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RESEARCH

Troubling Boundaries and Negotiating Dominant Culture: *Fun Home* as a Transmedial Text

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This article troubles the definitive boundaries between text and paratext, and questions the distinctions made between adaptations and transmedial texts. It conceives of a point of view in which it is possible to experience texts such as *Fun Home* as a series of distinct, separate texts and (para) texts, while simultaneously comprehending them as a complete, transmedial whole. This point of view is then used to examine the ways in which *Fun Home* interrogates and uses concepts of high and low culture, and ultimately its role in the negotiation of dominant culture. It brings together theory from adaptation and transmedia studies with theatre and performance studies to begin to theorise the complexities of intertextual connections made by the reader/viewer/spectator of the transmedial text, particularly those aspects of text made available at least in part via new media.

Keywords: Adaptation; Alison Bechdel; Gestus; Intertextuality; Paratext

Introduction

Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) is a graphic novel in which Bechdel tells the reader of her childhood in rural Pennsylvania with her closeted gay father in their family-run funeral home – the origin of the book's title. It is also the story of Bechdel's coming out to her parents while she was at college, and her father's suicide shortly thereafter. *Fun Home* was published to immediate and great critical acclaim, making the *New York Times* bestseller list and named as Book of the Year (2006) by *Time* magazine. In 2015 the musical stage adaptation *Fun Home* by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori, directed by Sam Gold, had its first Broadway performance, which went on to win five Tony Awards including best musical. The play has since toured with a different cast at the Young Vic theatre in London's West End (*Fun Home*, 2018).

Taking into account these two apparently clearly delineated, singular but related texts – the graphic novel, and the stage musical – *Fun Home* is not obviously a transmedial project. This article examines how these two texts, and their apparently separate paratext, are useful in interrogating what is meant by adaptation and transmedia, text and paratext, and whether a separation of these concepts is necessary or even possible. This work is concerned with how the conception of *Fun Home* as a transmedial text contributes to our understanding of it as both part of the comics and literary canon, and a challenge to canonical conceptions of art and literature.

Troubling the Boundaries: Text/Paratext/Adaptation/Transmedia

This article has been inspired in part by the 2017 article 'Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia' by Henry Jenkins, and it is this work I draw attention to in my use of the term *transmedia*. Jenkins' earlier work (2006) made the term 'convergence culture' part of mainstream academic discourse and marks something of a watershed in terms of the conceptualisation of the ways in which 'old and new media collide, [...] grassroots and corporate media intersect', analysing 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of audiences [...]' (2006: 2). Until recently, transmedia and adaptation studies have progressed somewhat separately, but Eckart Voigt's recent work acknowledges that 'there is no fundamental difference between current transmedia discourse and the processes of cultural adaptation, appropriation and borrowing' (2017: 295), and updated editions of influential works in adaptation studies like those of Sanders (2016) and Hutcheon (2013) now take transmedia concerns as part of their remit. Jenkins defines transmedia in his 2017 article as 'a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels,' where each platform makes a 'unique contribution' resulting in 'additive comprehension' as new insights are formed 'at the intersection between different media extensions' (Jenkins, 2017). In his definition, Jenkins sees 'extensions' in opposition to adaptations – whereas an adaptation is understood as a retelling of the original, an extension goes beyond, expanding characters, backstories, and so on (see also Long, 2002, Weaver, 2010).

If we follow this definition, again it would at first appear that *Fun Home* is not a transmedial project as Jenkins and others envisage them. The stage musical is a clear retelling of the graphic novel's narrative, including most of the same events and transposing much of the text/dialogue straight from Bechdel's book.

The songs, however seem to constitute what Jenkins refers to as 'extensions,' as they are not just a retelling of the adapted text but go beyond it. *Ring of Keys* in particular demonstrates the 'additive comprehension' that the theatrical medium provides in its extension of the 8-panel section in the graphic novel where a very young Alison encounters what she refers to as a 'truck-driving bulldyke' (**Figure 1**). (Bechdel, 2006: 119).



Figure 1: *Fun Home* (Bechdel, 2006. © Alison Bechdel 2006).

