Out and About: Slash Fic, Re-imagined Texts and Queer Commentaries.

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In the 1960s, a highly sexual and transgressive form of fan fiction (fanfic), termed 'slash fic' would subvert and homoeroticise the heterosexual relationships depicted in the TV series, *Star Trek*. In the 1990s, the internet would later facilitate a boom in these slash writings as the web provided anonyminity coupled with a potentially global audience. Slash communities started to form online and new queer canons have emerged. This chapter will explore this new dialog between an established media text, its transgressive slash fic and the comments of community members and will argue that this can facilitate a queer space online as writers reflect on their own sexual identity.

Slash fic then can be conceived of as a subversive form of appropriation where the source text is opened up for the purposes of a 'carnivalesque' sexual and political agenda and allows for a critical reception of mainstream television texts and the queering of such texts by online communities. Interactive media made fan and slash writing far more participatory, and the barriers between the writers and readers were further blurred, as for Bakhtin the "carnival...does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (1994: 198). The instantaneity of responses and reaction to online fan writing can be seen to heighten the excitement for readers and writers,

becoming something akin to sexual tension and erotic foreplay, but it also offers what Aaron Ben-Ze'ev calls a "detached attachment" – an intimate closeness at a distance (2004: 26). Fan writing on the web is never ending, so any climax is deferred. The pleasure then for online fan writers and readers is in the *process*, and that is what I shall examine here.

Fanfic writers will often provide sequels/prequels to major literary, filmic or televisual works. Some writers go on to write 'profic' - officially sanctioned stories. However, it is rare for fanfic, or profic, to become part of any 'canon' so traditionally such texts sit outside and beyond the reach of 'official' source materials. Even fairly prestige works - such as Jean Rhys' *Jane Eyre* prequel, *Wide Sagarsso Sea* - are an adjunct to, rather than a part of the Bronte canon. Often such works play on a reader's desire to revisit favourite characters and diegeses. These works can be subversive, as Rhys' novel is far more sexually explicit than anything in the Bronte canon, and there have been fanfic stories exploring a perceived homoerotic attraction between Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee in J. R. R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

As such, fanfic is a very durable form and has been in existence for many decades – the comic book genre was thrillingly subverted by the 'Tijuana Bibles' of the 1920s and 1930s, where mainstream comic book characters where re-imagined and recast in pornographic tableaux by amateur artists (see Adelman, 2006). Today many writers encourage fanfic, while others

deplore it; the author Annie Proulx commenting on the fans of her 1997 short

story, *Brokeback Mountain*, complained that:

> "[The fans] constantly send ghastly manuscripts and pornish rewrites of the
>
> story to me, expecting me to reply with praise and applause" (cited in
>
> Shoard, 2008).

When television became a mass medium in the 1950s, fanfic followed suit and

a new generation of fanfic writers began to provide episodes of their favourite

TV shows. So, fan writing is synonymous with fan culture and fanfic acts as a

type of cultural virus in the way it can mutate and evolve to suit new media.

Fanfic can refashion television into what Roland Barthes (1974) would call a

'writerly' text. However, most fanfic adhered to broadly canonical structures

and rules were quickly established whereby writers had to adhere to canonical

aspects of a series, character or setting. Fanfic that synchronically departed

from the rules of the diachronic source text were generally considered to be

poor. The trick was to maintain a significant level of fidelity while at the same

time exploring new plots and developments. In this way, minor characters in

a canon would become popular with fanfic writers because they offered more

scope for exploration, but still within the recognisable diegesis of a TV series.

The 1960s saw a boom in fanfic, generally in the science fiction genre. This

decade also saw the emergence of a splinter-genre of fanfic which would

deliberately frame itself as non-canonical - this was its virtue. Slash Fiction –

so called because of its denotative 'slash' in advertising a transgressive non-

canonical coupling – was a more aggressive, and carnivalesque, form of

sexually explicit fan writing. Slash fic writers would imagine sexual

relationships between characters in largely mainstream television programmes

which weren't portrayed or explored in the original text. So, these texts

sketched an ambivalence whereby well-known mainstream characters were

often depicted as sexually transgressive. These rewritings were often

inversions where 'straights' were queered by slash writers, as Linda Hutcheon

notes:

> "Parody, therefore, is a form of imitation characterised by iconic
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> inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (1989: 88).

