spreading" content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media" (2013: 21). Indeed, for Jenkins et al., audiences' "choices, investments, agendas, and actions determine what gets valued" (2013: 21). The fan scholars argue that it is fans who give value to content, by deciding to spread such content in ways that reflect their affective involvement with it—creating fandom. Jenkins et al. give agency to fans through the materialising of media circulation as something that is spread, unlike the model of a contagious virus that would illustrate exchanges of affective matter as something spooky and unmoored to affective practice.

According to Jenkins et al., a focus on media spreadability "refers to the potential—both technical and cultural—for audiences to share content for their own purposes, sometimes with the permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes" (2013: 3). This is linked to Jenkins' concept of "textual poaching" ([1992] 2013) developed in the nineties, where fans are seen as "readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform [the experience of consuming media] into a rich and complex participatory culture" (Jenkins, [1992] 2013: 23). In effect, Jenkins has been continually advocating for the recognition of fannish agency and the scientific research of fan practices which culminates in his theory of "spreadable media," where "audience members are active participants in making meaning within networked media," and where media gains affective charge as it is "expanded by their movement from person to person and community to community" (Jenkins et al., 2013: 20-21).

This theory of media circulation has been analysed by Jenkins et al. within fandom. As they theorised about 'spreading' as key to determine what gets valued, Jenkins et al. have introduced a concept of 'gift economy'. In *Spreadable Media*, they develop two interlinked economies taking place within fandom: the aforementioned gift economy between fans, which creates worth, *and* a commodity economy between media marketers and fans, which creates value (2013). In this thesis, the conceptualisation of my data revolves around a gift economy between fans. Indeed, to understand how affect is being circulated through textual practices, it is necessary to look into how such practices are seen by fans: gifts. The key tenet of fandom is that it is free; in this way, I claim alongside Jenkins that economies at play in fandom are affective gifts, for the most part in a textual form. The authors add that a gift economy places greater emphasis on "social motives" (Jenkins et al., 2013: 63); here, wanting to escape heteronormativity and toxic masculinity, in the form of gift-giving: slash fic.

When Jenkins et al. identify a gift economy within fandom, they thus identify an economy of social motives that 'tokenise' social practices of 'media spreading' as a way to generate and exchange emotional worth. They suggest that "in the informal gift economy […] the failure to share material is socially damaging" (2013: 63). That means Jenkins et al. place emphasis on the practice of gift giving and receiving as socially meaningful; which, I argue, is also affective. Indeed, affect—through a discursive practice—is at the heart of the fan gift economy.

Similarly to Jenkins' gift economy, Wetherell develops Ahmed's concept of affective economy. Later in her book *Affect and Emotion* (2012), she offers a critique of Ahmed's idea of 'sticky' affect and develops Ahmed's subsequent 'affective economy', which I will use in coordination with Jenkins' gift economy as a way to conceptualise my data. Wetherell argues that affect without a subject is too vague to constitute subjectivity (2012: 125) and adds that she wants to "look more closely at the transmission of affect," being "interested in how affect circulates" (2012: 141). Similarly, I am interested in contributing to understanding of how affect circulates by combining it with Jenkins' own theory of how media circulates.

Going further with Wetherell's understanding of affective economy, affect thus circulates according to an economy where emotions work as a form of capital: they are produced as an effect of their circulation. Such affect, circulating between objects and signs, accumulates value over time. A sign like 'asylum seeker' accrues more and more value and

capital over time; affect is accumulating around the figure (Wetherell, 2012: 157). This 'accumulation' of value can, depending on who conducts it, serve different ideological ends.

Hence, for Wetherell, "what creates values and/or capital is the direction and history of affective practice over time, and the history of its entanglements with other onto-formative social practices and social formations. The concept of affective practice, then, encompasses the movement of signs but it also tries to explain how affect is embodied, is situated and operates psychologically" (2012: 159). In other words, an affect economy's currency is the orientation, frequency, and co-construction (with social practices and social formations) of embodied affective practice, repeated over time.

Bringing together Jenkins' gift economy, based on social positioning through strategies of worth, and Wetherell's affect economy, based on social positioning through strategies of repeated social practices, gave me the theoretical framework needed to identify the various types of discourse of affect at play in feels culture, analysed in chapter 7.

3.2) Fic as literary practice

The second side to my three-dimensional theoretical framework, after affect, is the consideration of fic as text—and of fans as literary agents, creating textual archives that take the form of fandoms. In this section, I lay out the basis for understanding how I conceptualise fic as text within this thesis. I build up on the divide between conceptualising fic as literature or as drama, and how a bridge between these can be created (as seen in chapter 5) through specific archival practices. Going further, I explain how understanding fic as text implies that literacy around such texts is possible; in fandom, I claim it is encouraged. Tying back into affect, I argue feelings of belonging are intimately linked to reading *Star Trek* in the 'right' way, and to reading K/S fic in a way that cites specific norms around gender and sexuality.

3.2.1) Fic as drama? A unique take in the conceptualisation of fic as text

Francesca Coppa's essay, published in a 2006 and a 2014 collection of essays on fanfiction (both edited by Hellekson and Busse), makes a unique claim: for her, "fan fiction develops in response to dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling and can therefore

be seen to fulfil performative rather than literary criteria" ([2006] 2014: 218). This means that fic texts should be conceptualised through a performative lens, rather than be seen as novel-like literary works that can be commercialised. I use Coppa's take on fic in a way that reconciles performativity and literature—the basis of chapter 5—yet it is necessary here to look deeper into what 'dramatic storytelling' entails.

Coppa explains that fic "is charged with being derivative and repetitive, too narrowly focused on bodies and character at the expense of plot or idea. That may sound like failure by conventional literary standards, but if we examine fan fiction as a species of performance, the picture changes. […] Fan fiction's concern with bodies is often perceived as a problem or flaw, but performance is predicated on the idea of bodies, rather than words, as the storytelling medium" ([2006] 2014: 222). This focus on bodies as a storytelling medium links back to my understanding of affect. As affect is materialised through bodily practices, here Kirk and Spock's bodies are used to convey both affect and stories, following specific norms cited by fans through fic writing and literacy.

In this way, this thesis' theoretical framework intersects with two concepts: a turn to affect, as embodied practice (Wetherell, 2012), and a focus on performativity, as embodied storytelling (and norm-citing for gender and sexuality). I suggest that the duality around analysing fic as drama or literature can open new ways of thinking about fic. The following sections delve deeper into alternative understandings of fic as text, which are needed as I argue they can all be reconciled alongside Coppa, allowing me to conceptualise fic in a new way in chapter 5.

3.2.2) Textual archives and the archontic

A significant contribution to the conceptualisation of fic in fan studies theory takes place in Abigail Derecho's essay on fic as 'archontic literature' (2006): fic as literature that creates archives. She explains that "*archontic* relates to the word *archive*," and she takes it from "Jacques Derrida's 1995 work *Archive Fever*, in which Derrida claims that any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents" (2006: 64). As an alternative to popular understandings of fic as literature being transformative (in relation to the source text), Derecho manages to remove fic from politics of worth and value (what is the worth of transformative content) and offers a new conceptualisation of fic, as fully self-

sufficient despite its connection to the original media (eg. *Star Trek*). Indeed, she doesn't see fic exactly as transformative or derivative; but rather as a writerly practice that does not need to be attached to the original media, as the concept of the archive allows it autonomy.

Indeed, the term archontic grants this genre of literature a place of "inherently, structurally," being "a literature of the subordinate" (2006: 72). This is, while adjacent to Coppa's understanding of fic as drama, key to the understanding of my wider conceptualisation in chapter 5. Indeed, Derecho explains that "fan fiction is a genre that has a long history of appealing to women and minorities, individuals on the cultural margins who used archontic writing as a means to express not only their narrative creativity, but their criticisms of social and political inequities as well" (2006: 76). I argue the following: be it conceptualised as drama or literature, fic transcends traditional hierarchies of genre as an archival, affective practice that uses bodies to unfold discourses criticising social and political inequities, as well as provide respite from the heteropatriarchy. The focus on valuable repetition, as a core function of fic, creating archives, could be understood as something akin to theatre—a production of Kirk and Spock's relationship, where each iteration has the same value as another—alongside literature.

As an intersection between Coppa's theory of dramatisation and Derecho's concept of a fic archive, Abigail De Kosnik provides the building of scholarly work after Coppa's fic as production: looking into what it is producing exactly. For De Kosnik, it is producing a meta-archive. She explains that "Coppa's theories of fan fiction as performances lead me to ask a speculative question about fan archives: What if a fan archive were structured to preserve all of the fan fiction in a given fandom with an eye to the fact that every fan story is a unique performance of a source text?" (De Kosnik, 2015: ¶ 3.1-3.2). In fact, she even argues that "fan archives preserve fan fiction stories in just this way—as new extensions and versions and augmentations of source material. […] Every fan fiction archive is, in some sense, a concrete, visible incarnation of a wide variety of performances based on that source material" (De Kosnik, 2015: ¶ 3.1-3.2). This allows me to conceptualise fic as follows: a text that is both dramatic and literary, which—by the repetitive nature of its practice—creates archives that encapsulate the fan's experiencing of the source media. This practice of rewriting the source media is a feminist practice, as it seeks to criticise and provide respite from toxic masculinity and heteronormativity, alongside other discriminations (e.g. race, see Pande, 2018).

In this way, the inclusion of fic within a greater meta-archive allows us to ask further questions such as whether audiences of mass texts are "passive or active" (De Kosnik, 2015: ¶ 3.4). In effect, looking at slash fic through this framework enables us to ask more about the production of cultural and political matter within fandom in relation to the source text. Conceptualising fic text as archival material, De Kosnik adds, in reference to earlier analyses of fan practices (see chapter 2), that "audiences are active, that they make their own meanings of texts, that they are never wholly passive in their intake of media (Fiske 1987; Lewis 1991; Hall [1981] 1998; Hebdige 1988; McRobbie 2000)" and that "online fan archives […] offer visible evidence that audiences actively and imaginatively engage with media texts" (2015: ¶ 3.4). To conceptualise fic as an active, intentional textual practice (literary or dramatic) is to understand fic as something that can teach both media literacy and political awareness, related to heteronormativity and discriminatory power structures.

Building on the theories of fic as archontic literature and fic as bodily-focused meta-archives, I argue we can conceptualise fandom writing practices further according to Stuart Hall's notion of decoding, as used by Woledge and Busse, to bridge the gap between source and transformative, archontic/archival text.

3.2.3) A focus on fic as interpretive communities

Adding to the corpus of work which conceptualises fic as text, Busse selects literary theorist Stanley Fish's concept of "interpretive communities" (2017: 30) and Stuart Hall's work around dominant reading in "decoding" (2017: 106) to look into fic texts as pedagogic. Stuart Hall's concept was also re-purposed by Elizabeth Woledge (2005). Both fan academics argue that beyond the conceptualisation of fic as comprising specific kinds of textual practices, a conceptualisation of fic as a pedagogic practice materialised through text (be it literary, dramatic, or as I argue in chapter 5, a hybrid of these) is necessary.

First of all, Fish, taking insights from reader-response criticism, summarises his concept of interpretive communities as follows: "it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings […]. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts" (Fish, 1980: 14). For him, a text has meaning within a set of cultural assumptions, which shape it. Writers write a certain way because they operate in an interpretive community, which in turn influences the

text to be understood in a specific way. This means, in this thesis, that *Star Trek* K/S communities are interpretive communities which shape not only how the fan texts are read, but how they are written. And it is through this writing practice that political agendas are activated, linking the single fan reader to the K/S community as a whole—creating feelings of belonging (Ferreday, 2009). The audiences of mass texts, here *Star Trek*, are active rather than passive because they belong to an interpretive community.

Indeed, Fish suggests that "there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only "ways of reading" that are extensions of community perspectives. […] This meant that the business of criticism [is] to determine from which of a number of possible perspectives reading will proceed" (1980: 16). The way fans interpret characterisation and plot stems from their belonging to an interpretive community; fic is used as a medium for a criticism of the wider world fans are evolving in—*Star Trek* being read in a way that provides respite from such a world. In fanfic production, the act of writing is an act of belonging: by using codes, tropes, and storylines that are stemming from an interpretive community (here, K/S), a feeling of belonging to the K/S community is created.

Busse, then, explains that "Fish redefines the reading as a (collective) writing process, […] pointing out that texts only ever mean when they get read, and that this reading process is never only passive or directed by author and text alone" (2017: 30). Slash fics are the result of the *Star* Trek text being read; all reading is a writing process, and writing fanfiction makes this overt, through practices that are communally shared. Busse goes further by saying that members of an interpretive community (fans) share certain "articles of faith" about what is seen as good fanfiction and good writing, as well as a "repertoire of interpretive strategies" with respect to canon (2017: 110). Chapter 6 will look at what 'good' fic and 'good' writing teaches, building up on chapter 5's repertoire of interpretive strategies. Fanfiction benefits from being interpreted through reader-response theory, as offered by Fish and Busse. Indeed, as Fish's "interpretive communities denote a collection of interpretive strategies," in the case of slash "fan fiction readers and writers create actual communities" of people rather than just strategies (2017: 30). This is key to my conceptualisation of fic; I am interested in how these interpretive communities, more specifically the Kirk/Spock slash fan community, create meaning around the characters' relationship and behaviour, especially in regards to gender and sexuality.

In effect, "fannish interpretive communities define themselves around shared readings of a character, a pairing, or a particular aspect of a fictional universe. Communities may form around central interpretive moments, such as the celebration or rejection of a central plot point or a particularly aggressive reading of a controversial source text event" (Busse, 2017: 127). These interpretive moments, I claim, need to be analysed to learn more about the fans themselves: the ways fans read have to be conceptualised, as well as the moments around which interpretations coalesce (here specifically K/S), to make sense of the impact of fic on the community.

3.2.4) Decoding and encoding

This is where Stuart Hall's concept of *encoding/decoding,* applied by Busse (2017) and Woledge (2005) to fan theory, helps us bridge theoretical gaps when it comes to the impact of fic reading on fans. Woledge argues that to examine the interpretive strategies used by fans in the production of K/S, we can borrow Hall's term "decoding" (Hall, 1981). She explains that Hall said the interpretation of media messages might be conceptualised by how the meanings or "codes" that were encoded into them at production (here, the original *Star Trek*) were understood or "decoded" at the moment of audience (here, the fans decoding Kirk and Spock's relationship as lovers) (2005: 238). Here, within this system, decodings might be classified as "dominant, negotiated or oppositional" depending on the extent that they diverged from the initial encoding: conceptualising fic as oppositional (eg. Jenkins, 1992 and Derecho, 2006) or negotiated (Woledge, 2005: 238). "Different communities of readers make different decodings because of the differences in their knowledge structures and cultural competencies; decodings shared by large communities have traditionally been seen as preferred readings," or in Hall's terms "dominant decodings", while those shared by smaller communities, such as K/S fans, have been seen as "negotiated" or "oppositional decodings" (Woledge, 2005: 238). Here, Woledge suggests heterosexuality and homosocial bonds are seen as the 'dominant' or 'preferred' meaning (Hall, [1980] 2005) within the decoding of *Star Trek*, yet slash fans use the same material to decode K/S, thus creating interpretive communities (Fish, 1980) with similar decodings that see Kirk and Spock as lovers. This is key to the further conceptualisation of fic as a text that can be read in specific ways, ways that look into the pedagogy of the medium.

Taking Hall's analysis of television, "more often broadcasters are concerned that the audience has failed to take the meaning as they—the broadcasters—intended. What they really mean to say is that viewers are not operating within the 'dominant' or 'preferred' code" ([1980] 2005: 125). This reflects the way that *Star Trek* viewers who enjoy K/S are not operating within the dominant, heterosexual and homosocial code. In effect, "it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference" ([1980] 2005: 127). By conceptualising slash fic in this way, it is now possible to look at issues of reading (decoding) and rewriting (what I name, in chapter 5, re-encoding: the encoding of transformative writing) within the K/S interpretive community. It allows us to go beyond fan studies' tendency to focus on the nature of the initial encoding, that is to say, whether the idea of Kirk and Spock being lovers was intentional in the original *Star Trek* or not. This way, earlier issues of incorporation/resistance and subtext are acknowledged but also surpassed, in the way decoding allows for fan agency (they decode and re-encode) while focusing on the practice itself (fic writing) and not Gene Roddenberry's authorial intent (the creator of *Star Trek*), which is rather difficult—or impossible—to make out. How this media literacy, this decoding of *Star Trek* and re-encoding of K/S happens within fanfic writing will be the starting point of my chapter 5.

3.3) Gender and sexuality

The third and final side to my three-dimensional theoretical framework, after affect and the consideration of fic as text, is the conceptualisation of gender and sexuality—which is necessary to the understanding of slash fic as a feminist practice. I first look at how gender and sexuality are intertwined in my thesis framework, then at how the heterosexual matrix is key to the conceptualisation of gender and sexuality as performative (Butler, 2007). The writing and reading of fic in specific ways directly highlight gender's performativity, as fans use writing to explore and teach their own vision of gender and sexuality. What is deemed 'good' in the identity and relationship of Kirk and Spock, I argue, is considered as norm within the interpretive community of K/S; chapter 6 unfold these norms according to Judith Butler's theories. Another layer in this conceptualisation is the turn to affect: as Kirk and Spock's

bodies are used to embody discourses of 'good' masculinities and 'good' relationships (as opposed to toxic or harmful), the same discourses are also used to convey fan affect about Kirk and Spock as lovers.

3.3.1) Gender and sexuality as intertwined

I inscribe my work in the fourth wave of fan studies and look at the intersection between gender theory, affect, and fandom. This is why, for this thesis, I use Judith Butler's work on gender and sexuality. But first, the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality (especially in regards to homosexuality and gender performativity) needs to be conceptualised. For this, I refer to scholars Momin Rahman and Stevi Jackson.

According to them, "homosexuality is meaningful or socially significant precisely because it forms the basis of an identity which is outside the conventional gender order and, as a result, is placed at the bottom of the gender/sexual hierarchy. […] From a sociological perspective, then, **gender and sexuality are intimately intertwined:** the social construction and significance of one can rarely be understood without considering the other" (2010: 5). Following this, gender and sexuality seem inexistent without the other; in effect, in the specific case of heterosexuality, it implies "a gendered institution based on gendered relationships: social and personal relations between women and men" (Rahman and Jackson, 2010: 187). Being in a heterosexual relationship enforces the role of being a man and being a woman. In the same way, I look into what type of masculinities homosexuality enforces in K/S fic, yet also what type of queerness is enforced by 'good' masculinity (the way masculinity is normed by fans against toxic masculinity). This is the centre of chapter 6. The social construction of gender and queerness are indeed intimately intertwined: I argue they need to be conceptualised through the concept of embodiment. Actually, they are citational; gender and sexuality are manifested through the body, as something that is performed in relation to someone else. Kirk is queer because there is Spock, Spock is queer because there is Kirk—their masculinities are cited in relation to each other. We look at the 'goodness' of their gender because they bring it out of each other, through the embodiment of specific performances for each other, dictated by the fan writer who belongs to the K/S interpretive community.

3.3.2) The heterosexual matrix: what the fans fight against

Butler claims in her book *Gender Trouble*, a cornerstone of gender studies, that "becoming" a gender "is a laborious process of becoming *naturalized*, which requires a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings. […] Some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body" ([1990] 2007: 95). Becoming a gender, then, is intimately linked to 'being the right body' and 'desiring the right body parts'. According to the heterosexual norm, this becoming is key to what Butler calls a 'heterosexual matrix' ([1990] 2007).

Rahman and Jackson analyse Butler's heterosexual matrix as follows: "precisely because heterosexuality's discursive constitution depends on the constant enactment of its gendered identities, these 'performances' are constantly being replayed over and over, becoming 'performative' in that they are reiterating gender norms, but often they will fail to live up to perfect copies of the ideal […]. Furthermore, these resistances reveal that there is no original gender from which homosexuals deviate, but rather that the heterosexual matrix itself is a 'regulatory fiction'" (2010: 128). Butler, famous for going against naturalising interpretations of sex and gender, argues that the heterosexual matrix is indeed used by society to police gender and sex, through the standardisation of heterosexuality. Homosexuality, or queerness, is effectively disruptive as it falls beside such a matrix, hence taking back power over sex and gender and exposing them for what they conceptually are: a performance existing because it is cited against something or someone else. The heterosexual matrix "serves to instate [categories of sex and gender] as exclusive, natural and interdependent" (Rahman and Jackson, 2010: 128). The breaking and subverting of the heterosexual matrix through queerness, taking place in K/S fics, still inscribes specific parts of Kirk and Spock's bodies as foci of pleasure but this time outside of what society considers 'normal' masculinity. While this departs from societal standards of heteronormative masculinity, new norms are developed in K/S communities; yet norms that conceptualise Kirk and Spock's gender as performative and not natural or biological.

This is why this thesis departs from earlier fan studies that have based their understanding of K/S upon an essentialist analysis of gender roles (Jones, 2014; Penley, 1997, Driscoll, 2006; Tresca, 2014; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Lamb and Veith, 2014, principally). That is to

say, these fan scholars support their own analysis of slash through a differentiation between masculine and feminine roles that are implicitly referring to gender stability within the heterosexual matrix. For example, fans—typically identified as heterosexual women—are analysed as desiring the supposed "equality" between two gay men (or equal power), or because they are attracted to the male "sex" (Russ, 2014) and same-sex gay relationships (Bacon-Smith, 1992). They are also seen as enjoying slash romance due to the two gay men either embodying non-threatening masculinity or some feminine qualities (Lamb and Veith, 2014)—due to the fact that women writers inscribe their own identity into the characterisation—while remaining men (Penley, 1997).

Yet, as much as these kinds of analysis remain central to the understanding of gender in slash dynamics, I argue that we find ourselves in a bind around the apparent self-sufficient binarity of gender according to the heterosexual matrix (as a heterosexual woman I must be attracted to the 'opposite' gender, hence why Kirk and Spock together are attractive; if Kirk and Spock love each other, that implies there are feminine qualities in each of them that attracts the other; and so on and so forth). By this I mean that there is a problem in using a binary framework to attempt to get out of a gender dichotomy: gender (and, by extension, sexuality) conceptualised through the heterosexual matrix does not allow us to look at Kirk and Spock differently than other heterosexual couples. Looking at gender through a performative lens (Butler, [1990] 2007) seems like, I argue, an efficient way out of arguments about gender as stemming from a natural core belonging to Kirk and Spock.

This is why, in chapter 6, I will look at how specific concepts taken from gender studies are relevant to the analysis of K/S slash in the light of my own data—such as hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity (Connell, 2005), hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007; Paetcher, 2018), homonormativity (Duggan, 2002, 2003), and the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999).

3.3.3) Gender performativity and trouble

To make sense of this heterosexual matrix and the relationship between gender and sexuality within fic, we must also have a closer look at how Butler theorises gender. For her, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized*

repetition of acts" (1988: 519). Gender is a social enactment; it is not the 'starting point' of consequent acts but rather it is 'made' through the repetition of these acts.

Butler introduces the notion of gender trouble ([1990] 2007), in order for gender to 'trouble' social norms such as the heterosexual matrix. For her, one should make "an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, *to make gender trouble [...] through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity*" (2007: 46, emphasis mine). Butler sees gender as a copy of a copy, exaggerated performances such as drag (2007) making obvious that femininity and masculinity are social performances and not bound by natural or biological laws. Gender, posted by the heterosexual matrix as the natural foundation for heterosexuality—hence making homosexuality and gender queerness un-natural—can be, thanks to Butler, used to confront such a matrix. By 'over' doing or 'subversively' doing gender, by rewriting it into the body as act and not biological imperative, one can indeed question the heterosexual matrix. In this thesis, I argue many fans are attempting to do so through making Kirk and Spock act in queer and feminist ways. This conceptualisation of gender is the focus of chapter 6.

Butler explains that "it is important not only to understand how the terms of gender are instituted, naturalized, established as presuppositional, but to trace the moments at which the binary system of gender is disrupted and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, where the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable" (2001: 12). By talking about gender, we are assigning it, performing it; yet fans write gender in a way that is malleable and transformable as they disrupt its binarism.

This theory of gender allows me to conceptualise fic in new ways, as in the creation of slash fanfic the hyperrealism (when it comes to male bodies) is so prevalent that Kirk and Spock's 'maleness' is both exaggerated and subverted (with non-normative actions and affect). Kirk and Spock also embody feminine acts, which add to the disruption of gender—a troubling of gender, revealing its performativity. In effect, Butler suggests that "through performativity, dominant and nondominant gender norms are equalized" (2001: 6): Kirk and Spock acting in a masculine and feminine ways can be conceptualised as demonstrating that gender is embodied and not natural. This displaces earlier discussions of Kirk and Spock's maleness/femininity (and whether they are one, both, or the other) into discussions of Kirk

and Spock's identity as vessel for the criticism of the heterosexual matrix. This is why writing Kirk and Spock is a gendering practice, and why conceptualising gender this way is key to understanding the mechanisms at play in fic as providing respite from toxic masculinity and heteronormativity.

I analyse, in chapter 6, how slash enables the breaking down of identities. Yet discourse also has a role to play in this process of breaking down, and Butler has herself a nuanced understanding of discourse. She explains, for example, that "the power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression" (2007: 158). Gender is made through discourse, and I claim that through my data analysis, discourse in fic is a way beyond gender oppression.

3.4)   Conclusion

To conclude, my theoretical framework for chapters 5, 6, and 7 has been informed by a turn to embodied, discursive affect (Wetherell, 2012, Ferreday, 2009). Following the strategy of fourth wave fan studies, I have here provided the theoretical means necessary for an intersectional, intertextual framework. Indeed, further chapters look at how fans belong to fandom, with texts, in relationships with other fans. By looking at how fans perpetuate norms about writing 'good' characters and being 'good' members of the K/S community, I was able to develop three data analysis chapters based on an interpretation of fic as literary text, as a gender and sexuality performance, and as affective community.

First, my theoretical framework around affect (as a discursive embodied practice) sets up the concepts needed for an understanding of fic as a community, with affect circulating as drive for this community. Trying to reconcile Stein's notion of 'feels culture' with such circulation of affect, I laid out the concepts needed to understand that "what links community, belonging and fantasy is the notion of affect; that it is the capacity of bodies and texts to affect and be affected that structures online belongings" (Ferreday, 2009: 30). Building up on these online belongings, chapter 7 looks into the capacity of fans and fic to affect and be affected; I use Jenkins et al.'s notion of gift economy (2013) to structure such dynamics. I also reject affect as pre-discursive and 'spooky', taking a theoretical leap to define and analyse affect through discourse; in chapter 7 I lay out four different types of affective discourses that are at play in the circulation of affect around K/S fanfiction.

The second side to my theoretical framework is informed by debates around the nature of fic as text, such as Kristina Busse (and Elizabeth Woledge) who analysed in detail Stanley Fish's concept of interpretive communities and Stuart Hall's concept of decoding (Busse, 2017). Those concepts act as a way to locate reader response and reader agency; indeed, meaning is taken to be embedded within the fandom (the interpretive community) and as being decoded and re-encoded there. These interpretive communities are affectively reading, relying on feelings of belonging (Ferreday, 2009) to enact practices of meaning-making through K/S. Going further, Derecho develops the concept of fic as archontic literature (2006), or literature of archives—locating the differences in 'repetition' within an ever-growing archive physically present in AO3. Finally, Francesca Coppa offers the concept of fic as drama (2006, 2014), a unique take on the debates around the nature of fic. For her, drama justifies the focus on bodies and performance, making the repetitious nature of fic akin to a repetition of various 'productions' (just like theatre), creating a meta-archive (De Kosnik, 2015). By using these concepts in chapter 5, I thus build up a bridge between literature and drama, following Hall's concept of decoding also used by Woledge (2005), and set out to analyse what kinds of pedagogies are at play in K/S.

To finish, chapter 6 rests on Judith Butler's notion of gender as performance ([1990] 2007). Following Butler, gender and sexuality are intimately intertwined (as explained in Rahman and Jackson, 2010) and by making the act of talking about gender, one genders the topic at hand: that is to say, when my fan writer participants say that 'Kirk is definitely a feminist man' for example, this genders Kirk in ways that fic can spell out. A performance of gender is at play, which many fan scholars have attempted to disclose (Penley, 1997 especially), yet few have done so in a way that did not essentialise or reify gender. Fan studies have been trying to 'discover' the essence of Kirk and Spock's gender, overpassing its constructed nature in the process. The heterosexual matrix, or desiring 'the right body' while being in 'the right body', is another of Butler's concepts allowing me to understand the gendering processes at play in K/S slash. Then gender trouble, a key concept from Butler's body of work ([1990] 2007), takes a new dimension as K/S writing is interpreted as a gendering practice that troubles the heterosexual matrix.

With this three-dimensional theoretical framework, I have attempted to set up the theory for data analysis. With the unique use of interviews in my data collection on top of fic

texts, I was able to overlap enough data to conceptualise new dynamics within fan studies, helped by the inputs from gender, queer, literary, and affect studies.

Chapter 4. Methodology: About investigating affect and community in online spaces

This chapter traces this thesis' methodological process and enquiries: first explaining how my own involvement in the *Star Trek* fandom impacted this work (being an aca-fan), then the research design (including my pilot study), the methods (textual analysis of fics, semi-structured interviews, textual analysis of comments, structured interviews), the data analysis (critical discourse analysis), and the ethical issues at play. The main areas of enquiry in this thesis are as follows: *how does fanfiction challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality in mainstream media content? And, what does the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction?* As these questions will be answered in my chapters 5, 6, and 7, this chapter is framed around methodology-specific questions: *how do I go about investigating affect and community in online spaces, how are my research methods and methodology relevant and original in answering the question of investigating affect and community in online spaces, and what is the significance of the choices I have made within this thesis?*

For my research design to be aligned with my research aims, that is to say, the concordance between the first set of questions and the second set of questions, I have crafted my study around fourth wave fan studies (Hannell, 2020); by using an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991, see chapter 2) focus, I structured my thesis around the meeting of affect, feminism, queer studies, pedagogy, and fan studies theory. By intersectional, I also mean (supplementary to the feminist praxis at play here) data at the intersection of various qualitative entry points: indeed, I use in-depth interviews of fan writers, textual analysis of their fic works, structured interviews of fan readers, and the observation of fan interactions through the sampling of comments left on the fics I have studied. This thesis, born out of my own personal interest in fandom and fourth-wave feminism, is deeply enmeshed in both fields; it presents a feminist, aca-fan perspective on slash fanfiction with a turn towards the affective-discursive.

4.1)   Being an aca-fan

The reason this thesis came to life in the first place was due to my own involvement in the fandom culture and *Star Trek* in particular, which needs to be explained in this methodology chapter to put in perspective why I chose specific methods and methodologies. Indeed, following Ferreday, "methodology, practice and theoretical approach are mutually constitutive and are, furthermore, inseparable from the researcher's own lived experience" (2009: 52). As for why I chose *Star Trek* as object of analysis, three reasons come to the fore. First, I have been involved in various media fandoms since 2008, slash fanfiction since 2010, and *Star Trek* since 2012. Having been personally involved in the fandom and pairing for so long, and active on AO3 and Tumblr online culture for more than a decade, has given me extensive insider knowledge—allowing me to conduct research in a reflexive and informed way. Second, K/S has been the 'original' pairing in slash culture (Jenkins, 2012; Bacon-Smith, 1992). It was—and still is—very popular in fan circles and relevant today in the light of the fandom's evolution from the physical to the digital. Third, such a deeply embedded community in the sociality of popular culture has generated extensive research on the matter—many theoretical analyses using K/S are published. This thesis adds to the corpus of already-existing K/S fan studies to offer new ways of theorising fan social practices.

Yet whatever the research method, the question of involvement comes to the fore. In my area of study, there are both aca-fans, or academics who are also part of a fandom (like Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Hellekson and Busse, 2006) and regular academics, who are initially foreign to inner fan behaviour (like Bacon-Smith, 1992). Being involved or not in the practices of the research area has both advantages and disadvantages: by being immersed in the area of study, the researcher might lose track of their own concepts or show harmful bias when interpreting research results; on the other side, the researcher is motivated due to their involvement and becomes very closely and intimately linked to the object of study. For academics uninvolved in fan communities, some insights and experiences that can only be generated by being a fan might remain inaccessible.

Having written and read slash fanfiction myself, I identify as an aca-fan rather than a regular academic; I am heavily involved in the fan experience and cannot separate that from my theoretical work. I conceptualised the relationship between my personal interest and my

academic interest, learning from how they informed one another in the practice of doing research: my affective insights in fan experience (feelings 'feels', writing comments, writing fanfiction) were instrumental in the understanding of fan theory, allowing me to focus on concepts of affect and literature especially. My own identity as a queer feminist has been heavily shaped by my involvement in fandom, too; it is thanks to online fan communities that I learnt more about fourth-wave feminism and that I was exposed to the identity of non-binary lesbian, amongst the spectrum of queer identities. This is why this thesis is inscribed in the corpus of fourth-wave feminist work within fan studies.

I oriented this thesis towards a feminist epistemology, where being an aca-fan can help in understanding the context (and content) of fan texts well beyond the initial accessibility of the sample. Being completely immersed in the culture also helped me in conducting interviews: indeed, I could tell which fanfic writers were popular within K/S circles and knew how to approach them through Tumblr and e-mail. I was aware of and used slash fan-specific concepts and vernacular in the interview. As the participants used the same kind of register, my identity as aca-fan managed to elicit trust and engagement from my participants. This was possible by me explaining my own involvement in fandom as I contacted them, then as I started the interview. It created an atmosphere akin to two fans talking to each other about their craft within fandom circles; this allowed me to gain particular insights such as the fans' experiencing of gender and sexuality in their fics, or their own feminist involvement in their daily lives. I conveyed how familiar the participants' felt experiences of fic were to me, as a fan, and this eased the conversation—all while I was focusing on the academic goals of the interviews.

