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# AN EXPLORATION OF WRITERLY ONTOLOGIES IN TRANSMEDIAL LIFE-WRITING

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Laura-Jane Maher

## **Abstract**

Recent years have seen a proliferation of studies directed at storyworlds that are constructed across multiple media platforms. These are alternately described as transmedia, cross-media, and immersive or distributed phenomena. To date most research in this field has focussed on its implications for entertainment and imaginative storyworld creation, and has generally considered those storyworlds that blossom from cinematic or computer and console gaming experiences. Rather than investigate the effect this constellation of artistic forms might have on the storyworld as a product, this thesis concentrates on the effect of using transmedial creative practices to explore autobiographical storyworlds, in particular how such storyworlds enable a renegotiation of the subject and other. The outcome of this research raises questions regarding how such storyworlds are positioned and regulated in an economic and legal context.

To do this, this thesis draws on the semiotic theory of “writerlyness” and then embeds it within a feminist framework indebted to intersectionality to illuminate the matrix of ontologies that manifest in an autobiographical storyworld. Since the phenomenon involves both diegetic and mimetic modes, a new reading practice described as the “lacuna” is introduced to account for the variety of reading practices that arise in response to these storyworlds. This thesis considers how transmedial narratives are regulated and how that regulation is subverted in order to determine how readers and creators can use transmedial life-writing to challenge regulatory discourses that purport to police creative endeavour and subjective expression.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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The saying goes that it takes a village to raise a child. It takes the same to write an ink-and-paper child. She's ready to enter into the world now.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

There are people who think that things that happen in fiction do not really happen.

These people are wrong.

—Neil Gaiman, in *Evelyn Evelyn: A Tragic Tale in Two Tomes* (2011).

## 1.1 Please, Take a Seat: Answering “What’s Your Thesis About?”<sup>1</sup>

We were sitting in the bar on campus, catching up in between lectures. He tossed his earphones at me: “Try this, I think you’ll like it.” He was right, of course. He knows my taste. “They tell a story, you know,” he had my attention, “each album is a chapter. There’re comic books, too.” I was curious.

I found other musicians who were telling their stories this way, and I took the very loose idea for this thesis to my supervisor. She smiled knowingly while I ranted about storytelling, and music, and a literary world beyond print, grasping at some inkling that lay just beyond my fingertips. She gave me a reading list, and sent me on my way. She said there was something to it. She was right, of course.

And then there was the word—“transmedial”—a possibility, a promise, a path. I was excited by these stories, and by the theorists my supervisor directed me to—Henry Jenkins, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Will Brooker. Jenkins famously defines transmedia as “the art of world making.”<sup>2</sup> He expands on this definition through *transmedia storytelling* which he describes as a process that “[integrates] multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium.”<sup>3</sup> Carlos A. Scolari unfurls Jenkins’ definition, asserting that the transmedia format is “a social, commercial and semiotic necessity of certain tales”<sup>4</sup> that often responds to readers’ demands, or that readers act on those desires in contravention of the canonical storyworld when they are so motivated by “storytelling [that] is so strong that the characters require

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to open the thesis with a personal anecdote regarding my research as this is a thesis about life-writing.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*, (New York University Press: New York, 2006), Kindle eBook, Loc. 527 of 8270.

<sup>3</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2032 of 8270.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos A. Scolari, Paolo Bertetti and Matthew Freeman, *Transmedia Archaeology: Storytelling in the Borderlines of Science Fiction, Comics and Pulp Magazines* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

more space and time to tell their stories.”<sup>5</sup> This possessory turn of phrase, “their stories,” signposts not just the fictions that readers become involved with, but speaks to how those stories are incorporated into the individual reader’s lived experiences: to ask for someone’s story is to ask them to tell you their lives. This suggests that there is a confluence between commercialised culture and personal ontologies, as suggested by Jenkins’ statement regarding the lack of “pure boundary between the emergent commercial culture and residual folk culture”<sup>6</sup> with one borrowing from the other, that is not fully realised. Such a claim can be read against how texts that examine a lived experience might borrow from, and loan to, their readers. I start with these definitions as the basis for my study, however, my focus on reader engagement with the storyworlds means that I expand on the term *transmedia storytelling* to recognise and privilege those folk-cultural contributions of readers (as discussed by both Jenkins and Scolari *et al.*) in cohering and expanding these storyworlds.

Although there is more discussion of the roles that readers can perform in relation to the storyworlds, most scholarship into transmedia considers the creation and production processes. Geoffrey Long, for example, focussed on the delivery of a coherent storyworld to readers,<sup>7</sup> which implies that the coherence lies in the creation of the story, rather than in its reception. In her examination of *Doctor Who* and transmedia, Elizabeth Evans notes that transmedia practice can lead to “the mixing of this fictional world with the real world of the viewers lived experience”<sup>8</sup> and this method is incorporated into the contemporary case studies that I draw on throughout this thesis. Evans goes on to note that transmedia is not “the telling of the same events on different platforms” but is rather

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<sup>5</sup> Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman, *Transmedia Archaeology*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 3020 of 8270.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Long, “Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company,” (Master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 48.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life*, 25.

“the telling of *new* events from the *same* storyworld.”<sup>9</sup> Where readers are implicated in this storyworld, as they are in my case studies, whether through play (as in Jay-Z’s *Decoded* game) or performance (as through the eulogy that opened Amanda Palmer’s *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* tour shows) then they are also implicated in the creation of the storyworld, and it is this question of shifting authority in relation to transmedial texts that I find particularly engaging in the study of transmedial life-writing; if authority in the storyworld lies with a corporation—a legal person, but not a natural one—then readers and writers both are faced with the potentiality that their lives, loves, and losses are the property of media conglomerate. This thesis asks: how can readers and writers of life-stories take back our own lives?

Transmedia life-writing offers readers a cultural space within which they can assert their agency with storyworlds. Scholars of transmedia have written extensively about how these narratives functioned, for example Jenkins examines the ways in which readers are taking more responsibility for transmedia stories,<sup>10</sup> while Elizabeth Evans considered the ways in which a reader’s experience of one media might shape the readers subsequent experience of the narrative in a different media by positioning the reader to “[take] into account the specific values of one medium, such as television drama, that are applied to another, such as gaming.”<sup>11</sup> However, this research often drew on cinema based narratives such as *The Matrix*, *Star Wars*, and *Spooks* to demonstrate the researchers’ theories. These texts are largely fantasy or science fiction texts, and the relationship between such texts and transmediality was recently explored

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<sup>9</sup> Evans, *Transmedia Television*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.2023 of 8270.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Evans, “Character, audience agency and transmedia Drama,” *Media, Culture & Society* Vol 30(2),198.

by Colin Harvey in his book *Fantastic Transmedia*. Harvey recognises much of the overlap between the texts and society. He writes:

I argue for a definition of transmedia storytelling which is *relational*, emphasising the relationship between a particular transmedia articulation such as a comic book or website with the wider storyworld in question, and by extension the wider culture. I argue that in each instance these transmedial relationships are governed by legal parameters—or indeed their operation *outside* of such legal parameters—and that these constraints dictate the ways in which transmedia expressions can ‘remember’ other elements in a given transmedial network.<sup>12</sup>

Harvey’s recent claims about relationality and transmedia are exciting, given that my particular interest in transmedia lies in determining how it might impact on or reframe our understanding of the self, of subjectivity. However, rather than consider texts premised in the fantastic or science fiction genres, I turned to life-writing, a genre that brings together self, experience, and encounter to construct a narrative for the purpose of ontological coherence.<sup>13</sup> Like Harvey, I recognised that the legal and economic regulation of transmedial texts would impact both creators and readers, and so I looked to transmedial life-writing as a way of understanding how selfhood—which underpins both of these regulatory discourses—can be constructed across multiple media platforms. My motivation is to determine whether transmedial life-writing can act as a site of resistance to NeoLiberal discourses of subjectivity as exemplified in legal and economic discourse, or whether it is complicit in an ontological narrative that privileges such a subject.