This highly sexual and transgressive form would seek to subvert and

homoeroticise heterosexual relationships on television, for political purposes.

Decades later the popularity of the web would extend slash's reach and

would create a vibrant fan community where readers could discuss

stories with like-minded audiences. As Susan Clerc suggests: "the most

primal instinct a fan has is to talk to other fans about their common

interest" (2001: 216). Since the 1960s fan culture has become

increasingly participatory as John Fiske observes:

> "Fans produce and circulate among themselves texts which are
>
> often crafted with production values as high as any in the official
>
> culture" (1992: 39).

However, these spheres of cultural reproduction are increasingly

dialogical, as fans enter into a communion with an array of media texts.

Dan McKee argues that the internet has allowed fan communities to

form more quickly and these fans therefore display "agency in their everyday media consumption" (2003: 67). Again, for Henry Jenkins:

> "…an alternative conception of fans as readers who appropriate popular texts and re-read them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture" (1992: 23).

Clerc further suggests that:

> "Fans, whether online or off, discuss characterisation [and] speculate about what would have happened if some feature of a story had been different…Fans try and fill in the gaps left by writers and form connections between episodes" (2001: 216-7).

In pre-web mainstream television, one of the biggest 'gaps' in texts was sexuality. So, fanfic writers had a rich ground to explore and develop in any number of non-canonical reconfigurings, because: "Fanfic happens in the gaps between canon. The unexplored or insufficiently explored territory" (Pugh, 2005: 92). Alexander Doty makes a case for all texts having a queer aspect and he rejects any heterocentric notions of queerness as sub-textual:

> "Queers positions queer readings and queer pleasures are part of a reception space that stands simultaneously beside and within that created by heterosexual and straight positions" (1997: 15).

So, the term 'queer' here is far more complex and encompassing, and the post-web slash fic of the 1990s certainly reflected that.

This dialogue between an established media text, its transgressive slash/fanfic and the comments of community members can therefore facilitate the type of space Doty describes, as many writers dealt with their own sexuality through providing alternative storylines to established media texts from *Star Trek* in the 1960s to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the 1990s. I want to map here how this genre moved from one of subversion and transgression to a more dialogical and 'playful' mode. As many have noted, there has been a change in the representation of gay men and women: what Steven Seidman calls a "slow and uneven but steady march toward social acceptance and equality" (2004: 2). Both Seidman and Richard Dyer (1995) reflect that homosexuality has been defined by heterosexuality. For Hutcheon:

> "The recognition of the inverted world still requires a knowledge of the order of the world which it inverts and, in a sense, incorporates"
> (1989: 99).

So, the 'inverted' queer world of slash writing still depended on the 'straight' world it was commenting on, certainly up until the late 1980s. Earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, gay men were often portrayed as sad, lonely figures in media representation. It is no coincidence that the first slash stories started to emerge at this time. As Michael Warner puts it, "queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer", (2000: xiii) so slash in some ways asserts the queer nature of the world, moving from the sub-textual level where Doty (1997) argues it has always existed. Slash can be read here then as a queer commentary on popular culture, and this

commentary - just as with the texts it seeks to comment on - has changed a great deal.

Adaptation theorists such as Geoffrey Wagner (1975) have often cited a text's re-purposing as having the potential for commentary, but this dialogue is little more than a conversation between an adaptor and an adapted work. Fanfic, and its sub-genres, is a far more interactive, visible and therefore plural process. However, as I shall show, slash has shifted from the politically subversive – a reaction to the 'queerlessness' of mainstream media and the 'normal gay' - to the more carnivalesque and playful. Simon Dentith suggests that Bakhtin's carnival is:

> "An aesthetic which celebrates the anarchic body-based and grotesque
> elements of popular culture, and seeks to mobilise them against the
> humourless seriousness of official culture" (2003: 66).

So, slash fic certainly contains the ambivalence of the carnival, and juxtaposes the grotesque body of slash against the classical body of its source, but for Bakhtin the carnival was always temporary, and fan and slash writing has gained a type of permanence online, which makes this process far more participatory and open-ended. This then opens up the possibilities for a critical examination of the reception of mainstream television texts by online queer communities.