Following Åhäll, through this thesis I went beyond the 'taken-for-grantedness' of popular culture: indeed, she explains that "as Judith Butler's theory of performativity has taught us, theory is not just about what we think. It is also about what we do. Theory is also lived. This is why, in a cultural context of patriarchy and sexism, feminist scholars are often interested in challenging the politics of "common sense," that which we tend to take for granted" (Åhäll, 2018: 42). More precisely, I focused on going beyond the common sense in fan studies that sees women and queer fans' voices as automatically marginalised, uniform, and rebellious. Fan researchers have also taken for granted traditional methodologies—often focusing on a single point of data entry (they read fic, or they observed fans). Through my earlier experience of slash fic (I have read thousands of slash fic in many fandoms since I

started my fan journey) I have given theory life, doing meaning-making through the search for feminist epistemology. I have done so through a challenging, novel methodology: interviewing fan writers, fan readers, and studying writers' fics and readers' comments on said fics as a combination of objects of study.

4.2) Research design

My key design choices were the development of a digital ethnography and the theoretical stance of treating fan texts as literary artefacts (and hence the fans as literary producers). I focused on fan subjects' positionality (from where are they taking a stand), embeddedness (how are they involved in the community), and situatedness (what can their position reveal about their experience). Yet, I am not studying fans as a demographic group per se, but rather as affective literary producers; this avoids a reification of identity as a whole (i.e., a unique group identity). I am working in the friction between arts-based practices and social science methodology. Fanfics, as literary artefacts, answer to the social embeddedness, positionality, and situatedness of the fans—combining the textual nature of my data while analysing the attitudes and behaviours of fans in a social entanglement.

My rationale has been to combine more traditional methods of data collection, as found in ethnographic works (fan interviews, digital observation, fic document analysis) with more recent, experimental ways of implementing data analysis (looking at the material embodiment of the affective-discursive digital through critical discourse analysis). Fan communities have been studied since the beginning of fan theory by ethnographers (Bacon-Smith, 1992), textual analysts (Jenkins, 1992) and psychoanalysts (Penley, 1997); yet, despite the richness in analysis, I noticed that interviews with fan writers and readers are almost non-existent in fan studies. Bar Will Brooker's respondents (2002), Woledge's convention conversations (2005b), and Anne Jamison's interviews (2013) in particular, I have not encountered fan scholars who have included data from fan interviews; they have privileged texts (fics) and fan blogs for data collection—incidentally taking the text as author intent in many cases, a face value which I argue can be misleading.

This is why I believe my thesis brings in original contributions to the field of fan studies: combining in-depth interviews of fan writers, structured interviews of fan readers, textual analysis of fics, and observation of fan writer-reader exchanges through textual analysis of the

comments left on fics—all the while privileging digital collection, hence staying in the communicative mode of the fans, i.e. chatting—I was able to account for multiple inputs and hence unfold data cross-analysis.

According to Gibson and Brown, "the exploration of potential data characteristics can also be used to reflect on how different methods may be combined to create different types of data. [...] By gathering data through different methods, researchers can compare different forms of data against each other." (2011: 13). This is why my four data inputs allowed me to cross-analyse the findings. By using traditional digital ethnographic data collection methods (interviews, observation, text) and using discourse analysis to make sense of these different sources of data, aiming to understand the fan slash experience, I am not only challenging the way fan scholars have repeatedly conducted research through methods that depend on textual analysis, but also inscribing my own methods in a wider methodology that coincides with the development of fourth wave fan studies—researching affect and community in online spaces.

As I am not analysing the demographics of fan communities, instead aiming to create rich retellings of the fan experience, I have decided to carry out—like the majority of fan scholars—a qualitative, rather than quantitative, research. In effect, "a key qualitative feature is that research questions are typically limited, studying a central phenomenon in a particular context. The researcher's intent is not to generalize from the sample to a population, but to explain, describe, and interpret (Maxwell, 2013) this phenomenon. Consequently, sampling is not a matter of representative opinions, but a matter of information richness" (Guetterman, 2015: ¶ 2). In a similar way, I am not aiming to generalise my study of Kirk/Spock fic to all other slash fandoms (as slash fic exists a multitude of them) but, rather, I am aiming for data richness and depth of study within the K/S community, as a starting point (not an end result) for future analysis of other slash enquiries. Indeed, my cross-analysis coming from interconnected data points allows me to make new contributions to the field of fan studies, which can used as a springboard for future studies. Being constrained by time and by the huge quantity of data a single fan participant can generate, I was thus not striving for representativeness, but the deep understanding of fan experience.

For example, a fic can be short-story length or—in the case of the fics I looked at—novel length, which generates a huge amount of data. My choices in the relevance of my sampling and methods are informed by my own position as aca-fan: I argue that by knowing

the influence popular fan writers have on the community, more so than less popular writers, my choice of selecting specific popular K/S writers allows to achieve an understanding of the dominant tropes (and affect) within K/S. Concerning the type of research, choosing a qualitative inquiry and, more precisely, a digital ethnography, benefitted by making my research process structured (to unfold the study according to pre-existing methods) yet open to the connected experience of fans (to manage data collection entirely remotely, hence not being limited by geography and using the same online communication mode as the fans do).

Following this, I have gone about investigating affect and community in the online *Star Trek* fandom: by using theoretical frameworks (Wetherell's notion of embodied affect, 2012; Butler's notion of gender performativity, 2007; and Stein's notion of feels culture, 2015, especially—see chapter 3) alongside my knowledge of concepts and practices happening in fandom (personal experience and chapter 2), I have focused on conceptualising fan discursive practices in the data analysis. Designing interview schedules around concepts I wanted to code (using my personal knowledge of fandom alongside a grasp of the waves of fan studies to select relevant, academic concepts used in fan studies), like 'embodied affect,' 'pedagogy of fic,' 'rejection of the heterosexual matrix,' and 'gift-giving', I have been able to analyse data systematically.

4.2.1) Pilot study: fine-tuning theoretical enquiry, data collection, and analysis

Before this final research design, I conducted a pilot study in order to have a sense of what data and methods were needed and which concepts were recurring in my area of research. To this end, I undertook a discourse analysis of two slash fics and conducted interviews with their authors. This pilot study was my first putting into practice a queer, affective theoretical framework. Originally planning to compare canon and fanon slash (with two different fandoms), this pilot study found that while the approach to discourse was productive, a tighter focus and a consideration of para-texts would be more productive.

I selected two participants on AO3 through purposive sampling, which means the sample was chosen because it had features and characteristics that allowed a detailed exploration of my field of study: these features and characteristics were linked to my own personal knowledge of slash fandom (popularity, relevance to slash writing conventions, affective attachments of other fans). I ended up selecting Liss (*Star Trek* fandom, rooting for

the fan romance between Kirk and Spock), and Amelia (*Shadowhunters* fandom, rooting for the official romance between Magnus and Alec). Indeed, you cannot message another AO3 member; I chose Liss and Amelia because on top of being popular, both of them had their Tumblr URL in their biography, which I used to contact them. I had passed the ethics approval beforehand, so I could securely store and analyse the data from my two participants.

This pilot study was on two fandoms, *Star Trek* and *Shadowhunters,* which I had selected to highlight the difference between a canon slash pairing (the two characters were together in the official media) and a fanon slash pairing (the two characters were not together in the official media). Nevertheless, I realised that the focus of my study was not relevant enough if I looked at this canon/fanon difference, hence why I decided to only focus on a single fandom and pairing in my final research design.

I interviewed Liss and Amelia separately to gather data on their personal motives, opinions, and view of slash fan texts in their respective fandoms. The setting was online, on a text chat platform (Google Hangouts and Discord), to obtain data through fan-specific practices (online chat with specific vernacular). I asked them to select the favourite fanfic they had written, which I closely read (*Sha Ka Ree* for Liss, *A Separate Peace* for Amelia). Then I analysed their interviews while exploring *Sha Ka Ree* and *A Separate Peace* concomitantly to find the presence of the feminist and queer-positive discourses which they were describing in their interviews. I used discourse analysis to make sense of such discourses in their fics, for example looking for recurring types of words referencing intimacy or emotions, queerness and gender, or that had pedagogic intent. I also studied, on a bigger scale, the power dynamics and emotional labour between characters, to see if they also challenged hegemonic masculinity. Exploring the interviews, I theorised the way the discourses writers partake in (feminist, queer…) were transformed into affective textual practices (fic). I showed that there was a rejection of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007) that took specific discursive forms within slash fic, and that fans organised their online communities around a circulation of affective gifts.

This pilot project was a useful trial in the sense that I improved my purposive sampling criteria, honed my interviewing skills (and refined the interview schedule in order to get as much relevant data as I could), showed me that I only should study K/S communities in *Star Trek* (and not other fandoms), and confirmed that my approach through discourse analysis was the right one for this study. I thus learnt to work with discourse analysis in my data, as

well as analyse raw data through a conceptual lens that made out a relevant theoretical framework: Butler's gender performativity (2007), Wetherell's embodied affect (2012), Ferreday's online belongings (2009), and Stein's feels culture (2015) in particular. Thanks to this pilot study I could claim that slash fanfiction was indeed a field for gender trouble (with Kirk and Spock embodying gender as a queer performance), building affective networks from queer threads, and enabling new ways of becoming (fourth-wave feminist demands).

This experience led me to decide to no longer research *Shadowhunters* and instead to focus on *Star Trek*: my primary research questions did not lie in the difference between canon and fanon slash analysis. This pilot project showed me what other areas I should focus on: for example, by exploring fanfiction production processes I noted that to understand networked audiences and communication, I should analyse comments left on fics (affective-discursive replies to fanfics) in order to get a sense of fan interactions and their impact. These comments materialised the affect between the writer and the reader—they told a lot about how the reader said they felt while reading a fic. After this pilot project, I also noted issues with the way my interview schedule for fan writers was structured. I was asking too many broad questions and needed to focus on specific areas to make sure I did not end up overwhelmed by data—unfocused and with little analysis potential. I hence modified the schedule for the final study to better focus on fic as literature, the gender and sexuality norms of what it meant to be Kirk or Spock, the relationship dynamics between them, as well as the affective-discursive practices at play around the fic texts.

4.2.2) Major study for this thesis

Learning from the pilot, I thus decided to diversify my focus to include more data points (fan writers, fan readers, fic text, comments) and interview and/or observe fewer of each unit (from 30 fics planned to 5 fics, only 5 fan writers and 15 fan readers, from around 120 comments to 23 threads and 19 single comments) to generate more focused data. I also decided to choose the fics I would study, not ask for the participant to choose their favourite for me to study, due to the purposive nature of the sampling. Indeed, I was looking for fics representative of popular, well-liked works in the K/S fandom, and that meant I could yield more depth by choosing fics myself (based on popularity). In effect, by choosing the fics myself I managed to tighten my focus on fics as literary devices and potential for richness of data;

nevertheless, I asked whether the fan participant was comfortable with me choosing one of their fics to study in the Information Sheet and Letter of Consent (see Appendix)—hereby making sure they were open to any of their fics being studied.

As for the interviews themselves, data collection concerning fan writers was carried out by doing a semi-structured interview. Each interview lasted around 3hrs. Using this kind of interviewing via chat/instant messaging allowed me to contact people regardless of location, giving more privacy to the interviewee (especially if they felt anxious about video or in-person interviewing), and catching the written language of online communities. Indeed, practices of online chatting so peculiar to digital communities were disclosed successfully through this digital ethnography. Additionally, "it also acknowledges the intangible as a part of digital ethnography research, precisely because it invites us to consider the question of the 'digital intangible' and the relationship between digital, sensory, atmospheric and material elements of our world" (Pink et al., 2016: 7). My approach has been informed by my experience of the 'digital intangible' of online slash fandom spaces (with their conventions, discourses, and vernacular) where the sensory and atmospheric was, in fact, the very embodied affect I was researching.

4.3)   Methods: how did I collect data

Taking stock of the process and results of the pilot project, I crafted my final study to collect data in a way that was more focused to answer my research questions (how does fanfiction challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality in mainstream media content? And, what does the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction?).

I thus refined my sampling process and targeted a smaller number of participants, following a logic of theoretical or purposive sampling. According to Emmel, "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information rich cases that best provide insight into the research questions and will convince the audience of the research" (2014b: 2). In the same way, I have selected cases of popular K/S writers which allowed a better focus on my research questions. Jennifer Mason (2002) in Emmel "insists that in theoretical or purposive sampling, the process of sampling, data generation and data analysis are viewed and reviewed interactively throughout the research" (2014c: 4). Similarly, I have viewed and reviewed my

selection process when it came to final data collection, questioning the first few iterations of sample selection, focused on what would yield a satisfactory amount of data richness—informed both by my former fandom literacy *and* the literature review I organised around the gaps in fan theory. I indeed made sure to select stories focused on male intimacy, with a fair amount of mature or explicit sexual scenes, a plot that was close to the original media (no distant Alternate Universes where the *Star Trek* universe was replaced by 'othering' world-building), and Kirk and Spock being the main characters with their relationship front and centre.

This led me to focus on three things in particular: the relationship between text and reader, between author and text, and between author and reader. Looking at the *Star Trek* fandom and the relationship Kirk/Spock, I selected 'popular' (well-liked, with a high amount of 'kudos' i.e. 'likes') fanfictions on AO3 and checked whether their author had disclosed a way for people to contact them (e-mail, Tumblr blog). Once I contacted 5 participants to begin with (Liss, Anna, FalsePremise, Pensive, Waldorph), I started to re-read one of their most popular fanfictions in great detail—some were of short length, novella length, or even novel length. After taking some notes and selecting a scene to ask them about (chosen for coincidence with a concept I was researching, such as feminine masculinity, or queer sex acts), I conducted semi-structured interviews.

Purposeful sampling, here, helped me to reflect on the "cases for study (e.g., people, organizations, communities, cultures, events, critical incidences) [to select] because they are "information rich" and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling, then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population" (Patton, 2002: 40). In the same way, I did not attempt to reach empirical generalisation but rather gain a deep insight into the practices at play around the writing and reading of K/S fanfiction.

The remaining of my data collection streams from this selection of 5 fics and 5 fic writers: I observed the comment section of each 5 fics and initially selected 15 comment threads between readers and authors as well as single reader comments for which I could contact the commenter outside of AO3 to interview. I also selected 27 supplementary comments, on a purposive basis, to add depth to my data analysis while not interviewing these commenters—as I already had a significant amount of data from the 15 interviews, and as I was stopped by the unavailability of means of direct contact for commenters on AO3 (as AO3

does not have private messaging or contact functions of any kind apart from commenting on fics).

While purposive sampling helped in the constitution of a sample, "one limitation of purposive sampling is that another expert would likely come up with different sampled elements from the target population in terms of important characteristics and typical elements to be in the sample. Given the subjectivity of the selection mechanism, purposive sampling is generally considered most appropriate for the selection of small samples often from a limited geographic area or from a restricted population definition" (Battaglia, 2011: 2). This is why, following Battaglia, I have selected small samples that were focusing on a restricted population: popular fan writers and talkative fan readers (of K/S, thus of slash and of *Star Trek*).

4.3.1) Textual analysis of fics

The first research problem I had was, like many fan scholars interested in fanfic, about the content of the fic themselves: how did the textual content of the fic produce the discourses typical to slash? Or, also, what was the relationship between the fic author and their work; their intentions, their use of language to signify and elicit affect? I thus investigated what the practices around fic writing looked like. Before going further into 'unusual' methods of data collection for fan scholars, I looked at the texts themselves: I purposively selected 5 fics that were amongst the most popular on AO3 in the K/S section. Hence why I settled on *Sha Ka Ree* (Liss), *The Truth* (FalsePremise), *The World Well Lost* (Anna), *When The Stars Align* (Pensive), and *strive seek find yield* (Waldorph). I stopped at 5 different fics because, as previously mentioned, the huge amount of text was already yielding a lot of data—and I was striving for depth, not breadth. The biggest motivation behind this sample is informed by my decade of engaging with slash fic—including *Star Trek* K/S fic—and how this literacy was combined with the gaps in academic literature I had previously identified: I selected these 5 fics for the variety of archetypal scenes I could closely analyse, as I was focusing on studying the relationship between fans and writing (not with the aim of a contrast and compare study for example).

The population sampled was thus an array of popular K/S fics on AO3; fics written by people who left contact details on their AO3 profile (for availability and convenience). The

sample size was reduced from 30 fics (in theory) to 5 fics (in practice) as I was taking into account the sheer volume of data available—more than a few fics would have been too important to analyse closely. The mode of data collection was helped by the fact that all fics were publicly-available texts online, not even needing an AO3 account to read the fics, see the author's profile, and read the comments. I searched K/S fics through their number of kudos to find appropriate texts, then looked at whether the authors were contactable, then read the texts in detail to find out if they had appropriate scenes which would illustrate and disclose new insights through my theoretical framework.

I was, as mentioned above, constrained by the nature of fans' transformative works as extremely prolific. Indeed, the total of words for the five fanfictions selected attains 363,631 words, or roughly between 800 and 1 000 pages—considering this, while I closely read all fics, I selected only a few excerpts to do a detailed textual analysis which were included in this thesis. The way I selected such excerpts went as follows: after a first read of the full fanfiction, I identified which parts of the narrative were specifically related to the codes I had pre-determined for my data analysis (eg. a sex scene that shows queer gender roles, a scene where Kirk or Spock embodies femininity and/or masculinity, a scene that resonates with feminist viewpoints, a scene where aliens are not conforming to binary genders). For the sake of my analysis, I focused on these specific extracts because they could relate to the reading of the whole—they were not exceptions, but representations of the politics and characterisations of the entire fic. Indeed, each excerpt was selected as representation of the gender, sexuality, and identity politics developed within each fic.

4.3.2) Semi-structured interviews of fan writers

After I confirmed the selection of 5 fic writers and one of their fic each (with an Information Sheet and Letter of Consent, see Appendix), I proceeded with the interviewing of said writers. Once I had selected the fics I developed questions and enquiries that could not be answered with the text only; for example, one of my research problems was more specifically about writer intentions and experiences of creating and engaging with fic, the pairing K/S, and the readers. I was deeply interested in the concordance of 'feels culture' and embodied affect (which fic texts could not depict fully from the point of view of fans), the writing process and the writer's position on fic as a literary text, and the way fic writers were

personally dealing with questions of gender, queer sexuality, and feminism (which fic texts could not, once again, fully depict). The combination of several objects of analysis, in this instance, was needed; fic texts had presented specific discourses on gender and queerness, yet I also wanted input from the authors themselves. Data richness came from learning about fan motivations and feelings: what made them want to write and how did that make them feel. I developed my interview schedule with considerations into what the fan writers bodily felt (to look into embodied affect) when thinking about K/S being together and their impressions when they received comments from readers.

This is why, since the pilot study, I had planned on using a semi-structured interview schedule that was adjustable to the fan writer's experience. According to Gibson and Brown, in "semi-structured interviews […] interviewers prepare a list of questions, but these can be asked in a flexible order and with a wording that is contextually appropriate. The aim is to ask all the questions on the list with sensitivity to the developing conversational structure, but not necessarily in any particular order. […] Interviewers are also free to probe the research participants for more information on particular points, to explore the topics more discursively than in structured approaches, and even to explore topics that may emerge that were not included in the interview schedule" (2011b: 4-6). A strict structured interview would have been, in this case, too restrictive. I conducted the interviews not always with the same order of questions, probing where necessary, to ensure the flow of the interview would remain insightful. Also, as aca-fan, involved in the well-being of my participants as well as attentive to the maximisation of rich data collection, I allowed myself to share some of my own fan experience to foster trust and community when needed.

Indeed, "interviewers may offer their own experiences of whatever it is that is being discussed, or provide evaluations of a particular issue. In these ways, the interviewer both removes the interactional barriers of the attitude of 'interviewer as an objective outsider' and creates discursive resources for the other participants to use in the course of their own formulations" (Gibson and Brown, 2011b: 7). Following this kind of feminist epistemology, I answered the questions my participants asked of me (especially around my slash experience and my personal preferences) as a means to co-create meaning and create a good interview experience.

The population sampled was thus the 5 fic writers (Liss, Anna, Pensive, Waldorph, FalsePremise) I had selected off AO3 according to availability, willingness, and relevance in

terms of popularity and variety. I proceeded with digital chat interviewing over Discord and Google Hangouts: each interview was roughly 3 hours long, with 22 open-ended units of questions and one demographics question (asking them to describe what they identified as and which pronouns should I use). I chose digital chatting for both ease of use, immediacy, solution to geographic distance (the few participants that disclosed their country of residence were located in the USA or Europe), and because I chose to focus on discursive practices. These practices, with my involvement in fandom, were possible for me to understand as fans were replicating specific vernacular, punctuation, and other textual intricacies present within online fandom culture (which would not fully translate in a physical setting); "[d]iscursive practice [...] involves processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, and the nature of these processes varies between different types of discourse according to social factors" (Fairclough, 1992: 78). Here, with semi-structured chat interviews, I focused on finding the trends in what content the discourses were made of, uncovering the fans' social 'factors' (being a woman or queer in a world that privileges the heterosexual matrix; Butler, 2007) and how it affected text production, distribution, and consumption.

Inspired by Wodak and Savaski, "critical, multilevel approach" to 'good' fandom norms "implies both complex theoretical and methodological approaches that allow for description, interpretation, and explanation of the workings of [...] policies, in the processes of their production and implementation over space and time" (2018: 107). By offering a space for fans to recount their experiences without a strict schedule, I was able to associate new objects of analysis (interviews in fan studies) to more traditional kinds of data (fics and comments), which yielded original analysis. It enabled me to address my research questions in a way that considered embodied affect and feelings of belonging within writerly and readerly practices at play in the K/S community.

4.3.3) Textual analysis of comments left on fics

Once I had collected these two types of data, fic and interviews, I focused on the fan readers comments. My main research problem was to understand how discourses of 'feels culture' create an 'affect economy'. Indeed, fans say they have 'feels'; my way of looking at this was how the discourses were mobilised and attached to by fans, studied through their comments. I collected data on affective-discursive practices within the K/S slash experience

through comments left on fics. I captured, measured, and analysed affect in the fic paratexts, aiming to re-transcribe data well enough for me to make out an affect economy. Asking by what this affect economy was driven was the basis of my rationale for this object of analysis (textual analysis). This is why I set out to combine two methods when it came to fan readers: one, the observation of reader-text and reader-writer interactions, through the purposive sampling of online comment threads on the fics I had selected; two, the interview of readers who had left a comment—something I could not find in fan scholarship. This section will focus on the reader observations.

The population sampled was thus readers who had left a comment on the popular K/S fics I had already analysed (and had also interviewed authors for) so I could interconnect the data between what the authors said they felt like, what they wrote, what the readers said they felt like, and what they wrote. The comments were chosen for relevance (of minimum a few sentences, for their link to 'feels' which I noticed with my pre-existing fandom literacy, as well as the presence of an author reply) and, for 15 of them, availability of the comment writers to be contacted off AO3 and interviewed. I selected data-rich comment threads between fic writer and fic reader, while keeping in mind that I was looking for affective practices who encompassed specific discourses of 'feels'.

The sample size was as follow: 12 threads (24 comments) and 3 single comments corresponding to the 15 fic readers I interviewed, and 20 threads (43 comments) and 16 single comments written by readers I did not interview. The total was 32 threads (65 comments) and 19 single comments, which amounts to 84 comments across all categories. The mode of data collection was observation of the textually-rendered fan reader interactions (with the fic and with the fic author in the case of comment threads) through publicly-available comments on the fics I had selected prior on AO3. I stopped at 84 comments due to data overload: before the final project I had tabled my sample at roughly 120 comments, that is to say around 20-25 comments per fic, including threads. Nonetheless, I reached a limit of 84 comments because the data was beginning to get out of proportion for a thesis of this size: after having secured the comments from the interviewed fan readers, I carried on selecting (publicly available) comments as I went through the first drafts of my chapter 3 analysis.

Guetterman explains that "sample size considerations appeared to involve two concerns: the size of the sample (i.e., extensiveness) and the appropriateness (i.e., relevance) of the sample, discussions of which were missing from most studies. […] As a planning step,

the researcher should identify a specific sampling strategy (e.g., selecting extreme cases), determine how many individuals are necessary, and document a rationale. The researcher should remain reflexive throughout the research process, continually assessing and exploring sampling issues including theoretical saturation" (2015: ¶ 6). My sampling strategy was based on criteria needed to answer my initial research problem: selecting cases representative of feels culture, and that were showing the relationship between fan reader and writer, as to follow my rationale of uncovering community belonging through affective discourses between fans.

Indeed, "a further approach to identifying cases for investigation is criterion sampling. In this purposeful sampling strategy criteria selected by the researchers are used to identify cases for investigation. These criteria might be identified from quantitative research, such as data from standardised questionnaires for instance, and form the basis for the selection of information rich cases for in-depth investigation. A further way of selecting cases may be that they have met predetermined criteria" (Emmel, 2014b: 8). Following this, my criteria were informed by my prior experience in slash fandom and my more recent literacy in fan theory: after Louisa E. Stein's book on feels culture (2015), I was looking for comments with specific punctuation, capitalisation, expressing emotion and thanks. More precisely, many (if not all) comments left on the 5 fics were expressing similar discourses, but I chose the comments that showed depth and variety within the criteria. I found the following categories in comments left by fans: extremely emotional use of language, expression of personal circumstances in relation to fic reading, making bodily reactions into a spectacle, and very elaborate ways of conveying thanks by offering literary critique.

4.3.4) Structured interviews of fan readers

The final object of analysis at play in my research design was the readers' accounts of their own experiences. In effect, what the observation of comments could not totally answer was the following: what were the reader intentions when they read fic, what were their views on fic as literature? Were they identifying as feminists and had this an influence on slash consumption, for example, or were they learning from fic reading? These enquiries were paramount to my rationale in creating the interview schedule. Also, most importantly in my research on embodied affect, I asked about their bodily experiences of reading K/S slash. To

capture and analyse the affect at play in fan slash practices, I used Margaret Wetherell's notion of affect looking at how discourses are affective and how this is embodied. This methodology entails studying the discourses in the text, interview or reader comments and seeing the major discursive patterns. Also however, I join these types of data together to see how the discourses in the fan fiction are taken up and connected to by the fans in comments, and then further by talking to these fans to see which discourses emerge in the narratives of their reading experience. This unique multi-pronged approach looking at the fic, the comments and the fan experiences, as well as the author's experiences is something not previously studied in most fan studies research. In this way I go beyond a textual analysis to show how discourses are felt and embodied through the narratives of the writers and the fans.

The population sampled was based off the availability and willingness of fan commenters to be interviewed—in my sample of comments observation, I had found around 20 people who had disclosed a way to contact them over the Internet on their AO3 profile, publicly available. My sample size ended up being 15 fan readers, as not all people I had approached were willing or interested to partake in an interview. The mode of data collection was an email, short structured interview with 6 open-ended questions and an enquiry about demographics (chosen name, gender, pronouns, and what they identified their sexuality as).

I chose, contrarily to my writer interviews, to conduct a small-size structured asynchronous interview (which could overlap with being a questionnaire) over email because I had more participants, because I needed to compare and contrast their answers prior to my data analysis write-up (to see if trends were standing out), and because my needs in terms of content were different from the interviews of fan writers. Indeed, in the light of my data analysis I was interested in the relationship between reader and text, as well as between reader and writer; this required less data input from this object of analysis than fic authors because I could associate their responses to the interview with the comments left online. As I was seeking depth with a small-size number of people (Patton, 2002: 244) for my in-depth writer interviews, I ended up seeking slightly more breadth and structure in the study of fan readers as a "specific set of experiences for a larger number of people" (Patton, 2002: 244) in terms of feels culture. Indeed, as Patton explains, "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (2002: 244). Having considered all this, 15 fan readers

interviewed over email yielded sufficiently satisfactory results in the building of this thesis—one could extend the sample size and method, and apply the same methodology as mine in a bigger study, which could yield different yet related results.

4.4) Data analysis and critical discourse studies

Digital ethnographers' qualitative methods like observation, online interviews, and online content analysis are textual, and this is why I have selected critical discourse analysis as a data analysis methodology—so I can deconstruct fan texts and analyse social dynamics (how texts convey affective discourses, what is the experience of producing them). Indeed, following Ferreday, "I wish to examine the ways in which my approach differs from accounts of online community based on 'virtual ethnography', a term which has been used to describe a variety of different research methods, but which has dominated studies of virtual community. […] I see the experience of cyberculture studies as contiguous with 'everyday' Internet use: both involve close reading" (2009: 52).

Fairclough explains that "*discourse* is commonly used," according to him, "in various senses including (a) meaning-making as an element of the social process" but also "(b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice," here slash, and "(c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective" such as queer or intersectional feminism (2016: 87). Discourse is thus made up of various texts and ways of being which, when combined together, are a disclosure of identity and social position in the world. I will thus focus on an approach of discourse to make sense of my data through Wetherell, because I conceive discourse as a kind of social and affective practice (2012: 36). Her way of conceptualising discourse is specifically relevant to my own study, as she associates it with affective practice and I connect it with a particular social perspective (fourth-wave, queer, sex-positive feminism).

Indeed, discourses as a social practice can be analysed through the lens of affect. Wetherell suggests that discourse could "show how people and their habitual affective practice construct realities and figure the world" (2012: 136)—in my case, understand how the feminist fan's affective practice can construct realities with discursive matter. By identifying the discourses at play in the data collected, which I managed to code in relation to fan, queer, and affect studies, I was able to focus on the social-discursive entanglements of

fan matter, as well as the process of 'embodied' fan practice (Hills, 2002). The discourses emerging, intersectional feminism and queer intimacy—as well as the spectrum of ways in which fans express thanks to fic writers—were coded into my data to reveal the trends studied in chapters 5, 6, and 7. Interviews gave me insights into the drives behind fan text production. Closer critical reading of the fanfics made apparent potential trends, and how they worked together to knit specific discourses. The analysis of comments and the commenters' interviews revealed, alongside this, how readers experienced feelings of belonging and how they were able to learn from fic. I wanted to understand why and how fans made a difference, including the dynamics of feel culture and affect within fan writing.

This is why, with this understanding of discourse in mind, I followed a methodology of critical discourse analysis, or critical discourse studies. It also sees language as social practice, "and consider the 'context of language use' to be crucial." (Wodak and Meyer, 2016: 5-6). Wodak and Meyer quote a popular definition amongst CDA researchers: "describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned — it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it" (2016: 5-6).

Texts, as socially enacted discourses, are thus produced by social agents that have a place in society—CDA is a way to determine what social structures the text reproduces or challenges, and how texts can be used to build communities. In my case, I set out to understand how fans used discourse to challenge normative gender and sexuality. Another discourse scholar, Fairclough, suggests that through discourse, people may "seek to remedy [social wrongs], and [identify] further possibilities for righting or mitigating them" (2010: 7). I argue we need to map discourses and their effects independent of the subjects articulating them. Further, I argue fans' discursive-affective-material practices challenge the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007) in a variety of ways, which my cross-analysis of data inputs highlighted. According to Wodak and Meyer, "power does not necessarily derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power" (2016: 12). For example, Waldorph explains in her interview that "I think fandom can be a driver for

change and the normalization of things that people don't get exposed to everyday, and it can make a place where people get to see themselves reflected — where they aren't reflected anywhere else." Here referring to queer politics, I argue fan writers like Waldorph use fanfiction as a platform to express their feminist beliefs through Kirk and Spock—but not only through this relationship; the other characters and entire universe within fics are used to further the political rejection of harmful masculinity and relationships. Through my research, I looked for textual ways fans challenge mediated patriarchal hegemony and toxic masculinity; I also analyse the drives behind fandom-specific ideologies in chapter 5, 6, and 7.

As to how we can concretely analyse language, CDA and discourse scholars have some examples. On the micro scale (words), Jones suggests that we should "look for linguistic features (words and grammar), which help to link different parts of the text or conversation together" (2012: 37). In my case, I was looking at words and features that belonged to discourses about intimacy, sexuality, power dynamics, emotions, homoerotic desire, or anything related that was repeated in the text. I also analysed on a meso scale (sentences) the scenes and actions themselves to see which beliefs were evident, and how gender expectations were challenged through characters and plot—how new gender and sexuality discourses were applied.

On a macro scale (texts) I followed Gee and asked myself: "what cultural models are relevant here? What must I, as an analyst, assume people feel, value, and believe […] in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way?" (2001: 78). This is how I uncovered what types of feminism fans did value in order to create fics in this way (i.e. sex-positive, queer, intersectional feminism). Jones adds that we should ask ourselves: "what do writers of such texts need to *do* in order to achieve their desired purpose?" (2012: 44). That is to say, understanding why fans felt the need to write fics to embody their own queer feminist beliefs. Chapter 5 and 6 answer this query.

Fairclough explains "what then is CDA analysis *of*? It is *not* analysis of discourse 'in itself' as one might take it to be, but analysis of dialectical *relations between* discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse. […] CDA is an interdisciplinary form of analysis […]. What this term entails is that the 'dialogues' between disciplines, theories and frameworks which take place in doing analysis and research are a source of theoretical and methodological developments within the particular disciplines, theories and frameworks in dialogue — including CDA itself" ([1995]

2013: 4). In this thesis I set out to foster a dialogue between fan studies, social science, gender studies, discourse studies, literary studies, and affect studies, following fourth-wave fan studies along fourth-wave feminism and CDA.

As for the challenges brought forth by my turn to affect, I believe the theoretical decision to bypass mainstream understanding of the concept has helped me overcome a false dichotomy of affect as spooky feeling and discourse as social marker of political views. Seeing affect not as something 'spooky' (Massumi, 2002) but as something visible, like Wetherell (2012) and her concept of embodied affect, makes it possible to study affect—as a practice— through digital ethnography. Looking at affect through texts and interviews has allowed me to cross-check and make interact data from various objects of analysis, which I claim is vital in affect research—not all that is written (here, fic) is representative of how we feel, and not all that is said (here, interviews) is representative of how we feel. I saw "qualitative interviews as *affective encounters* themselves, and more specifically as situated affective encounters" (Ayata et al., 2019: 64-65) in the wider field of fourth-wave feminism.