The song, which expands on the emotions of awakening experienced by young Alison (I will use 'Bechdel' to refer to the author, 'Alison' to refer to the character, and 'graphic Bechdel' to refer to her drawings of herself) as she begins to realise her queer identity, is especially effective in its theatrical medium, as the audience must acknowledge the live, bodily presence of the child actor in this queer role, celebrating an awakening queer identity.

This kind of brief comparative analysis reveals the complexity of defining even a single text as an adaptation or extension, as it would appear that the stage musical is, or at least contains elements of, both. An analysis of *Fun Home* the musical must also somehow take into account the plethora of other materials connected to it: YouTube videos of individual songs, excerpts from the Broadway show, concerts, behind-the-scenes footage of rehearsals, interviews with Bechdel, with Lisa Kron, with Jeanine Tesori, with the cast of the show, and with director Sam Gold, as well as print/web-based print materials including reviews, newspaper articles, and academic articles, as well as responses to the show in graphic form by Bechdel herself.

Jonathon Gray echoes Jenkins' terminology when he points out the 'extended presence' (2010: 2) we encounter in a cultural product's 'paratext,' a term he takes from Genette used to describe those textual or verbal materials that surround a literary work, such as titles, synopses, indexes, etc. (Genette, 1997) which Gray expands in his examination of media texts. In his work on *Promos, Spoilers, and other Media Paratexts*, he insists that any 'text and its cultural impact, value and meaning cannot be adequately analysed without taking into account [its] many proliferations', as 'each proliferation [...] holds the potential to change the meaning of the text' (2010: 2). There is a clear similarity here between what Jenkins calls 'extensions,' that take a facet of one text and expand upon or explore it further, and what Gray calls 'proliferations' – though Gray includes bonus materials, promos, games, spin-offs etc that might not be usually thought of as 'extensions' in that they are not necessarily recognisable as part of the same narrative. Jenkins, however, also points out that 'the borders between textual and promotional practices are breaking down' (2017) and acknowledges that the way we think about adaptation must respond to this, just as Gray points out that 'for many viewers [...] the title of the film or program will signify the entire package' (2010: 2).

Gray's central questions, 'What is the paratext in relationship to the text?' and 'How does it contribute to the process of making meaning?' (2010: 23) still appear to insist on a clear distinction between 'the text' – a distinct, finite, finished work – and a separate 'paratext'. This distinction between texts is also suggested in Jenkins' conception of an adaptation that retells an 'original' text versus an extension that goes beyond that 'original'. Each text and each extension appear to be conceived of as separate and distinct, though related.

The question I want to pose in this article is: should we define *Fun Home* and its adaptation *Fun Home* the musical as distinct, separate (but related) texts with a surrounding, separate (but related), paratext of interviews, reviews, videos, and so on; or can we see all of this as one larger, sprawling, transmedial text in which the parts come together to represent *Fun Home*? The answer I propose here is: yes. We can do both those things.

Theories of intertextuality associated with post-structuralist semiotics and scholars such as Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin have become widely applied within the field of adaptation studies since the mid to late 2000s. Many in the field have challenged the conception of a stable 'original' against which an adaptation can be judged for its fidelity, but also gone further in acknowledging that all narratives are, as Robert Stam puts it in a much-quoted phrase, 'part of an endless process of recycling, transformation, and mutation with no clear point of origin' (in Griggs, 2016: 4). The field supplies many metaphors for this intertextual interrelationship, including Julie Sanders' (after Kristeva) 'cultural mosaic' (2016: 17) and Simone Murray's 'web' of texts (2008), from which the spectator creates meaning.

There are also various models in the field which theorise the spectator's ability to engage with these (inter)texts and their interrelatedness. In this article the most useful model is Linda Hutcheon's 'oscillation' (2013), where she conceives of adaptations as inviting audiences to shift back and forth or 'oscillate' between the adapted text and the new adaptation. I have suggested elsewhere that an intertextual approach necessitates widening readings to acknowledge that a spectator will necessarily 'oscillate' between the performance they are watching and any number of related texts, media, and other cultural signifiers of which they

are cognizant (D'Arcy, 2017). Here I wish to take this further to suggest that this 'oscillation' becomes for the spectator both a way of distinguishing *between* texts and making the comparisons that we are familiar with between same/different, adaptation/source, etc, but also that spectators are capable of holding *all of those texts simultaneously* as a complete transmedial textual whole.