So, I am suggesting that fanfic is a genre, and like any such genre, it is by no means a fixed or closed system. Rather it undergoes fundamental change and

development in its life-cycle; in this case a hegemonic cycle whereby the subversive elements of slash are reworked, albeit in a neutered way, back into mainstream culture. Now slash communities have formed online and new Queer fanfic canons have emerged. These communities have provided nurturing spaces where a contributor's work is commented on and feedback is given. In short, slash can be conceived of as a subversive form of appropriation, where the source text is opened-up to subversion for the purposes of a sexual and often political agenda.

Slash: The 'fanfic of duty'.

Interestingly, slash has provided problems for literary and cultural studies scholars, particularly when attempting to define the term. As Mark McLelland notes:

> "Slash…is an underground fandom and many English-speaking people, including academics working in cultural studies, seem unaware of the extent of the genre or its longevity" (2001: 9).

Hutcheon (2006) argues that fanfic is certainly not a type of adaptation and I would agree. Rather, fanfic, and slash is more of a conversation, where fans are in communion with an array of texts which they already find a great deal of pleasure in. Furthermore some argue that fanfic is the preserve of largely female contributors: "Almost all fan fiction is written by women" (Clerc, 2001: 218). Sonia K. Katyal agrees, but with further insight:

> "...it is widely held that the largest number of slash writers are heterosexual or lesbian/bisexual women who write not for profit, but for their own artistic pleasure and creativity" (2006: 486).

At first glance this is surprising but "The crudeness and brashness of women in cyberspace often surprises men who encounter them there" (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004: 196).

Indeed, the first *Star Trek* slash story, published in the fanzine *Grup* in 1974, was written by a woman: 'A Fragment out of Time' by Diane Marchant imagined a sexual relationship between the two principle male characters Kirk and Spock:

> "Like Western slash fiction writers, the authors took heterosexual, heteronormative narratives and 'queered' them by imagining sexual relationships between the male characters" (McLelland, 2001: 6).

Right up until the late 1960s, gay men were usually portrayed as lonely, pitiful figures, even in such ground-breaking works as *Victim* (Basil Dearden, 1961). So, this new emerging fanfic dutifully rectified in an instant what Dyer calls a representation of someone "physically less than a man" (1995: 42). Also, as McLelland argues: "Western women have had a long-standing interest in male sexuality" (2001: 90). Similarly Jenkins notes this more plural nurturing environment for exploring female desire:

> "Slash breaks…with the commodification of pornography, offering erotic images that originate in a social context of intimacy and sharing" (1992: 190).

The mainstream television of the 1960s and 70s offered little in the way of representations of homosexual characters or storylines. In this period slash was a transgressive commentary on the mainstream portrayals of heterosexuality and the later crude stereotyping of homosexuality. Slash writers subverted storylines and characterisations of such popular shows as *Starsky and Hutch*, *Blakes* [sic] *7*, *The Professionals* and *The Man from Uncle*. All of these texts are notable for their foregrounding of heterosexual masculinity and male relationships. For Pugh:

> "Gay writers, or those concerned with gay issues, have used [slash] to establish a gay presence in a straight universe" (2005: 107).

I would argue that it is more than that, as slash writing provides a space where writers can explore and articulate their own sexualities and desires. It provides a forum for expression, offering anonymity. Slash is therefore performative as well as subversive – and therefore carnivalesque - where writers can explore their own sexual desires and sexualities in dialogue with a favourite show or character, and reading these stories, which ultimately results in writing them, is a pleasurable activity, as Wolfgang Iser notes: "The reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive" (1978: 108).

The 1970s and 1980s period of significant slash writing I will call here the 'fanfic of duty' as writers seemed determined to right the seeming wrongs of the mainstream television output of the time. The slash of this period was at

its most political and was largely a reaction against the marginalisation of homosexual representation in popular culture. This is by no means insignificant as the Proposition 6 legislation in the US and the Section 28 of the Local Government Act in the UK outlawed homosexual representation, promotion and practices.

Slash: New dialogues.

The web of the early 1990s shaped fanfic in a number of ways: it provided a new space far beyond the reach of fanzines and conventions; it facilitated more sophisticated routes of anonymity; it made fanfic more visible; it allowed fanfic writers to form online communities and slash would join with other forms of sexually explicit content online. This period was a far more dialogical era for fanfic and their writers. Gay writers could now be far more in more open in queering the texts they were commenting on, and with each other. Some sites, such as slashfanfiction.com, began to archive material from the 60s and 70s, introducing the genre to a new audience who would go on to write their own stories. Slash sites still maintained a veneer of political duty however: slashfic.co.uk has the disclaimer:

> "I'm not going to argue about it; the world is a grown-up place where guys can marry other guys and if you don't like it find another website. (Or another world.)"