The link between life-writing and regulatory discourses has long been a focus of life-writing scholarship. In *The Limits of Autobiography*, Leigh Gilmore describes life-writing as “an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one’s relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of

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<sup>12</sup> Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, play and memory across science-fiction and fantasy storyworlds*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Zachary Leader, *On Life-Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2-3.

representativeness (and exclusion)”<sup>14</sup> and in the introduction to *Identity Technologies*, Julie Rak and Anna Poletti identify the influence on life-writing scholarship of John Locke’s assertion that “identity is the expression of consciousness that is continuous over time, but that identity is also a product, one’s own property, which is a legal entity.”<sup>15</sup> Both of these critiques hinge on the intersection between social and legal ontologies. They highlight a discursive aporia between narratives of the self in a narrated and in a *narratable* context: the self as it is, and the self as it is allowed to be. Both transmedia narratives and life-writing account for corporeality: life-writing is an opportunity for writers to recount their lived experiences and transmedia positions readers to make their own experiences in relation to the storyworld. By questioning how readers and authors contribute to the construction of a subject there is potential to challenge regulatory discourses that privilege the sovereign, neo-liberal subject.

In order to frame a discussion of ontology when examining life, experience, and encounter in a transmedial context, I contend that it is necessary to draw on rhetoric rooted in both a narratological and a critical feminist patois. The narratological lens enables me to firmly position transmedia life-writing as a literary practice: it acknowledges the complexities of reading “the *historical person writing the autobiography* within her cultural world”<sup>16</sup> while enabling me to discuss “the intersection of levels of meaning and modes of self-representation.”<sup>17</sup> Specifically it makes explicit the type of subjectivity represented: is it presented as coherent and sovereign, or as “fragmented” and “multi-referential”?<sup>18</sup> In terms of applying a feminist lens to transmedia narratives, although there has been some discussion of feminist themes in

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<sup>14</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Julie Rak and Anna Poletti, *Identity Technologies: Constructing the self online* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 238.

<sup>17</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 239.

<sup>18</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 239.

transmedia texts, the discourse has not been applied to the form itself. As transmedia narratives are often collectively authored, and are non-linear, there is a lack of structural hierarchy to indicate to readers which texts are privileged in the storyworld's diegesis. A vibrant folk and fan culture has also arisen in response to these storyworlds, and they offer readers a way of reading using intertextuality and play that is not invested in regulatory language in the way that linear reading is. These qualities all position readers to approach the text with less of a focus on linear reading practices. It can be a "feminine" form of writing insofar as it offers readers "the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures."<sup>19</sup> The first step in this process is to interrogate the terminology that has been employed to describe transmedia narratives, and question the assumptions that language makes about how power is distributed through these narratives.

Determining what terms to use when describing the overall experience of the transmedial narrative for the reader is therefore a question not only of narratology, but of politics. As such, I find that metaphors rooted in geography articulates not only the boundaries of the transmedial narrative, but also signposts its political territoriality, and identifies the reader as a bounded object within that narrative practice.<sup>20</sup> Katherine Young's chapter, "Frame and Boundary in the Phenomenology of Narrative"<sup>21</sup>, provided a useful definition of the term "storyrealm" as it occurs in a transmedial, rather than in a monomedial, context. She writes that:

[the] storyrealm consists of tellings, writings, performances - that is, of recounting or alluding to events understood to transpire in another realm. The status of one realm bears on, but does not fix the status of the other.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Summer, 1976), 879.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on Ontological Metaphors in *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, R. 2003), 29-30.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine Young, "Frame and Boundary in the Phenomenology of Narrative," in *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2004), 76-107.

<sup>22</sup> Young, "Frame and Boundary in the Phenomenology of Narrative," 77.

However, while drawing on Young's explanation, I settled on the more expansive term 'storyworld' to describe the overlapping stories that contributed to the transmedial narrative after attending the "Storyworlds Across Media" conference organised by the Transmedial Narration Workgroup at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz in June of 2011. Unlike a storyrealm, the status and stasis of a storyworld is left to the readers, rather than determined by the texts considered part of the story's franchise. I argue that the storyworld must account for the narrative's entire possibility, and includes readers' creative responses to the narrative, while the storyrealm is the narrative that is bounded by franchised and regulated texts. I draw this distinction on the basis of the words 'realm' and 'world': the former signifies a geographical space that is ruled and regulated by a sovereign force (in the case of a storyrealm, this is the intellectual property rights holder) while a storyworld accounts for both regulated and unregulated aspects of the narrative, as well as its relation to broader culture and society. The storyrealm makes literature the primary frame through which this relationship between the narrative and society is examined. However, given that transmedial life-writing occurs across a series of texts that are implicated in the author's identity, it is necessary to consider how readers can make that identity cohere. Storyworlds are examples of transmedial narratives where print literature plays second fiddle to a host of other media, often audio-visual and game based. I therefore started using the word 'reader' as an amorphous term to indicate 'a person who engages with the storyworld', whether that is as a literary reader, a listener, an audience member, a gamer, a viewer, or a combination of any and all of these things. I thought about the nature of storytelling, specifically the dynamics of an author/reader relationship, as our society makes a technological shift that expands the possibilities of print culture. I focused my interrogation on storyworlds that contained literary engagements with life-writing: *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, *Decoded*, *The Amory Wars*, and *Who*

*Killed Amanda Palmer.*<sup>23</sup> One of the things that I observed across these texts was that there was something subversive happening in terms of how the authors were constructing their identities. Transmedial representations of identity seem seditious, as if they challenge the sovereign self that underwrite Western hegemonic discourses such as law, economics, medicine, and religion.

As I started looking into the case studies I noticed that the living musicians behind them—Shawn Carter, Claudio Sanchez, and Amanda Palmer—were all involved in conversations with their fans. Carter responds to fan queries through *Facebook.com* and his website, Sanchez pops up on *Reddit.com* to answer questions, and Palmer is a prolific communicator on *Twitter.com*, *Tumblr.com*, *Facebook.com*, and her website. This back and forth between the musicians and their fans gives them the opportunity to enter into dialogue with each other. This dialogue extends to the musicians' life-writing. Transmedial life-writing inhabits not just the space of telling, but of telling *to* an audience and being heard by them. In his article "Demonstrating *Discours*,"<sup>24</sup> Simon Grennan extends the narratological approach that focuses on the analysis of systems of enunciation (the *histoire*) and instead concentrates on examining the *discours* or the act of telling *to*. The *to* is an essential component of this equation and it comes through in the relational process that transmedial texts rely on—a story told with disregard for its audience is an account, a relay of information, but to be *told* it must be heard and responded to. Grennan describes this focus as a study that "opens itself to the analysis of the relationships between story, form, and enunciative context."<sup>25</sup> The enunciative context is a space for storytelling, where the articulated narrative is received and reflected upon by an audience. In terms of transmedia, Colin Harvey has also recently identified the overlap between the textual and the social. He writes:

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<sup>23</sup> A synopsis of these storyworlds is provided later in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Grennan, "Demonstrating *Discours*: Two comic strip projects in self-constraint," *Studies in Comics*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 295-316.