Collective Aesthetic Meaning-making

My own experience I think helps to bring this into focus: at the time of beginning this article, I had yet to see *Fun Home* the musical. I had tickets and planned to see it when it toured to London in the summer. This raised some provocative questions. Does it mean that at that point I only had experience of the paratext? Or that the musical was, for me, the paratext? While I hadn't seen the actual show, I had watched lots of extracts from the Broadway stage show on YouTube; I had read and watched lots of interviews with the cast, writers, and director; I had myself interviewed the playwright; I'd listened to the songs; I'd read the graphic novel and the graphic extensions Bechdel produced in response to the musical, as well as academic articles about the graphic novel, and Bechdel's other works.

Can, or should I therefore only have written about *Fun Home* as a graphic novel? Are there only two versions of *Fun Home* that can be considered actual texts, and had I only encountered one? I know my own understanding of *Fun Home* as a text went beyond the graphic novel and when I thought *Fun Home* it included all these other textual experiences. Was my understanding of the text incomplete until I saw the show? This might be the case, but I couldn't have known that until I saw it. My understanding of the text then was as a complete text – but I anticipated the addition that the performance would make to it. Since seeing the show, I do feel that the text is complete, but that does not negate my earlier understanding of a complete text that did not include the performance. This experience suggests to me that each of these separate textual experiences constitutes a 'unique contribution' to my 'additive comprehension' of *Fun Home* – Jenkins' (2017) criteria for our understanding of transmedia extensions. I would also suggest that this article's conception of a larger, transmedial text made up of constituent parts, which includes those texts that could

be considered paratextual, which we hold simultaneously but can examine separately, suggests that an experience of transmedial text is always both complete and incomplete, and each spectator's conception of a text is unique in that sense. Useful here is Doug Lanier's (2014) recent work repurposing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) concept of "rhizomatic relations" and structures in theorising [Shakespearean] adaptation and appropriation. The rhizomatic structure has "no single or ventral root and no vertical structure" (2014: 28). Instead, like the underground root systems of rhizomatic plants, the rhizomatic text is conceived of as part of a "horizontal, decentred multiplicity of [subterranean] roots. [...] rhizome has no central organizing intelligence or point of origin; it may be entered at any point, and there is no *a priori* path through its web of connections" (2014: 28–29). The transmedial textual spread that has become the norm in the twenty-first century has also normalised this rhizomatic relationship between texts and readers/viewers/spectators where "the perceived original or course might not in fact be first in the sequence", where "the notion of the 'source' might [...] fashion a multi-layered entity rather than a single original" (Sanders, 2016: 28) and where "multiple versions exist laterally not vertically" (Hutcheon, 2013: xiii). The conscious perception of a web of intertexts, coupled with the spectator's own personal web of knowledge applied to the experience of the transmedial text, makes that experience an accretive one which resists linearity. My experience outlined above, of a text perceived as both a series of interlinked, separate texts, and a single transmedial whole, is far from unique and not necessarily new. However, the ubiquity of technology means we have become "hyper-conscious perhaps of these digital and indeed textual affordances and the social and cultural values they perform" (Sanders, 2016: 3).

In 2010, Jim Collins already described as "standard operating procedure" a transmedial experience of literary culture, in which "the seamless, simultaneous, interconnection of novel, film, featurette, Web site, and digital reading device is the foundation of cine-literary culture, and [...] reading the book has become only one of a host of interlocking literary experiences" (2010: 119–120). Many also link this convergence with a kind of democratising of literary culture, with Collins outlining the

shift from the 'priesthood' of academic literary critics and restricted access to literary conversation to a "new *secularized* conversation about books which has changed the power relations within the triangular relationship between author, critic and reader", because in this new conversation facilitated by such curators as TV hosts, online services and amateur academic guides, "readers are capable of becoming authors of their own reading pleasure" (2010: 28–29). Robert Stam (2017) points out that while "transtextuality is not inherently revolutionary [...], the concept does carry the theoretical potential of socializing art by recasting it as transindividual and collective, emanating not just from the individual artist's demiurgic brain, but rather from a shared network of socially shared meanings" (2017: 241), suggesting the reading of meaning as collective, discursive agreement on how a text could and should be understood at a particular moment in time.