Some television shows gained a new type of longevity online, as fanfic often outlived their progeny source texts, particularly *Lois and Clark*[1] (1993 - 1997) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 - 2003). The fanfic site slayerfanfic.com has been in existence since 1997, the year of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* initial exhibition on television, highlighting an emerging dialogical relay between fanfic and television. These types of sites were not exclusively confined to the sci-fi/fantasy genre, or 'cult' television shows, for example http://www.britslash.co.uk/fictionlinks.htm, contains links to more 'mainstream' fanfic based on UK television shows such as *Goodnight Sweetheart* and *The Bill*, as well as soaps such as *EastEnders*.

It seems that narratives with the longest history were the most popular. *Lois and Clark* fanfic had many decades of comic books, films and TV serials to plunder, and was not immune to slash writing either. Many slash sites imagined sexual relationships between Clark and Lex, or Clark and Jimmy. Often, it was the attraction of actors such as Dean Caine which motivated such fan authors. At fictionresource.com/slash, Rositamia2 has written stories where "Superman gets amnesia. Jimmy finds him. Things happen" and one of his/her stories opens with the line, "Oh my God, I'm fucking Superman!".

Some sites such as xenite.org boasted that their fanfic was the place, "where Xena and Gabrielle are more than just friends!". At the time of writing, fanfiction.net had 1624 *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995 – 2001) stories. Some

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[1] Subtitled 'The New Adventures of Superman' in the UK.

writers specialised in writing fanfic for just one series, such as Twilight who

only writes *Buffy* - or 'Whedonverse' - related stories at twilightfic.tripod.com.

Others adopt pseudonyms which both highlight their affiliations as well as

their sexualities such as sapphicslayer at spacetart.tripod.com. Again, these

enactments of desire and fantasy online, in communion with a mainstream

text, further entrenches the ambivalence inherent in much fan writing, as

Bakhtin presciently put it: "Carnival is the people's second life" (1994: 198).

Xena: Warrior Princess and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* both had strong

proactive female leads in otherwise previously male dominated genres:

fantasy and the supernatural respectively. In a sense, mainstream television

was beginning to enact fanfic strategies and the dialogue between the two

forms became heightened as fanfic writers, "simply saw an unexplored gay

subtext in the writing" (Pugh: 2005: 95). As Seidman argues, in the 1990s,

"the closet [had] less of a role in shaping gay life" (2004: 11).

Satellite, cable and then digital television meant that there was now a great

deal more televisual content. Also from the late 1990s, 'quality' television

drama was undergoing something of a renaissance. In addition

representations of homosexuality were moving from virtually nothing and

crude stereotyping to more plural types of expression. The whole idea of

'mainstream' television was now in question as many subscription channels,

such as HBO, got large audiences and critical plaudits for a raft of television

dramas. Warner Bros' *The West Wing* (1999 – 2006) had no openly gay

principle characters, but that didn't stop the slash community queering

relationships between Sam Seaborn and Josh Lyman at sites like

westwingstories.com.

In the UK, *Queer As Folk* (1999 – 2000) broke new ground in its portrayal of

gay relationships and characters, and pushed the boundaries of what could be

shown on television. *Queer as Folk* was remade in the US and exhibited on

the Showtime network to great acclaim and had both gay and straight fans.

The series was written by Russell T. Davies, himself a former fanfic author of

some renown, who spent his early career writing *Doctor Who* fanfic, before

going on to revive the British sci-fi series. Other fanfic writers would also join

Davies on this project, such as Mark Gatiss, legitimising fanfic as a form and a

way of breaking into television and film writing. *Doctor Who* spin-off,

Torchwood (2006 -) would neatly encapsulate this by almost acting as its

own queer commentary on its progeny text.

Torchword's cental character is Captain Jack Harkness, a bi-sexual alien, who

also appears in *Doctor Who*. So, *Torchwood* serves to develop a character in

a similar fashion to fanfic in enacting almost slash-like strategies, and like

slash, in a far more sexually explicit way. In a sense, from the late 1990s,

fanfic had "remediated" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) television drama and this new

dialogue legitimised slash to an extent, but also neutered its political power

and subversion. *Torchwood* then, continues the conversation with *Doctor*

Who.