<sup>25</sup> Grennan, "Demonstrating *Discours*," 296.

I argue for a definition of transmedia storytelling which is *relational*, emphasising the relationship between a particular transmedia articulation such as a comic book or website with the wider storyworld in question, and by extension the wider culture. I argue that in each instance these transmedial relationships are governed by legal parameters—or indeed their operation *outside* of such legal parameters—and that these constraints dictate the ways in which transmedia expressions can ‘remember’ other elements in a given transmedial network.<sup>26</sup>

Harvey’s recognition of the relationality of transmedial storyworlds can be understood as a recognition of the roles that individual subjects play in mediating, that is, making sense of, the storyworld.

This mediation of the text, where it is understood within its literary, social, legal and economic relationships, leads to the type of reader engagement that is described by Louise Rosenblatt as a *poem* that occurs between readers and the printed text. Rosenblatt extrapolates on this terminology:

“Poem” presupposes a reader actively involved with a text and refers to what he makes of his responses to the particular set of verbal symbols... The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming together, a co-penetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being.<sup>27</sup>

I use Rosenblatt, whose research focussed on reader responses to texts, as a lens that brings into focus theories about relationality. Rosenblatt’s understanding of the poem as a “coming together... of a reader and a text” and Harvey’s understanding of the storyworld as fostering a relationship between the iteration of the story, the individual media, the broader story world, and society,<sup>28</sup> can also be likened to the process that Philippe Lejeune understands as the autobiographical contract.<sup>29</sup> These three ideas

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<sup>26</sup> Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, play and memory across science-fiction and fantasy storyworlds*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978 r. 1994), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Contract.”

address the confluence of reader and text can be understood as 'relationality', however this term is used to slightly different effect in both transmedia and life-writing studies.

Nancy K. Miller and Paul John Eakin have considered the issue of autobiographical relationality. They recognise life-writing as a genre that requires interaction between the author and their audience. Eakin writes that life-writing offers not only the "autobiography of the self but the biography *and* autobiography of the other."<sup>30</sup> This idea underpins much of my discussion of ontology in this thesis, although I expand it from a relationality between the author and other people with whom they are temporally proximate, to a relationality between the author and their unknown audience.

In transmedia studies relationality is understood as the relationship between the text, the storyworld, and the wider culture.<sup>31</sup> Colin Harvey makes the connection that the relationship between texts, storyworlds and cultures is "governed by legal parameters... [that] dictate the ways in which transmedia expressions can 'remember' other elements in a given transmedia network."<sup>32</sup> It seems to me that the differing articulations of 'relationality' arising from both life-writing and transmedia scholarship rely on, but elide, the relationship between the reader and the storyworld. In both instances it is left to the reader to make meaning from the text, both in terms of understanding the ontology represented in relation to their own, and being the nexus between the transmedial text, and the storyworld and broader culture.

My own exploration of transmedia and ontology brings together these understandings of how readers, texts and society function by thinking of them as an aspect of the storyworld that I describe as the *lacuna*. Although this term has been used by transmedia scholarship, such as in Stanford University's Lacuna Stories project, I extend Peter Grove's

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<sup>30</sup> Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>31</sup> Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 2.

use of the term in relation to Shakespearean metre. He describes lacunae as “either silent beats or silent offbeats, produced in our negotiation as performers between written line and known phonological and metrical constraints.”<sup>33</sup> Expanding on this idea of the interaction between the performer and text, I use the lacuna in transmedia storytelling to describe the physical, temporal and experiential space used by readers when they engage with the text in order to create a ‘poem’ (to borrow Rosenblatt’s term) with the storyworld. In my usage, lacuna describes a relational space that is both legally regulated and that is also a site for resisting that regulation. The lacuna is regulated by legal prohibitions placed on fan created merchandise in favour of licenced products: readers are told how they are allowed to engage with the storyrealm (that space that is constrained by licensed and legitimised texts), for example through the purchase of licensed merchandise. The lacuna is regulated by legal prohibitions placed on fan created merchandise in favour of licenced products: readers are told how they are allowed to engage with the storyrealm, for example through the purchase of licensed merchandise.

Storyrealms are not only regulated by legal prohibitions; genre can also act as a social regulator, placing prohibitions on how writers are expected to use a genre. In life-writing, this issue is most clearly demonstrated by texts which are charged with breaching the autobiographical contract. Smith and Watson note that “Charges of autobiographical bad faith or hoaxing reveal... how critical [questions of the authenticity of experience and the integrity of identity] are to the central notion of the relationship between life writer and reader.”<sup>34</sup> By resisting prohibitions against, for example, fan lead creation, or proscriptive notions of how experience must be articulated in order to be ‘authentic’, readers are able to broaden their understanding of how the subject is constructed and, if only for the duration of their engagement

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<sup>33</sup> In *Stylistics and Shakespeare's Language: Transdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Mireille Ravassat and Jonathan Culpeper (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 4.

<sup>34</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 37.

with the storyworld, to challenge neo-liberalist narratives of the self and other that underpin the ideology's regulatory discourses. All of these contributions increase the scope of the storyworld. My primary research question, therefore, is:

How is the subject constructed through transmedial life-writing?

Rosenblatt's definition also provided me with a number of the questions that I wanted to extrapolate on in relation to transmedial life-writing, such as:

1. How do texts position readers to engage with transmedial storyworlds?
2. If a story becomes a part of a reader's lived experiences, what rights and obligations do readers have in relation to the storyworld?
3. Where the author's life-story is told through the storyworld, does relationality, as discussed above, affect the way in which readers can affect the author's subjectivity?
4. Does transmedial life-writing offer writers and readers a site for resisting narratives that privilege sovereign subjectivity?
5. How can authors and readers ethically engage with each other, and the storyworld?

These questions position the reader's relationship with the storyworld at the heart of this study. While it opens questions of sociology, economics, and law, these are interrogations that can be addressed after the literary and narratological concerns are accounted for.

## **1.2 Transmedia**

Transmedial storyworlds use a method of narrative construction that is not reliant on one particular medium or art-object: across the case studies, music, books, and performance are read together to explore the storyworld's content. As such, readers engage with a narrative that spans a series of media, sites, and times, each of which might influence the reader's experience of the storyworld. This reading practice is familiar

largely because of the narrative and commercial success of storyworlds such as *Star Trek* (1966-), *Star Wars* (1977-), *Doctor Who* (1963-), and *The Matrix* (1999-2009). It was also incorporated into children's media<sup>35</sup> and has thus become a familiar reading style for readers who have been immersed in Western popular culture from the 1980s. The discourse surrounding transmedial storytelling has been linked to the emergence of 'convergence culture', as identified in Henry Jenkins' 2008 book of the same name.<sup>36</sup> He describes this culture as a discursive literary space where consumers participate in the circulation of media content across multiple media systems, economies and national borders in order to maximise their entertainment experiences and access to knowledge.<sup>37</sup> Jenkins therefore positions convergence culture as reliant on consumer engagement, if not consumer driven. Since Jenkins offered this definition scholars such as Marie-Laure Ryan, Christy Dena, and Elizabeth Evans have offered their own takes on the phenomenon. Most recently Colin Harvey traced the development of intra and transmedial stories from classical Greece through to contemporary fantasy literature. He asserts that "intramedia storytelling established templates for crossmedia storytelling that ran parallel with it and have increasingly succeeded it, and which in turn led to the disparate crossmedia storytelling forms that dominate contemporary culture."<sup>38</sup> Harvey's focus is on fantastic literature, however, he does turn his attention briefly to the question of life-writing and ontology, and he notes that "Reconciling this relationship between the embodied self and the wider environment is challenging."<sup>39</sup> He draws from Smith and Watson and Paul John Eakin to position the body as elided from Western narratives of selfhood, and links this elision, as I do, to Cartesian dualism, and the conflation of the masculine body

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<sup>35</sup> Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 177 of 8270.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 7.

with human embodied experience.<sup>40</sup> This elision of embodied experience is made explicit in transmedia narratives, as they are still generally understood as the product of a unified authorial force, rather than as a product of the relationship between a constellation of authors, readers, and the text. This elision is even more explicit in life-writing, which is “the property of publishing houses and media conglomerates”<sup>41</sup> but is popularly imagined as the creation of a single subjectivity recounting its own experiences.<sup>42</sup> However, as this thesis demonstrates, more and more writers and readers are engaging with and reflecting on non-linear life-writing practices.