This can be linked to Jenkins' conceptions in his earlier work *Convergence Culture* (2006) of 'participatory culture' and 'collective intelligence', where 'each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information' and 'because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there is an added incentive for us to talk amongst ourselves' (2006: 3). Jenkins links this to consumption, stating that 'consumption has become a collective process' (2006: 3). This means that meaning-making also becomes a collective process as each person's complete/incomplete understanding of textual meaning becomes the subject of discussion. In applying this to works of literature that enter the trans-medial sphere in the way *Fun Home* does, we can infer that literary meaning-making and aesthetic value judgements become collective processes also. Again, this is an area where *Fun Home* does not obviously fit transmedia models of such collective processes, which are more often based in studies of popular culture texts where participation takes the form of fan-based and/or social media responses (eg. Voigts, [2017] on Internet memes and the BBC *Sherlock* franchise; Jenkins [2006] and Long [2007] on *Star Wars*). *Fun Home* the graphic novel is such a self-consciously *literary* text, and one which has been thoroughly canonised by the legitimising structures and institutions of both the comics and literary realms, that to consider it under the remit of transmedia again raises some important questions.

***Fun Home* and Transmedial Negotiations of Dominant Culture**

When one begins reading critically about *Fun Home*, it becomes clear very quickly that to write about *Fun Home* is to write about the problematic conceptual dichotomisation of canon and popular, high and low culture. Ariela Freedman (2009) discusses how the graphic novel consciously draws on a canonical modernist lineage in its explicit engagement with Joyce, Proust, Fitzgerald, Camus, James, and others; Jane Tolmie (2009) similarly considers how the text's 'integration into the critical worlds of literary and cultural studies has been quick' because of its 'degree of academic referentiality' (79). Hillary Chute locates this literariness also in *Fun Home's* narrative sophistication and formal experimentation, and in the text's self-reflexive preoccupation with textual interpretation, pointing out that 'reading is the site where almost everything happens in *Fun Home*' (Chute, 2010: 184). The graphic novel is also, however, held up as a challenge to and queering of the western literary canon, in its equally self-conscious referentiality and interpretive engagement with feminist and queer theory and fiction, as well as pop culture texts including Bechdel's own previous work, particularly the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1983–2008). To engage critically with *Fun Home* is to engage with the ways in which dominant culture is 'negotiated' (see Hall in During, 1999), the ways in which texts and audiences at once reproduce and resist dominant culture.

To consider *Fun Home* as a transmedial text is to acknowledge the ways in which all extensions of that text are sites in which these canonical negotiations are repeated and reinforced. Simple searches for *Fun Home* online bring up many links to such high-end, legitimate and legitimising cultural institutions as the Guggenheim, the Young Vic, and *The Guardian*. While meaning-making in new media spheres may be a collective process, it is still governed by the same cultural and economic structures and constraints that govern the creation of legitimacy and symbolic capital beyond them. The transmedial (para)texts of *Fun Home* are themselves often sophisticated and formally complex (for example the hour-long intellectual discussion as part of the 'Works and Processes at the Guggenheim' series, articles discussing the musical's connections to the current political climate, Bechdel's interviews musing

on the nature of autobiographical narratives, and her characteristically self-reflexive graphic responses) reinforcing a literary, high culture status, and appear in contexts that bolster that status, endorsed by institutions that create legitimacy. However, the artists are often also explicitly challenging the canon in which they are being placed. I want to focus here on some of the (para)texts available online, including Bechdel's graphic responses, and their significance in reinforcing a transmedial reading of *Fun Home* as both a legitimised, canonical text, and one which resists dominant culture.

Towards Theorising Blurred Boundaries

As a memoir, *Fun Home* is particularly apt as an example of the blurring between which textual elements constitute part of a narrative and which might be considered extra to that narrative. To watch an interview with Bechdel about *Fun Home* is in some way to extend the narrative, because the narrative is in some way her life, and she is some way the protagonist. But in what way? Tolmie (2009) points out that 'the assumption that autobiography is truth in an unmediated way is something that Bechdel writes and speaks against [...]' and asks 'How should literary scholars characterize the fluctuating lines between mimesis and fiction?' (Tolmie, 2009: 82). How should those of us studying transmedia and adaptation theorise the multiplying and interaction of those fictions and mimeses across different textual sites? The characters in the musical include three versions of Alison at different ages; Bechdel includes in her graphic responses panels which show her in the audience watching a version of herself on stage; interviews can at points become uncomfortable as details of Bruce Bechdel's suicide and his life as a closeted homosexual are discussed in Bechdel's presence, in the objective tones of general artistic criticism of a character who symbolises the results of homophobia.