According to CDA scholars Berg *et al.*, approaches to emotion and discourse can be roughly separated into two categories. First, a linguistic and ethnographic approach that sees discourse as interaction emerging in social situations, focusing on how emotions are expressed and serve as an infrastructure of discourse and meaning-making; a strand in this category focuses on how people *talk* about emotions and what that reveals about their place in discourse and society (2019: 46). Second, some see discourse as a system of utterances which produces knowledge and encompasses political ideologies, especially joining research in CDA that looks at how emotions connect to social problems, ideologies, and power relations—emotional discourse is essential for becoming a subject and constructing social reality and subject positions (Berg et al., 2019: 46-47). This is why I used Wetherell's view of discourse (2012) to cross the boundaries Berg *et al.* have cited above, allowing a deeper look into how discourses of 'feels' could disclose and trigger affect. I treated the fic texts as literature, and analytically, a literature of affect.

Additionally, to help my own data coding and processing, I used the software NVivo, "a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. [...] The software indeed reduces a great number of manual tasks and gives the researcher more time to discover tendencies, recognize themes and derive conclusions"

(Haled Hilal and Alabri, 2013: 182). In my case, NVivo was used not for its computer-assisted analysis features but for ease of use in manual coding due to the large set of data at hand.

4.5) Ethics

When it came to informed consent and data access, I took into account that textual analysis data was different from participant-led data and both needed different ways of navigating ethics, especially when it came to consent. I did not need consent when doing textual analysis (and comment observation) because it was already publicly available online, and was not generated as part of the research process. The 'technical' openness of the website AO3 meant I did not need an account nor enter a password to access the content I wanted to study (Whiteman, 2010). By collecting this data I had no access to undisclosed personal information. I believe this would not incur supplementary harm to the authors of texts observed/analysed.

Concerning the interview participants, I discussed the purpose, demands, risks, inconveniences, and possible outcomes of the research with the participants in the Approach Letter: I was asking for their experiences and time to understand fanfiction as literary production, and in what ways it could enable the exploration of gender and sexuality. Interview participants were asked for informed consent regularly throughout the data collection process. The link between interview (consented content) and textual analysis (their publicly available content) was made clear to both fic writers and readers. I made them aware of anonymity issues, specifically, how it was possible to link fanfictions (publicly available) to interview data (privately generated)—how that could potentially breach anonymity, given that quotes from fanfictions can be searched for on the internet, and create links with the content of the interviews I conducted with them. They all expressed that as long as they used a chosen name, not their real name, they were comfortable to have the interviews linked with their fanfictions. The participants have been carefully choosing to expose parts of their personal lives online through blogs (LiveJournal, Tumblr, Twitter) already, and judged that what they divulgated in the interviews was not at risk or causing them any further harm. Hence, I have never collected their legal names, postal addresses, or asked any other information that could have identified them in real life. As I was cross-referencing content already publicly available with new information about the participant (interview) in my data

analysis, there was indeed a risk that this new information would be linked to their public profile (Tumblr or AO3). I thus sent participants a transcript of their interview after conducting them, and they were able to withdraw information if needed—which happened with a fic writer, whose desire was for me to withdraw a few sentences. There was also the possibility of not answering a question if they were unwilling to provide personal information about their fic experience, which did not happen.

I also shared with them the main concepts of my analysis and gave them the possibility to rectify their statement for me not to misinterpret them, leaving them space to explain. I did not publish any personal information other than the one approved beforehand, such as sexual identity or gender. Talking about their experience of gender and sexuality could have been emotionally difficult, which is why I left room for the participants to have time to think or decline to answer if necessary. I kept unavoidable personal information, their e-mail address, private.

I conducted a reflexive and interactive feminist interviewing, aiming for a collaboration (Yeo et al., 2014). I started with a brief self-introduction, and then asked questions on identity, fanfiction writing, specific questions about selected author fics, affective experiences, gender and sexuality in fic, and concluded on the representation of queer and feminist identities. I asked questions but also talked about some of my own experiences when relevant to the interview, to have more space for reflexivity. Indeed, as Patton suggests, "a common mistake among novices is failing to provide *reinforcement* and *feedback*. This means letting the interviewee know from time to time that the purpose of the interview is being fulfilled. Words of thanks, support, and even praise will help make the interviewee feel that the interview process is worthwhile and support ongoing rapport" (2002: 375). Moreover, "a good interview feels like a connection has been established in which communication is flowing both ways. [...] The interviewer has a responsibility to communicate clearly what information is desired and why that information is important" (Patton, 2002: 374). To this end, I felt comfortable sharing some of my own experiences of slash fandom and my identity as a non-binary lesbian. I did, however, not disclose the personal details of my online private blog as there was a risk of harm for myself. I had a separate, public Tumblr blog that explained my research and with which I contacted the participants that could only be reached for the first time through Tumblr (due to having no e-mail address stated in their AO3 profile).

As for risks of harm, some sensitive topics were present in my research, mainly about gender and queerness, concerning fictional characters but also (by proxy) the participants. I let the participants know they did not have to disclose their gender or sexuality or other parts of their identity if they did not wish to. Sensitive topics also included explicit intimacy in some fanfictions (sex scene for mature audiences for example). I quoted anything that had relevance to the analysis, asking for consent before talking about excerpts of sexually explicit content, which I offered to paraphrase if necessary—it did not happen as all participants agreed to discuss mature content throughout the interviews. Moreover, when needed in the interview I used trigger warnings to let the participant know beforehand I would talk about a potentially upsetting matter, and they had the space to refuse going further as needed—the only related memorable event was actually the other way around, with a participant asking me if they could talk about an upsetting subject matter from their life experience, asking me to keep it out of the transcript. I kept the lines out of the transcript, yet it did inform me about their own motivations and past experiences when it came to fic.

I kept my data on a Word document on my password-protected laptop and hard drive. I also uploaded my data on an encrypted cloud (one that provides a high level of security) for data storage. In the light of these ethical decisions, I do believe my research methods were necessary because few to no works have tackled the issue of fanfiction in the light of literature, interviewing writers and readers. Indeed, justifying my ethical standpoint, is that few works have connected the writers as subjects with their literary production, hence the need for a cross-referencing of author interviews and their fics. Often studied in the light of fan studies, and through publicly available texts only, I remedied the lack of first-hand accounts by looking into how far can gender and sexuality be explored through fic through fan testimonies. Despite the potential harm and risks interviews can trigger, the richness of the data collected and the protections I put in place outweighed my initial anxieties about my methods in the first place.

4.6)   Conclusion

To conclude, the data I have collected through documentation, interviews, and observation has set out to remedy the under-theorisation of fic as literature, the overtly essentialist theorisation of fic as gendering practice, and the under-theorisation of para-

writing (i.e., comments left on fic) as affective-discursive practices. The methodological enquiries set at the beginning of this chapter were how I went about investigating affect and community in online spaces, how my research methods and methodology were relevant and original in answering the question of investigating affect and community in online spaces, and finally the significance of the methodological choices I had made.

I believe that with the mixing of digital ethnographical methods, such as semi-structured and structured interviews, which are close to non-existent in fan studies (perhaps due to the method's 'private' nature), as well as more common textual analysis and observation (perhaps because all of these units of analysis were publicly available), I managed to cross-analyse enough data to answer my research enquiries. Crafted around fourth wave fan studies with the use of an intersectional, intertextual, transdisciplinary focus, these methods allowed me to structure my thesis around the meeting of affect, feminism, queer studies, pedagogy, and fan studies theory.

Nevertheless, there are methodological limitations in this thesis: this qualitative research enquiry includes small sample sizes, as well as a potential bias in participant answers, sampling, and data analysis with my status of aca-fan. What could be remedied for the sample size is a bigger study, having more time and more researchers working on textual analysis and interviewing, thus involving more data and participants. Fan texts have the challenge of being, while publicly available, often producing a huge amount of data. Moreover, pertaining to duplicability, my focus on K/S fanfiction does not attempt to encompass all slash instances; nonetheless, I believe that the archetypal nature of Kirk and Spock's relationship would make it possible to duplicate the method and methodology onto another slash pairing. As for the potential bias in research, my issue is that being an aca-fan involved in the *Star Trek* fandom has made me embedded to the point of mixing my fan and academic identities, thus acting on hunches from my fan experience to analyse with my academic knowledge. This is an issue, I believe, that needs to be stated—but as 'harmful' it may potentially have been, it was extremely useful in the initial coding and literature gaps stage. I have paid strict attention to my own bias in academia as aca-fan, and thanks to the expert supervision of my thesis advisors and my own academic journey, I believe I have managed to strike the right balance between 'aca' and 'fan'.

Figure 2
Nocturnal

Chapter 5. The creation of an archive of performances: slash as *performed literature*

Fanfiction, as a writerly practice, has mainly been considered as peripheral to traditional perceptions of literature—in many cases, as transformative literature (Busse, 2017; Kaplan, 2006; Stasi, 2006; Jenkins, [1992] 2013; Sandvoss, 2014, Hellekson and Busse, 2006, 2014) that takes source in already published media to transform it at the fan's will. This has, as a consequence, fostered a habit of taking literary theory (following community-based constructions of meaning) to make sense of fanfiction texts as transformative, with concepts such as Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities" (1980) or Stuart Hall's method of "encoding/decoding" media (1991). After analysing Kristina Busse's request for new literary theory being applied to fic (2017), as well as Abigail Derecho's work on fic as "archontic literature" (2006), I have realised—in the light of my own data—that slash fic, as transformative literature only (not as part of a larger set of discourses and practices that pertain to literature), did not explain the practices around fan writing and reading in enough depth, especially the practices of teaching political/social and media literacy through storytelling.

In effect, while Derecho suggests fic belongs to a larger genre of "derivative" or "appropriative" literature (2006: 63), hence her term archontic, creating an archive of texts (which I add is around an interpretive community, following Busse and Fish), the issue of how fans consider belonging to such a specific literary archive remains under-analysed. Archontic relates to 'archives' as per Jacques Derrida's 1995 work *Archive Fever,* claiming that "any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artefacts, new contents" (Derecho, 2006: 64). By categorising fic as archontic, Derecho inscribes it in the history of literary practices that imply political struggle and social relevance. She even claims that fanfiction is opposed to the dominance of a version of a text over another, hence fic being an 'ethical practice' (2006: 77), as it allows for fan texts to share multiple meanings without being hierarchised in ways that would disregard the work of the fan author. Yet, this combined with

her use of Deleuze's difference in repetition (1968) allows to open the field of fanfic studies to the question of fic as an embodied, political, affective practice; whether this practice would be more understood as an archive, to which I add what do fans get out of the repetitive consumption of K/S, and what do they get from identifying slash as literature.

Following Ferreday's argument which "hinges on a reading of online interaction as reading," I also "engage with websites not as spaces of encounter, but as texts. […] My engagement with that text is primarily as a reader. To reflect on the role of the researcher is hence to open up a wider reflection on what it means to read and how reading might be performative" (2009: 16). In this first analysis chapter, I will thus focus on the reading of fic as a literary production and what stakes its performative nature might bring into play. I argue this raises a conundrum within fan studies: how does the conceptualisation of fic as literature allow for an understanding of fic as performance, and how can literary production and fic practices connect in new ways?

This is why other fan scholars have raised a new concept to answer this conundrum: analysing fic as drama, something more akin to theatre—a production of Kirk and Spock's relationship, where each iteration has the same value as another, and where it is the performance of intimacy that belongs to the core of fic as a practice (Coppa, 2006). Francesca Coppa explains that "fan fiction's concern with bodies is often perceived as a problem or flaw, but performance is predicated on the idea of bodies, rather than words, as the storytelling medium" ([2006] 2014: 222). I claim that the tension between analysing fic as drama and analysing fic as literature can open new ways of thinking about fic, such as a potential resolution of the theoretical divide on fic as a written genre amongst fan scholars. Through the analysis of my fan writer interviews with Liss, Anna, Pensive, FalsePremise, and Waldorph, along with fan studies and cultural studies theorists, I attempted in this chapter to bridge the gap between fic as literature or drama. Indeed, I propose that the popular K/S fic I have analysed opens the theoretical field to a hybrid genre reconciling literature and drama: slash as '*performed literature*'.

My rationale for this first analysis chapter situates itself on fic as an intentional writing practice, hence my focus on fic writers: how do fans consider their own writing practices, and how can we define fic writing practices in the light of cultural theory? Following Derecho who sees slash fic as a literature of the subordinate, I wonder what kinds of pedagogies and politics are embedded in popular K/S fic. In effect, my starting point is how my writer participants

approach their own writing practices. I have structured this chapter around the analysis of fan writer interviews. It is structured in four parts: first, I build upon the debates around fic as literature or fic as drama within fan studies to offer an alternative: fic as a hybrid, performative genre. Coppa's concept of slash as drama ([2006] 2014) sees bodies in space, and slash is where bodies in space are the storytelling medium. Referring to Butler's concept of gender as performance (2007), I reconcile visions of fic as literature or drama through a queer framework. I then call upon Fish's interpretive communities (1980) to make sense of what is happening around this 'performance' socially and politically: interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts (prior to the act of reading), or how *Star Trek* K/S communities based on gay male relationships are the norm for an understanding (reading) of the original media. This way of reading *Star Trek* takes place in the repetition of 'drama' and the polysemy of 'literature' (multiple voices in fic communities), which is how I reconcile slash theories under the concept of 'performed literature'. By doing this, I perceived how the K/S community perpetuates norms around what is considered 'good' gender and sexuality, as seen in chapter 6: hegemonic femininity, taken from Schippers (2007); self-perception and the use of labels to understand one's identity; homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) which is used to grant Kirk and Spock a status of legitimate engagement to the other (marriage, children); the establishment of consent as necessary for intimacy; a queer gaze, which shows desire while respecting the other's boundaries; how sex roles are challenged during gay sex in K/S fic; and gender dissonance, taking the case study of FalsePremise's alien race bearing sequential hermaphroditism.

This is why, in the second part of this chapter, I look at how writing norms are a kind of political and social practice. Fanfiction, I argue, teaches both political/social and media literacy through the norms of the K/S interpretive community (Fish, 1980): fans learn to recognise feminism, learn about queer identities, and so on following the norms cited above and discussed in chapter 6. I discovered three attitudes towards the pedagogy of fic from my writer participants: a refusal to identify as teachers (Liss and Pensive), a more discreet kind of pedagogy (FalsePremise), and a self-aware politically motivated pedagogy (Waldorph and Anna) offered through their writing practices. I do so by discursively analysing interviews of my writer participants.

To understand how this pedagogy around skills of literacy are being encouraged in K/S, I suggest going beyond ideas of resistance/subtext in slash (whether the characters' queerness

is intentionally coded in the original media, or whether interpreting K/S is an act of resistance). In the third part of this chapter, I use the concept of encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980) later repurposed by Woledge (2005). I argue that decoding and then re-encoding queerness is the very transformative process of fic, which reconciles fic as 'performed literature' with its transformative history. Then, to build upon the process of decoding, I use Woledge's concept of intimatopia (2005b) as key to becoming literate in feminist, gender, sexuality, and diversity issues. Slash is not only working through representations of sexuality; love, friendship and intimacy (Woledge, 2005b) are key and all contribute to the pedagogy of slash. Fics, as performed literature, teach through intimate character relationships.

Finally, for the fourth part of this chapter, I argue the sharing of performances is what makes fic a hybrid genre: fic is a communal practice that not only politicises Kirk and Spock's love but politicises the whole climate around such a practice. Community is made around the sharing of politically and socially 'good' characterisation practices, hence building the K/S interpretive community through a repetition and polysemy of decodings/re-encodings. This, in turn, creates an archive of performances (De Kosnik, 2015).

For all of my writer participants, fic is indeed literature; the very fact that they fight for fic to be acknowledged as literature reflects a meaning-making practice that aims to legitimise the object of their affect. For example, *Sha Ka Ree* writer Liss explains that:

> "I absolutely believe fanfiction belongs to proper literature! I often tell people that I don't consider it a lesser art form, but rather a genre. It has its own conventions and language, like any genre, but it's also more accessible than any genre because literally anyone can write and share it — no barrier to entry. In my mind, *fanfiction is the great equalizer of "literature." No matter your class, race, gender, sexuality, you can write it*, and I actually believe you will be MORE successful in fanfiction coming from a marginalized background because you're taking source material created by those in power and turning it into something created by you, with your experiences (whatever they happen to be) influencing the text's message, and making it unique." (emphasis mine)

First of all, Liss does show an acknowledgement of slash as a genre in itself and mentions a disregard for textual hierarchy, following Derecho (2006) and others (Busse, 2017; Kaplan, 2006; Stasi, 2006; Jenkins, [1992] 2013; Sandvoss, 2014, Hellekson and Busse, 2014). The K/S writer also brings social identities to the fanfic practice (class, race, gender, sexuality), dubbing it 'equalizer of literature', opening psychosocial analysis to the affordances of the digital and the customs of the interpretive community that sees Kirk and Spock as lovers. It follows

interpretations of fic as the literature of the subordinate, an outlet Derecho (2006) and others (Jenkins, [1992] 2013, Russ 2014, Stein, 2015 especially) have theorised in their work.

Yet, Liss goes further, bringing out the 'pedagogical' function and 'literacy meaning-making' potential of slash fiction: for them, as a nonbinary lesbian, fic is a genre of literature that allows equity (especially due to its form and to its belonging to a fannish network)—prompting me to analyse fic as an 'ethical practice' (Derecho, 2006) where a polysemy of voices (a repetition with a difference) might build an archive of hybrid, pedagogical, political literature. Pensive, a bisexual writer, also said that:

> "I absolutely do think fanfiction is literature. For as long as humans have been creating stories, we've been coming up with variations on those stories and exploring them in new ways. […] The fact that fanfiction is derived from someone else's story doesn't make it less valid, or detract from its literary value."

By underlining her own affective attachment to fic as archontic literature, disregarding a hierarchy of texts and privileging a polysemy of voices from the entire K/S community, Pensive's comment joins Liss' statement in the will to acknowledge their work (and the work of other writers) as worthy of study and recognition.

In effect, as Fish claims, "the act of recognizing literature is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will; rather, it proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature" (1980: 11). In a similar way, throughout this chapter, I will go in depth into the features of fic as 'performed literature' with the help of the data I collected from my writer participants: going beyond debates about fic as literature or drama and giving a new depth to fic as writerly work.

5.1) Beyond debates about literature or drama: K/S as a hybrid genre

5.1.1) A focus on body and mind

Anna, a lesbian K/S writer, explains the following:

"Exploring my own queerness through Jim and Spock's is definitely a huge part of it for me. I enjoy fics where they grapple with their sexuality and also fics where they don't—fic is such a rare type of media in that it shows queer life in all its facets, not just in the realm of identity exploration. Watching them fall in love without being like "But is it ok

to love a man?" was revolutionary for me. […] I agree SO SO much that fanfiction should be recognized as legitimate genre."

Here are several points that are salient to the analysis of fic as performed literature. First of all, what Anna discloses through this statement is the fact that queer relationships are the norm in K/S, and that it is through this normalisation of what Anna dubs "exploring my own queerness" that the queer bodies of Kirk and Spock are invested in storytelling ("watching them fall in love"). If we follow Coppa's analysis of slash fic as a dramatisation, we understand that bodies are key to slash. In effect, she explains that "fan fiction's concern with bodies is often perceived as a problem or flaw, but performance is predicated on the idea of bodies, rather than words, as the storytelling medium. […] Scholars of performance studies often refer to their object of study as "the movement of bodies in space," and the behavior of those bodies is never unique or "original"" ([2006] 2014: 222). Fanfiction texts, indeed, foreground physicality (through the description of bodily reactions as emotional cues, through sex scenes, through the idea that bodies are to be used to signify intimacy and feeling) and this is useful for me to lead into the discussion of gendered performance.

Trying to reconcile literature and drama practices through a queer framework, I suggest that this movement of K/S bodies in space as storytelling medium can be linked not only to performance but, more precisely, gender performance. In effect, Judith Butler suggests that bodies "matter not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" ([1993] 2011: xviii), "performativity is thus not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and […] conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" ([1993] 2011: xxi). Gender performance is an involuntary "reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes" that does not presupposes a choosing subject but rather indicates a materialisation of regulatory norms to produce a viable body ([1993] 2011: xxiii-xxiv). The body, for Butler and—I argue—in slash fic is a place of performance, a place where specific (feminist, queer) acts are being repeated to the purpose of enforcing 'good' feminist, queer norms. This is how slash Kirk and slash Spock are made viable bodies; where storytelling is used as a mechanism to inscribe norms upon their bodies—through performance, especially of gender and sexuality.

Although Butler's book centres around heterosexual hegemony creating viable bodies, I propose that it can be approached differently when combined with Fish's interpretive

communities—here the K/S fandom. Acting as a digital ecosystem, "it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but *for writing texts*, for constituting their properties. […] These strategies exist *prior* to the act of reading and therefore *determine the shape of what is read* rather than, as it usually assumed, the other way around" (Fish, 1980: 14, emphasis mine). In the same way, the heteropatriarchal society that interprets heterosexuality as the only viable option is transformed in an interpretive community where the viable bodies are those of gay men, as "archontic literature is inherently, structurally, a literature of the subordinate" (Derecho, 2006: 72). That is to say, fic can be understood partly as drama, or more precisely as 'performed literature' that encompasses dramatic features, in a way that considers the bodies of the characters as storytelling medium; the story is 'materialised' through the interpretive community's norms of viable bodies—in K/S, the normalisation of gay male relationships and queer gender matterings which seem to be the norm for members of this interpretive ecosystem.

Other fan writers have been considering their own K/S practices similarly, like Liss for example. For them, "you can have the coolest plot ever, but if the characters aren't realistic and well-rounded, it's going to fall flat. Characters, to me, ARE the story. The plot is the vehicle." It seems here that for Liss, by saying characters are the story, that the characters' bodies are the site of storytelling, putting emphasis on the capitalised "ARE." This focus on embodied storytelling is producing the story and eventually revealing the norms enforced within the K/S interpretive community: for K/S fans, Kirk and Spock as having same-sex relations is the norm, the 'good' way to interpret their relationship. There is a link between body, character, and norm-making: by using the body of the characters as site for storytelling and emotionality, tropes and norms are being created by virtue of a belonging to the K/S community. Following Anna and Liss, a link between the importance of the body and the importance of the mind is created, which I claim is revealing itself through carefully crafted characterisation—the mattering of queer bodies, the disclosing of what is considered 'good' viable bodily norms.

This dual interest and mutual relationship between mind/identity and body/mattering is thus, I suggest, key to the understanding of slash fic as a hybrid genre between drama and literature. FalsePremise, a bisexual female writer of K/S, explains that:

> "Yes, I definitely bring the body into description of emotion. […] Definitely the physical reactions play a role—and I try to use all potential physical indicators of desire and tension—heart rate, breathing, flushing, dry mouth etc. It can be other things too. It is fun to give characters particular 'tells'."

Following this statement, we can observe just how much importance FalsePremise puts on the embodiment of emotion, a characterisation that takes place in the body through the relationship with the other—closing the gap between body and mind, in a way that allows an embodied turn to affect (Wetherell, 2012). Her focus on physical reactions as "tells" from the characters' bodies is something I have noticed appearing often throughout the reading of my wider corpus of 29 fanfictions (and my personal experience of thousands of fics read over the last decade) ranging from short stories to novel-length works. These 'tells' are important in the way that they make use of the character's body to convey emotion and feeling, without overtly stating so—showcasing embodied affect.

5.1.2) Repetition and polysemy

Similar to the analysis of fic as both drama or literature, creating a hybrid genre which I dub 'performed' bridges the gap between drama and literature through characterisation; this hybrid genre is being revealed through the repetition of drama and polysemy of literature. In effect, straight female writer Waldorph explains that:

> "I stay because there's something wonderful about being able to find something new in an old story. I can read 100s of Harry Potter fics (I probably have), and each time it's familiar in the sense that I know the characters, I know the world, but there's always something interesting someone wants to say."

By acknowledging that she finds pleasure in something new 'each time' she reads fic, even though it is using known universes and characters time and time again, Waldorph shows that the focus is not on the similarities or differences amongst fic works. Instead, the repetitious process of fic, made possible by a 'polysemy of voices', creates texts all co-existing digitally and available for reading within the interpretive community. It builds up, as Derecho and De Kosnik suggest, an archive of literature (Derecho, 2006) and performances (De Kosnik, 2015).

Indeed, Busse and Hellekson offer an analysis of Coppa's take on dramatised fic as follows: Coppa "reorients the discussion of fan fiction's seemingly more problematic aspects,

such as its focus on bodies and its repetitiveness, a central function of the field rather than an artistic failure. Coppa argues that fan fiction creates a performance: text gets embodied in front of an interactive audience that shares extratextual knowledge" (2006: 30). This knowledgeable repetitiveness is considered as positive norm within the interpretive community of K/S, especially due to the following of 'good' norms around the characterisation of Kirk and Spock (see chapter 6 in this thesis); allowing a polysemy (or difference in repetition, according to Deleuze) that is regulated through the community's affective gift economy that recompenses 'good' writing (see chapter 7 in this thesis).

This mosaic of 'good' characterisation and writing practices is key to the development of K/S as an interpretive community. In effect, Busse explains that "sometimes the interpretive communities simply comprise a reading consensus; other times, they may indeed be an explicitly defined society, group, or community with a well-defined name. [...] Any time a shared interpretation reverberates through the community, it is repeated and becomes reinforced. As such, fan fiction communities are an especially good example of interpretive communities because readers display in their fan fictions their particular—and shared— interpretations" (Busse, 2017: 111-113). In the same way, the K/S community perpetuates norms around what is considered 'good' gender and sexuality, through the bodies of Kirk and Spock, repeated (with a difference) over time to build an archive of performances which crystallise these norms.

Just like Waldorph and her enjoyment of multiple voices in slash fanfiction, voices that for her grant agency to the fan identity and to media consumption, it is not fic's status as original and/or transformative text that is important here, unlike the several theories on its legitimacy: rather, it is its belonging to a corpus within the interpretive community of K/S that reveals interest for readers (community members) and fan scholars. In effect, as literary texts tend to be valued for their unique contribution, my concept of 'performed literature' as a genre demonstrates the importance of both uniqueness and repetition (drama, a representation) to the experiencing of fic. This tension between difference and repetition is key to fanfic, intimately intricated within the writing and reading of slash texts, both as belonging to an interpretive community and as an archive of literary performance. Our focus should not be on the status, then, of a single or the totality of fics in a given fandom/pairing; instead, we should focus on fic as a process and practice that is materialised through an embodiment of affect by the characters, writers, and readers. Defining these practices is a

tenet of fan studies, I argue, considering both how fans and how scholars experience fic and seeing what affordances it allows, rather than trying to make fic a specific kind of literature as a separate identity from the writing practice itself—which my concept of performed literature attempts to reconcile.

In this way, Liss and FalsePremise add that complex characters are what drives their writing practice—coming back to the importance of characterisation. What interests me is not the definition of K/S as performed literature in order to give it a specific status void of psychosocial entanglements, but rather I believe the exploration of performed literature as a practice is a way for me to look at its impact and intra-actions within the sphere of the K/S interpretive community. Deborah Kaplan explains that "rewriting characters for a work of fan fiction is an interpretive act […] in which the text offers one possible understanding of characterization" (2006: 136). I thus wonder how fan writers appear to deal with this difference in repetition. In two separate interviews, both Liss and FalsePremise have touched upon the same subject in a similar way:

> "I definitely try to make them quite human and complex. I find it really frustrating actually when other fans have very simplistic interpretations of a character. For example—when fans think 'X character is brave therefore if X character isn't ALWAYS brave that's out of character'. That— just isn't correct. A brave character has a tendency to be brave. BUT that character has other tendencies too that may interfere with their courage in a particular situation. AND there are situations in which everyone would be afraid. So it is complicated. I love writing complex characters and giving them as much depth as I can" (FalsePremise)

> "Characters to me are most interesting when they're human and flawed. My wife, also a writer […], is big on personality contradictions, and I've tried to integrate that into my writing too! Where a character is both shy and outgoing, both cheerful and morose — because all of us have elements of all personality types, all ways of being in the world. And sometimes we make decisions counter to our "character" or we put ourselves in situations where we can't be true to what we would usually do. The more I can see and write characters like that, the better I feel!" (Liss)

In both cases, the characterisation they aim to do is conflated with depth and multiplicity, which echoes fic's polysemy as a genre. I argue that it is indeed through this complexity wanted by the writers, and which we will see is happening later on (see chapter 6), that the polysemy allows the interpretive community's repetition of embodied affects. Indeed, just like FalsePremise explains with a character's "tendency to be brave," polysemy is found in the shades of characterisation that see them in relation to being brave—that is to say, polysemy

is found in how the character deals with their desire to be brave, which is in turn a way to embody affect. The differences in the repetition of what it means for them to be brave makes fic the perfect practice for diversifying how affect can be embodied by a character over time.

Yet, as fans consider their own writing practices as complex and nuanced within, I add, the repetitive movement of fandom (coming back to familiar characters, coming back to familiar worlds, departing from single-minded characterisation) as a space where literature and drama meet and mix, we need to go further and see how these practices can enable other practices. As in Derecho's literature of the subordinate (2006), the embedment of fic into wider meaning-making, affective-discursive practices needs to be analysed.

5.2) Slash writing as a political practice: interpretive communities and their impact on fans

5.2.1) Learning to be literate

Busse, in her 2017 book on fanfiction, follows primarily literary understandings of fic (but also acknowledges Coppa's take on fic as drama) and suggests that "within fandom, there are continuous negotiations over what actually constitutes the meaning of a text, whether all interpretations are situated in the text or instead get created in the reading process, and whether authorial intent ought to have relevance above and beyond the textual boundaries" (2017: 100). This enables us to think about literacy, and negotiations of meaning within fic practices: in effect, for her, "fan fiction communities offer a vast number of self-reflexive readers who articulate their specific interpretations in fannish debates and creative fan works. More specifically, fannish discussions about the source texts, fan fiction, and the discussions such stories spawn in turn illustrate the powers of readers as cocreators of meaning" (2017: 100). In the same way, K/S fans as an interpretive community cocreate meaning through fic as a practice of performed literature.

By acknowledging fans as cocreators of meaning, Busse situates fic in literature but also, more importantly, in the middle of a process of meaning-making that rejects textual hierarchy (Derecho, 2006) and demands polysemy as 'good' writing practice—hence the development of 'self-reflexive interpretations' which create the norms of meaning-making

within the K/S interpretive community. To this, I add that what really matters here is the development of literacy (here, knowing how to 'read' something) within fan spaces, through fic writing (and then reading). To this, I offer FalsePremise's remark on fic as porn and the debate of porn as sexist or not:

> "Like — in some spaces you get these very black and white all or nothing debates over whether or not porn is fundamentally sexist, right? But how can you even answer that question without opening up to the fullness of human sexuality and the multiple ways it can be expressed artistically? *Only when you've done that, can you look back and point to some expressions and say "oh that's sexist and here is why."* Most is porn sexist debates assume erotic literature, fic and art doesn't even exist." (emphasis mine)

By bringing our attention to the contrary interpretation of slash fic as porn and porn as always sexist, FalsePremise makes a point that echoes the wider processes at play in the consumption and creation of slash.

Indeed, FalsePremise says that the debate over whether porn is sexist does not take into account practices where explicitly sexual texts and media (such as K/S) might function as a foil to widespread and hegemonic understandings of porn—slash expands the identity of porn and displaces its debate around sexism, inscribing it in its own very specific strand of sex-positive feminism. She even notes that this 'opening up' to new strands of pornographic material allows us to 'look back', identify 'some expressions' and analyse how 'this is sexist (or else) and why'. The key here is the 'why'; in effect, it discloses a development of media and gender literacy that is possible through the exposure to a polysemy of voices and texts.

Just as Busse says "this layering of conversations, analyses, and fiction constitutes the necessary context to explain and understand a given narrative" (2017: 152), I argue that the K/S interpretive community—and all the subcommunities it encompasses: Old Married Spirk[2], AOS,[3] TOS,[4] Pre-Reform,[5] etc—works through a sensibilisation to some specific practices of meaning-making, developing literacy within the fandom.

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[2] "OMS (Old Married Spirk) is a trope existing in the Star Trek Kirk/Spock fandom in which the characters Captain James T. Kirk and Commander Spock are married/bonded following the five-year mission" (plaidshirtjimkirk, 2021).

[3] Alternate Original Series. Refers to the *Star Trek* film series started in 2009 by J.J. Abrams with Chris Pine as Kirk and Zachary Quinto as Spock.

[4] The Original Series. Refers to the original *Star Trek* TV series started in 1966 by Gene Roddenberry with William Shatner as Kirk and Leonard Nimoy as Spock.

[5] "These stories feature a Vulcan society without their emotional control, and often quite savage, though not necessarily primitive (it can be technologically advanced or have smaller scale societies with tribal barbarians).

This also appears in Liss' interview. They have, as a concluding remark, explained that fic has had a lasting impact on them and their friends:

> "I know my fandom friends are so brilliant and accomplished and capable, and they do good work in their non-fandom lives. If fic has played a part in shaping their opinions and thoughts on gender, sexuality, culture or society, then I think we've all done a damn good job fostering a large community of thoughtful writers and readers!"

By dubbing writers and readers as a community that is 'thoughtful', Liss is putting the emphasis on how they have analysed fic practices as directly impacting their own literacy: about 'gender, sexuality, culture or society' as they list, but also, I add, about media itself. I argue that, while I initially observed how the participants in my study were considering their own writing practices, issues wider than considering fic as literature or drama appeared and required analysis, such as the impact of considering fic practices as a specific kind of social practice—which is what I am attempting to do through the study of fan writing practices as performed literature. By bridging the gap between fan scholars' theories and fan writing practices as embodied and felt, I realised that an assemblage of fan works and fan interviews particularly made sense for understanding slash in new ways. Fan writers, while having their works dissected and analysed by fan scholars, have been rarely interviewed apart from opportunities at conventions (Woledge, 2005b), Will Brooker's respondents (2002) and Anne Jamison's interviews (2013) for example.