From microblogging on social media websites, reality television programs, and increasing academic and popular recognition of journaling, letter writing, graphic memoir and performance as life-writing, people are increasingly partaking in life writing practices as part of their day to day existence.<sup>43</sup> The commercial success of these narratives combined with this storytelling method has made it a popular tool of publishing houses, ensuring that they can licence the rights to create different elements of the storyworld to franchisees. Transmedial storyworlds can turn a tidy profit, but is profit all that these storyworlds can achieve? These texts might be popular with publishing houses because of their potential as franchises, but the expanded storytelling platforms also allow the storytellers to negotiate between the media that best suit the narration of the storyworld. This sort of storyworld offers a more expansive view of its subject matter. Readers are afforded the opportunity to reflect on the subject of the autobiography and, by extension, their own subjectivity, while engaging in narrative portraiture offers writers a way to explore the complexities of life and identity. I narrowed my case studies down to

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<sup>40</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 125.

<sup>42</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Hayes, ‘Life Writing in the Digital Age’, in *On Life-Writing*, ed. Zacharay Leader, 233-256; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 183-186; Rob Cover, ‘Becoming and Belonging: Performativity, Subjectivity, and the Cultural Purposes of Social Networking’, in *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, eds., (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 55-69.

examples that included book texts, music texts, and performance. It seemed to me that life-writing that incorporated these elements is reliant upon the relationship between the musician and their audience. This relationship is mediated through these art-objects and is experienced by both the authors and the readers during live performances. Such negotiations of life-writing challenge the idea that life-writing is a retrospective practice, and bring it closer to an ongoing exploration of identity formation between the musician and their audience. This negotiation occurs most obviously during live performances in which the musicians' and the fans' bodies, as well as their subjectivities, are part of this reading negotiation, and so I was curious about texts that made explicit the embodied process of reading.

Both transmedia and life-writing are focussed on the body's experiences: life-writing focusses on writers recounting that experience to readers, while transmedia invites readers to create their own experiences. Examining the relationship between these embodied processes can open questions about relationality and otherness that are so integral to reimagining the subject. Transmedial stories use media that engage the body in a way that is more physical than imaginary. Harvey notes that transmedia storytelling "is constituted by an enduring dialogical interrelationship in which memory... is ever present. These memories are interpolated by a range of embodied and emplaced factors which affect how these stories are created and negotiated by key players within the transmedia network."<sup>44</sup> Performance is the most obvious of these physical engagements, but listening to music, game-play, and even reading all rely on some form of embodiment. Similarly, life-writing recounts embodied experiences; the negotiation of a corporealised ontology. In life-writing, the body is often experienced as the boundary of subjective experience: it is the border between subjects who exercise the sovereignty of their own bodies.

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<sup>44</sup> Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 37.

I have selected storyworlds that explore identity because it seemed to me that the question of how the Subject is constructed *through* these storyworlds is essential to understanding how the Subject is constructed *in relation to* these storyworlds. One of these texts—*The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*—dates from the late 1500s and therefore precedes the ready accessibility of print media, while the other three—*The Amory Wars*, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, and *Decoded*—are contemporary texts, all written by American musicians of similar age, and from the East Coast of the United States, but from varied cultural, economic, racial, and social backgrounds. Whythorne’s life-writing provides a material and historical precedent that grounds transmedial life-writing in a social, rather than a purely economic framework. Although other scholars have discussed the history of transmedial narratives—Scolari, *et al.* identify transmedia as a feature of early twentieth century comic book and pulp culture,<sup>45</sup> while Evans identifies Biblical stories, and British folk tales (such as Robin Hood and the Arthurian) as possessing transmedial qualities,<sup>46</sup> and Harvey points to Classical mythology as early examples of the practice<sup>47</sup>—these narratives are, again, stories based in the fantastic, while Whythorne’s reflections on his life and work is grounded in his lived experiences, and demonstrates that identity has been read as relational since before regulatory understandings of a sovereign subject were articulated during the Enlightenment.

Transmedial storyworlds demand a style of reading involving *symbolic* literacy (in order to engage in wordplay), as well as requiring the reader to be literate in non-alphabetic signifiers (semiotic signifiers such sound, movement and image). While I elaborate on this point further throughout the thesis, I use the terms 'semiotic' and 'symbolic' in a Kristevan sense. As such, the semiotic is the “original libidinal multiplicity

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<sup>45</sup> Scolari, et al., *Transmedia Archaeology*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, *Transmedia Television*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 42.

within the very terms of culture,"<sup>48</sup> an emotional province that occupies the ruptures and prosody that are outside of 'symbolic' language.<sup>49</sup> The 'semiotic' is associated with the musical, the poetic, the rhythmic, and that which lacks structure and meaning. 'Symbolic' therefore indicates language that is signified through the culturally ascribed meanings of words.<sup>50</sup> This is particularly salient when considering that transmedial storyworlds are interpreted through the reader's cultural lens, and that this perspective can vary from reader to reader. These storyworlds arise as an exchange between the authors and their readers, whereby authors create the storyworld and readers interpret and create meaning from the storyworld in line with their own experiences and cultural fluency. Given the proliferation of transmedial narratives it is necessary to investigate this narrative milieu in order to ascertain how transmedial narratives position readers, and how readers choose to position themselves as subjects in relation to the storyworld and indeed to the world at large.

The literary arts provide offer readers a lens through which they can reconcile "conflicting, even contradictory, views of the world"<sup>51</sup> into their sense of self. Eagleton notes that "artistic modes of production... [are] a crucial factor in determining the social relations between 'producers' and 'consumers' but also in determining the very literary form of the work itself."<sup>52</sup> I make the claim that transmedia storyworlds ask readers to think about their relationship with the text, the author, and the means of production. This choice is part of a wider discussion that I introduce in the thesis.

In the case of life-writing, I want to explore how transmedial storyworlds situate authors and readers in order to construct or

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<sup>48</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1990, r. 2007), 108.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject," in *The Kristeva Reader*, Ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1986, R. 1996), 26-27.

<sup>50</sup> Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," *Hypatia*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter 1989): 105.