In an interview for cuny.tv, the TV channel of the City University of New York, with a remit to 'educate and inform' (cuny.tv) – with Susan Haskins and Michael Reidell, there is palpable discomfort as Haskins discusses the nature of Bruce Bechdel's tragedy:

SH: The thing I've found myself wondering is, in this time when we all are aware of more equality, would this man have suffered so, and lived so, if he had been living in a different time?

BECHDEL: That's the whole story.

SH: That's the whole story. What a painful existence he had. [To BECHDEL]
But then you wouldn't have been born, if he had...

BECHDEL: [Laughs] I know...

MR: [Loudly] She wouldn't have written the book if he'd been *liberated!*

BECHDEL: It's a weird, conflicted feeling to have. I mean, I love the play, I love celebrating it, but it's also... there would be no play if my father hadn't killed himself, so there's this...

SH: And there'd be no you, if your father hadn't felt he had to get married and have a family even though that wasn't what he wanted.

BECHDEL: Right. [Pause. Smiles? Grimaces?]

SH: In his heart, yeah.

TESORI: Well, that's where the drama exists.

(Cuny.tv, 2015. 13:55–14:43)

I interpret Bechdel's grimace/smile at the end of this section as discomfort. Jeanine Tesori saves the situation by reminding us of the fictional status of the narrative, 'that's where the drama exists'. This discomfort for the interview participants arises from the jarring intersection of textualities, as the desire to engage with the fictionalised Alisons of the graphic novel and musical blurs into the engagement with Bechdel mediated through the interview format. Tellingly, there is a perceptible shift in tension as the language moves from descriptors associated with art like 'story' and the detached, socio-political criticism of relative 'equality', to direct address – 'you wouldn't have been born'.

The possible discomfort of the spectator arises from the same jarring intersection of textualities, with the added intersection of the interview itself experienced as a text in the *Fun Home* nexus. Not only are expectations of emotionally detached, intellectual cultural/educational content disrupted, but there are multitudinous possible reactions to and readings of the presenters' roles (did they go too far? Or is it the job of a presenter to ask difficult questions?), the nature of autobiographical 'truth', and all of the other 'oscillations' we perform between what we see here and our experience, whatever it may contain, of the rest of the *Fun Home* text.

Appearances on shows/networks such as these which mark themselves as 'educational' and/or 'cultural', suggest an overt desire to associate *Fun Home* with legitimacy and mark it as part of a canon. While this interview was a promotional appearance prior to a run of the play, the graphic novel by this time had already achieved canonical status and Bechdel's presence can also be read as part of this claim to legitimacy for both the musical and the graphic novel. However, Tesori also in this interview explicitly challenges attempts to universalize the narrative when accusations of the story being 'bigger than a lesbian' are dismissed humorously as the story is, as she says, 'exactly the size of a lesbian' (cuny.tv, 2015). Both Tesori and Kron point out the dearth of depictions of father/daughter narratives and instigate a discussion around the necessity for female audience members to identify with male characters due to the lack of female representation on stage, suggesting a critical view of theatrical tradition and the dramatic/literary canon. We can view the concept of 'additive comprehension' here not just as a narrative function but as a critical one. *Fun Home* the graphic novel is an exploration of the negotiation of dominant culture, and its transmedial extensions form part of that discourse.

Bechdel's graphic responses to the musical extend both her own graphic novel and the musical, reinforcing the sense of a non-linear, intertextual relationship between all the different *Fun Home* texts. In 'Fun Home The Musical!' one panel shows Bechdel sat in the audience, apparently relieved that having 'ceded any creative control' over the narrative, she is 'stunned by how good it was' (Bechdel, 2014). She engages with the blurring of identities in her labelling of the onstage "Alison" in quotation marks with a self-reflexive caption (**Figure 2**) about 'my memoir', describing her graphic novel as 'an intricate nonlinear account' (Bechdel, 2014).