I hence suggest that making sense of fic writing practices *including how* the fans say they experience it is key to go further and define fic as a hybrid genre itself, and this includes literacy as centre-point; further, it hints how this literacy is obtained and worked at. I thus analyse what kind of pedagogical features slash fic as hybrid 'performed literature' can enable. In effect, "in the realm of the archontic, in the multiverses of fan fiction, there is a recognition of the valuable innovations that occur in the process of repetition: one scene from a film or television show can be rewritten in fifty, or five hundred, different ways, with each repetition elucidating some different aspect or dynamic of the scene" (Derecho, 2006: 76). These 'valuable innovations', as Derecho mentions, carry also the potential to educate through repetition—I look into how fan writers experience this.

This can be either real Vulcan in the past at any point before Surak and Vulcan's Reform towards peace, some kind of alternate universe (mirror universes, parallel universes etc.)" (Ancient Vulcan, 2018).

5.2.2) The pedagogy of fic: three ways of teaching literacy

One of the features that has appeared in the light of my data is one of ambiguous pedagogy: or, put in other terms, intersectional feminism fans can't *not* write about. In effect, I have registered over my 5 writer fan participants three different attitudes towards their own potentially pedagogic roles: a refusal to identify as teachers (Liss and Pensive), a more discreet kind of pedagogy (FalsePremise), and a self-aware politically motivated pedagogy (Waldorph and Anna) that is offered through their writing practices. Busse, in her analysis of fanfiction, explains that "fan writers use the characters, plots, and bodies from their chosen texts as raw material that can be manipulated to explore questions of most interest to them as well as issues and plot points raised by the source" (2017: 60). Before exploring exactly what kind of content the fic writers set out to teach about, hence creating a relation of power with the reader, which will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7, I want here to focus on the way fic writers say they experience their writing practice and how it relates to pedagogy.

For the first group of fic writers I have selected Pensive and Liss, who both state that they do not feel as though they are purposefully educating fans through their fics—yet, I claim, a process of pedagogic transmission takes shape despite their statement:

> "As for my personal beliefs — I would say they probably do play a role in the sense that they influence what I write to some extent. I don't think I've ever written a fic specifically to draw attention to an issue I care about or to inform people, although I definitely see the value in that. […] *But I think my values do show through in that they influence my ideas and the stories I create.*" (Pensive, emphasis mine)

> "She [Carmen Maria Machado] said she never sits down with the intention of saying "I'm going to subvert gender roles today" but rather *that's all that interests her, so that's what she writes about.* When it comes to my writing, it's the same kind of thing. *I don't set out to write explicitly feminist fic, nor do I set out to teach any lessons, but I make choices for what the characters do and how they respond to certain situations*, and often the very concept of the fic, because I am an explicit feminist and I do believe in consent and compromise and learning how to deal with mental illness and trauma. So I hope my fic comes off as feminist (as much as it can being often about two men), *but I never TRY to teach any lessons or educate anyone.*" (Liss, emphasis mine)

Yet Liss adds:

> "Especially coming from a queer perspective, we kind of *have to be conscious of* healthy choices in relationships, yeah? 'Cause we had to do all our sexual and relationship education ourselves!" (Liss, emphasis mine)

By overtly stating that they do not feel like they are teaching their readers, they seem to back away from power relations around knowledge; I argue they nonetheless reveal an ambiguous kind of pedagogy where their own personal experience takes precedence over the plot: "*that's all that interests her, so that's what she writes about."* Liss especially opposes the will to educate (or not, in their words) and the learning fans do while reading fic ("we had to do all our sexual and relationship education"). They do not identify this as pedagogy, yet "while the dangers of losing oneself within a fictional world are not that simplistic, neither should we dismiss fiction and its impacts that easily. We know that words and narratives matter, and we need to account for the affective dimension of fan fiction combined with the social dimension of fan communities" (Busse, 2017: 95). Liss and Pensive do impact readers, as I will explore in more depth in chapters 6 and 7; but here, this socialisation and politicisation of the writing experience takes meaning through the experiences of the fan writers around pedagogy (and how they articulate their own relationship with pedagogy tells us a lot about the hybrid genre of slash fic). Liss and Pensive, through the very nature of their writing practice as politically oriented, do open up pedagogy within their fics.

This ambivalent experience around pedagogy can also turn into more discreet, yet self-aware pedagogy: for example, with FalsePremise. She explains the following:

> "Definitely my feminism played a role in The Truth. *I consider it is feminist work*. […] Some of the fic is very much explicitly feminist, The Truth is one of those. Others less so, but then still my feminism is there in my playing with gender roles, showing healthy intimacy etc. Yes, *I definitely slip issues that are important to me into the fic. But in a way that isn't too in the reader's face.* At least that's what I'm going for!" (emphasis mine)

As she identifies as a feminist (like all of my writer participants), the retelling of her own experience engages a pedagogy that she directs towards subjects that matter to her as a bisexual woman: "gender roles," "healthy intimacy" and so on. These subjects, examined at length in the text in chapter 6, conflate feminism with what FalsePremise dubs as 'good' norms in the interpretive community. In effect, Busse explains that "writing carries with it responsibility, not to the fictional characters but to oneself, to the readers, to the worlds one creates, and to the relationships these stories foster. Fans are often aware of the complex negotiations of identification and desire that feature in their roles as viewers, writers, and readers" (2017: 95). As gender mixes with media literacy, writers experiencing a discreet kind

of pedagogy are aware of such complex negotiations, setting out to teach informally, yet according to 'community standards' developed around the mingling of fourth-wave feminism and norms of 'good' characterisation (such as explicit consent or emotional availability). FalsePremise shows through her interview that she does not shy away from the responsibility enabled by her writing of K/S, and demonstrates agency over the political body matterings of Kirk and Spock.

The last category of pedagogical awareness I have encountered in the light of my data is a self-conscious will to educate. Following Busse, "authors of fan fiction tend to be in conversation with other fans; that is, there is a conversation going on that often includes the writer, thus rejecting literary models that tend to privilege authors" (2017: 149). In the same way, as fan writers are in conversation with fan readers, the material 'taught' rejects a model that tends to privilege hierarchical fluxes of power and knowledge; fan writers who say they experience their writing as a political practice often partake in open, rhizomatic pedagogy—adding to the polysemy of voices in popular K/S. For example, Waldorph explains that:

> "Yes, my writing is VERY political. I'm a very political person and so that's part of my identity that I don't want to exclude from my writing. I always want to write women who have stories, I want to write men who have friends and emotions — I absolutely am always trying to bring feminist values to my work."

By saying they want to write about characters who matter differently than stories enmeshed in the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007; e.g., women having no story, men having no emotions), Waldorph situates herself in a kind of horizontal exchange of power where her 'feminist values' are inherently embedded in the characterisation and plot and cannot be pried away, in turn consumed by fan readers who learn from it. By considering her work as feminist and political, she reflects on the conversation happening between fan writers and readers—and, often, the blurring of those boundaries that were faint to begin with. Anna also follows a similar path to Waldorph by explaining the following:

> "I actually think it's important that people be able to write and consume fic just for fun, without a social motive, but *for me it absolutely has become a method of education. Maybe because I'm queer and mentally ill and feel like I'm always explaining myself to others, fic becomes a way where I can do that with total control*. No wishing later on that I had explained myself better, etc. And I started getting comments early on from others with mental illness about how much my work resonated with them—

or even helped them!—and after that I felt compelled to make that a point of my writing." (emphasis mine)

While acknowledging that fic practices are not always visibly pedagogical, Anna inscribes herself in the back and forth between fan writer and reader as they co-construct the meaning of Kirk's and Spock's characterisation, through Anna's interpretation as fic. She makes a point of acknowledging her self-aware involvement in teaching fans, focusing on the control she can exercise upon the kind of knowledge she wants to pass on, and how that kind of writing practice benefits her *and* the fans who identify with her.

Within fan writing practices, then, the notion of literacy—in media, gender—and pedagogy—be it ambiguous, discreet, or emphasised—is central to the understanding of slash as hybrid performed literature. The polysemy of fan voices allows for a diffuse spreading of knowledge (see chapter 6), to which the fan reader responds affectively-discursively (see chapter 7). Yet, as fan writing is theorised to be prompted by resistant reading or subtextual reading, I question how that can be revealed in the process of analysing slash as a meaning-making practice.

5.3)   Working with the text: beyond resistance or subtext

5.3.1)   Encoding/decoding queerness: the process of transformation

Woledge, in an article on K/S fiction, introduces Stuart Hall's concept of encoding/decoding (1980) to fan spaces: "in a 'determinate' moment the structure employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinate moment the 'message', via its decodings, issues into the structure of social practices. […] The codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical" (Hall, [1980] 2005: 119). Something (like the relationship between Kirk and Spock) is encoded (by the TV show) then 'sent' out, which ends up decoded (analysed by the fans) and re-encoded, here as K/S fanfiction. It is this movement of encoding and decoding, I argue, that is key to understanding the writing practices of slash fic as performed literature.

Firstly, departing from Gwenllian Jones' suggestion of K/S being an "actualisation of latent textual elements" (2005: 236) rather than a purely resistant reading (such as Jenkins,

1992, and Bacon-Smith, 1992), Woledge argues that the supplementing of gaps within fan slash writing practices should be analysed through the theoretical framework of decoding (Hall, 1980 and Woledge, 2005). Rejecting Gwenllian Jones' alternative to encoding/decoding (which ends up being very similar to Hall, yet in Woledge's words 'limited and clumsy'), Woledge thus explains that "the dominant decoding emphasises the homosocial explanations that surround, and control, them in their textual context. By contrast, the K/S fans' decoding will divorce the connotation from its context, emphasising their recognition of its homoerotic possibilities" (Woledge, 2005: 244-245). This reconciles and bypasses the theoretical fault line between looking at fic through resistant or latent meanings, as fan writers regain agency by purposefully encoding, decoding, and re-encoding.

Back to K/S, Anna explains:

> "*I think it's also built into these characters to a certain extent. There's a reason they started slash. They love each other so tenderly, and no one can deny that* even if they don't ship them. As it happens I'm looking at the picture of Jim holding Spock's hand from The Motion Picture (which I have on my bedroom wall because I'm really that committed) and that seems very appropriate. There is a soft intimacy to them that creates a perfect landscape for queer exploration." (emphasis mine)

Anna sees how Kirk and Spock are encoded, in the poster from *The Motion Picture* for example, and decodes K/S out of them holding hands; which she re-encodes in her own fanfiction practices. This reinforces what Woledge suggests in her paper: "K/S fans do not fail to recognise the homosocial justifications that allow dominant decodings to ignore erotic possibilities in Star Trek; instead, they use these homosocial codes to suggest, not unlike Sedgwick (1985), that there is a continuum linking homosociality and homosexuality" (2005: 245). In effect, what Anna reveals is the embeddedness of homosociality as being encoded by the TV show writers ("They love each other so tenderly, and no one can deny that") can be decoded as something sexual and romantic ("There is a soft intimacy to them"); while Anna cohabits with two versions, the encoded one (or source media) *and* the decoded one (or interpreting K/S as romantically involved), she is able to navigate and manage her own expectations when it comes to the consumption of K/S by re-encoding her own version of Kirk and Spock through her fic writing practice.

Yet, as it is possible to have a polysemy of interpretations cohabit within a body or a fan space, I argue that within fandom there exists 'good' decoding practices revealing a self-

awareness of the source media limitations and fan creativity. Pensive, for example, offers a distinct proof useful for further analysis:

> "To address the question about the strong inclusion of ongoing consent, I think that was a combination of my personal values and my read on Jim Kirk as a character. If you've been active in the Star Trek fandom for any length of time, you've probably encountered the concept of Jim Kirk as a womanizer, and how false that is? […] I think the perception of Jim Kirk as a womanizer is rooted in toxic masculinity and the male power fantasy, but isn't actually accurate to who Jim Kirk really is. Someone in the fandom did a really great analysis of all the times he kissed women in TOS, have you seen it? Many of those kisses were strategically motivated, such as "The Gamesters of Triskelion" when Jim kisses Shahna to distract her. […] Anyway, *I reject the idea of Jim as a womanizer, so I spent some time contemplating him as I see him (a feminist who respects women, non-binary people, female-identified people, and everyone),* and I just had this strong feeling that he would really value consent and communication. That really felt true to who he is as a character, to me." (emphasis mine)

Here, Pensive reveals a point of view that is organised over the discarding of some decodings contrary to her own analysis of Kirk,[6] and the privileging of specific feminist-inspired decodings. As Pensive re-encodes Kirk as "a feminist who respects women, non-binary people, female-identified people, and everyone" (notice the lengthy enumeration showing gender literacy), Woledge's paper takes full sense: "the second aspect of decoding— "comprehension"—depends on how fans deal with their recognition of the ambiguous gestures and attempt to understand them" (2005: 245). Pensive offers facts ("Many of those kisses were strategically motivated") to underpin her own motivations in decoding Kirk as a feminist male character, showing that for her, the process of decoding is inherently tied to her enjoyment of the source media *and* one of the reasons to keep on 'righting wrongs' through her careful re-encoding of Kirk as feminist within her own writing practice—a political act.

FalsePremise also reveals part of how 'good' decoding practices are enforced within the K/S fandom by saying the following about 'good' characterisation:

> "And the characterisation needs to be spot on pitch perfect. There is nothing more satisfying than finding that perfect line and knowing through and through that is EXACTLY what Spock would say in that situation. It just rocks. So even if I was banned from any reading/writing of fic with sexual content I'd still read and write heaps of fic. […] I write in a way that is very character-driven. So *I tend to write moving the characters moment by*

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[6] For more information about how Kirk has been crafted as a womanizer in popular culture, further reading is available through Erin Horáková's essay on *Strange Horizons*, "FRESHLY REMEMBER'D: KIRK DRIFT" (2017), available here: http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/columns/freshly-rememberd-kirk-drift/

moment according to what I think they'd do/say in that situation. Which means sometimes they ruin my planned plot! But usually if I keep letting them do their thing, a better plot comes out anyway." (emphasis mine)

For FalsePremise, following up on the use of the body as site of 'good' characterisation and place of storytelling (akin to Coppa's drama, 2006), fic writing goes beyond the sole interest of sexual relations—something few fan scholars have touched upon, instead focusing on the sexually explicit content of K/S slash (eg. Russ, 2014, Penley, 1997). It reveals a practice of almost-spooky characterisation as re-encoding driving force—similarly to affect as almost-spooky force (Wetherell, 2012, Ahmed, 2004, Massumi, 2015)—with the uncanny "sometimes they ruin my planned plot" and "usually if I keep letting them do their thing, a better plot comes out." The characters are given agency through FalsePremise's words, and the embodied affect they disclose allows for the fan to discern 'good' decoding and re-encoding practices.

Woledge adds that "this brings us to the point where a K/S fan starts, before writing or reading a K/S story: the fan has recognised the ambiguous possibilities of Star Trek and comprehended them as referencing the ambiguous area where the homosocial codes begin to be transgressed and friendship moves towards desire. The next two stages move the reader and writer into the realm of fan fiction that deals with interpretation and response" (2005: 246). The realm of interpretation is decoding, and the realm of response is re-encoding; the writing practice embedded in movements of meaning-making, affectively embodied by the characters. Fans thus cite the norms (explicit consent, subversion of roles in sex scenes, marriage and monogamy between Kirk and Spock, and so on as explained in chapter 6) linked to the characterisation of Kirk and Spock, providing feelings of belonging (Ferreday, 2009) within the fandom.

5.3.2) Woledge's intimatopia

Woledge, in her PhD thesis published in 2005 and in a 2006 article, explains her vision of women's writing about male intimacy as 'intimatopia'. For her, "a women's consciousness does not need a fictionally female mouthpiece to find its way into the text" (2005b: 8); the female authors discussed in her thesis "might be seen, in Stanley Fish's terms, as an 'interpretive community' within the context of which sources are interpreted, and hence

retold, from a feminine perspective" (2005b: 14) while avoiding essentialising women as a group. Indeed, for Woledge, "slash fiction is frequently explicitly sexual and because of the startling and perhaps subversive nature of women eroticising male bonds, it is this sexualisation that has received the most attention, whilst the crucial structures of intimacy which surround and support it have largely been ignored" (2005b: 16); "the most central ideological concern of intimatopic texts is the weaving together of erotic, social and intimate cues into holistic relationships which, whether sexual or ambiguous, combine love, friendship and intimacy" (2005b: 209). In the same way, I argue fic needs to be considered not only through its sexual content, but through its pedagogic potential taking place in all Kirk and Spock interactions—and pedagogy not only in terms of sex. Becoming literate in feminist, gender, sexuality, and diversity issues as a whole does not only happen through the height of slash fics (a sex scene), as it is often argued to be the case in fan studies (Russ, 1985; Penley, 1997, etc.), but also throughout the entirety of the plot. Slash is not only working through representations of sexuality; "love, friendship and intimacy" (Woledge, 2005b) are key. Fics, as performed literature, teach through character relationships.

This vision of slash as intimatopic texts is hence, I argue, a key component to understanding fic writing practices as a hybrid genre of performed literature. Anna, for example, explains that:

> "I think I crave emotional intimacy so desperately that is just ends up being what I write about. When I was conceiving my version of these characters I still hadn't accepted that I was queer, so there was a subconscious yearning I was clearly weaving into their story. I think the gender subversion was mostly an accident; I didn't plan to write about men, I was just swept up by these characters and only have my queer female experiences to project onto them. But it ended up being an important part of their characters for me."

Here, we can witness just how intertwined pedagogy, literacy, the body, 'good' decoding and 'good' characterisation practices are. Anna has retrospectively recognised the experience of a queer need for emotional intimacy, and has located her desires through the re-encoding of Kirk and Spock as intimately connected. This follows Woledge's work on intimatopia, where sex is used to display intimacy and further develop the romantic relationship between Kirk and Spock. In the same way, Anna's sex scenes are a way to explore her own queer identity through intimacy, which she says she craves; the fact that she has interpreted her own need

for queer intimacy as driver to her fic writing practice is telling of how enmeshed identity, perception of the self, and 'good' practices of re-encoding within women's intimatopia are.

Similarly, FalsePremise has self-identified her own relationship with herself and her writing practice around intimacy. For her, it is a feminist decoding:

> "The exact ways I portray the intimacy and eroticism are definitely influenced by my feminism, yes. I enjoy portraying a very healthy eroticism that mixes up gendered expectations" (FalsePremise)

According to Woledge, "encoding and decoding are […] extremely dependent upon culture and context" (2005b: 27), yet "women's writing can be linked by the similar strategies it demonstrates in its representation of intimacy between men" (2005b: 10). I argue that in the light of my own data, the intimatopic writing practices organised through the K/S interpretive community are indeed specific to slash as a hybrid genre (i.e. performed literature), and an example of fandom-specific 'good' decoding practices, where media and gender literacies are taught through characterisation that fans dub as feminist (for an analysis of the content of what is dubbed feminist, see chapter 6). Intimacy is the catalyst for pedagogy.

Indeed, Woledge explains that "though often sexual, K/S fiction would be better viewed as intimatising, rather than sexualising, its source, for within its stories sex is just one, particularly vivid, way of exploring intimacy" (2005b: 175). As the fan writers decode and re-encode intimacy in a way that uses the body as site of storytelling and character development, the norms making up the K/S interpretive community are revealed. Pensive, for example, claims she uses intimacy as a way to show 'good' consent practices, which confirms her own pedagogical influence that she ambiguously self-occults:

> "So in that scene, it was an opportunity to portray consent in a positive way, sort of a "consent is sexy" vibe, while also writing Jim as I really believe he would behave in that situation based on how I interpret his character"

Here, the intimatopic nature of sex scenes allows Pensive to teach readers about her own vision of what she considers 'positive' consent. I claim that this dual working of intimatopic and decoding practices is thus a cornerstone to the understanding of K/S popular fic as performed literature. Yet, as we have seen, the tension between interpreting fic as literature or drama can be resolved through a mingling of the two into a hybrid genre; the way fans

consider their own writing practices in terms of belonging to a community (and hence inscribing their work into an archive of slash) needs to be analysed.

5.4) The sharing of performances

5.4.1) Fic as a communal practice

Coppa argues that repetition, performance and embodied action are key terms in theatre (Coppa, [2006] 2014: 225). Coppa explains that "one could define fan fiction as a textual attempt to make certain characters "perform" according to different behavioral strips" ([2006] 2014: 223). Yet, Busse's perspective from literary theory suggests that together, both approaches could prompt new ways of understanding fan writing both as a social, affective-discursive, and political practice. Busse explains that "simply reading and writing gay sex and enjoying the depiction of gay characters is not necessarily an act of subversion [...]. Although they may be politically aware and working in varying degrees to fight homophobia, they do not necessarily do so through their fan fiction. Their writings, and the discourses surrounding them, are as varied as they are. [...] Slash fic is thus often more concerned with the characters' feelings than the political climate surrounding them" (2017: 163). The decoding and re-encoding of Kirk and Spock, as an embodiment of the fan writer's views (especially on intersectional feminism), makes them 'perform' according to different behavioural strips (to quote Coppa) which are linked at least as much to the characters' feelings as to politics the characters' feelings (to quote Busse). Indeed, the sharing of performances as communal practice is what makes slash fic a hybrid genre: taking from drama and literature, it coalesces onto fans as a reflection of their embodied affect when it comes to Kirk and Spock, feminism, and identity politics. Slash as performed literature politicises Kirk and Spock's love, yet also the whole climate around them (through other relationships, characters, and worldbuilding), going further than Busse. Albeit indirectly, focusing on feelings can also be political, especially when they are coming from queer characters that follow norms of 'good' relationships (as explained in chapter 6) and whose bodies are marked by feminist undertakings. From this, fans recognise the tropes and storylines used which fit the views of the interpretive community; it makes them part of a communal practice. This happens within a specific

community (K/S) whose experiencing is unique to each fan, as they craft and filter the material they want to consume. "It should," to quote Ferreday, "become possible to explain how those communities work to produce a sense of identification in the user" (2009: 29).

In effect, for example, FalsePremise hints at the communal meaning-making which draws upon both the K/S interpretive community, with its 'good' characterisation practices and polysemy of voices, and upon the individual relationship the fan has with the source media and the socio-political world they inhabit.

> "I think, humanity is at heart a story-telling species. We are all just sitting around a campfire sharing our stories. And ALL stories draw on the communal shared stories that have come before them. Much of what is "literature" is actually fanfiction too! Like many of Shakespeare's plays. Fanfiction should definitely be talked about and studied. […] I think I primarily write in that character-driven way— so the moment by moment actions are driven by the character. But I also write themes that I think are positive— good stuff to put out there into the world."

Here, FalsePremise hints at how she sees characterisation and embodied affect as being integral to her writing practice; while she claims she is writing 'feminist work', she is also inscribing her work into a wider community that is made up of a multitude of voices, referring to its own norms and sanctioned practices, which I suggest are not always aligned with her beliefs nor, if they do share beliefs, explicitly disclosing them through Kirk and Spock.

This is why the notion of reader-writer contract is useful here. In effect, while the K/S interpretive community has its own norms shining through the writing of slash (see chapter 6), it is open to a polyphony of decodings and re-encodings that remain in constant motion. The fluxes of knowledge, which fans say enable literacy and open pedagogy through repeated exposure, are multiple yet organised through what Busse calls the reader-writer contract. Using the nomenclature of online fic (title, hashtags, description), fan writers convey mainly through the naming of tropes (e.g. hurt/comfort), relationships (e.g. Kirk/Spock), and fic-specific terms (e.g. alternate universe) what the reader should expect. This is key to the slash fan experience, and takes the form of a reader-writer contact which discloses their belonging to an interpretive community (referring to the rich culture and history of K/S, fans understand and 'belong'). Busse defines it as follows: "when applying this ethos of consent to fan fiction communities, it showcases how a culture of headers as reader–writer contracts must function within a broader intersectional feminist understanding of sexuality. After all, in order for headers to be properly read and understood, readers and writers must share vocabulary and

principles for both sides to agree on nuances, implications, and intentions. As such, clicking through or scrolling down to the story is, in fact, an act of affirmative consent" (2017: 209). Reader-writer contracts ensure the safe, pleasurable, and consented sharing of intimate feelings. They can take, as explained above, the form of tags and description at the beginning of fics on AO3; they can also represent, for fans, the trust they place in other fans to read (or understand) specific viewpoints disclosed within the fic practice. This implies that readers, to navigate the K/S communal mass of fan writing, need to observe a method of naming and filtering content, which showcases the exchanges of power between fan writer and fan reader (and vice versa). My writer participants explain the following:

> "I do consider how my readers could be affected in terms of triggers etc too. Like when portraying Jim's flashback to childhood abuse for example." (FalsePremise)

> "I think fandom can be a driver for change and the normalization of things that people don't get exposed to everyday, and it can make a place where people get to see themselves reflected — where they aren't reflected anywhere else." (Waldorph)

> "I hope that what my writing makes readers feel less alone, that it brings them joy, that it makes them laugh, that it's a bright spot in a dark world. Other fic writers have given that to me and I can only hope to give back a fraction of what fandom has brought into my life. […] I have found fic to be such a safe place to deal with pain and I hope I can give that to others." (Anna)

FalsePremise, Waldorph, and Anna have all engaged with a writer-reader contract, each from a different perspective—as using trigger warnings, as discovery and representation, and as safe place respectively. The relationship between this contract, the polyphony of stories, and fic as a communal practice is based on a key tenet: all parties belong to the K/S interpretive community, and this community has implicit rules around the creation of a safe space to explore relationships, sexuality, feelings, or kinks in a way that is explicitly sought and consented to. Reader-writer contracts are a part of the K/S whole, similarly to many other slash communities, yet remain indispensable for fans to orient themselves in the rich archive of K/S stories. Navigating the K/S interpretive community's polyphony of stories is hence made more manageable through reader-writer contracts, which implies literacy is needed to craft the fan experience—a meaning-making experience through which the intricacies of communal knowledge are disclosed.

For the last section of this chapter, I aim to close on the wider analysis of how fans and scholars consider the K/S slash writing practices, hence finishing my enumeration of fic features as performed literature. De Kosnik, in a paper published by the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* in 2015, has added to Coppa's definition of fic as drama. She explains that for "Coppa, as for the global theater theorists, writing can be performance. But the concept of global theater is that each person puts on a performance online, that each of us is an actor on the virtual stage constituted by digital networks, while […] Coppa [proposes] that fan writers script and direct the action of what Coppa calls bodies in space, the actors whose screen performances fans admire, and the fan-directed enactments of these bodies take place on a virtual stage that is not online but rather in fan writers' and readers' imaginations" (2015: ¶ 2.6). That is to say, as much as digital affordances allow the recording and indexing of the various re-encodings of K/S as representations, fic has been—just like Derecho's archontic literature—a part of the audiences' mind's eye for a long time, even since stories were shared and transformative works popularised.

The polysemy of voices, ordered by reader-writer contracts (and fuelled by what fans identify as the 'need to educate' and the 'need to decode properly'), is hence relying on difference in repetition; Liss, for example, discloses the IDIC[7] nature of performed literature by saying the following:

> "I want to see a Full Lived Life, not just one aspect of it! Taking K/S for example, they have potential for soft, tender romance; deep-seated angst, Rockin' Sex; and all that comes with a relationship, sure! But they're also accomplished Starfleet officers who explore the unknown, so I can explore them as characters dealing with their traumas, the things they've seen, diplomatic snafus, strange alien environments... I love the romance and I love the sexual content — I write a lot of both — but what really pulls me in is that their romance is just one aspect of their very full and well-rounded lives!"

This concept of 'full lived life', as experienced by Liss, is key; it takes the focus away from sex as the only 'worthy' element in fic and puts it back into the narrative itself, where it is the characters that embody intimate feelings—Liss explores them "as characters dealing with

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[7] IDIC, or *Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations*, is "the basis of Vulcan philosophy, celebrating the vast array of variables in the universe" (*Memory Alpha* wiki, available here: https://memory-alpha.fandom.com/wiki/IDIC).

their traumas, the things they've seen," and that permeates the very fabric of fic as performed literature. Moreover, the K/S interpretive community is the place of what De Kosnik terms a meta-archive: "Coppa's theories allow me to assert that fan fiction archives embody and make perceptible these formerly virtual-only meta-archives. A meta-archive grows without limit; it keeps growing as long as audiences keep encountering the source material and become fans of it" (2015: ¶ 3.2). This is illustrated, in a direct way, by what my interviewed writer participants have described as the premise of 'what if'. Liss, Pensive, Waldorph, and FalsePremise all mentioned, when asked how they had an idea for a new fic and hence prompting them to write it and publish it, that they had a moment where the 'what if' was strong enough to make them switch from mind to paper.

The K/S meta-archive, then, I argue, regroups all performances of Kirk and Spock—as a true hybrid genre, halfway between literature and drama, paper/screen and mind's eye. Pensive even dubs this a 'community of feeling' where "we can kind of share our love of the pairing as fans." Indeed, as feeling is embodied through affective-discursive iterations of meaning-making, the K/S meta-archive is a way for the performance of pedagogy, literacy, decoding, and intimatopia to coexist and co-function.

5.5)   Conclusion

To conclude, I want to reiterate that in order to attempt resolving the theoretical divide on fic as a specific textual genre, that is 'drama' or 'literature', we need to define fic writing practices in the light of both cultural theory and the fragmentary assemblage of fanworks, fan interviews, and their disclosure of fan experience. Busse, then, offers her own analysis of the fic genre as follows: "(1) fragmentation, or the way fan fiction often tends to be part of an ongoing conversation; (2) intertextuality, or a given story's dependence on community and fan text; (3) performativity, or the conversational, community interaction component of many stories; and (4) intimacy, or the emotional and often sexual openness and vulnerability readers and writers exhibit in the stories and surrounding interaction" (2017: 142). Building up on this, I offer additional context in the light of my data. Fic, as a hybrid genre I call 'performed literature' and which reconciles dramatic and literary doxa, possesses further features that build up on collective decisions of what counts as 'literature'. The importance of bodies in space (who embody gender performance and create bodily matter), the production

of certain kinds of viable bodies (encompassing dramatic features) where storytelling and characterisation work together to embody meaning-making; the determination of the shape of what is laid out as 'good' norms (around decoding, an interpretive community): all exist in order for 'good' re-encoding practices to stand out and organise the K/S fandom. Repetition and polysemy of voices become a meta-archive that, collecting both literary and dramatic performances, can be navigated through reader-writer contracts; based upon 'what ifs', fic writing practices are considered as pedagogical, training fans when it comes to media and gender literacy (see chapter 6 for more detailed data on what is taught). Fans occupy various stages of comfort and awareness in the light of pedagogy: feeling ambiguously involved, experiencing 'discreet' teaching, and also being more self-aware and politically motivated— fic as a communal practice emulates rhizomatic knowledge fluxes amongst fan writers and readers. Reader-writer contracts are often implicitly exchanged, which we will see in more depth in chapter 7. Finally, fic writing is embedded in archives of performances, offering space for political and social relevance in ways that writers can work with if they desire to, following Derecho's conception of archontic literature. Performed literature hence works as a hybrid genre, affording fans to develop personal thought, interior drives, and the complexity of their desires—regardless of morals—within a meta-community. It allows for Ferreday's "sense of identification" in the fan (2009: 30), a feeling born out of the citation of characterisation norms by the fic writer.

As final words, I want to share what Waldorph said about why they chose to write fanfiction and, especially, slash K/S:

> "One of my favorite writers, Speranza, she said once she likes to take characters apart and put them back together again and every time she comes up with something different. That's interesting. That's what I come to fandom for, that's what I try to explore in my own writing. What you get on the screen or on the page is often a very static view — it's like looking out a window from across a room. You're still seeing some truth, you're seeing the outside, but the closer you get and the angle you stand at changes the view, gives you a more fulsome understanding of what's actually outside the window. *For me that's what writing fanfiction is: getting a better view.*" (emphasis mine)

Fic, as a writerly practice, is indeed one of the many ways fans can address their grievances and desires when it comes to media consumption, the heterosexual matrix, and toxic masculinity—voicing their own truth, repeating the writing process with a difference in order

to 'get a better view'. In doing this they create new norms about what they consider to be 'good' masculinities and 'good' relationships; this will be the focus of chapter 6.

Chapter 6. A multiplication, challenging, and questioning of gender categories and gender production in K/S slash fic

Earlier fan studies (Jones, 2014; Woledge, 2006; Penley, 1997, Driscoll, 2006; Tresca, 2014; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Lamb and Veith, 2014, principally) have based their understanding of fan pleasure and motivation, when writing and reading slash, upon a rather essentialist analysis of gender roles. That is to say, they support their own analysis of slash through a differentiation between masculine and feminine roles that are implicitly referring to gender stability. This chapter aims to map out how the performance of gender, within the fic texts, is working alongside the labels that fan writers assign to Kirk and Spock; also, how the performance of gender works against gender essentialism. In effect, gender seems to be produced within slash texts through specific practices and processes, sometimes clearly referencing authorial intent, and sometimes working in a way beyond that indicated by self-reflection as recorded in the interviews. This chapter looks into how fans translate and retheorise gender (and sexuality) into something pleasurable, building their community around new kinds of normative knowledge about identity, gender, and feminism. It also looks into how the relationship between gender and sexuality is dealt with by fan writers; the way gender is developed in fic suggests it is produced as a consequence of fan writers' feminist beliefs, queer identity, and communal positive reinforcement. I am looking at the relationship between conscious intent (making Kirk and Spock queer, making them feminists) and the process of creating these norms.

Chapter 6 looks at how K/S fan audiences are assembled around the rejection of hegemonic masculinity: I use a cross-analysis of fic writer interviews and excerpts of their fics to make out the gender and relational norms emerging from pedagogic practices at play in slash. Building up on chapter 5 and its analysis of fic as a hybrid genre, I argue fans teach literacy in feminism, media, and identity through the development of specific norms in their fics. Using Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995) which can be supported by Butler's understanding of the heterosexual matrix ([1990] 2007), I offer that the fans' rejection

of harmful relationships and masculinity is taking place through "intimate publics" (Berlant, 2008) which provide relief. By repurposing Berlant's concept, arguing that the K/S fandom is an intimate public seeking relief from hegemonic masculinity—which it does by decoding and re-encoding queerness in Kirk and Spock (see chapter 5 and the power of the K/S interpretive community)—I bring the political into the intimate.