The dialogue continued in the new millennium, as it had done in the 1990s, with some television dramas containing openly gay characters in traditionally 'high-octane' testosterone genres. This shows that the era of what Siedman terms the 'normal gay' – "a good citizen" (2004: 17) – was over. In fact, these overly positive images of gay men and women were as unrealistic as the negative representations in the 1960s and 1970s, as I would argue they were nearly always a middle-class representation of unthreatening sexuality. *Oz* (1997 – 2003) was a gritty prison drama, with very few female characters. It featured gay relationships and explicitly and brutally portrayed male rape in a way not seen before on television. The most acclaimed drama of recent years, *The Wire* (2002 – 2008) was set on the mean streets of Baltimore and was concerned with the exploits of a number of street gangs and drug dealers, and their relationship with the police. The series was praised for its epic, novel-like qualities, but what was most significant here is that the most ruthless character, the 'stick-up man' Omar Little, was gay.

In *The Wire*, Omar's sexuality is not made an issue of - except perhaps when he avenges the murder of his partner, Brandon. Omar is exactly the kind of character a fanfic writer would create (or queer) in the decades previously. Omar was a canonically gay character. It is clear then that slashwriters had to now compete with canonically gay (and authentically queer) characters in television drama.

In response slash writers produced ever more explicit and transgressive stories:

> "Implicit in many site owners' defence of their fantasies is the right to imagine sex which is not 'politically' correct': that is, sex which derives its interest from imagining power differentials, not equality"
>
> (McLelland, 2001: 11).

The most unlikely of texts were subverted in this way. For example a great deal of slash was produced around the *Harry Potter* novels and films, perhaps to deliberately antagonise J. K Rowling's sanctioning of fanfic that obeyed the diachronic rules of her novels.

The web in a way had 'pornographied' slash, and slash itself was now competing with other forms of online porn. But largely, slash stories and communities became far more playful. These communities were not just supportive of slash fiction, but of the writers themselves. Young men and women could explore their sexualities in, paradoxically perhaps, a more anonymous and *more* visible way than they had ever been able before. Slash had moved from the intimate sphere of 'duty' in corners of science fiction conventions and in small circulation 'zines, to the public sphere of a global computer network.

Slash became a way of recasting a favourite television programme in the slash writer's own terms; a way of expressing their own desires in a fairly safe, but also an increasingly credible arena. For many writers, commenting

on, and having a conversation with a television character through slash writing is a safer and potentially more fulfilling way of exploring sexual fantasies than with a 'real' person you don't know. For many, slash is a way of bypassing the explicit content in chatrooms and forums, but in a way that still allows for a sexually explicit exploration of desire.

In the last decade, fanfic communities have flourished online, and some sites have become very sophisticated. Many offer searchable databases and archives, others provide forums where readers and writers can discuss stories. Others even deploy classification systems and encourage feedback and reader reviews. Some sites, including fanfiction.net, have adopted a universal ratings system, rather like the BBFC in the UK and the MPAA in the USA. Here a story rated 'K' is "Content suitable for all ages" and this takes in 'K+'; 'T'; 'M' right up to 'MA' which is the most explicit content. Squidge.org uses the MPAA's film ratings to classify fanfic, with the most sexually explicated receiving an 'NC-17' certificate. Such sites then can be a repository for general fanfic, as well as slash, as the latter form is no longer confined to specialist sites.

So, fanfic now has at least the veneer of authenticity, mirroring the forms it seeks to comment on. It is no longer just a commentary on a text but it is a commentary on the medium of television itself. Slash merely takes this into a more playful realm of sexual desire.

Slash fiction and fan writing in general has evolved a great deal in the last 50 years. It has almost abandoned its original form, to find a new one online. In addition the texts it seeks to provide a commentary on have also undergone change: there are now far more gay characters in mainstream television, than there were in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. In the US, legislation such as Proposition 6, Proposition 8 and Proposition 11 leave Californians constituents see-sawing between a recognition and re-statement of gay rights and the money and power of the religious right, but in the UK Section 28 has been finally repealed and civil partnerships are an increasingly common aspect of society. Television has followed and to an extent appropriated fanfic conventions, providing its own spin-offs and commentaries such as *Torchwood* and *Angel* (1999 – 2004) which was a commentary on aspects of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The UK 'teen' drama *Skins* for example has many gay characters and storylines, as well as a significant online aspect requiring participation by the audience, including writing plotlines. So, I would argue that fanfic has remediated television drama.