This invites a complex 'oscillation' from the reader/viewer/spectator, who is actively invited to compare their own memories and experiences of *Fun Home* the graphic novel with this graphic account, as well as with the stage show. The complexities of engagements such as these are intensified by the complicated chronologies of experiencing web-based texts. Although 'Fun Home! The Musical!' was drawn in 2014, before the play had its Broadway success, it is still (2018) available on the website of *Seven Days*, the local Vermont newspaper in which it appeared. Which



Figure 2: 'Fun Home! The Musical!' (Bechdel, 2014. © Alison Bechdel 2014).

(para)texts are encountered by the reader/viewer/spectator, in what order, and at what time, will also affect the nature of their comprehension of the *Fun Home* text.

As readers/viewers of the comic we are also looking at an "Alison" when we see the graphic Bechdel, serving to interrogate the sense of memoir as in any way a 'true' presentation of the author. A later panel (**Figure 3**) of 'Fun Home! The Musical!' (Bechdel, 2014) shows the graphic Bechdel emotionally responding to a scene where she describes the character of Bruce – here the graphic version of the musical character authored by Kron & Tesori – as 'my father' (Bechdel, 2014). She even comments on



Figure 3: 'Fun Home! The Musical!' (Bechdel, 2014. © Alison Bechdel 2014).

the ways in which the stage musical extends her work, pointing out that 'My mother, who had been a vague character in my book, was fleshed out' (Bechdel, 2014).

These formal complexities and self-referential intertextualities call attention to the paradoxes and contradictions of subjectivity in the memoir form, *and* the complexities of authorship and spectatorship thrown up by the adaptation process.

Oscillation and Gestic Layering

I have spoken elsewhere about adaptation for theatrical performance being gestic in attitude, as the 'oscillation' between texts is similar to the 'split' or doubling effect that Erica Fischer-Lichte identifies in the spectator's oscillating percep-

tion of actor and character (Fischer-Lichte, 2014). Elin Diamond (1997) includes in her work the historical subject who *plays* the actor. My own work points out we can add *adapted character* to create a tetrad of possible oscillations between subject/actor/character/adapted character (D'Arcy, 2017).

One of the ways in which Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* was conceived to be achievable was through a *gestic* acting style in which the actor 'quotes,' 'shows,' 'demonstrates' the character's behaviour rather than attempting to 'become' the character. Thus gestic acting has a 'double, dialecticising function' (Brooker, 1994: 197) as the audience is simultaneously, *consciously* aware of both the actor and the character. In this way the performance is historicised for the audience as they are constantly made aware of the historicity of the character in contrast to the actor's present time and place; they are aware not only of how events unfurl in the performance but of the multiple ways in which the event could have occurred and thus of the contingent nature of social and political relationships and choices.

There is a clear link to be made between this sense of gestic 'doubling' and stage adaptation. One of the 'oscillations' performed by the spectator between the adapted text and the adaptation is between the character on stage and the spectator's memory or knowledge of the character in the adapted text; thus the actor cannot but "quote" a character already known to the audience – at times literally. Similarly, the reader of 'Fun Home! The Musical!' (Bechdel, 2014) is consciously aware of the graphic Bechdel as a 'quotation' of the stage musical and graphic novel *Alisons*, as well as the author/subject Bechdel.

Yet another theory of 'oscillation' is to be found in the field of Theatre Semiotics. Fischer-Lichte identifies a similar 'split' or doubling in the perception of the actor who presents their phenomenal body so that the spectator experiences them as '*present* and simultaneously as a dramatic character [...] the actor creates both presence and the character through a special process of embodiment; neither presence nor dramatic character exists outside the performance.' (Fischer-Lichte, 2014: 33) The spectator oscillates between what she terms the *perceptual order of presence* – the phenomenal body of the actor and objects in their phenomenal being – and the *perceptual order of representation* – the perception of the body and objects

as signs. She suggests that the more often these oscillations occur, the more spectators are made to feel they are between two worlds as they:

constantly but unsuccessfully attempt to reset their perception – and become aware that the oscillation [...] is out of their control. They experience their own perception as emergent [...] inaccessible but also conscious. The oscillation draws the attention of the spectator to the dynamic process of perception itself. (Fischer-Lichte, 2014: 41)