The rest of the chapter is an assemblage of seven concepts that are created, found, or repurposed to make a list of the norms I was able to make out from the fanfiction texts I have studied. The first, hegemonic femininity, is taken from Schippers (2007) and used to understand the feminine-coded traits in Kirk and Spock. The second concept concerns self-perception and the use of labels to understand one's identity—from Kirk and Spock to the reader/writer. The third concept, termed homonormativity (Duggan, 2002), looks into the relationship expectations and—parallel to heterosexual couple milestones—the plot points used to grant Kirk and Spock a status of legitimate engagement to the other (marriage, children). The fourth concept develops from this to then depart from heteronormative behaviours with the establishment of consent as necessary for intimacy. Indeed, consent is seen as a black-and-white, yes-or-no yet ongoing practice that goes beyond sex. Building up from this, the fifth concept repurposes Mulvey's male gaze (1999) into a queer gaze, which shows desire while respecting the other's boundaries. Going further, the sixth concept looks into how sex roles are challenged during gay sex in K/S fic. Citing back Connell (1995) and Butler ([1990] 2007), the performance of gender needs to encompass the materiality of the bodies upon which gendering processes operate. The bodies of Kirk and Spock are sites where body-reflexive practices are materialised; a materiality that is able to take shape and become theoretically intelligible, not just affectively intelligible. Finally, the seventh concept of this chapter is one of gender dissonance: especially taking the case study of FalsePremise's Ashtahli, an alien race that develops as sequential hermaphroditism. I conclude that the creation of the Ashtahli situates the production of gender as exceeding labels we use or, if we use them, makes sure to signify how fluid they remain—how gender is indeed citational, as we speak it into existence, and relational, as we live it in relation to others.

To better grasp the social aspect of K/S fandom and how it might reveal trends in gender production, I will also use and repurpose Lauren Berlant's concept of intimate publics (2008). An intimate public, according to Berlant, is an often female-populated community that operates "in aesthetic worlds […] flourishing in proximity to the political because the political

is deemed an elsewhere managed by elites who are interested in reproducing the conditions of their objective superiority" (2008: 2-3). That is to say, there can be communities of systemically oppressed individuals that are assembled around a core affective subject, which provides a space to enjoy respite from oppressional politics. It also enables texts to circulate which "express those people's particular core interests and desires," where participants "*feel* as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions" (2008: 5). In the case of the K/S fandom, this describes how fanfiction texts circulate; they express the fans' core interests and desires, and their own identity as fans—essentially women, queer, and non-binary people (Jamison, 2013)—has a role in why and how they deal with masculinity in ways that bring them pleasure. Additionally, this works in tandem with Ferreday's suggestion that "by paying attention to the ways in which specific online communities create norms, and provide spaces in which their members are able to 'cite' those norms, it should become possible to explain how those communities work to produce a sense of identification in the user" (2009: 29): fan intimate publics, organised as an interpretive community (see chapter 5), create norms around gender and sexuality that make them *feel* members of the K/S fandom. This chapter will look at how these norms are cited.

In this thesis, I use an updated version of the concept of intimate publics to build upon chapter 5's interpretive communities: based on an interpretation of *Star Trek* as K/S, I look into what this interpretation can mean 'politically', as a rejection of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007)—that is to say, going from interpretation to the search for communal relief. In the case of this chapter, I suggest the gender of Kirk and Spock is being worked through dynamics peculiar to intimate publics; although I will offer a slightly repurposed interpretation of such a concept to allow feminist political practice to be taken into account. I will analyse how gender norms are re-produced in the fic texts while comparing it to how the authors talk about gender in the interviews, and see how a shift is taking place—which, in my analysis, explores why women and lesbians enjoy writing about two men together. In effect, from the process of gendering seem to result a set of norms around 'good' (healthy) masculinity and 'good' (queer) relationships.

Divided across seven sections, following a first section laying out the theoretical concepts at play, this chapter will examine how the fan author intent of creating 'true' masculinity in Kirk and Spock is enmeshed in the way queer masculinity is produced in fic.

Here, the focus is on the intimacy between Kirk and Spock, as it reveals challenged identity categories within the fics: gender is done through instances of hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007 and Paechter, 2018), homonormativity (Duggan, 2002, 2003), yet also through self-perception, consent, queer gaze, gay sex, and even a kind of gender dissidence enabled by the affordances of science-fiction (differently gendered alien races). Challenged identity categories are especially specific to slash as it is a genre that bases its popularity and core dynamics off the intimacy between Kirk and Spock, as men, and as queer.

Gender and queer theory are thus played with and shared through the affective writing within slash circles: I argue the queerness of gender in K/S does not only arise from conscious authorial intent, but also because of the process or performance that fans engage in through writing within an affect community. In slash, instances of gender and sexuality are feeding into each other, informing the other into an identity that emotionally resonates with the fan. Indeed, gender and sexuality are "intimately intertwined" (Rahman and Jackson, 2010: 187), and according to Butler, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1988: 519), it is a social enactment. By talking about gender, we are assigning it, performing it. Fans, then, are creating new ways of doing/performing gender along a queer axis; this chapter looks into which discourses they enact by doing this.

6.1) An intimate public assembled around the rejection of hegemonic masculinity

The fan writer participants in my study have all expressed literacy in gender and queer theory, especially shown in self-reflective thought when it comes to social constructs enmeshed with gender. They have made clear that they saw gender as more complex than the male-female binary, all the while singling out some behaviours as feminine or masculine gender roles. For example, *TWWL* writer Anna explained, when I asked her about the way she saw Kirk and Spock's gender, that it qualified as "a radical masculinity, I think, and certainly a subversion. Jim and Spock are men who would fit a traditional concept of masculinity—strong, disciplined men commanding a vessel together—which is why it's so impactful to portray them as soft and queer and emotional."

By saying this, Anna makes the distinction between acts that would be seen as masculine or feminine, all the while opening masculinity to various forms and distancing herself from what can be understood as "traditional" or 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995). For R.W. Connell, "hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (1995: 77). The concept of one configuration of masculine gender practice as hegemonic indicates the existence of others; hegemonic masculinity is the most privileged and powerful, defined in difference to subordinated or complicit ones; it also is defined in difference to femininity—or femininities, as I will argue in the next section. For Anna, a masculinity that is "radical" is one that allows non-hegemonic masculine traits as a counterpoint to situations that could favour Kirk and Spock's dominance according to the source media ("strong, disciplined men commanding a vessel").

Going further, fan writer participants have not only attempted to single out hegemonic masculinity in order to undermine it but, also, attempted to look at the openings a non-hegemonic masculinity could offer; they identified their own intent behind writing Kirk and Spock in a slash-specific way as subversion. For example, Liss has said that "I do think slash writing can subvert traditional masculinity, and I think it does subvert it more often than it upholds it because it is a genre largely written by women. And, yes, I think it still qualifies as masculinity, but it wouldn't surprise me that men might see it differently because our society has warped what I believe to be true masculinity."

What Liss qualifies as "true" masculinity meets Anna's "radical" masculinity and both, by analysing their own Kirk and Spock as subversively gendered, show that they see gender as performative (Butler, 2007). Following Butler, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1988: 519). These acts, as they are named and witnessed, produce gender upon the body as a consequence; and agency is located in the possibility of a variation in repetition of acts (Butler, 2007: 198). The fan writer participants have, by naming Kirk and Spock as acting out 'masculine acts', demonstrated both their gender literacy and the relevance of looking at gender as something that can be performative.

Liss's comment about fic being largely written by women (I add non-binary people) has pushed me towards the repurposing of Berlant's concept of intimate publics (2008) as a logical

theoretical development of interpretive communities (chapter 5). Here, what is crucial is that all the fan writer participants have shown a rejection and disagreement with hegemonic masculinity, or also what they call 'toxic' masculinity. In effect, analysing writers Waldorph and Pensive, they have considered masculinity over a spectrum of good-bad or healthy-toxic to situate their own dealings with gender as a political and feminist process.

For instance, a striking example was the mention of a 'masculinity spectrum' by both writers, with no awareness that the other would use the same concept—both referencing discussions of gender in fourth-wave feminism, happening online (Tumblr, Twitter, etc.) especially, alongside fandom content. Waldorph explains her relationship with gender (and masculinity) as follows: "I think it's a subversion, but I think that it is still masculinity. […] I think that writing slash, and more specifically writing rich emotional arcs, creates cis male characters who still exist in the spectrum of masculinity—albeit on the other side from what we'd call toxic masculinity." While joining Liss and Anna on the favouring of subversion when it comes to cissexual male Kirk, cissexual male Spock, and gender roles, Waldorph also joins Connell's opening of masculinity into a multiplicity of felt identities and embodied experiences, while hinting at a breaking of the gender binary.

Pensive, in the same dynamic, explains that "if we envision masculinity as a spectrum, with toxic masculinity on one end, and a healthier expression of masculinity on the other… then I would want my portrayals of male-identified characters in slash fiction to lean toward the healthier forms of expression, to create the world that I want to see, in a sense." There is a comparison of the gender spectrum with a masculinity spectrum, and while we could see the trifecta man/woman/non-binary (as the gender spectrum is often categorised), I believe a similar triple categorisation of masculinity like Connell's hegemonic, complicit, and subordinate masculinity (1995) would be reductive.

I look here into the nature of this 'true' masculinity according to the fans, and whether it is handled by fan writers as a cause or a consequence for gender production in the fics. As the blending of fan writer interviews and their fic texts suggest, I argue there could be two dynamics in particular: specific, new gender norms around 'true' masculinity; and more free, subversive openings around gender as a concept in fic texts. This subversion of hegemonic masculinity within Kirk and Spock, resulting in the creation of 'healthy' masculinity—according to the fans—is precisely asking in which ways gender is connected to the writers and in which ways it is connected to hegemony.

On top of this, Pensive's remark about "the world that I want to see" has unveiled the need, in my theoretical framework, to acknowledge and work with the sociality of gender experiences in K/S fic. This is why, to complete my theoretical framework and build upon interpretive communities, I will use and repurpose Lauren Berlant's concept of intimate publics (2008). In her book titled *The Female Complaint* (2008), Berlant explains that "intimate spheres *feel* like ethical places based on the sense of capacious emotional continuity they circulate, which seems to derive from an ongoing potential for relief from the hard, cold world" (2-7). This sense of relief is created by the sense of community in the rejection of the heteropatriarchy through affective texts, as for Berlant intimate publics are first and foremost female-oriented. It has "conjoined the very act of consumption to a powerful hunger to know and adapt the ways other people survive being oppressed by life" (2008: 20). Intimate publics are areas where nondominant people feel normal, and feel relief from the politics that constrain their existence (Kanai, 2017).

I suggest using the concept of intimate publics as a structure for K/S slash fandom; in effect, fans—in extreme majority women and non-binary people—are circulating texts (fics) that consider Kirk and Spock's queerness as the norm, and their 'true' masculinity as preferable (and able to be set as norm), thus providing fans with relief from every day oppression by societal structures of hegemonic masculinity and the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007). Building upon this theoretical framework by repurposing Berlant to fandom, the relief sought after by members of the K/S intimate public thus seems to be directly tied to the production of gender in fic. I will consequently analyse the production of gender with this concept, and see whether it can develop a slash-specific process of finding relief from politics.

In effect, while Berlant advocates a juxtapolitical relationship with the world that marginalises nondominant people, a sort of detachment from its politics while being in a space where they "may feel central without detaching from, indeed, strengthening, desires for normativity" (Kanai, 2017: 5), I suggest that in the case of K/S intimate publics, there it isn't a detachment from politics in writing or reading about Kirk and Spock, there is instead a politics parallel to that in the world. That is to say, the fans' open identification with queer feminism cannot be de-politicised and should be taken into account—I claim, and will analyse throughout this chapter, that the fans' involvement with queer feminism makes the production of gender political while still providing relief from hegemonic masculinity.

What seems like the result of author intent works in ways that go beyond those which fans state in their interviews. I call for an understanding of the production of gender not from a deliberate and purposeful political cause, like Berlant (2008) would consider politics to be, but rather as a consequence of fans' self-identified feminist practice: this kind of politics is adjacent to Berlant's, and concerns fans whose feminist practice is so enmeshed in their identity that it permeates all their writing. Fans do not write Kirk and Spock with the conscious intention to only enact the specific norms cited in this chapter (hegemonic femininity, homonormativity...), regardless of plot. Instead, my interviews and fic samples show that fans are so involved in the K/S community that they write Kirk and Spock in normed ways *because* fans belong to (and evolve in) a corpus of queer storylines that have favoured specific characterisations of K/S, over time, as a consequence of feminist leanings (including trying to find relief from the heterosexual matrix).

6.2)   Repurposing hegemonic femininity: a way to approach 'true' masculinity

Fan writers, in my study, have said that what they write is 'true' masculinity; hence, Kirk and Spock are men. While 'true' masculinity is highly grounded in performance, I believe that the ways in which fans gender Kirk and Spock is a process where normal connotations and associations of identity categories are challenged. In effect, what the fans see as "true," "radical" masculinity (which provide them with relief from hegemonic masculinity) is also associated with the involvement of "soft," "tender" behaviour in Kirk and Spock. Pensive, for example, explains that "I see the concept of tender masculinity — a man who isn't afraid, for lack of a better word, to be tender, gentle, and open about his emotions as an ideal, something I'd like to see more of, both in real life and in the media." This qualification of men as tender, soft, still follows a production of gender as performative (by saying "tender masculinity" followed by "a man," Pensive associates gender identity with the body) and signifies her need for relief through the production of nonhegemonic categories of masculinity ("something I'd like to see more of").

Even when they are "soft" men, we follow gendered labels to make identity intelligible; this joins Lamb and Veith's list of "feminine" and "masculine" qualities (2014: 104) that Kirk and Spock embody in fic. Pensive, having touched upon her own questioning of gender roles and seeing gender as something 'out there' that is made recognisable through tentative

labelling of experiences, but still open to change, in fact reveals a wider phenomenon happening in the gendering of Kirk and Spock.

In effect, we see that what would be considered as "tender" masculinity seems, in this case, to be a repurposed kind of hegemonic femininity: "tender, gentle, and open about his emotions" are such qualities. Hegemonic femininity has been theorised by Mimi Schippers (2007) from Connell's emphasised femininity (1995), then been re-theorised by Carrie Paechter (2018). Schippers claims that "*hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women*" (2007: 94).

Yet, this is not exactly the type of hegemonic femininity that seems to be at play in K/S fic. According to Paechter "for Schippers, gender hegemony is legitimated by preserving the hierarchy between masculinity and femininity. Consequently, no masculine characteristics can be regarded as subordinate, because masculinity itself can never be subordinate. Thus, when people with male bodies exhibit characteristics that are not part of hegemonic masculinity, such as desire for other men, weakness or compliance, they have, instead, to be treated as feminine, and thus automatically inferior and stigmatised" (2018: 122). Following this criticism, I argue that the "tender" masculinity at play in slash is in fact better apprehended as a kind of repurposed hegemonic femininity, not as an actively binary opposition to hegemonic masculinity but as a historical and social category of qualities that have been assigned as womanly and, if they were enacted by women, would be understood in terms of Schippers' hegemonic femininity that enforces women as being subordinate to men. In other words, if these qualities were enacted by women, they would enforce hegemonic femininity in which women are subordinate; yet, if they are enacted by men in the way they are in K/S, they subvert gender hierarchies and question the idea of 'hegemony'.

I claim that what is interesting here—to make the production of gender intelligible— is the use of hegemonic femininity as a 'symbolic' assemblage of qualities, hence being able to enact the process of gender subversion that the fan writer participants have identified. Writer Liss translates and retheorises gender theory into something that provides them with relief, both opening the process of gender production and assigning normative categories to them in order to make her self-reflection intelligible. Liss' own personal experience with gender, as a non-binary lesbian that questions gender and feels a bit uneasy "about existing

in womanhood, and in a body with a uterus and all the various bells and whistles that comes with that," is enmeshed with the way gender is produced in their fic *Sha Ka Ree* (SKR).

Liss explains the following: "I would like to see fanfiction — and fic writers who eventually publish original works — inspire people to rethink what masculinity really is, and to rethink who can exhibit masculine or feminine traits. In my opinion, we are all such a blend of masculine and feminine, regardless of gender, but we need to dismantle the cultural programming that tells us that those traits belong to one gender or the other." In the same dynamic as Pensive, Liss deconstructs gender production as something that can (and should) be multiplying, questioning, and challenging categories of gender—through the separation of felt gender and gendered traits, assigned "regardless of gender" as a way to manifest gender subversion. This denomination of a "blend" of masculine and feminine echoes the symbolic category of hegemonic femininity that is being repurposed in the apparent masculinisation of Kirk and Spock—holders of "true" masculinity, a relief from hegemonic masculinity.

In their fic *SKR*, there is a scene in particular that illustrates how symbolic hegemonic femininity is being accessed and used as a way to produce "radical" masculinity. In this scene, Spock (who has grown out his hair due to being stranded on an uninhabited planet with Kirk) lets Kirk braid his long hair with flowers. Following feminine qualities of being "beautiful," "sensuous," "letting the other lead," "intuitive," "evoking powerful emotions" (Lamb and Veith, 2014: 104) and, I might add, being tender and soft with the other, Kirk and Spock both perform symbolic hegemonic femininity in complementary ways. The play between them marks both with symbolic femininity. The scene goes as follows:

> Spock raised an eyebrow and Jim's grin widened. He brought a hand to Spock's hair and began to stroke down the strands that had risen with the humidity, starting at the crown of his head and ending where he'd tied it at the nape of his neck. "Your hair has gotten so long," he said.
>
> […] There was something sensual in Jim's voice, a husky sort of wonder that made Spock swallow. But he allowed Jim to card his fingers through his hair, and soon his eyes fluttered closed at the sensation. "There's something I want to try," Jim finally said.
>
> […] "Stay right there," Jim said with a wink. It was boyish and charming and playful and Spock found himself averting his eyes in hopes that Jim could not see his reaction to the gesture.

[…] But then Jim's fingers were back in his hair, slipping through the strands that Spock had oiled earlier that day, separating locks between his digits. The motion was soft, comforting, and Spock felt his eyes closing once again.

[…] But even innocent actions like this, the soft caress of Jim's hands through his hair, Spock melted into. He was so caught up in his thoughts and the gentle feeling of wandering fingers that he hardly noticed when Jim picked up one of the flowers, a trumpet-shaped pink plume with bright violet veins, and set it against Spock's head. It was then that Spock became aware of Jim's fingers twisting strands of hair around its stem.

"What are you doing?" Spock asked, and he felt Jim's smile over their bond, though he couldn't see it over his shoulder.

"Braiding," Jim replied. "I can't tell you how long I've wanted to do this." (*Sha Ka Ree*, 2017: 201-202)

Gender, then, is not just a blend of "masculine" and "feminine" as according to the author; it is also produced through the specific process of referencing hegemonic femininity, and activated by the need to find relief from hegemonic masculinity. Liss' request for more freedom in gender performance, in order to carry on questioning gender categories and feel more in tune with one's own identity, seems to be in fact hinting at the crux of gender production. Namely, the production of gender in fic seems to be not a cause stemming from an initial identity ("one gender or the other"), but a consequence of Liss' own relationship with their body, sexuality, feminism, and doubts. Gender, here, is produced as a consequence of seeking answers to Liss' own gender journey. Kirk and Spock do not have an inherent gender assigned by the author from which acts follow; instead, they have bodies which are performing acts in a way that troubles the order of the gender binary, thus gendering them. Repurposed hegemonic femininity is a practice at play in *SKR* to provide an alternative to the heterosexual matrix.

In this extract from *SKR*, Liss plays with hegemonically feminine symbols of womanly qualities while embodying them in cissexual male-assigned bodies: Spock's long hair, the way it is eroticised and qualified as sensual, the way Kirk touches it and the feelings it triggers, Spock letting Kirk take the lead, the grooming care ("oiled earlier that day") and, especially, Kirk's enjoyment of braiding it with flowers. Yet, while these actions and descriptions might fit a symbolically hegemonic femininity, I indeed argue that gender is produced through the contrasting of this symbolic femininity with the normatively masculine body of Kirk and Spock,

as well as more hegemonically masculine qualities from the source media. It is not only a blend of masculine and feminine traits, as Liss observes, but more-so a careful play of contrast and dissonance within the very categories of femininity and masculinity. In effect, right after Kirk's line, Liss writes:

> Spock attempted to turn his head, but Jim's hands held him steady. "Nah-ah, this is delicate work," he admonished gently. "Eyes forward, Commander." (*Sha Ka Ree*, 2017: 202)

The juxtaposition of "delicate work" and the military injunction "eyes forward, Commander" both appeal to very defused, apolitical hegemonic understandings of femininity and masculinity. The military injunction is political, but the juxtaposition with "delicate work" defuses it: taking it away from an external political context (akin to Berlant's notion of the political, 2008). However, this act in itself can be considered as political in that it creates a gender norm of 'true' masculinity. Rendered symbolic through its repurposing into a 'true' masculinity, such a gender category is made political thanks to the peculiar juxtaposition of hegemonically feminine and masculine gendered acts.

Yet, Kirk and Spock are not always gendered this confidently and authorial intent, while similar between the participants, can produce other ways of gendering Kirk and Spock. This is the case with Anna, who particularly deals with identity exploration—which I will analyse in this next section.

6.3)   Self-perception: understanding one's identity with labels

Anna, writer of *The World Well Lost* (TWWL), expressed in her interview a certain safety in labels: being now out, she feels in tune with her body as a cissexual lesbian, and understands gender as something innate/felt within one's body. She explains that "I wasn't ready to admit I was gay and ended up in a long-term relationship with a person I thought was a man. She turned out to be a transwoman, to both my surprise and hers, and everything made a lot more sense after she came out lol."

This statement is especially important as it reveals much about Anna's own dealings with gender, and how it might inform her own production of gender in slash fic. In effect, by saying both "she turned out to be a transwoman" and "everything made a lot more sense

after she came out," this implies that Anna sees gender identity as a core, innate identity and by discovering it then naming it, one becomes it. This is a puzzling take on Butler's theory of gender performativity (2007); gender seems to be understood both as a cause (an essence, which Butler rejects) and a consequence (named into existence through discursive performance).

In the case of Anna, she adds that author intent for the way in which Kirk and Spock are gendered in fic also stems from her own grappling with gender and sexuality. She explains that "exploring my own queerness through Jim and Spock's is definitely a huge part of it for me," and adds "I think the gender subversion was mostly an accident; I didn't plan to write about men, I was just swept up by these characters and only have my queer female experiences to project onto them. But it ended up being an important part of their characters for me." These quotes are especially interesting in several ways. First, she talks of projection and identification: hinting that her Kirk and Spock were gendered on the basis of her own lesbian female experience of gender, thus associating her label of femininity and her label of lesbianism upon the body of characters 'who happen to be men'. Second, she suggests that it is precisely this repurposing of womanly-symbolic qualities and experiences onto Kirk and Spock that are, for her, a reason for the appeal of K/S slash.

Following upon the previous discussion of her quest for "radical" masculinity, and her experience of gender as discursively performative, I claim that Anna produces gender in *TWWL* through naming as a discursive practice, especially with times of introspection as prompted by an emotional journey—coming to terms with one's gendering—inherent to character growth. An example that echoes her experience with herself and also her ex-wife is especially striking in *TWWL*: Spock, who was in love with his bondmate Kirk as a teenager but then was a victim of amnesia, is now an adult in a relationship with a woman (Nyota Uhura). Spock's sister Michael (an addition from the latest Star Trek TV series *Discovery*) knows that Spock is, in fact, also interested in men while Spock seems to ignore this aspect of his sexuality or, at least, is not out. Their phone conversation goes as follows:

> "And I will remind you," Spock went on, "although I should not need to, that I am involved with Nyota."
>
> Ah yes, Nyota. Poor girl. Well, she'd have no trouble finding someone else after Spock accepted he was gay. She was funny and brilliant and extraordinarily beautiful, and

Michael had gotten a distinctly queer vibe off her the one time they'd met. Hopefully she'd find a nice girl.

In truth, the whole thing made Michael incredibly sad, and not just for Nyota. Spock didn't realize how obvious his intentions were; maybe he didn't even understand them himself. Nyota was about as far from "the boy" as Spock could possibly get. After Spock had come back from Gol all those years ago, he had stopped talking about his supposed bondmate, and since then he had never said anything else about being attracted to men. Not even after Michael very loudly came out as bisexual and no family distress ensued. The only thing that had shocked the S'chn T'gais was Spock bringing home a woman. (*The World Well Lost,* 2018: 56)

In this extract, gender is very prominently produced through naming as a discursive practice, and refers to an "essential" understanding of identity: "after Spock accepted he was gay," "Michael had gotten a distinctly queer vibe off her," "after Michael very loudly came out as bisexual." All imply that Nyota, Spock, and Michael have a 'true' queer identity within and that this identity can be accessed through an emotional journey—according to Anna, who aligns herself with queer feminists, the 'truthfulness' of an identity is given through this opening to what people feel within, in accordance to their own desires and self-representations. "Radical" or "true" masculinity is thus closely linked to the authenticity of self-discovery, and the opening to queer desires regardless of their object's gender. By naming an identity, one owns that identity—through labels such as "gay," "queer," "bisexual." Anna's sense of gender and sexuality, based on a body's inner truth (be it cis, trans, gay or not) could be referred to as essentialist, yet I argue it goes beyond ideas of biological imperatives or gender binary. For Anna, there is safety in being recognised through labels; she relies on labels to make sense of her innate sense of self, henceforth involving gender and sexuality into the mix. It suggests a politics of its own: we can find a sense of normativity in the categories of gender produced by Anna, but I suggest it could be influenced by the need for relief from a society that only grants power to hegemonic labels. It is a repurposing of the conventional, a way to use hegemonic practices of labelling difference by 'owning' that difference, using labels for others to recognise that she is, in fact, against hegemony and feels it as her inner truth.

6.4)   Homonormativity: Vulcan marriage and having children

In all of the writers' fics I have analysed—*Sha Ka Ree* (Liss), *The Truth* (FalsePremise), *The World Well Lost* (Anna), *When The Stars Align* (Pensive), and *strive seek find yield*

(Waldorph)—and in countless others I recall from personal experience, there has been a push for commitment, monogamy, marriage, and even having children as the realisation of a 'good' intimate relationship between Kirk and Spock. These staples of heterosexual relationships are an inherent part of the production of gender and sexuality within fic; what is interesting is that it seems to be applied to two men being together, in a universe where such a togetherness is legally possible and culturally accepted. I believe that this movement follows Berlant's claim that "a public is intimate when it foregrounds affective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness" (2008: 10).

In effect, if we look at gender and sexuality production within the scope of intimacy, or more exactly as it is revealed due to the intimacy between Kirk and Spock, categories of normative sexuality are addressed with making two men endorse practices found within ordinary heteronormativity. Moreover, fans seem to find respite in the validation of Kirk and Spock's relationship by heterosexual norms while advocating for their queerness; I believe a repurposed concept of 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2002, 2003) could make this production of gender more legible.

According to Lisa Duggan, new homonormativity "is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (2002: 179). I offer a remodelling of the concept of homonormativity by restoring the sense of juxtaposed politics so peculiar to K/S slash, similarly to my repurposing of intimate publics. While marriage and other heteronormative institutions may depoliticise gay culture, the fans' feminism and own queerness as women and non-binary people (bisexual, gay) do sometimes offer a critical reading of the institutions they enforce; it is precisely the subversion of sexuality categories within gender production that challenges and questions an initial, surface reading and application of Duggan's homonormativity to fic.

For example, the specificity of Vulcan mind bonds allows for a universalisation of marriage and acts as a confirmation of legitimacy whenever Kirk and Spock's quality of relationship is questioned. In *When The Stars Align* (WTSA), Pensive writes Kirk and Spock as being bondmates, or telepathically linked, due to their intimate relationship:

> The tension drained from Spock's body and Jim exhaled softly in relief as Spock spoke. "It is true that, traditionally, intimate relations take place only within a bond, but that is by custom, not necessity. So long as you are not seeking a casual encounter — as you have now stated — your desire to begin a serious, monogamous relationship is sufficient." (*When The Stars Align*, 2016: 27)

Vulcan culture specifies that bonds act as marriage, and ensure monogamy—as long as the two bondmates are together, it would be extremely out of character to seek another partner, and may even be sanctioned—in ways that, in the case of K/S, act as a staple within fandom lore for the confirmation and enforcement of a committed romantic and sexual relationship. To this end, the K/S intimate public seeks comfort from Kirk and Spock being able to commit in ordinary practices that would be seen as homonormative—all the while in an extraordinary manner. FalsePremise, fan writer, also confirms this through her fic:

> He could hardly believe all that had transpired in the past day. Jim was in love with him. They were in a committed relationship, with a view to marriage in the future. There were still many details to be discussed. But their mutual commitment was clear. (*The Truth*, 2017: 66)

As well as Liss, in the last lines of *SKR*:

> Jim smiled against Spock's skin, something Spock could feel as though it were branded into him. And across the current of their minds, he heard two, clear words rush to him as though Jim had spoken them aloud.
>
> *Forever, then.*
>
> Spock laid his lips in Jim's hair, an intensity of emotion he couldn't place or categorize rising in him, but it didn't scare him anymore. He doubted it ever would again. "Forever," he said, and he found it in himself to smile. (*Sha Ka Ree*, 2017: 321-322)

Still echoing Berlant, these excerpts from popular K/S fic coincide with the fan writers' own dealings with normative sexuality, and their own position in a world that wants to subject them to the rule of heteropatriarchy—what if a woman, a queer woman, a non-binary lesbian finds comfort in both exploring gender *and* inhabiting repurposed heterosexual institutions for the sake of affective pleasure? Liss is married to a woman, Pensive has a child, Anna was married to a woman and is now in a committed relationship with a non-binary person. I suggest that it is through the reappropriation of homonormativity, through the sexualised bodies of Kirk and Spock, that 'true' masculinity is partially created. This even goes as deep as

Kirk and Spock having a biological child, as enabled by the sci-fi technology available in the *Star Trek* reality. In *strive seek find yield* (SSFY), set in an alternate universe where Kirk and Spock are royalty and married, Waldorph writes:

> "Our situation is still tenuous at best," Spock says, even like he's rehearsed it. He's looking at the space behind Jim's left ear, posture a mockery of parade rest. Great, this is—this is going to go really well. "A child would give us a sense of security that has been eroded with you—" he breaks off, but Jim knows the rest of the sentence: *having been out there—you were gone and all the good we got out of the wedding went downhill, and now we have to have a kid to fix it all.* (*strive seek find yield*, 2010: 122)

Taken out of context, this last sentence is especially specific to heteronormative culture; yet as we put it into the context, the novel-length story where 'healthy' ('true') masculinity is being produced over the emotional journeys of the characters shifts its understanding into a repurposed homonormativity. Later on, after Kirk and Spock's child Sorrin has been born, both parents feel happy—unlike in straight culture ("*to have a kid to fix it all*"), where a couple's marriage is often depicted as failing despite having a child:

> [...] "Are you happy?" Spock asks Jim, one night when Sorrin is particularly disgruntled and simply will not settle and they are both exhausted (Jim gets up more, though Spock wakes up faster—Jim insists it's because he can go with less sleep, and he can fall asleep easier. Spock knows both of those things are true but some absurd part of him suspects Jim of trying to be the favorite parent).
>
> "Yeah," Jim exhales.
>
> When Spock wakes up Jim is asleep, propped on the pillows from chairs and sofas, and Sorrin is sleeping on his chest and Spock thinks, *Me too. I'm happy."* (*strive seek find yield*, 2010: 130)

Homonormativity, here as it is repurposed in K/S, is thus not just reproducing heterosexual norms. It is transforming, improving, and creating new norms through 'true' masculinity, using the halo effect of legitimisation that comes with children and marriage to apply it to a queer relationship. Henceforth Kirk and Spock, as following homonormative storylines, benefit from such validation—akin to Anna's use of labels to validate her identity in her eyes and others' (by being recognised, she is being made legitimate).

While homonormativity suggests intimacy, especially sexual intimacy, fans have created norms around the establishment and maintaining of consent—which I will explore in this next part.

6.5) Establishment of consent as necessary for intimacy

Fans have other specific ways in which they translate and retheorise normative sexuality into something pleasurable, a relief from the heteropatriarchy: for example, following a feminist practice of acknowledging consent as an ongoing process. I have analysed many instances of Kirk and Spock getting physically intimate and organising their desire around explicit asking and receiving of consent, many times throughout their actions. Pensive, for example names this process as—in her words—giving a "consent is sexy vibe." In *SKR*, *TWWL*, *WTSA*, *SSFY* and especially *The Truth*, there are instances of consent as a direct rejection of hegemonic masculinity, thus becoming a feature of "true" masculinity. FalsePremise writes for example:

> 'I'm going to kiss you now. Is that okay?' Jim asked, moving closer to Spock.
>
> 'It is...' Spock replied, his mouth twitching up into a slight smile, 'It is more than okay, Jim. It is necessary.'
>
> Jim paused in his approach, his head tilting to the side as he considered Spock's answer, 'necessary? We don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Not ever, Spock.'
>
> 'You misunderstand, Jim,' Spock answered carefully a soft green blush extending across his cheeks, 'I find it to be... necessary...for me...'
>
> Jim smiled warmly, 'Well, in that case...' and he leant into Spock's mouth, gently grazing it with his lips.
>
> [...] Jim wanted to touch every inch of Spock. To breathe him in. To devour him. Jim groaned and pulled back while he still could. Spock tried to follow for more kisses but Jim stopped him, holding him back.
>
> 'Spock,' Jim whispered, 'we don't have to do anything more tonight.' [...]
>
> Spock blinked rapidly and he sighed, 'Jim, I see no logical reason to delay in our expression of mutually desired intimacy. However, should you wish to delay I will not object.' (*The Truth*, 2017: 55-57)

In this scene, Kirk asks for and acknowledges explicit consent no less than four times: getting gradually closer to Spock physically, from a kiss to starting sexual relations, and making sure that his intentions were clear to Spock. Kirk, here, not only asks for Spock's confirmation that he agrees to his actions but also, more specifically, tackles more nuanced types of consent. For example, he notes that Spock should not be a victim of peer pressure: he makes sure that Spock saying kissing is "necessary" does not mean it is necessary for the satisfaction of Kirk's own desires, but a shared need from both of them; in another way, he also makes sure to allow Spock respite from societal pressure of carrying onto erotic exchanges ("we don't have to do anything more tonight"). Here, consent is seen as an ongoing process, and as FalsePremise uses Kirk and Spock to display consent as something that has to be freely and enthusiastically given, she builds up on the norm that "good" sexual relationships should acknowledge the other as someone that should be able to feel comfortable giving—or not giving—consent, as opposed to hegemonic masculinity and rape culture.