<sup>51</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 6

<sup>52</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 63.

deconstruct identity, and to consider how these identities might be regulated in broader taxonomic discourses. I draw on a feminist approach that combines reader-response theory and deconstruction. I am interested in whether transmedial life-writing might destabilise popular notions of the autobiographical genre amongst non-academic readers, and whether it can provide a space for the expression of subjectivities that are beyond the parameters of hegemonic masculinity: subjectivities that are relational, transactional, and collaborative. These are subjectivities that are inadequately articulated, that fight back against psychological and corporeal colonisation, and that queer those other subjectivities with which they enter into dialogue. Life-writing scholarship has already turned its attention to the question of power and life-writing. In particular, the question of legitimacy (that is, who has the right to have their life-experiences recognised as signifying a broader social experience with which readers can identify) has arisen in terms of scholarship that turns its attention to marginalised testimonies from women, queer people, people of colour, the working classes, and survivors.<sup>53</sup>

With these queries in mind, I ask: How is the subject constructed through transmedial life-writing? I propose that transmedia narratives might offer a feminised way of reading that is a manifestation of Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine* insofar as it challenges the symbolic order by centring the reader. This becomes a way for the reader to "return to the body which has been more than confiscated" and, most important is the means by which the reader might "become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process."<sup>54</sup> This research considers if and how the case studies have explored this potential. I use the terms masculine and feminine (and derivatives thereof) to describe how power, in particular as a way of constituting knowledge and truth, is negotiated across the matrix of economic, legal, artistic, and cultural

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<sup>53</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 117-125.

<sup>54</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Summer, 1976), 880

practices that shape transmedial storyworlds. I initially make this observation on the basis that transmedial narratives are non-linear, insofar as there is no set beginning, middle and end for the story, but a series of entries and exits into the storyworld via different media. This disrupts the chronological reading style associated with linear narratives that Cixous describes as motivated by a “libidinal and cultural... economy.”<sup>55</sup> It is a practice that is more reminiscent of events that commence, continue and then culminate. Cixous describes this process as motivated by a “libidinal and cultural... economy.”<sup>56</sup> In contrast, transmedial storyworlds have multiple entry points that are open for manipulation and play by readers. These entry points are among the spaces that I attend to in the third chapter discussing the *lacuna*. As mentioned earlier, the *lacunae* are the space where readers can take control of the storyworld’s meaning: they are the space where consumers become *prosumers*. I make the claim that reader involvement in storyworlds, *prosumption*,<sup>57</sup> is what makes transmedial texts cohere. This puts readers, rather than writers, at the centre of the knowledge making process, and opens a line of questioning about subjectivity, and how identity is experienced, that is not as explicit in relation to linear reading practices. It positions readers to be *prosumers*.

*Prosumption* is a portmanteau derived from *production* and *consumption*. It indicates that creative output is the result of both consumer cultural practice and active creative and critical response: the term ‘prosumer’ is generally attributed to Alvin Toffler who devoted considerable attention to it in *The Third Wave*.<sup>58</sup> Toffler argued that prosumption was prevalent in pre-industrial, or ‘first-wave’, societies. ‘Second wave’ societies came around in early modernity with the rise of a merchant class, and this drove “a wedge into society, that separated these two functions, thereby

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<sup>55</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Signs*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Summer, 1976), 879.

<sup>56</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Signs*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Summer, 1976), 879.

<sup>57</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, (New York: Morrow, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> Toffler, *The Third Wave*.

giving birth to what we now call producers and consumers.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the nascent economic form is prosumption. More recently, in their 2010 article, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital ‘prosumer’,” George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson turned to Toffler’s theory of prosumption to frame their discussion of user-generated content in online markets, further suggesting that prosumption is relevant in examining transmedial storyworlds. In Toffler’s view contemporary society is moving towards a ‘third wave’ that, in part, invites the reintegration of the prosumer into the market.<sup>60</sup> It is this interactivity between authors, readers, and the text that enables the story to manifest within the reader. The reader, not the author, is the agent that brings the texts together to make the storyworld.

While contemporary stories are told through ‘second wave’ communication channels (such as newspapers, television or radio websites and books), which clearly delineate the creator and the consumer, they are increasingly constructed across social networking platforms (such as Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook and YouTube) and a hybrid interactive editorial affectionately dubbed ‘The Blogosphere’,<sup>61</sup> as well as through games and other websites. The increased use of these new communication platforms has resulted in a paradigmatic power shift in terms of ‘authority.’ The question of authority is manifested differently between life-writing and transmedia scholarship. Smith and Watson describe ‘authority’ as a rhetorical device that “invites or compels the reader’s belief in the story and the veracity of the narrator.”<sup>62</sup> In this context, ‘authority’ gains its rhetorical force from an association with ‘truthfulness’—that is, it positions the reader to accept particular claims made in the text as truthful, and “justifies writing and publicizing the life

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<sup>59</sup> Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 266.

<sup>60</sup> Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 265.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Blogosphere’ is a portmanteau of ‘Web-Log’ (an on-line diary or journal entry) and hemisphere, and connotes the medium’s permeable and inclusive state.

<sup>62</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 33.

story.”<sup>63</sup> In transmedia scholarship, authority is often associated with the question of a storyworld’s canonical coherence, and is generally regulated by an intellectual property rights holder, who engages in licensing agreements in an attempt to delineate which agents may and may not amend the story.<sup>64</sup> Given the often fallible conflation of the rights holder with the author of the text in transmedial storyworlds, the question of ‘authorial intent’ is already troubled. Once this issue is paired with “the multiple interpretive strategies [that] audiences... might utilise in the negotiation of the storyworld”<sup>65</sup> it becomes clear that, as with life-writing scholarship, the role of the reader is constructed by the work itself, and positions the reader to delineate the bounds of authority—to decide which authorities they will follow, and which they will defy—is under examined in both disciplines, and should be central to the study of transmedial life-writing. Similarly, this lack of delineation between the creator and the consumer of a storyworld also raises the question of which information is considered ‘legitimate’. Legitimacy can be understood in life-writing discourse as the sanctioning provided by “[some] higher authority or recourse to its functions... where truth is an issue.”<sup>66</sup> Joanna R. Bartow describes legitimacy as a “process that [proves] or [justifies] the truth of something or the character of a person or thing in conformity to the law.”<sup>67</sup> In transmedia studies the term is again related to questions of an internal narrative truthfulness. This legitimacy rests less on the question of authorial intent, and more with “what a storyworld’s audience understands of the diegetic universe they’re engaging with.”<sup>68</sup> However, Harvey goes on to note that the relationship between regulatory discourse, in this instance intellectual property law, is

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<sup>63</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 33.

<sup>64</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 97.

<sup>65</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 122.

<sup>67</sup> Joanna R. Bartow, *Subject To Change: The Lessons of Latin American Women’s Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, and Theory*, (Chapel Hill, N.C. : U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages : Distributed by University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 35.

<sup>68</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 27.

hugely influential on the question of legitimacy in transmedia storyworlds. He writes:

Transmedia storytelling... is constituted by an enduring dialogical interrelationship in which memory... is ever present... At a textual level these memories are framed by legal contracts, which have direct bearing on which elements of the diegesis might be articulated in the specific element of the transmedia network in question, and indeed how these articulations are manifested. Even those memories which exist outside of legal frameworks are still relationally determined by such legal frameworks.<sup>69</sup>

Bringing together these understandings of legitimacy in transmedial life-writing means having to grapple with the problem of how legal discourse intersects with ontology. However, this is not the central concern of my thesis, rather, I consider the more broad concern: how do transmedial storyworlds position readers to exercise authority and legitimacy in relation to the narrative?

In transmedial narratives, where the author and the reader can both contribute to the storyworld in different ways, the power hierarchy that situates the author as ‘the imparter of knowledge’—as the agent who controls the reader as ‘the receiver of knowledge’—is troubled. Transmedial narratives challenge traditional notions of storyworld ownership by encouraging, and sometimes requiring, prosumption from their readers. This creates a form of literacy<sup>70</sup> where the focus must shift from merely the ability to read and write words, to one that requires greater expression and understanding of words, sounds, and images as well as the ability to critically engage and seek out meaning both within and without the text. In order to accommodate this reading practice, regulatory discourses, such as law and economics, need to respond to a market where authors and readers are acting in concert with, rather than against, each other to produce stories.