A gestic mode of performance attempts to increase these oscillations between the *perceptual order of presence* and *representation* by constantly reminding the spectator of the double nature of the actor/character. Drawing the attention of the spectator to their own processes of perception activates the possibility of critique; the conscious manifestation of same/different in the paradox of actor/character invites the spectator to interpret the social and political relationships represented. In this way it is hoped that theatre can truly affect social change through politicising and activating the spectator's interpretive sense of cultural structures in the hope of inspiring them to affect change in their lives outside of the theatre. The complex layerings that occur in the transmedial spread of the *Fun Home* text can be seen as having a similarly *gestic* function in the activation of conscious critical awareness.

The beginning of a 'Works and Processes' series event at the Guggenheim (2015) livestreamed on *YouTube* saw an extension of the 'Fun Home! The Musical!' (Bechdel, 2014) extension, as Bechdel's comic was partially animated and given a voiceover narration by Beth Malone, who played the Adult Alison in the Broadway show. Later at the same event, Bechdel projected panels of the graphic novel while she read the captions, turning her own graphic novel into a sort of intermedial performance piece where she was both author and narrator. In the Guggenheim video we see historical subject Alison Bechdel, performing the part of author Alison Bechdel, writer of the graphic novel *Fun Home*, performing the part of narrator in a performance of that graphic novel, which we remember from our reading of the adapted text, which we know is about the life of Alison Bechdel. We also see her

'live' audience and are aware of the effect of mediation in whatever our own current geographical, physical context is when consuming this content. The complex layering in performance of subject/actor/character/adapted character is complicated further as the audience are also made aware of the memoir's already blurred boundaries between author/character, and here there is yet another layer of mediation as we are made aware of our role as 'audience member' through experiencing the doubled audience on our screen.

Of course, not all spectators will be aware of every layer unpicked above, but the function of this *gestic* layering is to create the *possibility* of awareness; the *opportunity* for the audience to become conscious of the nature of what they are viewing as doubled, and to awaken the critical faculties of the spectator. In these complex, intermedial and intertextual layerings, the transmedial extensions perform a function of extending our understanding of *Fun Home* as a sophisticated, formally experimental text, and thus a literary, canonical text, but also as one which challenges and invites critique of certain hegemonic structures – like authorship and gender – associated with that canon.

Conclusions

The advantage of reading *Fun Home* as a transmedial text, especially in the light of new media, is brought into stark relief here. It brings to the fore the complexities of how each reader/spectator's experience varies depending on which texts are experienced, in what order, in what environment/context, and from the perspective of the differing identities including age, gender, education, class, ethnicity of each reader/spectator. The Guggenheim is associated with high culture (and with Bechdel herself, who was awarded a fellowship there in 2012). The Works & Process series is intended to "make artists and performing arts accessible to the public", (Guggenheim.org) and is funded by public donations. The Guggenheim website lists different levels of "access" from discounted performances to invitations to rehearsals or private receptions available for different levels of donation. The livestream of this event allows access for those who lack the means to donate or buy tickets, but the mediation points out the disparity all the more clearly;

providing 'access' in this way could ironically serve to highlight any economic disparities in the audiences, as one is invited to observe the others' (privileged) position.

By conceiving of *Fun Home* as one large transmedial text *and* as a series of discrete interrelated texts, we can keep in view the 'bigger picture' of 'additive comprehension' without losing the analytical gains of focusing in on each 'unique contribution'. The transmedial multiplications of *Fun Home* effect our 'additive comprehension' of the text. But they also have an accretive effect on our continually destabilised notions of authorship, subjectivity and performativity. The formal experimentation, sophistication and engagement with philosophical, thematic and generic questions about artistic practice seen in the transmedial extensions of *Fun Home* repeat and reinforce these qualities in the graphic novel and the musical, and so reinforce the whole text's canonical status for spectators. They also stress, however, that the presence of this queer, female, graphic narrative is an unusual one in these high culture surroundings, both reproducing and resisting what is thought of as canonical art, literature and drama.

Editorial Note

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Competing Interests

Jeanette D'Arcy is married to Geraint D'Arcy. This article underwent the journal's standard double peer-review process and complied with the guidelines on ethical editing and research established by the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE) and the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO).

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