Writing similar scenes of consent, Pensive commented as follows: "I think the perception of Jim Kirk as a womanizer is rooted in toxic masculinity and the male power fantasy, but isn't actually accurate to who Jim Kirk really is. […] I reject the idea of Jim as a womanizer, […] I just had this strong feeling that he would really value consent and communication." This take on Kirk is widespread in the K/S interpretive community; yet, it also hints at a causal relationship with sexuality and gender production (and especially 'true' queer masculinity) where the gender of Kirk, differentiated from hegemonic masculinity, is seen as the cause for his behaviour. I suggest that while it may seem so at first, it is also interesting to look at gender production from a more theoretically informed standpoint and recognise just how prevalent the writer's feminist beliefs are; indeed, comforted by their belonging to the K/S intimate public and their own experience, they cannot write from anywhere else than their own position—hence the affective attachment to slash as a place where their own personal is made universal in the fic world.

Yet, consent is not always as clear-cut and unambiguous as the type involved in *The Truth*: for fans, 'good' masculinity involves a relationship where consent has to be fully verbalised and made out clearly, where consent has to be always clear-cut and immediately understood, forgoing the intricacies of real life in favour of a world where one's desires and speech are always in sync and where one's needs are always fully understood and singled out. This kind of binary consent (yes/no) is thus self-identified as an intimacy practice that

produces 'true' queer masculinity. Here, fan norms about 'true' masculinity are used as a basis to build an intimate relationship of 'good' sexuality (as two men together), intricately intertwined. Yet, in fic, there is also a question of consent in the way Kirk and Spock even behave with each other—for example, how they look at each other. This will be the focus of the next section.

6.6)   Queer gaze and desire towards the male body

The challenging and questioning of categories of gender and sexuality in fic is, I have analysed, also prevalent in the way desire flows from Kirk to Spock and back again. The K/S intimate public, still seeking relief, seems to do so by also encouraging a specific kind of gaze towards the pleasured body, towards the pleasuring body; neither belonging fully to one or the other, or to any gender whatsoever—especially going against a kind of hegemonically masculine gaze of pleasure. I argue that fans have reconceptualised a concept of gender theory known as the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999), deconstructing its inner workings and repurposing it through subversion as enabled by a queer position.

To define what the male gaze originally entails, Laura Mulvey has theorised how a phallic, heterosexual, masculine gaze objectifies women in cinema (1999). Building up on the Freudian psychoanalysis of scopophilia, she explains that the male gaze is "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. […] Although the instinct is modified by other factors, […] it continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object" (1999: 835).

Yet, as we consider this concept in the social world of the heteropatriarchy, Mulvey specifies the core nature of the male gaze: "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (1999: 837).

The male gaze, then, holds power from the privileged viewpoint of men and produces heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity by looking at women as sexual objects (regardless of consent). However, in K/S, I have observed that through the rejection of hegemonic

masculinity also came the reversal of the male gaze. A specific scene in Liss' *SKR* comes to mind, illustrating what I call a 'queer gaze', as Kirk and Spock are taking off their clothes to go swimming in a volcanic cave lake similar to a caldera:

> Pale stretches of skin revealed themselves as Spock pulled the tunic over his head in a motion that seemed slow, almost unsure. Then, shirtless and shining with flashes of the birds' wings, he folded the tunic with gentle hands, careful hands. Jim watched the soft stretch of his arms as he set the shirt aside, watched the line of his spine curl when he knelt, watched the muscles of his back pull him upright again. Spock's hands moved to the zipper of his slacks before— as though a sixth sense had alerted him to Jim's stare— he met Jim's eyes with a side-eyed look of his own.
>
> Covering the moment with a smile, Jim tore his eyes away and slipped through the water toward the center of the lake. The birds settled again on their branches and the flashing of their wings faded.
>
> His heart was pounding, but it had no reason to. He'd seen Spock shirtless a few times before— it wasn't like he was incapable of containing his libido. But there was something about how gentle Spock looked in the blue light, hair springing out of its tie from the humidity, his strong figure unusually pale against the black backdrop of rock. Maybe swimming had been a bad idea. (*Sha Ka Ree*, 2017: 119-120)

Kirk, here, is looking at Spock while he undresses to go swimming in a lake, then averts his gaze. We look at a male character through another male character's eyes, full of desire ("his heart was pounding"), and there is no objectification or de-humanisation typically observed through the usual male gaze. The observed character has full bodily autonomy, returns the gaze ("he met Jim's eyes"), and the observing character is respectful of the other ("Jim tore his eyes away"). The body is a space of desire and eroticised love, yet Kirk looks away when a heterosexual-coded man might have kept on looking, even against Spock's consent, sexualising him as a way to assert power over him.

In this way, the development of the reversed male gaze (or 'queer gaze') has facilitated the process of sexuality and gender production in fic: what the fans often call a "soft" masculinity, characterised by the softness of the gaze that carries desire towards the male-coded body, in a 'good' queer relationship. This facet of 'true' masculinity—as the fans call it—is thus especially visible during intimate moments between Kirk and Spock. Yet, what happens when this intimacy is pushed to the extreme and desire becomes sexuality needs also to be analysed; I will approach this in the following section on sex roles during sex scenes between Kirk and Spock.

6.7) Sex roles challenged during gay sex

Following gender theory inspired by Butler, Connell—in the unfolding of her theory of hegemonic masculinity—has also written on the embodiment of masculinity. She claims that "with bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the formulae of current social theory. This pattern might be termed body-reflexive practice. […] Through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. They do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse. Their materiality (including material capacities to […] open, to penetrate, to ejaculate) is not erased, it continues to matter. […] Body-reflexive practices form — and are formed by — structures which have historical weight and solidity" (1995: 61-65).

Drawing on Connell, I suggest that the performance of gender, as inspired by Connell and Butler and studied in K/S popular fic, needs to encompass the materiality of the bodies upon which the gendering process operates. The bodies of Kirk and the body of Spock are, through the fan writers, sites where body-reflexive practices are materialised; their materiality is able to take shape and become theoretically intelligible, not just affectively intelligible. That is to say, such bodies are sites of gender production where the matter created is able to rework gender theory and gendered societal structures: here with the rejection of hegemonic masculinity, and with the other processes I have analysed throughout this chapter (symbolic hegemonic femininity, repurposed homonormativity, consent, and so on), including more specifically sexual intimacy.

A striking example can be found in FalsePremise's *The Truth*. Analysing authorial intent, she explains that "some of the fic is very much explicitly feminist, The Truth is one of those. Others less so, but then still my feminism is there in my playing with gender roles, showing healthy intimacy." As we dig deeper, I wonder in what ways does this multiplication and challenging of 'normal' categories of gender and sexuality work with this 'explicit feminism'. I argue that K/S is caught up in gender trouble and rejection of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2007) because of its close relationship with intimacy, where the production of identity is exercised and disclosed through what the fans qualify as feminist practice. Let us have an example from FalsePremise:

Jim swallowed hard. He was overcome with the image of kneeling down before his lover and taking that half-hard cock into his mouth, licking and sucking it to full glory. But Jim had a plan. So he resisted the temptation.

Instead, he again leaned close, his mouth brushing against Spock's ear, 'lie down on your front.'

For a moment Spock's eyebrows knitted in thought obviously calculating the probabilities. But he nodded and obeyed, lying on the bed, completely trusting in his t'hy'la. Jim relished in Spock's trust.

Jim sat beside Spock on the bed and began to slowly and gently trace his fingers over Spock's body, starting with Spock's shoulders and flowing down over his buttocks, thighs and calves down to his ankles.

Spock made a soft groaning noise into the pillow.

'Feel good?' Jim asked.

'Affirmative,' Spock answered in a whisper.

[…] Jim took in the full results of his ministrations. Spock's body was flushed green, his hair usually so perfect was dishevelled and his face was the perfect picture of wanton lust. God, he was perfect.

Jim's own cock was painfully hard, heavy with need. Jim decided that it was time to take Spock's erection in his mouth, and moved to do so but before he could Spock had flipped him onto the bed and began licking his way down Jim's body, sucking and gently biting at pieces of flesh.

Jim heard himself groan and beg. After exploring Spock's body so fully Jim did not have any self-control left and so their positions were instantly reversed.

'Please, Spock...' he begged, 'Please...' (*The Truth*, 2017: 80-81)

In this scene, a love scene between Kirk and Spock, we can see FalsePremise crafting a troubling of gendered roles—the 'top' and 'bottom' situation, usually understood as one dominating (masculine) and penetrating a more submissive (feminine) one. For example, Kirk wants to perform fellatio on Spock, taking a more 'submissive' role, yet he asks Spock to "lie down on your front" (a typical 'dominating' request) and starts to explore his body at his leisure, with Spock "trusting" him—"he nodded and obeyed," filling a more 'submissive' role. Then, there is a role reversal ("their positions were instantly reversed") as Spock flips Kirk from over to under him on the bed.

In fact, just as Butler claims that gender reveals itself to be a performance due to its troubling and subverting of gender, FalsePremise—and my other participants, who all author similar sexual encounters—write gendered roles (the top/bottom dichotomy) as a performance too, taking life in the queer sexuality of Kirk and Spock. I argue this is a way of dealing with troubled intimacy practices beyond the gendered binary present not only in heterosexual relationships, but also in more homonormative relationships.

I claim thus that in slash fic, one of the things that precisely makes it popular, and so specifically normed, is the idealisation of a troubling of gendered practices during erotic intimacy; a working of queerness into gay sex where the production of gender is being questioned and multiplied. Kirk and Spock's sexuality is cited through these acts, which in turn inform their performance of gender identities. Yet, some fan writers push understandings of gender and sexuality to their limit—that is to say, they go beyond human understandings of identity to those which alien races can provide them.

6.8) Gender dissidence: going beyond "true" masculinity with the Ashtahli, an alien race with sequential hermaphroditism

To finish this chapter, I have selected as concluding section a case study of what can be understood as *Star Trek*-specific gender dissidence, deliberately queering up the normal connotations and associations of categories of gender into a post-gender exploration of potential identities: FalsePremise's alien race, the Ashtahli, or the materialisation of what sequential hermaphroditism might create in humanoids.

> 'Captain, how exactly does sequential hermaphroditism present in the Ashtahli?'
>
> 'The Ashtahli are born female.' Jim answered pleased to satisfy his first officer's scientific curiosity, 'It seems that the process of transformation into males is sparked by successful reproduction. I'm afraid that's all we know so far.'
>
> 'That may have created significant cultural differences,' Uhura replied thoughtfully, 'coupled with the Ashtahli's valuing of honesty, and the fact that the Ashtahli have not yet found their place in the universe, we'll have to tread quite delicately, Captain.' (*The Truth*, 2017: 4-5)

The creation of the Ashtahli race was, according to FalsePremise, a conscious and deliberate choice—in fact, she considers it one of her most complex fics in terms of the reconciliation of gender and identity between the human and the non-human. She explains that "I wanted to explore sex and gender thoroughly too. So I thought about species on Earth and looked for something that could allow me to do that— something biologically plausible that's quite different to human life. And I hit upon sequential hermaphroditism."

Through this statement, we are able to see in which ways FalsePremise attempts to sidestep the usual production of gender. First of all, she uses non-human biology to explore the relationship between sex, gender, and felt identity; yet, secondly, she uses "normal" labels to make the 'unintelligible' intelligible; thirdly, I claim this makes obvious the need for us humans to produce gender everywhere, even upon bodies that go beyond our understanding of human gender ("born female," "transformation into males"). One scene in particular materialises what is, literally, 'lost in translation' as Kirk and his crew meet the Ashtahli for the first time:

> One of the three Ashtahli stepped forward, speaking in his own tongue which the universal translators automatically translated into standard for the benefit of the Enterprise crew. As the translator did so, it made a dinging noise to indicate any words that were not adequately translated, 'The Ashtahli accept your greetings and return them. I am Tarosh the Grand grandfather *ding* and leader of the Ashtahli people. This is Amresh, my second in command, and Lareng, my scribe and clutch *ding* sister-mate *ding*. We are surprised to find that someone so young *ding* is part of your party. Does this reflect a lack of respect for the Ashtahli people?'
>
> Jim frowned, looking at his team, 'Apologies. Who are you referring to?' Tarosh gestured towards Uhura, 'the young *ding* one of course.'
>
> Nyota stepped forward, 'Greetings to the Ashtahli people. I am not significantly younger than my companions. I am female.'
>
> Tarosh's tentacle-like facial protrusions wiggled rapidly, 'I understand. Your differences have been explained to us. We still find it difficult to fully comprehend.' (*The Truth*, 2017: 6)

FalsePremise, with the creation of the Ashtahli, situates the production of gender as exceeding the labels we use or, if we must use them, makes sure to signify how inaccurate they remain still. According to Butler, "can gender complexity and dissonance be accounted for by the multiplication and convergence of a variety of culturally dissonant identifications?

Or is all identification constructed through the exclusion of a sexuality that puts those identifications into question? […] The debate over the meaning or subversive possibilities of identifications so far has left unclear exactly where those identifications are to be found" (2007: 89-91). Following this questioning of the necessity—and impact—of the multiplication of identifications, Butler opens the field of discursive naming and labelling to the possibility that gender might be produced through "repeated stylization of the body" (2007: 45) yet also, perhaps, through mechanisms still unintelligible to us. The Ashtahli, with their untranslatable production of gender, underline this possibility.

But, to understand where this alien race is coming from, it is important to understand FalsePremise's relationship towards her own gender, body, and sexuality. She follows a "radical" agenda—her words—when it comes to gender, and, I suggest, intently sees gender as essentially performative. Aiming to express her own identity experience by repurposing labels, she explains the following when I ask her what she identified as (at the beginning of the interview): "I'm female and I'm bi/pan. I usually say bi but pan fits as well. When I say I'm female I'm talking about my sex. I don't experience myself as having a gender identity separate from looking at my physical body and recognising it as female. I suppose I could call myself non-binary then but I don't. […] I was raised in a very gender-free way, I guess? So I only ever thought of being female as a physical aspect of my body. […] I feel very connected to my physical body and very comfortable with it, including the female aspects of it. In fact, I find the biology of womanhood quite cool. When I think female that's what I think of. Not gender roles etc. Does that make sense? And— all that said I'm VERY confident I'd also be right at home in a male body."

Through this nuanced description, I believe FalsePremise is trying to bypass both hegemonic and nonhegemonic understandings of gender, as she relies on her own relationship with her body assigned female at birth *and* the identification enabled by fiction or fic ("in a male body") to understand identity. She clearly differentiates biology from sex from gender and gender roles, even suggesting these terms should be used only for legibility and not for more abstract, felt conceptualisation.

In effect, she identifies her own production of Kirk and Spock's gender as follows: "it can subvert traditional understandings of gender and masculinity. Would it still qualify as masculinity? Well I think it depends how radical your agenda is! Personally I'd like to see us as a species put all of those ideas into the bin. But that's me." In this case, there is a deep

questioning of the aim of gender production, as if to go beyond labels and focus on the affective ease in which one inhabits a body—fictional or real.

By using the biology of the Ashtahli to create a nuanced, complex alien race that make us humans question the sanctity of gender production, I thus believe that FalsePremise represents a kind of fan that not only works towards the making of 'true' masculinity—a label used for intelligibility—but also fundamentally questions the necessity and repercussions of using such multiple categories, challenged or not.

6.9) Conclusion

To conclude, throughout this chapter, I have attempted to show how norms around gender and sexuality are produced through the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity as experienced by the authors, and how these gender roles as a consequence are providing relief from toxic masculinity—a key mechanism in intimate publics explaining the feeling of community fans experience. The production of gender and sexuality have been enmeshed with a symbolic use of hegemonic femininity, a repurposing of homonormativity, the openings self-reflection provides, specific norms around consent, a reversal of the male gaze, a challenging of sex roles in gay sex, and even attempts at gender dissidence.

I believe that the sections of this chapter are less about an essential/non-essential analysis of gender and more about queer feminist practice as a gendering practice, where gender is a consequence of the feminist beliefs, of the queer identity, and of the need for relief (from the heterosexual matrix) felt by fans; correspondingly forming its own politics through the creation of K/S norms.

By performing what fans see as 'true' masculinity and what I have analysed as a multiplication, challenging, and questioning of normal associations of categories of gender, Kirk and Spock have become symbols of gender subversion. I suggest that this is one of the reasons why female fans turn to the reading and writing of Kirk and Spock's special brand of masculinity, as mentioned in Penley (1997) who claims they remain men *in spite of* the subversion of their masculinity through queerness.

Yet, what is most important following this chapter discussion is to recognise that fans, as women, queer, and non-binary people, manage to create and develop other modalities than body-violence—a violence perpetrated by entities such as the state, gender, race,

sexuality, and so on. As advanced on the gender and sexuality journey as they will it to be, fans producing identity through slash fic are driving for normalisation, expressed in both a complex rejection and co-optation of hegemonic powers. They organise around the possibility to rethink the links and relationships to the body outside of violence, a kind of plastic political thought. In effect, one needs flexibility, an acceptance of polysemy, a willingness to let process take the lead over pre-set ideas, to escape the constraints of gender norms—in this case, resulting in the production of a K/S-specific 'true' masculinity and 'good' queer sexuality. And by doing this, fans have been developing new ways of conveying their feelings when reading about 'true' masculinity and 'good' queer sexuality; this will be the focus of chapter 7.

Chapter 7. Feels culture and the affective gift economy in K/S fanfiction

Chapter 5 considered fic as a form of performed literature, while chapter 6 looked at the texts themselves in terms of the intimate publics and the new norms they establish around gender and sexuality. This chapter examines the relationship between the fan readers and fic writers—looking at norms in the materialisation and consequent circulation of affect within fandom. I thus look at the traces left by affective feedback cycles, using discourse analysis to understand how affect moves around in the digital network of K/S fandom. Indeed, I start my analysis with Ferreday's claim that "what links community, belonging and fantasy is the notion of affect; that it is the capacity of bodies and texts to affect and be affected that structures online belongings" (2009: 30). I thus enquire about the dynamics of texts' ability to affect and be affected, and where fan belonging is situated.

To this end, I will base this last chapter upon a concept coined by Louisa E. Stein in her 2015 book *Millennial Fandom*: "feels culture". Stein theorises this term as follows: "Millennial feels culture combines an aesthetics of intimate emotion […] with an aesthetics of high performativity" (2015: 158). She is the first to properly acknowledge and theoretically analyse the term *feels culture*, as fan studies enter a fourth wave: fourth wave scholars, including Stein, focus on digital fandom's shift from the fan experience as a private cult to the fan experience as part of a mainstream, public, digital fabric of the everyday (Stein, 2015).

Feels culture, directly linked to this fourth wave of fan studies, allows us to theorise the fan experience which reconciles earlier personal, cult emotional reactions with newer, more performative registers of expression shared in the open digital fabric of the everyday. Feels culture theory hence works as a bridge between older fan studies and newer fan studies, linking personal experience to a new kind of circulation of media—which I examine alongside Henry Jenkins' notion of gift economy, coming from his book on 'spreadable media', and Margaret Wetherell's notion of affect economy, inspired by Sara Ahmed.

I will first situate feels culture within slash fandom, then look at the economies at play there, and eventually map out the practices revealed in the light of my own data when it comes to feels culture. This chapter thus builds up on Stein's notion of feels culture (2015)

and expands and reworks it into four specific kinds of feels: feelspeak, dramafeels, truefeels, and profeels. These theories are a conceptualisation of the discourses at play in the interactions between fans through fan paratexts. This is possible from the analysis of comments left on the 5 fics I have studied in this thesis. The 4 concepts are linked to the gift economy at play in fandom (Jenkins, 2013)—intimately connected to what I also refer to as affect economy (Wetherell, 2012). I analysed how affect circulates in the K/S slash community by identifying these 4 feels discourses expressed as gifts for the fan writers, leaving a digital footprint that validates the ways in which K/S impacts fan readers. After looking into how fan writers teach readers, by using bodies in space and storytelling (chapter 5) which promotes specific norms around 'good' relationships and 'good' masculinities (chapter 6), this chapter retraces the behaviours that close fan affective feedback loops. In this chapter, I focus on a selection of 22 comments out of 51 multiple-comment threads left on the fics *Sha Ka Ree* (written by Liss) and *The Truth* (written by FalsePremise), putting them into context with the use of Liss' and FalsePremise's interviews as well as the interviews of sampled fan readers (from the comments).

7.1) Stein's theory of *feels culture* and the economies at play in slash fandom

Stein's theory makes a recognised, nuanced term within the digital fandom sphere, *feels*, into what I claim is a cornerstone of contemporary fan studies. Feels culture is about the networking of the performance of affective reaction: the making public of what is considered private, through highly performative aesthetics. She focuses on feels culture's understanding as a collective culture of fan authorship; "an expansive fannish collective to which we all belong," then suggests that "it celebrates our collective belonging through images of embodied emotion" (2015: 157). This echoes Ferreday, and the argument that "the notion of affect is present, if not fully articulated, in some theories concerning online communities; indeed, one way in which 'affect' appears is through the invocation of a 'sense of community'" (2009: 37).

For Stein, it is this aesthetics of intimate emotion combined to an aesthetics of high performativity that creates feels culture. This kind of discursive expression inspired by Stein's work, I suggest, can be called 'feelspeak' (as a way to distinguish Stein's original theory of feels culture from my own contribution). To recall what feelspeak looks like, its high performativity

is materialised by the use of gifs, hashtags, images, but most of all emojis, repeated punctuation, spoken grammar, effusive syntax and text that indicate "the sense that we are accessing an author's immediate and personal emotional response to media culture" (Stein, 2015: 158). There are thus conventions around expressing emotions, which in turn links fans together (referencing Ferreday, 2009) and, according to Stein, are the mechanics through which feels culture makes the fabric of fandom itself.

Stein opposes feelspeak, which is deemed emotional, to a more professional discursive register, which is deemed rational and asserts authority, deliberately invoking the idea of the professional economy of writing: what I dub 'profeels' and, in a step away from Stein, I claim also mediate affect. The lines between collective feelspeak and individual profeels are blurring: authors who write what other fans deem as literature can also use feelspeak, in the comments or author's notes, to convey gratitude and performances of intimacy. Fans who use feelspeak might also mix it with profeels to add gravitas throughout, or even use other registers of feels to take part in the feedback loop of fic comments.

Stein, continuing to describe profeels aesthetics, takes as an example fan tutorials shared to teach how to write professionally. She claims that such advice "illustrates how the pursuit of writing "good" fan fiction can mean subscribing not only to the rules of grammar but to value sets that rein in excessive emotion and performativity in favor of a more measured professionalism. These discourses of professionalism in millennial fandom urge fan creators to downplay excess emotion, collective or otherwise, in favor of individual literary and artistic restraint" (2015: 159). I argue that writing "good" fanfiction does not always entail a downplaying of excess emotion, both within the fic and around the fic (comments), and that fan writers can write with both themselves *and* hypothetical fan readers in mind, at the same time, without compromising their writing style and the emotionality of their reaction to media. For example, Liss writes fic in what can be read as professional yet answers in feelspeak to comments left on their fic *Sha Ka Ree*, and mixes profeels and feelspeak when leaving comments on FalsePremise's *The Truth*. I believe that feels culture has shifted from being a collective authorship (Stein, 2015) into being, going beyond Stein, a part of an affective network that works around tokens of appreciation as new ways of dealing with ownership. In my data, fans write affective tokens to thank the fan writer, hence acknowledging the ownership of the transformative work. I chose to focus on feels culture through this lens of an affect economy.

While later in her book Stein opens her theoretical framework to a mixing of profeels and feelspeak, she does not fully encourage the questioning of this dichotomy. I believe that we must go beyond considering the two forms as distinct and opposed; rather, we must refocus our theoretical framework to include both registers as not a dichotomy but belonging to the same spectrum of the fan experience.

In effect, while Stein sees the boundaries between feelspeak and profeels as opposed in the light of my own data and analysis, I suggest that profeels are not separate from feels culture but a part of feels culture itself, hence my use here of the denomination 'professional feels'. It is a register that is employed to show engagement and that can convey acute emotions in a similar way to feelspeak, although it is materialised in a different register. Profeels can be, I claim, not only collective but also a performance and feelspeak can be, I believe, an affective token acknowledging ownership, hence blurring the lines between feelspeak and profeels.

"As millennials and millennial fans traverse cultural forums that confound assumed divides between public and intimate, they must negotiate the expression of emotion as simultaneous threat and asset" (Stein, 2015: 170). Stein, here, suggests that performative emotionality is seen as something wanted in feelspeak yet feared in profeels; she also suggests that fandom (as a cultural forum) mixes feelspeak and profeels while considering them as clear-cut, separate experiences and discursive practices. I argue that within fandom, the two registers are not in fact two separate practices, but rather manifest as a sliding back and forth between two ends of the spectrum that *is* feels culture: profeels in fan writing, in the light of my data, is enabled by feels.

While Stein tries, in the end, to consider the mixing of feelspeak and profeels, she sees it as an opposition that still keeps them separate, like oil and water—some fans might emulate the two, but they remain distinct and it is a complicated practice to embody. She does not see profeels as primarily motivated by feels culture, but this motivation is revealed in the analysis of my data. My analysis also reveals, beyond Stein, that profeels might be a discursive strategy to be taken seriously at certain times just as feelspeak is a discursive strategy to be taken seriously at other times, both being fully part of feels culture. Both seem to be part of the same fan experience; this why I will use Liss' data as a key element in this chapter, considering how they blur the boundaries between discourses of feelspeak and profeels, which, along other comments left on fics, creates a spectrum encompassing various types of discourses of

affect. In effect, Stein separates profeels as being rational and feelspeak as being emotional: this split is a false binary as affect is present in each practice. Profeels must mobilise different kinds of associations and represent a different set of values, embodying authority, not stifling but circulating affect.

Following Stein, we can see feels culture as the performance of emotion (2015), yet I claim, also as a deeply discursive and material discourse that does not circulate in a spooky way (like a virus, Massumi, 2002) but is caught in a familiar practice that sees affect as embodied (Wetherell, 2012). This chapter looks at the norms in the K/S affective cycles; I consider how my data analysis contributes to the understanding of fanfiction writers in terms of economies of feedback, and the various patterns coming forward in the various types of discourses of affect within feels culture.

Stein's original starting point for how feels operate in the K/S subculture (through various exchanges of worth) should not be limited to feelspeak or my own concept of profeels—there are, I claim, other types of discourse of affect at play, repeated over time, seemingly being a part of affective feedback loops. The movements of the circulation of media and affect is hence key to the understanding of fandom feelings of belonging. I thus chose to build upon Jenkins' gift economy and Wetherell's affect economy to frame the spectrum of feels culture apparent in K/S fandom.

Jenkins et al. considered the concept of a gift economy in fandom in Spreadable Media (2013). As previously discussed, this work looks into the way media circulates, is "spread" across society; avoiding metaphors of "infection" and "contamination" (which Massumi favours, 2002) to focus on how "audiences play an active role in "spreading" content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media: their choices, investments, agendas, and actions determine what gets valued" (2013: 21). Both Jenkins' spreadable media and Stein's feels culture resonate particularly deeply with Wetherell's theorising of affect economies, where the circulation of affect has to do with subject positioning through discourse: "we see, in other words, an affective–discursive practice emerging along with complex acts of subject positioning rather than, say, an emotion moving to 'land' on one individual. This is joint, coordinated, relational activity in which affect and discourse twine together" (2013: 363). Considering together Jenkins' gift economy and Wetherell's affect economy is especially useful in the light of my own data, where I claim feels culture (as made up of many affective-discursive practices such as feelspeak) forms an affect economy through repetitive discursive

practice (for example, comments on fic), alongside other social practices, and reveals social formations such as gender, sexuality, positioning due to personal history (e.g. practices against sexual violence), or feminist agendas through the circulation of media.

To finish, similar to Jenkins' gift economy, Wetherell develops Ahmed's concept of affective economy. In her book *Affect and Emotion* (2012), she offers a critique of Ahmed's idea of 'sticky' affect and develops Ahmed's subsequent 'affective economy', which I will use in the light of my data in combination with Jenkins. She argues that affect without a subject is too vague to constitute subjectivity (2012: 125) and adds that "I am interested in how affect circulates" (2012: 141). Similarly, I am interested in contributing to understanding of how affect circulates by considering Wetherell's perspective alongside Jenkins' theory of how media circulates.

For Wetherell, an affect economy's currency is the orientation, frequency, and co-construction (with social practices and social formations) of embodied affective practice, repeated over time. Bringing together Jenkins' gift economy, based on social positioning through strategies of worth, and Wetherell's affect economy, based on social positioning through strategies of repeated social practices, gave me the theoretical framework needed to identify the various types of discourse of affect at play in feels culture. Indeed I locate, on the spectrum of feels culture, 'feelspeak' (following Stein's book, 2015), moving towards increased discursivity with 'dramafeels', towards the increasingly professional register of 'truefeels' then, to finish, 'profeels'.

7.2) Analysing the spectrum of feels culture: introducing *Sha Ka Ree, The Truth*, and the case study of Liss and FalsePremise

In this chapter, I have selected 22 comments out of 51 multiple-comment threads left on the fics from my data—focusing on two fics, *Sha Ka Ree* (written by Liss) and *The Truth* (written by FalsePremise)—through purposive sampling, focusing on the particularly rich data coming from Liss (both as writer and reader) and FalsePremise. In all purposive sampling, "researchers must make decisions about whom or what to sample, and be able to describe: a relationship where the sample is designed to encapsulate a *relevant range* of units in relation to the wider universe, but not to represent it directly" (Mason in Emmel, 2014: 15). In this

light, purposively sampling from a much bigger, similarly sampled set of data texts allowed me to focus on my research rationale: in this chapter, the analysis of feels culture's circulation. I selected the data through a system based on comment length, comments replied to, and overall blend of the spectrum of feels (from feelspeak to profeels).

As I analysed my data, I witnessed a particularly interesting set of texts and practices linked to my writer participant Liss. Liss has written *SKR* in what Stein could identify as a professional register, but they also have answered comments left on *SKR* in typical feelspeak; on the other hand, they have also assumed the place of reader as they have left 4 long comments on FalsePremise's fic *The Truth*, showing a mix of feelspeak and profeels, to which FalsePremise responded. As I have in-depth interviews of both Liss and FalsePremise, as well as the full content of their comments to each other, I decided to focus on *SKR* and *The Truth* to follow Liss' discursive practices in what can be seen as a gift economy of affect (Jenkins et al., 2013; Wetherell, 2012).

In *Sha Ka Ree,* Kirk and Spock are strangers on a mission to a seemingly deserted planet emitting an emergency beam. While they attempt to land their spaceship, they are caught in an ion storm, killing the other members of the rescue team. Kirk and Spock, alone, have to survive on the deserted planet. This proves more complicated than imagined when they understand that the ion storm was not a generic storm, but has distorted spacetime and brought them back in time—to a time before the United Federation of Planets, where interstellar travel was not at hand and Starfleet did not exist. Left utterly alone, Kirk and Spock attempt to rebuild a shuttle to use in the next ion storm, in order to go back to their time and their crew. At the same time, their relationship is evolving, as they slowly fall in love and start (not without issues and misunderstandings) a romantic and sexual relationship. The fic revolves around the concept of *home*, and how Kirk and Spock build a home on the planet and with each other, in a form not experienced previously with other people.

SKR has had, as of 6 August 2023, 2,452 comments, 4,621 likes (kudos), and 101,275 views since its publication in 2017. It spans 180,505 words over 18 chapters and has been bookmarked 1,575 times. This is, in the K/S fandom, representative of its great popularity compared to other, lesser-known fic.

In *The Truth,* Kirk and Spock are on a diplomatic mission to establish peaceful relations between the United Federation of Planets and a newly discovered planet, Tahli. Inhabitants of Tahli, the Ashtahli, are biological sequential hermaphrodites (that is to say, they are born

as female and become male as they mature) who live in 'clutches,' polyamorous family groups of around 6 or 7 members. Their culture is based upon a core value: truth. They accept anything except lies, and have rituals around the speaking of truth—your own truth, for yourself or others. Spock volunteers to take the Talesh, a truth serum required to begin negotiations—and confesses that he is in love with Kirk in Vulcan terms. Kirk, unaware of this, separately takes the Talesh as well and confesses he is in love with Spock. As the fic unfolds, Kirk and Spock partake in several rituals of truth (including writing confessions on their body) and try to deal with their own feelings for each other, believing them to be unrequited. At long last, they confess to each other and begin a romantic and sexual relationship, which culminates in an Ashtahli marriage ceremony a few years later. The fic deals with the concept of truth and acceptance, the truths of others but most of all of your own personal truths.

The Truth has had, to date (6 August 2023), 788 comments, 1,910 likes, and 34,933 views since its publication in 2017. It spans 54,125 words over 20 chapters and was bookmarked 506 times.

To analyse the span of my data, I have used purposive sampling that illustrates an addition of sets of characteristics to feels culture, as a spectrum. It builds upon Stein's analysis with additional components developed through my own theoretical framework, which considers feelspeak and profeels as a spectrum, and allows me to map out norms within discourse that can be used to order and classify the social practices at play in feels culture.