The following six chapters are collected into three sections. The first section relates to transmedial form and practice: it provides an

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<sup>69</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> I use the term “literacy” less in its pedagogical sense and more to signify a textual experience that is a fluid, volatile and permeable state of reading, writing and critically engaging.

overview of what transmedial narratives are, and considers how they can be regulated both progressively and reactively in response to prosumption. It also extrapolates on the lacuna as a semiotic space that arises in storyworlds. The second section considers the ways in which the Subject and the Other are constructed in transmedial life-writing, and proposes an ethical framework for reimagining the regulation of these identities. The final section performs an exploration of life-writing and autobiography. It then draws on the case studies to consider the ways in which transmedial life-writing can be written, and how it can be read. By necessity, my research moves between narrative sites (music, text, performance and image) as appropriate.

### **1.3 Case-Studies**

There are four examples of transmedial life-writing that I draw on in my exploration of this literary practice: *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, *The Amory Wars*, *Decoded*, and *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* with *Theatre is Evil* and *The Art of Asking*. These storyworlds engage in the process Henry Jenkins calls “the art of world making”:<sup>71</sup> they consist of a number of different media, each of which develops a different part of the storyworld, and it is up to the readers to search out the coherence between the different medial explorations. As such, it feels artificial to approach these case studies as story fragments; to look at a singular medium and experience rather than to recognise the confluence of the whole work. It is therefore essential to consider the books, music, and other media as a whole: as storyworlds.

#### **1.3.1 The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne**

This example of life-writing is by an English composer and poet, Thomas Whythorne, and is considered one of the earliest surviving

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<sup>71</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 527 of 8270.

examples of autobiography in the English language.<sup>72</sup> It is also a transmedial storyworld, constructed across both live performances (of his compositions), and the manuscript itself. Whythorne's music, although unrecorded during his lifetime, was published as sheet music, and was therefore available for his potential readers to perform. Whythorne adopts the style of a commonplace book—a "repository for quotations from other texts"<sup>73</sup>—juxtaposing a collection of quotes and sentiments from the classics and scripture, with the author's own prose and poetry. These books were collections of proverbial wisdoms; essentially scrapbooks where the collator arranged quotes, poems, proverbs, and prayers, or other trivia that they wished to remember. Whythorne elaborates on the genesis of his lyrics and poetry, a unique practice among early modern poets. *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne* (Autobiography) follows the author's childhood and early education at Oxford, before he moved between a series of masters and mistresses as a music tutor. He reflects on his lived experiences, the art that was inspired by those experiences and his attempts to reconcile ideal Tudor masculinity with his class position and his lived experiences. Throughout the text Whythorne provides an explanation of his songs and elucidates on their "secret meaning."<sup>74</sup> In his foreword to the first publication of Whythorne's autobiography, Osborn notes that:

Whythorne's poems are really the heart of the autobiography, providing its basic structure. For it is clear that when Whythorne sat down to write his life story he opened up a manuscript wherein he had inscribed his Songs and Sonnets in chronological order, and used each poem as a peg on which to hang his narrative.<sup>75</sup>

This suggests that Whythorne considered his music and poetry a means of extrapolating on his lived experience. Although the storyworld draws to a close in 1576, it was written during a time when the English publishing

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<sup>72</sup> James M. Osborn, "Introduction," in Thomas Whythorne and James Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne: Modern Spelling Edition*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), xii.

<sup>73</sup> Jillian M. Hess, "Coleridge's Fly-Catchers: Adapting Commonplace-Book Form," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Volume 73, Number 3 (July 2012), 463.

<sup>74</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Osborn, "Introduction," iv.

industry was experiencing technological innovation analogous to the advent of the internet. Whythorne notes in his *Autobiography* that he determined to publish his music in order to “benefit and profit [him]self the better”<sup>76</sup> and decided that publishing his music would “make [him]self to be known of many in the shortest time that might be.”<sup>77</sup> Whythorne subsequently experienced a modest level of success with the publication of his work “Triplex of Songs, for three, four and five voices” in 1571. Although *The Autobiography* initially reads like a confessional text directed to a more intimate audience, he also suggests that it might educate “youthful imps,”<sup>78</sup> indicating that he anticipated a more diverse audience, only accessible through publication. Whythorne addressed the autobiography to an unnamed friend, writing:

As I do write unto you to gratify you withal, so I am partly enforced thereunto because I think it is needful not only to show cause why I wrote them, but also to open my secret meaning in divers of them, as well in words and sentences as in the whole of the same.<sup>79</sup>

Given Whythorne’s enthusiasm for making his music available to as broad an audience as he could through publication, it is not inconceivable that he intended for his reader to be able to hear live performances of his music, which they could then decode through his book. The manuscript was found in 1955 and was subsequently published as *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne* by Clarendon Press. The 1961 publication uses the author’s “new orthography,” while the 1962 edition (edited by James Osborn and published through the Oxford University Press) uses modern standard English. The editor, James Osborn, divided the text into twenty-five chapters, each one focusing on a significant period in Whythorne’s life. In his introduction to the 1962 edition, Osborn warns that the book “should be judged not by comparing it with the polished products of professional pens in the twentieth century, but by the prose standards of

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<sup>76</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 140.

<sup>77</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 140.

<sup>78</sup> Osborn, “Introduction,” xvi.

<sup>79</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 1.

the mid-sixteenth century”<sup>80</sup>; it is not so much the text’s literary merit, as its form that I am considering in relation to the contemporary examples of transmedial life-writing.

### 1.3.2 Decoded

*Decoded*<sup>81</sup> was released in 2010, and like Whythorne, it contrasts song lyrics with lived experiences in order to reveal the significations that the author identifies within their creative writing. It is published under Shawn Carter’s stage name, Jay-Z,<sup>82</sup> although the copyright is vested in Carter under his legal name. The text was initially published in partnership with the *Microsoft* owned search engine, *Bing.com*, as an immersive puzzle game:

Every single page of JAY-Z’s book will be released to the public before the book is in stores, with pages physically placed in locations related to their specific content. The immersive journey will take players from the projects in the Brooklyn neighborhood [*sic*] where JAY-Z grew up and the London streets where he found inspiration[,] to the building of his empire in Manhattan and beyond. Fans physically in those locations and those playing on-line with Bing will be offered never-before-experienced insights into JAY-Z’s highly personal process. In addition to high-profile media placements around the world, all 300 pages of “DECODED” will be appearing in places and on objects that have never before been used as advertising. From pools and pool tables to bronze plaques and high-fashion clothing racks, a variety of unexpected surfaces will become the canvas for JAY-Z’s art.

And it will be up to fans to decide how to find these pages using Bing. On-line, fans will find a one-of-a-kind search experience built on Bing technologies and will be able to walk the streets that JAY-Z walked and use Bing to search and decide how to decode his life and lyrics at every turn. The immersive on-line experience utilizes multiple facets of Bing, including Bing Maps and Bing Entertainment, to give fans full access to the stories behind JAY-Z’s songs.<sup>83</sup>

This game immediately locates the reader in a physical world, where they can (if they are in the appropriate location) go out and search for the

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<sup>80</sup> Osborn, “Introduction,” xii

<sup>81</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> For the purposes of clarity, I refer to Carter by his legal name, unless he is referred to by his stage name (in the case of quotations), or when I am examining his performance as Jay-Z.