The web has acted as a repository for the fanfic of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, giving it a permanence that Bakhtin's definition of carnival never had, and has been the engineer of a new era of fanfic writing. Therefore, slash is not just a response to television drama, but also to decades of fanfic too. Some fanfic writers produce sequels to the work of other fan authors. Slash can now be read as a commentary on its own progeny form, as fanfic has become a very popular activity online as online fanfic communities create their own canons.

Some fanfic writers are now being recognised for their work and are gaining some semblance of status and cachet in cyberspace for their output. Slash then has responded by furthering the playful nature of its transgression in aping the 'mash-up' practices of cyberculture.

Sites such as crossoverfic.com encourage writers to move further away from perceived canons by cross-pollinating source material for subversive ends. This particular site contains a great deal of *Lost/West Wing* slash writing where characters from both shows meet and form relationships. In 'The Witch and the Warrior' by daviderl, the eponymous hero from *Xena: Warrior Princess* forms a relationship with Willow from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; in 'Through the Rift' Beatrice Otter provides a rebirth for Buffy as she survives falling into Sunnydale's rift, by appearing in modern day Cardiff having emerged from *Torchwood's* rift; in Azar's 'Five Couples Jack Harkness Never Slept With' the bi-sexual promiscuous time-traveller from *Torchwood* is teamed up with characters from *Doctor Who*, *Stargate SG-1* and *Stargate Atlantis* - furthering slash's playful nature and removal from political agency.

A lesbian sub-genre has emerged: known as 'femslash' or 'femmeslash' it has its origins in the 1980s, but is only recently flourishing online. This may be in part as a reaction to the lack of gay women in television drama, as opposed to gay men, and such writing does seem to cluster around those texts which feature lesbian relationships, such as *The L-Word* (2004 -). Otherwise, femslash focuses on the same texts and characters that mainstream fanfic

and slash has done, namely *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Willow and the young

20-something 'good' witches in *Charmed* (1998 – 2006).

More television and print media is now devoted to celebrity, and the fanfic

and slash communities have not been immune to the charms of reality

television. Another emergent sub-genre is 'Real Person Slash' or RPS. These

slash writers began in the 1990s, and were a small community who wrote

about imagined relationships between the members of boy bands, or between

boy bands, such as New Kids on the Block, Take That, Boyzone and Westlife.

More 'credible' artists were also 'slashed' with Morrissey having his already

ambiguous sexuality re-imagined and developed by RPS writers. So, it seems

that anyone who circulates in celebrity culture is fair game. For example

fiction.fandomish.net exhibits an RPS story 'The Birthday Boy' which has

Justin Timberlake and the actor Hayden Christianson involved in a

relationship. Some elements of the slash community have turned their backs

on the fictional work of television drama, to the 'real' world of celebrity. It

seems then that slash writers have as much of an appetite for a constructed

reality as have television viewers.

It is not really reasonable however, to make a distinction between slash

writers and television viewers, or as Doty suggests between straight and

queer audiences, because slash writers are almost exclusively television

viewers and slash therefore is one of the best phenomenological

commentaries on television there is. Television has appropriated, absorbed

and re-purposed many of the properties of the world-wide-web, but this has been a relationship of mutual exchange, which any appreciation of online fan writing will reveal. Television audiences and 'web 'users' are the same people, and therefore expect certain things from their media consumption. Fanfic is now closer than ever perhaps, to television, as well as many decades of fan writing. Fanfic is now situated in the same arena as the media it seeks to comment on, but has now been joined by other types of commentary: 'spin-off' television series; film/television prequels; sequels; fan sites; discussion forums, celebrity magazines etc. It is now perhaps more visible and less subversive, but it still acts as a community for lesbian, gay and bisexual people; a community that enacts its transgression and subversion through play, rather than politics. For Bakhtin, the carnival must be liberating, and slash, to an extent, has liberated many LGBT writers by allowing them a space to explore their identities and desires in a creative way, which is also in communion with an array of media texts, writers and readers, as far from the wretched portrayals of lonely and bleak homosexuality in the decades before the web.

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