7.3)   Discourses of *feelspeak*: effusive punctuation, emojis, overuse of capitalisation

Stein, in her chapter on feels culture, has referred to a very effusive, highly performative kind of feels culture (2015)—what I term feelspeak. This feelspeak is what is most visible about the economy of feels at play in the K/S fandom. *SKR's* author, Liss, explains the following about writing fic: "my philosophy is that if it makes me happy or makes me feel feelings, I'll share it, and if it makes other people happy or feel feelings then it's just a great bonus to something I already loved doing." Following this thinking, I claim that Liss situates themselves at the centre of a gift economy of affect: Liss' 'feels' motivate a 'storyfication' of K/S, and precisely because they have materialised an experience of feels (through the decision to share *SKR* with the fandom), they expect to spread feels (by spreading fan media, Jenkins

et al., 2013) to the network. They write texts that affect and are affected, producing feelings of belonging with other fans.

This supposes that Jenkins' gift economy could be an affective-discursive practice repeated over time, as there is a mobilisation of affect through discourse with intent to make other fans feel—and whose responses demonstrate this feeling. These mobilisations of affect reveal various discursive strategies to be taken seriously, here feelspeak and profeels for example, as a way to convey thanks to the fan writer and appreciation for their craft. In effect, *SKR* is embedded in profeels aesthetics with the following of grammatical rules and other discursive methods to achieve a high literary standard, yet Liss also writes feelspeak comments on FalsePremise's *The Truth* (and in response to comments on their fic *SKR*), a highly emotional and intimate response to K/S.

Feelspeak is materialised by three main visual practices: effusive punctuation, use of emojis, and expansive capitalisation that are meant to convey enthusiasm. For example, in their reply to reader Musa, Rayni, and Theresa, they write "for a little while!!!!!", "I can hardly even convey!!!!!!", "Thank you!!!!!!!", "thank you thank you!!!", "so thank you!!!!", "all the same!!!", "All my love!!!!!", "this comment!!!". As for emojis, Liss used a combination of 21 heart "<3" symbols in their three replies. This means that in the act of writing a performance of emotional reaction, Liss mediates their own affect in ways where their intensity, sensation, and value are being modulated for different purposes and collapse the dichotomy of feelspeak/profeels. Liss writes *SKR* according to professional-looking literary aesthetics yet it is emotionally intimate, and reacts to *SKR* comments and *The Truth* in a highly performative register (typical feelspeak).

In their comments on chapter 10, 11, 15, and 20 of *The Truth*, Liss has used 125 exclamation points, 19 question marks to signify rhetoric questions, and a mix of 8 of both ("!?!?") to convey delight and acknowledgement of feels in a specific erotic scene. As for capitalisation, Liss is aware that they use it in 'excess', writing the following on *The Truth* chapter 10: "OH MY GOD JIM IS SO SWEET WITH HIM AND HE'S SO SMART AND HE KNOWS EXACTLY HOW TO TALK TO SPOCK TO MAKE SENSE TO SPOCK'S LOGIC WITHOUT PANDERING TO HIM OR COMPROMISING THE WAY *JIM HIMSELF* COMMUNICATES AND UNDERSTANDS??? FUCKING GODDAMNED SOULMATES IN LOVE. I'm so sorry for the capslock but that was SUCH a great and in-character conversation!". Acknowledging the character development of Kirk and Spock, Liss insists on the 'perfectness' of FalsePremise's K/S by using

capitalisation (or capslock in millennial fan culture) to bring attention to what gave Liss 'feels'. What is interesting is the apology for the capitalisation, foregrounding to the affective-discursive labour Liss is doing and offering to FalsePremise.

"Worth," Jenkins says, is associated with things on which "you can't put a price." Sometimes, people refer to the "worth" of a gift as sentimental (when personalised) or symbolic (when shared with a larger community). "Worth is variable, even among those who participate within the same community—even among those in the same family" (Jenkins et al., 2013: 67-68). Here, Liss anticipates the transfer of affective worth to FalsePremise by saying they apologise for the capitalisation. Jenkins et al. even add that "what at first glance seemed to be "free" was actually a reciprocal exchange of social worth within an ongoing relationship between producer and fans" (2013: 73): feelspeak is a strategy of highly performative affective answering to the media producer (here FalsePremise) that illustrates the producer/fan relationship *and* the importance of feels culture in the reciprocal exchange of social worth within slash fandom.

Liss also capitalises 25 words in these comments, bringing attention to the importance of certain practices such as "OKAY I literally LOST IT": an excess of feels that is made spectacle. Capitalisation and punctuation work, here, as a way to stress the high performativity of feels culture's aesthetics—a staple of feelspeak and its materiality. Feelspeak is not only a collective intimacy but these performative elements are affective tokens acknowledging ownership: Liss owns their own performance of emotions, in comments; by using feelspeak they revendicate that such a performance of affect belongs to them and has worth. This kind of effusive materiality constructs the visual aspect of feelspeak, and also encompasses declarations of embodied affect, as I go on to explore. Feelspeak thus combines individual and collective manifestations of affect through their discursive norms.

7.4) *Dramafeels* as performing affect: dramatisation of bodily reactions and overwhelming emotions in feels culture

As I was sampling and analysing comments left on *SKR* and *The Truth*, I noticed that recurring intense, emotional feedback cycles were being embodied by both fan readers (in comments) and fan writers (in their reply to comments). These embodiments are taking the

material form of bodily reactions and overwhelming emotional states; that it to say, fans carry on using feelspeak's logic of exaggeration and dramatisation to convey thanks not only visually (with punctuation, capitalisation, and emojis) but also more discursively. This material, I have analysed, can be differentiated from typical feelspeak as another discourse of affect with its specific norms, caught in a familiar practice of affective dramatisation. Hence the portmanteau term I will use: dramafeels.

For example, Theresa says "Gah, I was DESTROYED but in a good way" about *SKR*, to which Liss answers "I owe you my LIFE for this comment!!!" Liss comments "I don't know if I have words to accurately express what I'm feeling right now?????????" to FalsePremise, who says to Liss in another chapter "I will DIE OF HAPPINESS" as a way to convey involvement in the affective labour of both writer and reader. Yet, these overwhelming emotional states, statements featuring the expression of bodily reactions, are responses that are performed: what is important is conveying bodily affect as thanks for the other fan, following material rules to be taken seriously. Psychoanalysing the reply is neither possible nor useful here. Instead, we can analyse feels as a social practice: it is not feeling sad, or happy, or whatever the fan illustrates—it is more complicated as we understand that they are dramatisations of complex acts of subject positioning.

Wetherell explains that "it is a useful stretch to think of 'communities of affect', following the lead of historians, investigating the ways in which sub-groups and sites of social relations become defined through distinctive, recurring affective activities and performances. Then, so much of public affect is communicative and bound up with communicative practices such as narrative. Affective-discursive practices such as 'doing righteous indignation' or 'doing being the victim' are so salient and crucial in political life and yet are deeply methodical and mannered" (in Wetherell and Beer, 2014: 1). Here, it is about 'doing being the thankful and emotionally involved fan' through methods of normed discourse. This entails, in ways more finely tuned than feelspeak, the use of selective capitalisation and punctuation, along with the use of hyperbole in figurative speech. What is conveyed here is the creation of a spectacle of embodied affective reaction to the spread media at hand (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Stein claims that "in this culture of feels, participants perform emotional responses to media and to one another and, in so doing, articulate community bonds based on their playful enactment of shared investment in media narratives, characters, and storyworlds" (2019: 84). So, going beyond feels culture as feelspeak, I claim that the performance of bodily reactions

and overwhelming emotion are practices of good fan behaviour: the more extreme, the more worthy it becomes, especially from fan readers. For example, Liss says in multiple comments to FalsePremise "SCREAMING!" (notice the combined use of capitalisation to inflect more strength to the performed action), "that made me clutch the cat and make genuine squealing noises," "AuGH anyway it gave me a lot of emotions" (notice the onomatopoeia to convey affect visually), "I laughed out loud," and many other instances of bodily reactions.

This performance of bodily reactions recurs in the hundreds of comments in my larger sample and the dozen I have shortlisted here. There is a focus on the involvement of the body upon the reading of the fic. Theresa says that "it made me smile, cry, laugh, sigh, worry, and feel like it would all be okay." Theresa is conveying affective and social worth to match the gift of *SKR*: "I could go on forever". There is an emphasis on affective immersion as a token of intimate reaction, to give thanks to the author, giving movement to the circulation of affect: "The bulldog attack and Spock fighting them off and Jim flying them home made me forget how to breathe for a while. So tense!"

Theresa explains in her interview that "one of the things I am looking to get out of it is the satisfaction of a happy ending. I feel longing, happiness, and fondness for the characters. And yes, sexual arousal when that is part of the story. Basically, *I want to feel fulfilled at the end of the story*, but I don't mind hurting to get there" (emphasis mine). It highlights community bonds between the writer and reader, and the strength of the reader-writer contract (chapter 5)—whatever Theresa feels makes her *do* dramafeels in leaving a comment that opens an affective cycle between her, Liss, *SKR*, and other comments, fulfilling her end of the contract.

My comment samples from *SKR* and *The Truth* offer much data on bodily reactions and overwhelming affective responses. The affect produced by such comments following feels culture norms is being circulated as fans writers answer with thanks—thanks I will analyse in more depth in the following part of this chapter. To return to affect, Liss comments that "I literally snapped my fingers. (I go to a lot of poetry slams, so snapping fingers is how I show appreciation for pretty words, but it's a lot less effective when the writer of those words isn't actually in the room. XD)". This is a way for Liss to make FalsePremise a witness to the effect *The Truth* has on them: what is important is not whether Liss actually snapped fingers, but rather the very haptic materiality that Liss generates discursively, gathering affect around the words in order to affect FalsePremise, answering the gift of *The Truth*.

In the same vein, Musa comments on *SKR*: "When I hit the later chapters, I actually had to step away for a couple of days because of how anxious I was that something awful was going to happen to one or both of them." With this sentence, Musa channels the circulation of affect within the K/S fandom. In effect, she tells Liss of her reaction in order to spread this overwhelming affect—affect, under the form of a discursive gift, is being circulated and spread.

Indeed, Wetherell explains that "any particular instance of the circulation of affect [...] involves understanding a raft of processes: body capacities to re-enact the actions of others; [...] the power of words; the affective-discursive genres personal and social histories provide which channel communal affect; inter-subjective negotiations; consideration of the cultural and social limits on identification and empathy; and exploration of practices of authorisation, legitimation and resistance, not to mention analyses of the containing institutions, spaces and media of circulation" (2012: 142). In the same way, fic commenters are involved in the circulation of affect through the processes of embodied re-enactment of media creators' actions; the repetition of the social practice of reading and commenting initiates them to the power of words (and their norms: feelspeak, dramafeels, profeels...). They are involved in the processes that give them authority through the channelling of communal affect, and analyse spreadable media.

Liss answers to this comment by writing "Oh my gosh, thank you SO MUCH. Hearing that it affected you and resonated with you is just absolutely the single greatest compliment I can receive! Thank you for telling me that you actually had to step away from it for a little while!!!!!". This affective feedback cycle is especially interesting to analyse with Liss' interview in mind:

> "But oh man, COMMENTS. Given I started out with such low expectations for the response, anytime ANYONE comments on my fanfiction, I get this almost pain in my chest because I'm just so happy? Sometimes I'll see how many kudos a fic has (I don't look at numbers often, so it's usually a surprise) and just be like "THIS MANY people read this story?? And LIKED IT?" I mean, it's incredible? [...] When someone comments (and usually makes me cry, haha) I want to interact with that comment because I want them to know how grateful I am. Writing can be so solitary — lonely even! — but fandom makes it an interactive experience." (Liss, writer)

By transforming the affective experience of the fic into more defined emotionality (by writing a comment), both fic and comments accumulate transactional value—an accretion of affect

which circulates amongst fan writer and reader, exchanging tokens of gratitude as they spread media. This is what is happening with *SKR*, Musa, and Liss; along with the hundreds of other commenters on *SKR*. Liss documents how fandom makes writing an "interactive experience"—I would specify that this experience Liss describes is the circulation of affect as economy (they want to "interact"). Liss understands comments on their fic as gratitude, which they try to respond to according to feels culture practices that are necessary to be taken seriously (and convey maximum appreciation). Liss even uses feelspeak in this part of the interview, reverting back to fandom practices (use of capitalisation, effusive syntax, onomatopoeia, punctuation) to convey their involvement in the affect economy. An emotional reaction is being performed to come across as impactful.

Bellewa, then, comments on *SKR* that "time and time again i am reminded of the magic of writing, of the pain, joy, love, and adventure one can experience in hundreds of thousands of words. no words can describe the pain and love i felt during the course of this fic. gosh, i never wanted this to end." Bellewa, here, has written an affective performance of overflowing emotion to convey thanks and appreciation to Liss ("no words can describe"). Comments are written to be interacted with (even if they are not always answered immediately), an inherent part of the affect economy within fandom, leaving traces of the reader-writer contract online.

Similarly, PageofWands comments on *SKR*:

> *takes a deep breath* I LOVE THIS STORY SO MUCH AHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhh! !!!!!!! I can hardly stand how AMAZING it is!!!!!!!!!!! So much so that despite binge-reading it like an addict, I had to stop and scream in the comments several times along the way o__O

Here, there is a mix of more visual feelspeak with the performance of "emotional responses to media and to one another" (Stein, 2019: 84). What is especially interesting to note is the fact that PageofWands describes not only a reaction but also a practice, as they "had to stop and scream in the comments" as an answer to the fic (it is another bodily response). Here, affect is both binding and circulating and rewarding the writer through a feedback system.

We have seen that feels culture comprises not only feelspeak but rather a spectrum, starting with feelspeak and including profeels; in this part of the chapter, I have focused on the recurrence of bodily reactions and overwhelming affect being performed through dramafeels. It is all part of an affect economy; yet, I argue there is another way in which affective discourse can be tokenised and given social worth.

7.5) Serious tokens of appreciation: conveying thanks and relating the reading experience to personal circumstances with *truefeels*

As we have seen, feels culture is a material culture that begins with Stein's feelspeak; what kind of other affective-discursive registers are at play? After the performance of bodily reactions and overwhelming affect (dramafeels), I suggest another register (that oscillates more towards profeels than feelspeak on the spectrum of feels culture) is indeed occurring. It is a register that enables tokenisation of gratitude in the affect economy: taking a simple form, in the form of thanks, and a more complex form, in the explicit relating of the fic to the reader's personal circumstances, with the drive to convey gratitude. Truefeels are named as such because through the conveying of thanks, there is a mobilisation of discourse asserting 'truth' in the reaction to the fic: be it the use of specific vernacular to say thanks, or the activation of lived experiences to assert truth in the comment.

For example, in the four comments Liss sent to FalsePremise and FalsePremise's replies on chapter 10, 11, 15, and 20 of *The Truth*, they exchanged 9 'thank yous' and 6 paraphrases of thanks to convey gratitude to each other. In a reply to a *SKR* comment by Musa, who was saying thank you, Liss answers "Thank you thank you thank you thank you for reading, and for leaving such a kind and thoughtful comment! It means so much to me I can hardly even convey!!!!!! <3 <3 Thank you!!!!!!!". The repetition of thanks, here, is mixed with feelspeak-typical practices to perform as much gratitude as possible towards Musa.

Jenkins et al. explain that "indeed, when we describe such goods and services as "free," we mean that people have not purchased them with money, not that they have not paid for them via some other means. In each case, the producers and laborers working for "free" expect some form of (social) payment, and each person provides his or her time and labor under an expectation that others will contribute similarly, to the benefit of all" (2013: 74). Following this mechanism of the gift economy, I claim that the exchange of 'thanks' is social payment, used in conjunction with truefeels to acknowledge the labour of the fanfiction writer. This discursive strategy is a type of discourse of affect to get worth across in order to reach the fan who, by the repetition of feels culture material, takes part in a social practice that creates norms such as truefeels.

Further, alongside textual depictions such as feelspeak, dramafeels, and truefeels, the fan bodies need to be considered in terms of their thick materiality; such materiality being manifested, in the light of my own data, as the inclusion of personal circumstances within feels culture. In effect, for example, Liss' writing practice is focused on their own experience with feels culture: "I wouldn't say I write with readers specifically in mind? I don't know if that's terrible or not, haha! I mean, I want to convey emotions and I want the readers to be affected by what I'm writing, but usually while I'm in the thick of it, I'm more focused on how I feel writing it." While Liss is focused on how they feel, *SKR* ends up moving fans in specific ways that grant affective reactions a place within feels culture.

Further along the feels culture spectrum, different from the types of discourses of affect identified as feelspeak and dramafeels, appears a relation between the materiality of the body of the fan and the emotional involvement in the fic. For example, Theresa says in a comment on *SKR* "I took this story with me through several days of scary real life stuff and a plane ride that lasted forever," which works as a way of authenticating the genuine performance of being affected by *SKR*. Liss answers "I'm so glad this story could be with you during a scary time, and so glad that it could make you smile," hence closing the cycle of gift (worth) exchange between *SKR*, Theresa, and Liss. This recurs in almost all of my sampled comments: for example, PageofWands writes "it brought me so much joy in a tough time." PageofWands uses the truth of their 'tough time' to assert how the 'joy' that fic brought has been appreciated by the reader.

In a similar way, pastmydancingdays has written about how FalsePremise's inclusion of 'good' consent practices resonated with them; to "the inclusion of consent and safety is really important!!" FalsePremise answers "Thanks for noticing the consent and safety stuff too. That's important to me to include." Here, she relates to her own personal history to convey thanks to the commenter. What is interesting here is how *The Truth* was written from a place of personal experience, as FalsePremise indicated in her interview, to resonate with the personal experiences of a fan as a part of feels culture's reaction leitmotiv. FalsePremise indeed explains that "yes, I definitely slip issues that are important to me into the fic. But in a way that isn't too in the reader's face. At least that's what I'm going for!" which is here manifested by the affective feedback cycle between pastmydancingdays, FalsePremise, and *The Truth*. As Wetherell suggests, "it is so obvious that semiosis and affect are inextricably intertwined, not just in the production of 'atmospheres', spaces and relations but in their

effects and in subsequent patterns of engagement" (in Wetherell and Beer, 2014: 1). This affect economy is thus onto-formed in social practice where the subject reveals social positioning and personal history; feels culture's affective-discursive formations disclose social formations such as a feminist agenda (importance of consent) through the commenting as part of a gift economy. There is social worth in the social positioning of fans.

A fic speaking to a fan's personal circumstances is a way to bring out the materiality of the body and how is affect embodied by the reader—how the fic (which was not written for them specifically) ends up being personally relevant. When a fan speaks about how the fic resonated with them personally, evocating intimate situations, they are using a professional-looking register—as it works to be taken seriously in this instance—that in fact is expanding the ownership of the text from the author to the numerous fan readers. In other words, it is when multiple personal stories are told (in comments), as token of appreciation and a testimony of involvement in the fic world, that the ownership of such intimate reactions is made collective. Fans share their personal stories as thanks with a different register than feelspeak, yet they are indeed taking part in feels culture: this is what I call truefeels, or the relating to personal circumstances in order to bring authority to the conveying of thanks, a discourse of affect based upon 'truth' and the willingness to make intimate experiences publicly collective.

Stein claims that professional registers "rein in excessive emotion and performativity in favor of a more measured professionalism. These discourses of professionalism in millennial fandom urge fan creators to downplay excess emotion, collective or otherwise, in favor of individual literary and artistic restraint" (2015: 159). To this I argue that other kinds of professional registers are possible, ones where it visually and materially matches with literary restraint yet conveys the performance of deep, collective emotion that comes with the sharing of personal stories. For example, naniyo has written about *The Truth* "I love stories that explore the characters' insecurities, fears, and feelings of shame and guilt, and this one really hits home so well." naniyo shares intimate reactions ("hits home so well") and uses a register of visually professional-inspired discourse. To be taken seriously here, fans employ a practice of professional reaction (something Stein sees as personal and rational) in the typical way of feels culture—as culture of emotional answer and collective intimacy.

This being said, there is one more subtle, professional-looking register that Stein did not include in her feels culture, instead arguing that writing in a professional register is

detached from feels, but that does belong to feels culture as complementary to feelspeak: profeels. In the light of my data, I argue that it does exist, which I will uncover in the next part as the final section of my feels culture spectrum overview.

7.6) Discourses of professionalism: *profeels*, or acknowledging the labour around writing, and the analysis of character emotional arcs

As described earlier in this chapter, I suggest that what Stein would consider professionalism can be indeed a part of feels culture itself. It is a discursive register that is employed to show engagement *and* that can convey acute emotions in a similar way to feelspeak, only in specific materialisations: while feelspeak, dramafeels, and truefeels are discursive strategies to effectively circulate affective media, like Jenkins' spreading, collective displays of intimate details from the life of the commenter can also visually match with professional aesthetics (or what I term 'profeels'). The profeels register, as initially indicated by Stein, stems from "a call to protect the rights and values of the individual author, and a call to value professionalized skill" (2015: 159). She suggests that it means "subscribing not only to the rules of grammar but to value sets that rein in excessive emotion and performativity in favor of a more measured professionalism. These discourses of professionalism in millennial fandom urge fan creators to downplay excess emotion, collective or otherwise, in favor of individual literary and artistic restraint" (2015: 159). By divorcing rationality from feels culture, I claim that Stein creates a false binary.

In the spectrum of feels culture I have recognised, on its more professional end, that profeels do indeed visually appear as rational and downplaying excess emotion with adherence to grammar rules, serious punctuation and usual rejection of uncanny capitalisation (unlike feelspeak). In the light of my data analysis, I aim to go beyond Stein's dichotomy and interpret profeels' acknowledgement of fan labour (along the acknowledgement of the emotional journey of the characters) as a way for fans to articulate their experience of reading fic and 'doing' feels.

Liss explains that "we all respond to each other not out of obligation, but out of genuine JOY. Whether reading or writing, it all has to be done out of love! If you aren't in fandom for love, for community, for passion and fun — then why are you in fandom? You

know?" which is clearly in line with Jenkins's gift economy "where goods are circulated freely for shared benefit rather than sold for profit" (2009: 119). In putting these two quotes together, I attempt to draw the link between affect economy and gift economy, in terms of feels culture's materiality within spreadable media—that is to say, the circulation of tokens of appreciation as gifts between fans.

For example, *The Truth* reader Burning Amber explains in her interview that "I, personally, [reach out to fanfiction authors] to show appreciation and gratitude." This takes an interesting turn as she comments to FalsePremise "I will probably re-read this chapter slowly again later, savoring the speeches specially." Here, the acknowledgement of FalsePremise's work ("savoring the speeches") is something that deserves to be re-read slowly, a way for Burning Amber to signify that she has enjoyed FalsePremise's writing work. Burning Amber uses a profeels register while articulating her own affective reaction, thus opening wide the spectrum of feels culture. This token of appreciation is being circulated as currency for fan involvement.

On top of this, FalsePremise explains that "I always respond to comments even if it is just with a quick thank you. I think that's just polite. I love knowing that people are reading and enjoying the fic. I love it when they say the characterisation worked or when the world building etc is enjoyable for them." Here FalsePremise conflates politeness with profeels, which enables her to be taken seriously with a discursive strategy that indeed downplays emotionality yet does not separate from it. Profeels are a more discreet type of discourse of affect. There is a clear involvement in receiving the tokens of appreciation from fan readers such as Burning Amber or pastmydancingdays— the latter comments "I love how tender and sweet the boys are with each other" and FalsePremise answers "yes, Kirk and Spock are so tender and sweet with each other in so many ways, I imagine their first time would be all tenderness." Both materialise professional-looking registers, yet they are connected to the emotional reaction of the fan *and* act as tokens of appreciation that are taken seriously this way: they are part of feels culture.

Another *The Truth* reader, MyFirstistheFourth, explains in her interview that "sometimes, it is the skill of the author and the beauty and/or complexity of their work that appeals to me and prompts me to speak. I know how it feels to have someone appreciate something I have written and I constantly read others I feel are far better than me and equally or more so deserving of appreciation." Here, MyFirstistheFourth is showing how the gift

economy, with writing labour, is inherently tied to the circulation of affect: it "appeals" to her and "prompts" her to take part in such a cycle of worth. She comments on *The Truth* that she finds it to be "such a creative and engrossing story. SO Inventive!! I loved the Ashtali world you crafted and enjoyed being lost in it with the characters as I read." Here, MyFirstistheFourth is acknowledging the labour of FalsePremise as a writer not only transforming the original *Star Trek* narrative but also working to craft a world and relationships. She even uses a snippet of feelspeak ("SO Inventive!!"), which further shows that feels culture is mobilised through a spectrum and not a binary of feels/professional writing.

Stein explains that "the ethics of professionalism extend into fan communities and to the creative works of fans. These ethics can come directly in conflict with even such a seemingly core fannish value as the fan right to transform. […] Affective collectivity and fan transformation exist in tension with discourses of individual professionalism and idea ownership" (2015: 160). I argue that this dichotomy between ethics of professionalism and the fan 'right to transform' needs to be dismantled and its parts re-connected to the feels culture spectrum as a whole. In effect, transforming does not exclude identities of visually individual professionalism: profeels reconcile the two. Fans acknowledge the labour of the fan writer, their own vision of K/S, while making collective the worth it gathers. Profeels detach from Stein's initial idea of individual professionalism to evolve, in the light of my own data, towards collective intimacy.

For example, bellewa has commented on *SKR*: "i am reminded of the magic of writing, of the pain, joy, love, and adventure one can experience," "i think you striked a good balance with each character" and "neat characterization, and their relationship was a treat to watch unfold." For them, Sha Ka Ree is seen as "a prison, then a paradise" where "we see their vulnerabilites and tender moments, but they aren't weak or overly dependent on each other, and we see their strength shine through" and where "seeing [Spock] embracing his feelings was lovely. and jim, so sweet and compassionate. what a beautiful bond they shared; the strength and devotion was absolutely stunning. their hardships made their love satisfying." These comment extracts all refer to Liss' ability to transform the original work of *Star Trek*, yet doing so following a professional register ("the magic of writing," "you striked a good balance," "we see their vulnerabilities," "their hardships"). Liss uses feelspeak in the comments as a discursive strategy to express their own tokenisation of appreciation. In the

same way, bellewa uses a profeels register as discursive strategy in the comments—feelspeak and profeels are thus ends of a spectrum of feels culture, regrouping the wide array of discursive strategies to be taken seriously as they perform affective reactions to other fans' work. It is indeed a gift economy where affect is being tokenised in specific ways then circulated in intense cycles of worth.

A last example is Musa, who commented on *SKR*: "I read this fic over the course of several days, enjoying it like a fine wine, and now that I've finished it I honestly wish I could scrub the words from my brain so I could start it anew and read it for the first time." This section of her comment brings light onto the feedback cycle process. In effect, she says that she read the fic "enjoying it like a fine wine," giving worth to Liss' work; then, by adding she wanted to "start it anew and read it for the first time," she hints at the fact that she might read it again, and that is part of her own enjoyment of K/S; she also hints at other readers who might read it for the first time they should enjoy it "like a fine wine" too. By commenting this, Musa performs an affective reaction to *SKR* while inscribing her own work—being a reader— as part of the circulation of affective currency. By using a profeels register, she is unfolding her strategy to be taken seriously by Liss in order to convey thanks, as part of the reader-writer contract. Once again, the cycle is ongoing.

7.7)   Conclusion

What appears within comments and fan texts as an exchange of reasons why fans liked a fic, or an exchange of thanks, or an exchange of reasons why they transform the original media, is in fact a vehicle for the circulation of affect and inherently tied to the spreading of media, producing feelings of belonging (Ferreday, 2009). Fan comments and fan texts are a conversation, where fans are using specific discursive registers across the feels culture spectrum for specific strategies of being understood, acknowledged, grateful, conveying thanks as a way to make affect accrue and circulate around feedback loops. The discursive strategies take form in the materialisation of text, be it feelspeak (with punctuation, emojis, capitalisation) as Stein described feels culture initially, or more developed performative occurrences such as dramafeels (the expression of bodily reactions and overwhelming affect). Then, we slide into more professional-looking discourse with a focus on the tokenisation itself of the affective reaction (with emphasised formulae of thanks) and the collectivisation of

professional discourse as it is related to intimate, shared personal circumstances: truefeels. Finally, I claim we can dispute Stein's initial dichotomy of feels/professionality with the acknowledgement of fan labour (with character emotional arcs and the praise of both the use of the source material and the original invention of fic) as a way to be feeding into the affective worth cycles at play in K/S fandom: this is a register of profeels. There is a dramatisation of the embodiment of the affective discourse, indeed materialising a spectrum of feels culture: feels culture is not only the performance of emotion, but also a deeply affective and material discourse that is not flowing freely from fan to fan, but instead caught in a familiar practice that sees affect as embodied. By seeing various norms repeated over time through registers of feelspeak, dramafeels, truefeels, and profeels, this affect 'gift' economy reveals social practices of positioning such as gender, sexuality, personal history, or feminist agendas in the spreading of media.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This thesis, *(En)Gendering Difference: A fourth-wave account of K/S fanfiction as a literature, performance, and community of affect* has analysed, through a qualitative study, fan experiences of literary, gendered, queer, and affective practices within the *Star Trek* fandom. Focusing on slash fanfiction, namely K/S (Kirk and Spock being lovers), I have looked into two main lines of enquiry: *how does fanfiction challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality in mainstream media content? And, what does the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction?*

Through a considered and multidimensional theoretical framework, a careful methodology including a critical discourse analysis of interviews of fic writers and fans, reading of fics, and consideration of fans' online interactions through comments, I investigated how writerly and readerly practices have developed around representations of Kirk and Spock as romantically and sexually involved. Inscribing itself in the large corpus of academic works on *Star Trek* (and specifically *Star Trek* fan culture) since the 1970s, as well as the more recent fourth waves of fan studies and of feminism, this thesis has contributed to scholarly debates around practices of gender and sexuality in slash, as well as the feminist and pedagogic nature of fic writing, and the circulation of affect in fan communities. This conclusion considers my original contribution to knowledge, the limitations of my research, and finally offers an end note to close this body of work. I aim to have contributed to the field of fan studies through three accounts of feminist epistemology: fic as textual performance, fic as gender production, and fic as community. For the first, I argue fic is *performed literature*, for the second, a list of hegemonic and non-hegemonic norm-making performances of gender and sexuality; for the third, I disclose four discourses of 'feels' happening within the K/S fandom. In terms of the limitations in this thesis, I chose the *Star Trek* fandom in which fic centres on Kirk and Spock, but other *Star Trek* stories exist and many other fandoms exist, as well as other romantic pairings within fic (and not always of two men). Looking at less popular fanfiction could also yield relevant analysis going forward. Finally, insights from this study can increase our understanding of the circulation of affect, the development of new norms, and

the formation of communities in many other contexts. Slash fanfiction, highlighting the diversity of fans and the labour these fans put into their enjoyment of a given media, reveals a real and deep need for more diversity on screen and in the media. As K/S fic is adjacent to *Star Trek* yet deeply influential in online communities, sometimes creating material that fans value more than some iterations of the original media, cultural importance and an acknowledgement of fan labour should be given to K/Sers. Indeed, Kirk and Spock were invented by Gene Roddenberry in 1966, yet his legacy has engendered (and 'gendered') a huge number of invaluable stories embodying feminist attempts at creating better worlds. This thesis is a reflection on these stories and the community they belong to, hoping to show fandom-specific practices to the mainstream as a way to 'boldly go where no one has gone before'.

8.1) Original contribution to knowledge: Performance, pleasure and exchange—the dynamics of K/S

I have mapped out how the performance of gender and sexuality, within the fic texts, works alongside the representations of Kirk and Spock created by fan writers. In my analysis I have argued that fans have translated and retheorised gender (and sexuality) into something pleasurable, building their community around new kinds of normative knowledge about identity, gender, and feminism. These are a set of norms around 'good' (healthy) masculinity and 'good' (queer) relationships; looking at how fans blend normative and non-normative concepts to create a take on K/S that shows a multiplication, challenging, and questioning of gender categories, I drew upon hegemonic femininity, homonormativity, consent and the queer gaze as sex roles can be challenged during K/S sex; even whole alien races can challenge the production of sexuality and gender in this instance.

Researching the types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction in fic as an intentional writing practice allowed me to focus on fic writers: I asked what the writing made happen within/around the fans by looking at how fans considered their own writing practices. I made out three kinds of pedagogies that were embedded in popular K/S fic: a refusal to identify as teachers (Liss and Pensive), a more discreet kind of pedagogy (FalsePremise), and a self-aware politically motivated pedagogy (Waldorph and Anna) offered

through their writing practices. In the first instance, despite fan writers' claim that they refuse to purposefully teach what they believe in, I claim there is a process of pedagogic transmission that takes shape. In the second instance, the pedagogic transmission (of, above all, feminism) is done under an enforcing of 'good' characterisation and 'good' gendering practices. Then, in the third instance, is the self-conscious will to educate fan readers on matters close to their heart, i.e., intersectional feminism—linking back to fourth-wave feminism. By considering their work as feminist and political, fan writers reflect on the conversation and power relations happening between writers and readers—and, often, the blurring of those boundaries which were faint to begin with.

I also added to fan scholar debates of fic as literature and fic as drama, offering an analysis that, in the light of my data, creates K/S as a hybrid genre: fic as 'performed literature'. By this I mean that according to my data, slash is a political practice, teaching fans media literacy, going beyond issues of resistance or subtext (whether K/S is visible in the original media or whether it is a purely imaginative premise) to end up as a sharing of performances— creating an archive through communal practices. I argue the writing enabled media literacy through the characters of Kirk and Spock, focusing on the development of body *and* mind, repetition and a polysemy of voices (with complex characters being what drives the fans' writing practice), and more precisely learning to work with encoding, decoding, and re-encoding practices (Woledge, 2005, Hall, 1980) on a very wide level.