<sup>83</sup> “JAY-Z and Bing Change the Game With “DECODED,”” news.microsoft.com, accessed 13/04/2012, <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/news/press/2010/oct10/10-17bingjay-zpr.aspx>.

story on the streets. The text recounts Carter's childhood in Brooklyn, New York's Marcy Project, and reflects on his status as an icon for a generation of African-American youth who found solace and solidarity through hip-hop. In extrapolating his song lyrics for an audience that did not experience these living conditions, Carter contends that these children were at the heart of a cultural movement, and the growth of an art form, that shaped a particularly American success story grounded in a form of counter-liberalism. Carter came of age in the 1970s and 80s when heroin was taking hold of New York City. While gangs had been a constant presence in the Marcy Project, and many children expected to end up as gang members, Carter writes that his experiences as a hustler gave him "a story to tell" and that he "felt obligated, above all, to be honest about that experience."<sup>84</sup> It was this ambition that pushed him into rapping. The storyworld consists of Carter's back-catalogue of recordings, live performances, the book *Decoded*, as well as the embodied game, an iOS application, also entitled *Decoded*, and Carter's website, which expands upon the decoding project by inviting other hip-hop artists to decode their own writing.

Carter attributes his independence from gangs, and eventually his ability to liberate himself from the financial imperative to deal drugs, to his art: rap as poetry. His story elucidates the socio-economic context for the success of one of (if not the) most influential contemporary music forms. In *Decoded*, he articulates the lyrical and acoustic value of rap, acknowledging the way that the two elements interact in order to mould the narrative.

Carter describes the relationship between artists and major labels as "the most contractually exploitative relationship you can have in America, and it's legal,"<sup>85</sup> reflecting a youth culture that was alienated by American politics and economics. This instigated an alternative (although not subversive) capitalist market. For Carter, founding his own record

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<sup>84</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 246.

label, *Roc-A-Fella Records*, was a central part of this process. His narrative spans both the illegitimate curb-side economy, found in doorways, and street corners, and between the cracks in the pavement, as well as his success in the legitimized, although still marginalized, hip-hop market.

For Carter the potential hypocrisy of his history, the conflict between street hustler and boardroom hustler, was soothed by the process of self-reckoning. His rapping was “the ideal way to make sense of a life that was doubled, split into contradictory halves.”<sup>86</sup> The book *Decoded* brings together Carter’s performed life-writing (music) and his autobiographical reflections to construct his subjectivity across time and space. Most importantly it is a subjectivity constructed across performance: when he performs as Jay-Z (whether on stage, or on the street) he does not “reject Shawn Carter”;<sup>87</sup> instead he asserts that “Shawn Carter’s life lives in Jay’s rhymes... Flesh and blood became words, ideas, metaphors, fantasies and jokes. But those two characters come together through the rhymes, become whole again.”<sup>88</sup> To make his lyrics accessible to the privileged (and largely white) audiences that did not share his lived context, Carter had to bring together a number of formats. Everything about this exploration is about decoding: it is not merely an unravelling of lyrics, colloquialisms, metaphors and slang for unfamiliar listeners, it also gives readers an opportunity to “learn about worlds different from their own (or find new ways of looking at worlds they already know.”<sup>89</sup> This is a decoding of cultural and racial identity: the book contains those readers with similar lived-experiences to his in parentheses. These readers become a reference point that Carter can turn to to validate his assertions, but otherwise they are unable to enter into the flow of the main narrative, they are an aside. The musical texts are handed over to the Other; they are a middle and upper class, often white, reader. They are an Other that already wields such extensive political

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<sup>86</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 239.

<sup>87</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 245.

<sup>88</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 245.

<sup>89</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 315.

power, and Carter is teaching them how to access the language employed by the Hip-Hop Nation. He offers an example of this knowledge-exchange in the afterword to *Decoded's* the extended edition, quoting the poet Kathleen Norris, who asserts that “given a choice between going clubbing to hear hip-hop and going to a monastery to chant the Psalms with Benedictine monks, the monks will win out every time.”<sup>90</sup> Norris firmly positions herself as one who is outside the artistic and social idiom that hip-hop provides, and describes reading an editorial proof of *Decoded* as having given her “a better sense of the workings of this vital art form.”<sup>91</sup> By reading the book, she is given an alternative path into the storyworld, and the storyworld is made accessible to her as a reader. Carter’s musical memoir rejects the “invisibility cloak”<sup>92</sup> that shrouds African-American art and culture. *Decoded* serves as a reminder that, before rap was appropriated by major record labels, it was a profoundly political means of cultural artistic expression that called out to, and spoke for, an entire generation of inner-urban African-American youth. As such, it is a lyrical form that is at home with constructing and de-constructing identities that run counter to, or parallel with, the Subject that informs regulatory discourses.

### 1.3.3 The Amory Wars

*The Amory Wars* is Claudio Sanchez’s transmedial storyworld, constructed across recorded music, live performance, sequential-art texts (including a graphic novel, comic books, a Major Arcana, and an art book), a script, and a prose novel. It also incorporates fan-based interactions across social networking sites.<sup>93</sup> The storyworld has multiple points of

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<sup>90</sup> Norris became a Benedictine oblate in 1986: Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 309-311.

<sup>91</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 311

<sup>92</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 163.

<sup>93</sup> Coheed and Cambria, *Second Stage Turbine Blade* (New York: Equal Vision Records, 2002); *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3* (New York: Equal Vision Records, 2003); *Good Apollo I’m Burning Star IV, Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness* (New York: Columbia, 2005); *Good Apollo I’m Burning Star IV, Vol. 2: No World for Tomorrow* (New York: Columbia, 2007); *The Year of the Black Rainbow* (New York: Columbia, 2010); *The Afterman: Ascension* (Los Angeles: Hundred Handed/Everything Evil, 2012); *The Afterman: Descension* (Los Angeles: Hundred Handed/Everything Evil, 2013); *The Prize*

entry, but the recorded music has been the primary gateway for most readers and is the most accessible medium.<sup>94</sup> It is a storyworld that explores identity through music and sound, as well as through illustration, prose and performance. The storyworld is an example of speculative fiction that incorporates both scientific and supernatural tropes. It is contained within a broader meta-narrative written by “The Writing Writer.”

*The Amory Wars* is a political text, albeit a patchwork of various socio-political concerns that examines the roles of violence, authority, religion, power, the ethics of scientific development, and the experience of multi-racial identity. The protagonist, Claudio, is part IRO-bot (a type of cyborg that refers to Asimov’s SF classic, *I, Robot*), and part Prise, as well as being human and Messiah.<sup>95</sup> This is one of the most significant ways in which Sanchez explores his own Italian and Puerto Rican heritage. *TAW* is set in Heaven’s Fence, an arrangement of seventy-eight planets and seven stars that are connected by a spiritual energy force called “the Keywork.” This galactic arrangement is set within our own universe’s far distant past, Earth being a part of Heaven’s Fence.

*TAW* consists of three main story arcs, and a peripheral narrative. For the sake of establishing a sense of the storyworld’s history, the arcs are presented in chronological order.

1. The Afterman

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Fighter Inferno, *My Brother’s Blood Machine* (New York: Equal Vision Records, 2006); *Beaver Records EP* (Beaver Records, 2011); *Half-Measures EP* (Los Angeles: Evil Ink Comics, 2012); Claudio Sanchez and Gus Vasquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook* (Los Angeles: Evil Ink Comics, 2006); Claudio Sanchez, Gus Vasquez, and Others, *The Amory Wars: The Second Stage Turbine Blade Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010); Claudio Sanchez, Peter David, Chris Burnham, and Others, *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010), Claudio Sanchez and Christopher Shy, *Good Apollo I’m Burning Star IV, Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness* (Los Angeles: Evil Ink Comics, 2005); Claudio Sanchez and Peter David, *Year of the Black Rainbow* (Nashville: Evil Ink Books, 2010); Claudio Sanchez and Nathan Spoor, *The Afterman* (Los Angeles: Evil Ink Comics/Hundred Handed Inc., 2012).