Yet, I argue another side of the slash fic experience needed to be analysed: I focused on fic as a communal practice. Indeed, when I asked 'what did the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction,' data about the relationship between the fan readers and fic writers helped me make out affective tokens being circulated in fandom. Looking at norms in the materialisation and consequent circulation of affect within fandom, this chapter considered the traces left by affective feedback cycles, using discourse analysis, to understand how affective tokens move around in the digital network of K/S fandom. I first situated feels culture (Stein, 2015) within slash fandom, then looked at the economies at play there: mainly, a gift economy (Jenkins et al., 2013) that made embodied affect—feels—circulate. After mapping out the norms analysed in the data with regards to feels culture, I saw there were four registers of feels that were discursively used in reader/writer interactions: I argue my data made evident the

circulation of affect through gift economies at play in K/S circles: feelspeak, dramafeels, truefeels, and profeels.

Feelspeak refers to a highly performative kind of feels culture (Stein, 2015) with effusive punctuation, use of emojis, and expansive capitalisation that are meant to convey enthusiasm. Dramafeels, then, are a 'discursive embodiment' of bodily reactions and overwhelming emotional states; that is to say, fans carry on using feelspeak's logic of exaggeration and dramatisation to convey thanks not only visually (with punctuation, capitalisation, and emojis) but also more discursively, a kind of 'affective dramatisation' through the spectacle of bodily acts. As for truefeels, they are a register that enables tokenisation of gratitude in the affect economy: taking a simple form, in the form of thanks, and a more complex form, in the relatedness of the fic to the reader's personal circumstances, with the drive to convey gratitude. Finally, profeels, the last of the four discourses at play in feels culture, visually appear as rational and downplaying excess emotion with adherence to grammar rules, standard punctuation and, usually, rejection of uncanny capitalisation (unlike feelspeak). Yet, going beyond Stein's dichotomy of feels/professionalism, I interpreted profeels' acknowledgement of fan labour (along the acknowledgement of the emotional journey of the characters) as a way for fans to articulate their experience of reading fic and *doing* feels.

To conclude, my argument in this thesis has focused on how fanfic challenged dominant forms of gender and sexuality, as well as how such writing created specific conventions (how to be a 'good' fan, write a 'good' queer man), practices (how to properly convey 'feels'), and processes of interaction (with the gift economy making affect circulate).

I have developed my thesis through the lens of intersectionality and inter-connection—within gender theory debates, within fan studies debates, and overall as through a theoretical framework that is networked with other fields such as affect and literacy. The first question, *How does fanfiction challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality in mainstream media content?* can best be answered by the data analysis present in **chapter 6**. Fanfiction does challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality present in *Star Trek* by enforcing other, sanctioned norms around the performance of gender and sexuality about what it means to be a 'good' fic writer and writing 'good' characterisation. As Ferreday explains, "by paying attention to the ways in which specific online communities create norms, and provide spaces in which their members are able to 'cite' those norms, it should become

possible to explain how those communities work to produce a sense of identification in the user" (2009: 29). I argue that specific discourses pertaining to the performance of gender and sexuality within slash fic indeed produce a sense of identification in the fan, concerning both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic types of norms.

The hegemonic norms at play in K/S slash are as follows: first, the identification of some behaviours as pertaining to a repurposed hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007, Connell, 1995, Paetcher, 2018). Departing from Schippers and Connell, who claim that hegemonic femininity forms a complementary and hierarchical relationship to hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007), Paetcher offers a critique of such gendered production by stating the conundrum of men exhibiting typically 'feminine' practices and desires—desire for other men, weakness or compliance, for example (2018). I thus offer a repurposed hegemonic femininity where Kirk and Spock exhibit typically 'feminine' behaviours and characterisation, which could fall into the spectrum of the original hegemonic femininity (with often-gendering practices such as tender longing, gentleness, daintiness, desire for other men, weakness, and so on), but do not guarantee a hierarchical relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, gender is not just a blend of "masculine" and "feminine" as according to the author (Schippers, 2007); it is also produced through the specific process of referencing hegemonic femininity, yet is activated by the need to find relief from hegemonic masculinity. This is the first practice that challenges dominant norms of gender and sexuality.

The second 'hegemonic' practice that challenges dominant norms of gender and sexuality is the double-edged repurposed concept of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002, 2003) which operates in all of the fics I have analysed. According to Duggan, homonormativity is anchored in domesticity and consumption (2002); adjacent to sexual and gender politics, it upholds dominant heteronormative assumptions 'transformed', in this case, for same-sex couples—for example, marriage, domesticity, child-rearing, and so on and so forth. I argue that within slash fanfiction a kind of homonormativity is being produced, yet I align it with the gender and sexual politics so peculiar to K/S, as a tool to legitimise queerness. While heteronormative institutions may depoliticise gay culture, the fans' feminism and own queerness as women and non-binary people (or bisexual, gay) do sometimes offer a critical reading of the institutions they enforce in K/S; it is precisely the subversion of gender categories within gender production that challenges and questions an initial, surface reading and application of Duggan's homonormativity to fic.

Additionally, I have analysed in the fics from my sample a focus on the establishment of consent as necessary for intimacy—the "consent is sexy" movement, as labelled by fans themselves. The fan writers all uphold a norm of asking for consent before partaking in sexual—even platonic—activities, maybe with the downside of portraying consent as something more clear-cut than in real life. That is to say, in K/S fans write *explicit verbalised consent*, a practice that for them is indispensable for producing 'true' masculinity.

Another way fans challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality in slash fic is the subversion of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999) into what I call a queer gaze. Instead of objectifying the source of their desire, Kirk or Spock, the characters convey such desire in an erotic, deconstructed gaze that respects the boundaries and intimacy of the other. The other retains his bodily autonomy and is not importuned by power relations that objectify him: what the fans often call a "soft" masculinity, characterised by the softness of the gaze that carries desire towards the male-coded body.

Moreover, fans disrupt hegemonic or heterosexual-based sex roles in their writing of sex scenes between Kirk and Spock. Their gendering processes are self-reflexive and mindful of the gendered body—writing 'good' masculinities through Kirk and Spock also means, then, that they switch up sex roles into a coupling that cannot be reduced to a hegemonically heterosexual encounter where one man is 'masculine' or active and the other 'feminine' or passive.

Yet, as a concluding remark, fans also challenge dominant norms of gender and sexuality by making the most of the *Star Trek* universe, mainly, by exploring the affordances opened by the science-fiction of the original media. A striking example is FalsePremise's fic about the Ashtahli, a race of aliens that are sequential hermaphrodites—inspired by a real identity in the realm of animals on Earth. Gender production is literally side-stepped; FalsePremise uses biology to explore the relationship between sex, gender, and felt identity. She uses "normal" labels to make the "unintelligible" intelligible, this makes obvious the need for us humans to produce gender everywhere, even upon bodies that go beyond our understanding of human gender.

The second question, *What does the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction?* can be better answered by the data analysis presented in **chapters 5 and 7.** First, in chapter 5, I had to situate my enquiry across the theoretical spectrum of fic as a specific kind of 'literature'. While

often considered as peripheral to dominant definitions of literature, as a literature that is transformative or specific (Busse, 2017; Kaplan, 2006; Stasi, 2006; Jenkins, [1992] 2013; Sandvoss, 2014, Hellekson and Busse, 2006, 2014), Busse has argued that fic should be considered through the lens of a new form of literary theory (2017). She voiced the need for a shift in debates within the field of fan studies—by considering slash fic as transformative literature only, we have lacked the tools to improve our understanding of such texts. Coppa (2006) has addressed this conundrum with a new perspective to answer it: analysing fic as drama, a production of Kirk and Spock's relationship where each iteration has the same value as another (and where intimacy is performance). Building on Coppa's perspective, I have argued that the tension between analysing fic as drama and analysing fic as literature can open new ways of thinking about fic as a genre, which then can inform us on what this genre could make happen within fandom. By considering fic as an intentional writing and community-based practice, it has led me to consider new ways in which fic could be understood as a hybrid genre.

Reconciling the theoretical divide between literature and drama, I offered an analysis of fic as performed literature that encompasses dramatic features, considering the bodies of the characters as a storytelling medium which reveals several kinds of pedagogy. Feeding from and filling up archives; I joined Derecho's 'archontic literature' or literature of archives (2006) and De Kosnik's archive of performances (2015) conceptualising fic as drama. This allowed me to build up on both literary and dramatic theorisations of slash fic to create a new term, *performed literature,* which reconciles views of drama (as performance) and literature (as professionally published). This shows in a polysemy of voices, a focus on bodies as vector for emotions and storylines, and the use of intimatopia (Woledge, 2006). Going further and adding to the field of fanfiction research, Woledge has introduced Stuart Hall's concept of encoding/decoding (1980) to K/S, which feeds back to the pedagogies at play in slash fic. Indeed, by decoding the media 'in a way that is right', fans are encoding their own take on 'good' relationships and 'good' masculinities through Kirk and Spock. By bringing together theories of literature, drama, archives and literacy, I have discovered how fans are creating specific kinds of pedagogy—this new perspective reveals a previously unrecognised dynamic in the fan community.

Further considering the question, *What does the writing make happen within/around the fans and through what types of conventions, practices, and processes of interaction?* I have

in **chapter 7** worked to expand the understanding of feels culture (Stein, 2015) within the theoretical cross-over of affect and fan studies. Fans exchanging comments about why they liked a fic, as thanks, or the discussing transformations of the original media, in fact may be read in terms of Ferreday's theorisation of affect in online communities. From this perspective, text can be seen as a vehicle for the circulation of affect, producing feelings of belonging (2009), making private affective experience public, and doing so in ways which reflect a complex aesthetics. In this chapter, I thus develop a new understanding of feels culture, which connects Stein's work with Jenkins' gift economy and Ferreday's framing of affect through a 'sense of community'. This community is the key tenet of feels culture, as seen in the exchange of comments—affective-discursive practices that in the end fuel a gift economy (Jenkins, 2006). By bringing together affect, discourse, and social theory, my research contributes to the fourth wave of fan studies through its focus on intersectionality, and also opens debates around the creation of slash politics around the writing and reading practices of K/S.

8.2) Limitations of my research: what are the boundaries defining my thesis, and where might future research turn?

As with all research, there are limitations to what is possible within the constraints of a PhD; this section thus considers how this work may be developed and built upon in the future. Other *Star Trek* stories exist alongside K/S, as do many other fandoms. The fanfictions I decided to focus on were stand-alone and could be read with knowledge of either *Star Trek: The Original Series* (TV series from 1967 to 1969 then films) and/or *Star Trek: Alternate Original Series* (movie remakes started in 2009), both of which contain Kirk and Spock timelines, and with which I'm deeply familiar with. But there exist many other iterations of *Star Trek* and accompanying fics, as well as other fandoms —AO3 registers more than 54,070 fandoms. It would be impossible to study every fandom in one study, and I chose to focus on *Star Trek* K/S due to my affective involvement in it, my knowledge of its intricacies and history, its status as the first slash fic, and the tradition of using K/S as a springboard for deeper understanding of fandom, shipping, and fanfiction practices. The methodologies I've used could be applied to other fandoms in order to see the interrelations between the fic, the fans

and the writers on digital platforms, which is the multi-layered methodological contribution of this thesis.

Second, I chose to focus on the most popular fan practice, fanfiction writing and reading. Fanfiction is one of the many fan practices at play in the *Star Trek* fandom. Indeed, other popular practices—sometimes coupled with a fic story—are fanart (drawings), meta (short essays reflecting on an element of fandom/*Star Trek*), fanvids (video montages of *Star Trek* material to tell a story), cosplay (real-life impersonation of *Star Trek* characters with costumes, acting, including photoshoots often shared in the fandom), and filking (songs written about *Star Trek*). Moving forward, a focus on other fan practices could yield specific insights into the production of gender, sexuality, the circulation of affect, and the pedagogy in fan re-encoding of media. I chose fanfiction for several reasons: my own involvement in and knowledge of K/S fic, the fact that it is a practice widely researched (hence with much theoretical analysis already available), and my chosen focus on written fan practices as a medium for fan expression. That is to say, I was interested in how language was used by fans to experience and interpret *Star Trek*, with its particular vernacular (for example feels culture language) and the fact that almost all fan interactions happen through digital writing (such as blogs and social media).

Although there is a wide variety of fanfiction genres and lengths, the ones I purposively sampled ended up all containing either Hurt/Comfort, Angst, and/or Fluff alongside mature content (sexual and sometimes graphic violence). This is because my sample represents the most popular fanfiction genres and content, amongst AO3's 14,814 works in the K/S category. Their length—*When The Stars Align* with 17,991 words, *The World Well Lost* with 42,811 words, *The Truth* with 54,125 words, *strive seek find yield* with 68,199 words, *Sha Ka Ree* with 180,505 words—spans that of short-story to novella to novel. However, there exist many other types and lengths of fanfiction within the *Star Trek* fandom, from 'drabbles' (100 words) to novel series, to stories spanning over 350,000+ words. Both shorter-length fic genres and lengthy fic series necessitate both more time and sensitivity to the particularities of different forms of theory that I had no space in my own thesis to tackle—but merit examination all the same. Moving forward, an analysis of less popular and differently formatted fics through this method, in relation to the writers' feelings about fan works and the readers' responses, would make an important contribution to the understanding of relationships between the fics, fans and writers on particular platforms.

Third, I chose to focus on the historically studied, most popular pairing in *Star Trek*, K/S. Kirk and Spock, together, have been at the forefront of fan studies from the first wave (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1997). Yet there is an area of K/S fanfiction that I did not have the capacity to study, and which would have necessitated an entire section dedicated to it: femslash K/S. That is to say, the writing and reading of stories about female Kirk and female Spock together (Levin Russo, 2017). Some fans enjoy changing the gender of K/S for specific reasons that deserve full focus. Further, as much as Kirk and Spock are well known and seen as the original slash pairing, there are other pairings that coexist alongside K/S: for example, Spones (Spock/Bones, in which Bones is a nickname for Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer and close friend of Kirk and Spock) or McKirk (Bones/Kirk, who are already established as best friends). There is even another combination, called an OT3, that sees Kirk, Spock, and Bones together as a romantic triumvirate. Due to the extensive variety of these pairings, I chose to focus on only K/S to ensure a manageable scope and detailed analysis. Despite these limitations, I have set out to analyse in depth K/S fanfiction with a theoretical framework that brings together multiple perspectives. My methodology and case for a deeper intersectionality, inter-textuality, and inter-connectedness of theories are informed by and aim in turn to inform fourth-wave fan studies. In the same vein, I hope to do and see more of these rationales at play in fandom research. These could even extend to other areas of popular culture, affect and network theories, gender studies, and identity at large.

8.3) End note

Future work on slash fic might take the shape of digital ethnography or auto-ethnography, textual analysis or psychoanalysis, or more experimental methodologies: multiple, complementary data sources are, I believe, key to richer data and deeper analysis; there are still new ways in which data can be collected and analysed—for example, in-person experiments with feminist new materialisms (see Zarabadi's doctoral thesis, 2021), and so on Yet, I argue that in the ever-evolving, online and immediate growth of fandom, the possibility for detailed, comprehensive quantitative studies should be the focus of future academic work. Indeed, the next steps in fanfic research (and fandom more generally) could follow a rationale that aims to understand the psychographics and diverse identities making up slash fandom.

K/S has been popular since the 70s, both kickstarting research on fanfiction and gathering communities of fans involved in *Star Trek*—even today, with the remake of *Star Trek* in movies starring Chris Pine as Kirk and Zachary Quinto as Spock (*Alternate Original Series*). I argue, in the light of my data and my own personal experience, that fanfic has become a means of expression for many fans to express or feel like they belong to both the fandom they love, and the LGBT+ community. Fanfiction-hosting website AO3, with its 6,095,000 users and 11,520,000 works (as of August 6th, 2023), clearly shows that fanfiction is not an isolated or rare phenomenon. As we have seen throughout this thesis, fic is a useful and unique way for millions of people to express themselves, creating diversity where there is none, and answering their own needs when it comes to media content. Fans use fanfic to feel represented and to learn more about others, about relationships especially, and it would be outdated to think this fairly recent medium for self-expression has no influence on others—fans or not.

For example, AO3 won a Hugo award for Best Related Work in 2019: "Rare for it to include an entire website — and Hugo members have never nominated unpublished fanfiction before. But now the Hugo voters have sent the emphatic message that not only does an entire fanfiction archive constitute a single "related work," but that work is worthy of standing alongside some of the most renowned sci-fi/fantasy authors around" (Romano, 2019). The Hugo award provided AO3 with cultural capital, a significant advance in the battle of fanfiction writers to be recognised by society, and representing the fanfic community's shift from small and disparate groups of likeminded fans to the mass subculture it now represents—enabled by the internet (Stein, 2019). Going forward, a study on fanfiction works that have been re-purposed in published fiction, alongside regular (non-transformative) fiction (such as former fanfics that became *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James or *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare) could draw attention to the freely (monetarily) available fanfic and the works based on existing universes which are traditionally published, or the relationship between fanfic and original fiction.

Furthermore, issues have arisen with the recent development of AI-generated content. AO3 has published a statement as follows: "it is an unfortunate reality that anything that is publicly available online can be used for reasons other than its initial intended purposes. […] Once we became aware that data from AO3 was being included in the Common Crawl dataset — which is used to train AI such as ChatGPT — we put code in place in December 2022

requesting Common Crawl not scrape the Archive again" (Eskici, 2023). While AO3 does not ban AI-generated fanfiction uploaded by real fans, concerns have emerged in the collective discussions happening in fandoms: the pervasive use of AI created a sentiment of violation for fic writers, as their own stories might have been scraped and re-used by AI, and also created a feeling of mistrust among fic readers, as they see AI meddling with the deeply human, affective, intimate practice that is slash. Further study of AI and fan works is indeed necessary to theoretically understand and map out the ethical considerations at play in digital fandom.

K/S slash fanfiction and fandom in general have still much to offer. Yet, after a cyber-attack in July 2023 where AO3 was victim of denial-of-service (Scribner and Glasser, 2023), the question of the preservation and access to slash fanfic archives remains at the forefront of fan agency and scholarship. While fandom has exponentially grown through the internet, digital spaces are not permanent, and since the AO3 cyber-attack there has been a recurrence of voices advocating for the printing of online fic into physical books—some having provided bookbinding tutorials to teach fans how to print stories for safekeeping (Alexander, 2021). Fan studies would benefit from researching the social and historical repercussions of these practices.

This thesis has been a reflection on stories about gender, sexuality, intimacy, pedagogy, diversity, and feminist ethos; as fans 'boldly go where no one has gone before', I look forward to the unfolding of this fourth wave of fan studies, alongside fourth-wave feminist scholarship.

Fic Summaries

Sha Ka Ree, Liss

In *Sha Ka Ree* (abbreviated SKR) Kirk and Spock are strangers on a mission to a seemingly deserted planet signalising an emergency beam. While they attempt to land their spaceship, they are caught in an ion storm, killing the other members of the rescue team. Kirk and Spock, alone, have to survive on the deserted planet. Which, in fact, proves more complicated than imagined when they understand that the ion storm was not a generic storm, but has distorted spacetime and brought them back in time—a time before the United Federation of Planets, where interstellar travel is not at hand, Starfleet not existing. Left utterly alone, Kirk and Spock attempt to rebuild a shuttle to use in the next ion storm, in order to go back to their time and their crew. At the same time their relationship is evolving, as they slowly fall in love and start (no without issues and misunderstandings) a romantic and sexual relationship. The fic revolves around the concept of *home*, and how Kirk and Spock build a home on the planet and with the other, in ways they did not have previously with other people.

The Truth, FalsePremise

In *The Truth* Kirk and Spock are on a diplomatic mission to establish relations of peace between the United Federation of Planets and a newly discovered planet, Tahli. Inhabitants of Tahli, the Ashtahli, are biological sequential hermaphrodites (that is to say, they are born as female and become male as they mature) who live in 'clutches,' or synonym of polyamorous family groups (around 6 or 7 members). Their culture is based upon a core value: truth. They accept anything except lies, and have rituals around the speaking of truth—your own truth, for yourself or others. Spock volunteers to take the Talesh, a truth serum required to begin negotiations—and confesses that he is in love with Kirk in Vulcan terms. Kirk, unaware of this, separately takes the Talesh as well and confesses he is in love with Spock. As the fic unfolds, Kirk and Spock partake in several rituals of truth (including writing confessions on their body) and try to deal with their own feelings for each other, thinking it is unrequited. At long last, they confess to each other and begin a romantic and sexual relationship, which culminates in

an Ashtahli marriage ceremony a few years later. The fic deals with the concept of truth and acceptance, of others but most of all of your own personal truths.

The World Well Lost, Anna

In *The World Well Lost* (abbreviated TWWL), Kirk and Spock meet as teenagers on the planet Tarsus IV, governed by Kodos, who becames a dictator and orders a massacre of half the population to suit his authoritarian regime. Kirk and Spock endure extreme famine and horrors together, hidden from Kodos' soldiers, yet develop a strong bond and fall in love despite the death around them. They attempt to survive until they are discovered and Kirk has to erase his telepathic bond to Spock to save him, which in turn makes Spock forget about all of his time with Kirk on the planet. Years later, Kirk is barely hanging on while Spock seems unaffected by his amnesia, and both are still in love with the other while keeping it secret. Despite this, when Starfleet tasks the Enterprise with hunting Kodos down, the truth comes to the surface—forcing Spock to re-live his shared history with Kirk. Spock is shocked at the state of the telepathic bond he was oblivious to, so painful to Kirk; nonetheless, he understands his love to Kirk was already there on Tarsus IV and they end up together while Kodos is neutralised.

When the Stars Align, Pensive

In *When The Stars* Align (abbreviated WTSA), Kirk and Spock are on a diplomatic mission to Syleese, the jewel of the Kalinae system, rich in mineral resources and advanced technology of great interest to the Federation. The Syleesians are peaceful, yet the mission is not without risk as the planet's entire culture is based upon an elaborate set of courtly manners that dictate how one should behave in every circumstance. Kirk, hiding his feelings from Spock, decides they should proceed with the mission anyway. Yet, while at the very formal dinner welcoming Starfleet to Syleese, Kirk provokes a cultural misunderstanding: his host, Vice-Chancellor Amarr, interprets the Captain's behaviour as being romantically interested in him. Informed about the situation when Amarr privately offers Kirk a key to his room, Kirk declines and explains that he is, in fact, in love with Spock. Yet, as he says this, Spock overhears and as Amarr leaves, Spock confronts Kirk about the reciprocation of his feelings.

They begin a romantic and sexual relationship and seal a treaty between Syleese and the Federation.

strive seek find yield, Waldorph

In *strive seek find yield* (abbreviated SSFY), taking place in a royalty Alternate Universe, Spock is heir to the Federation throne. He is supposed to marry soon. At the same time Sam, Prince of America, abdicates—making his younger brother, Kirk, the new Prince of America on top of being a Lieutenant Commander in Starfleet. Spock chooses Kirk as his fiancé, what was understood as a convenience marriage; a wedding put into place to strengthen the as the Klingons are about to declare war on the United Federation of Planets. Yet, as the story progresses, Kirk and Spock fall in love; the story ends as they win the war against the Klingons and become fathers with two children, Sorrin and T'Laris, helped by an Artificial Gestation Unit.

Glossary

AOS: The *Alternate Original Series*, referring to the film reboot of *Star Trek* by J.J. Abrams started in 2009. Three films are already out (*Star Trek*, *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, *Star Trek: Beyond*) with a fourth one being planned for December 2023.

AO3: The fanfiction hosting website *Archive of Our Own*, created by the non-profit Organization for Transformative Works and Cultures. It is free, open-access, and ad-free.

AU, Alternate Universe: A fanfiction that takes pre-existing characters and puts them in an unfamiliar setting, often following tropes. E.g. "I wrote a K/S royalty!AU" meaning they wrote an alternate universe fic where Kirk and Spock are royalty (see SSFY).

Canon: Knowledge based off official sources from the media at hand. Eg. "Kirk and Spock are canonically t'hy'la!" meaning that it is mentioned in official sources that Kirk and Spock are t'hy'la.

Fanon: Knowledge based off unofficial sources, unlike canon. Fanon is widely accepted amongst fans, often creating tropes in fandom which are massively used. E.g. "pansexual Kirk is the best fanon out there," meaning that fans as a whole interpret Kirk as being pansexual, yet there is no acknowledgement of that in any official source (or canon).

Femslash: A term used for slash fanfiction about female characters being romantically and sexually involved.

Fic, fanfic, fanfiction: A piece of writing about characters of pre-existing media, by fans, for other fans. E.g. "I read K/S fics," meaning they read stories about K/S.

IDIC: Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. "The basis of Vulcan philosophy, celebrating the vast array of variables in the universe" (Memory Alpha wiki, available here: https://memory-alpha.fandom.com/wiki/IDIC).

K/S: Kirk/Spock, or interpreting Kirk and Spock as being in a romantic and sexual relationship.

LiveJournal: A blogging website where people could create journals and communities that were either public or private, created in 1999. It peaked from the mid-2000s to the early 2010s then was slowly replaced by Tumblr by fans.

Meta: A self-reflexive writing practice at use in fan circles, akin to a fan essay.

Pairing: Putting two characters (or more) in a couple setting.

Ship, shipping: The action of putting characters romantically and sexually together. E.g. "I ship Kirk and Spock," meaning they interpret these two characters as being a couple.

T'hy'la: A Vulcan word encapsulating the relationship 'brother, friend, lover' between two people. It was used in a footnote written by Gene Roddenberry in his novelisation of the film *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* in 1979 and has, since, become the most popular term of endearment to K/S shippers. Roddenberry has focused on Spock feeling like a brother to Kirk, yet many slash fans have used it as proof of the 'canon' status of K/S. More information available on Fanlore: https://fanlore.org/wiki/T%27hy%27la_(Vulcan_term).

TOS: *The Original Series*, referring to the original *Star Trek* TV series on air from 1966 to 1969, created by Gene Roddenberry.

Tumblr: A microblogging website created in 2007 on which many fandom online communities have migrated.

Vulcan: The birth planet of Spock. It is common knowledge within the *Star Trek* universe that Vulcans are ruled by logic, hiding their feelings so as to master them and striving for IDIC in all of its forms—for example they are vegetarians, they meditate.

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Appendix A. Consent Form

Letter of Consent

Research project title: (En)Gendering Difference: Slash Fanfiction as Literature of Affect

Research Investigator: Audrey Jean

Research Participant's chosen name:

Research Participant's email:

Research Participant's AO3 username:

Research Participant's tumblr username:

I will read several of your fanfictions published publicly on the website Archive of Our Own (AO3). The following interview will take roughly 2h30 hours. I don't anticipate there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. All collected data will be stored securely and I will keep these recordings anonymous as well as publish your data under the name of your choice.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from UK institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for me to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the information sheet below and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

Your email address will be kept on this encrypted Letter of Consent and only myself will have access to it.

Your email address will never be associated with your chosen name or AO3 username apart from this encrypted Letter of Consent, and will never be published in any piece of writing such as my thesis or an academic paper.

The online chat interview will be transcribed, you will be sent the interview transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors.

Access to the full interview transcript will be limited to myself and my supervisors, it will be stored securely in an encrypted .docx file on my password-protected computer, cloud, and hard drive.

The interview transcript will be analysed by me only as the sole research investigator.

All or part of the content of your interview and publicly published fanfiction may be used in academic papers, my thesis, or a spoken presentation.

Any summary or any direct quotations from the interview and fanfiction that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be made anonymous (with the name of your choice) so that you cannot be linked to your real identity, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

By signing this form you agree that:

You are voluntarily taking part in this project. You understand that you don't have to take part, and you can stop the interview at any time.

Extracts from the transcribed interview or publicly published fanfiction may be used as described above.

You have read the information sheet.

You do not expect to receive any benefit or payment from this participation.

You can request a copy of the interview transcript and make edits you feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.

You have been able to ask any questions you might have, and you understand that you are free to contact me with any questions you may have in the future.

Participant's chosen name:

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's name: AUDREY JEAN

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Appendix B. Interview Schedule (Fan Writers)

I would like to ask you some questions about your identity, your fandom experience, why do you write fanfiction, and your relationship with gender/sexuality/feminism. I will use this information for my thesis research. This interview should take about 2h30, but you are free to stop at any time if you feel the need to take a break. I have prepared some questions, but they are not set in stone; you can talk about any related topic that seems important to you. I will also disclose some information about myself, to join you in this conversation— I am doing academic research but I am first and foremost a fan, and trying to understand what is happening to gender and sexuality in fanfiction. So thank you for your help and your time!

IDENTITY

To begin with, a short introduction: I'm Audrey, a non-binary lesbian (I use she/her mostly), officially involved in fandom since 2009. I say officially because I created a fan blog in 2009 (on a French platform) then switched to Tumblr in 2011, and I frequently read slash fanfiction. I have written some myself as well. I have many favourite fandoms, including Star Trek.

1) I was wondering what you identify as? You can be as precise or as succinct as you like, or not give me an answer altogether. This is to get an idea of who my participants are.
2) Did fandom have a role to play in your process of self-identification?
3) How did you get into fandom, what makes you stay in fandom?
4) How did you become involved with fanfiction and slash shipping?
5) Does your identity influence your enjoyment of fanfiction?

FANFICTION WRITING

6) Why do you feel the need to write about your ship? What does it bring you? Is it about the characters, the storyline, the intimacy, the sexual content, or something else? You can be as vague or precise as you wish, as it is a very broad question!

7) What role do your personal beliefs play in the writing of fanfiction? Do you make your fanfic explicitly feminist, for example? Is it important to you? Do you write with the wish to educate readers on issues that seem important to you?

8) Can you describe your process of writing fanfiction?

MINOR LITERATURE: I am looking at fanfic as a proper literary genre (especially with Deleuze's notion of minor literature), and I have some questions for you about that.

9) Do you believe characters and narratives can be a collage of bits and pieces, as in that they do not need to be representing a "universal" quality like "funny", "nice", or other vague concepts— instead they attempt to convey the complexity of life? What do you like making your characters and narrative of? To put it simply, do you believe that characters should go beyond just filling archetypes or other "universal" interpretations of human nature? Do you see your characters as being made of bits and pieces of "real" stuff, as to make them more "human"?

10) Do you have a specific idea in mind when weaving the characters' emotional journey in the plot? It this journey the main drive in your stories?

11) Do you attempt to make readers "feel for" or "feel like" characters, and why? Do you think using all 5 senses to convey emotion in your fics is essential?

12) Is fic, for you, an attempt to re-appropriate the male body? Where do you situate desire in slash writing?

YOUR FANFICTIONS

Now I am going to ask questions more specific to Sha Ka Ree and Star Trek.

13) I am interested in the scene, in Chapter XX part XX. What did you want to convey through that scene?

14) In your fanfiction, the flower hair braiding happens, and other quiet moments of intimacy. Could you explain what drove you to write these kinds of scenes? What was the drive behind constructing such masculinities, and these relationships to gender more broadly?

15) What do mind-melds enable you to convey or write?

AFFECT: I'm working on embodied affect, or stuff that you can feel almost physically, and how that might work for fic.

16) What do you generally feel, physically even, when you write or read fanfiction? Can you put it into words? When you write about intimacy specifically, can you tell me what it makes you feel? Do you feel disconnected from your own body or those of the male characters?

17) Do you write with readers specifically in mind, like, how it could affect them? And also, to go down that road: when you receive a comment on your fanfic what does it make you feel? Why do you interact with it?

18) If you had to describe it in a succinct way, what makes you 'ship' two of your favourite male characters together? Is it important for you to have two men loving each other, does it make you "feel" something special?

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

19) Would you consider fanfiction as belonging to "proper" literature? (I am working on establishing fic as a type of Deleuzian minor literature, minor in the way that is isn't major or hegemonic, not in the way that it is "less"— on the contrary) I was also wondering, as gender is a part of this minor literature in my study, where do gender and queerness stand in the light of your slash fanfiction writing? Do you think your slash writing can subvert traditional notions of 'masculinity'? Would you still qualify it as 'masculinity'?

REPRESENTATION: To conclude, I have a last couple of questions about fic more broadly.

20) What does your writing 'make happen' in your eyes? Do you think fanfiction can influence people, on feminism or gender norms for example? Or that it has a role to play in the representation of oppressed groups?

Thank you so much for your help and time— it has been very interesting and insightful interviewing you! I will send you the final transcript soon and you can revise it if needed. I will keep in touch and update you on the thesis, it should be finished by mid-2022 (June or October) and will email you the official copy when it is available! If I can manage, I would

love to make it into a book at some point— will let you know how that goes too! Once again, thanks so much for everything and I hope that you have a great week-end!

Appendix C. Interview Schedule (Fan Readers)

I would like to ask you some questions about your fandom experience, why do you read fanfiction, and your relationship with gender/sexuality/feminism. I will use this information for my thesis research. Answering these questions should take around 30min, you are free to send me the email at your convenience **in the next few days**. I am doing academic research but I am first and foremost a fan, and trying to understand what is happening to gender and sexuality in fanfiction. So thank you for your help and your time!

You can write as much or as little you want, but I suggest the rough length for answers is a paragraph of 150-200 words. This is for information only, feel free to answer as you see fit. You also do not have to answer the questions chronologically, start by the one that speaks most to you. There is no right or wrong answer— just write about what you feel!

First of all, to have an idea of my research demographics and to refer to you properly, could you say what you identify as and what are your pronouns (only if you feel comfortable)? Thank you!

Chosen name:

Gender:

Pronouns:

Identity:

QUESTIONS

1) Why do you feel the need to read about your ship, what does it bring you? Is it about the characters, the storyline, the intimacy, the sexual content, or something else?

2) What do you generally feel when you read fanfiction? Can you put it into words?

3) Why do you reach out to fanfiction authors specifically? Would you say that their work is literature (or belongs to a specific genre in literature)?

4) In your eyes, do you think fanfiction can be subversive, and slash can disrupt what is normally considered 'masculinity'? How so?

5) Do you think fanfiction can have a role to play in the representation of oppressed groups?

6) Have you ever been influenced by fanfiction, concerning feminism or gender norms for example? Is it important to you that fanfiction might be the vessel for feminist or queer thought?