<sup>94</sup> *Year of the Black Rainbow* (Nashville: Evil Ink Books, 2010) is only available via the band’s on-line store and the graphic novels are generally stocked in specialist comic book stores.

<sup>95</sup>Analogous to an angel.

The Afterman provides a history of the storyworld, and explains how the series got its name. It follows the characters Sirius and Meri Amory, who are married. In this section, Sirius is a scientist who heads into The Keywork to find out what it is made of. His spaceship suffers a malfunction, and he is left floating in space. While he is immersed in The Keywork he discovers it is actually an energy source made of dead people's souls. He experiences a series of possessions, as some of the souls take over his body, and he lives through important moments in their life. He escapes The Keywork and returns to his wife, only to discover that he had been gone for a long time, was presumed dead, and she had moved on with her life with a new partner. He ends up killing her in a car accident and returns to The Keywork to find her soul.

## 2. The Black Rainbow

This story details the rise of the Supreme Tri-Mage Wilhelm Ryan as he takes control of Heaven's Fence. It follows Dr Leonard Hohenberger, a scientist who builds the IRO-bots known as The Knowledge (Cambria), The Beast (Coheed) and The Inferno (Jesse), or the KBI. Hohenberger's son, Joseph, dies during a peaceful protest against Ryan's expansionist policies. Ryan then kidnaps Hohenberger's wife, Pearl, and forces him to create a virus, the MonStar, which lies dormant in Cambria and Coheed, in order to secure her freedom. Once she is freed, and while in an unstable mental state, she rages at Hohenberger for helping Ryan, and then commits suicide. Hohenberger then builds a final IRO-bot, Josephine, and puts the cure for the MonStar virus in her. He then attacks Ryan, with the KBI, and is killed. The KBI return to the home they shared with the Hohenbergers and find Josephine incubating. Jesse de-activates Cambria and Coheed while they are asleep, and when they awake their memories are erased. They live as a couple, with Josephine as their oldest child. Jesse leaves them to lead the Rebellion against Ryan.

## 3. The Amory Wars

In the final story arc readers discover that *TAW* are an embedded narrative. A character called "The Writing Writer" had constructed the Heaven's Fence universe. Within that embedded narrative, Coheed and

Cambria Kilgannon had raised Josephine, and had three other children: Claudio, Matthew and Maria. They are told by one of Ryan's lackeys that they and their children are infected with the MonStar virus which would destroy the universe if it was ever triggered. In order to save the universe from the virus, Coheed kills Josephine, Matthew, and Maria. He and Cambria are kidnapped by Ryan's forces before Claudio returns home. Subsequently, Claudio Kilgannon discovers that he is a Messianic figure known as The Crowing, and he commences a revenge-quest to destroy Ryan.

A side project by Sanchez, *The Prize Fighter Inferno*, tells the story of a parallel but distant universe, as narrated by Jesse, Coheed's brother. This part of the storyworld is set in *TAW*'s distant past and follows two brothers, Long-Arm and Butchie Bleam, who decide to compete for the position of Death.

Claudio Sanchez is the real-world figure who produces the autobiographical 'I' that is situated in the *Amory Wars* storyworld. He has explained that the story follows two paths: it is both his perspective of his parents' relationship as well as an exploration of his relationship with a previous partner and with his current wife. Life-writing is not imputed to *The Amory Wars*; rather, Sanchez has openly discussed the fact that the story is a metaphorical exploration of his lived experiences.<sup>96</sup> This autobiographical exploration is channelled through the characters Sirius Amory, Claudio Kilgannon, and The Writing Writer. These autobiographical representations are complicated by the storyworld's transmediality, fictional elements, and multiple authors. I consider whether *TAW* can demonstrate how transmedial life-writing might have the potential to disrupt populist notions of both autobiographical practice, and subjectivity.

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<sup>96</sup> "Claudio Sanchez: I Let My Life Dictate Or Inspire What The Songs Are," ultimate-guitar.com, accessed 08/01/2014, [http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/interviews/interviews/claudio\\_sanchez\\_i\\_let\\_my\\_life\\_dictate\\_or\\_inspire\\_what\\_the\\_songs\\_are.html?no\\_takeover](http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/interviews/interviews/claudio_sanchez_i_let_my_life_dictate_or_inspire_what_the_songs_are.html?no_takeover)

### 1.3.4 Who Killed Amanda Palmer/ Theatre is Evil/The Art of Asking

In 2008 Amanda Palmer released her first solo project: a transmedial exploration of mortality, celebrity, and narrative entitled *Who Killed Amanda Palmer (WKAP)*.<sup>97</sup> Across books, music, performance and documentary, Palmer and a veritable army of creators (musicians, writers, dancers, producers, photographers and readers to name a few) carefully recorded her many 'deaths', and chronicled the effect they (might have) had on contemporary culture. The photobook follows a similar format to a sequential-art text: short stories by Neil Gaiman and photographs taken of Palmer either as she is being killed or as a corpse. It juxtaposes these stories and images with Palmer's song lyrics, and the reader is asked to bring together the images, stories and poetry to construct a mythology surrounding Palmer's demise. This is expanded upon by a second collection of short stories that is framed with an "academic" discussion regarding the fictional study of "doxithanotology": the "macro-socio-psychological responses to the death of social icons."<sup>98</sup> These stories are named "Palmeresques," and described as an artistic and literary movement that arose in response to Palmer's 'death.'<sup>99</sup> This text, *On the Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer (and the many crimes of Tobias James)*, is written by Rohan Kriwaczek, a musician whom Palmer had worked with and who wrote the text under Palmer's guidance.<sup>100</sup> The book is narrated from within the storyworld, as it were, where Amanda Palmer is dead. This exploration is tied together by the pursuit of a

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<sup>97</sup> Amanda Palmer, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, 834672, 2008, CD; Brianna Olsen, Chip Yamada, Matt Nelson, Alan Bezozi, and Amanda Palmer, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer: A Surrealist Mini-Mystery*, directed by Michael Pope (New York: Road Runner Records, 2008), DVD; Kyle Cassidy, Amanda Palmer and Neil Gaiman, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer: A Collection of Photographic Evidence* (New York, NY : Eight Foot Books, 2009); Rohan Kriwaczek, *On the many deaths of Amanda Palmer and the many crimes of Tobias James* (London : Duckworth, 2010); It's WKAP Radio!, <http://web.archive.org/web/20090312050718/http://wkapfm.com/>; Who Killed Amanda Palmer, [www.whokilledamandapalmer.net](http://www.whokilledamandapalmer.net).

<sup>98</sup> Kriwaczek, *On The Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer*, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Kriwaczek, *On The Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer*.

<sup>100</sup> Amanda Palmer, "The Evelyn Graphic Novel and a Book About my Deaths," accessed 17 April, 2012, <http://blog.amandapalmer.net/the-evelyn-graphic-novel-a-book-about-my-deaths/>

mysterious character named Tobias James, who has an uncanny knowledge of exactly how Amanda Palmer died. This information is “presented” in the book, but it is largely redacted, as a “legal requirement” before the book could be published (within the storyworld). As such, the mystery of Amanda Palmer’s death is preserved for readers, allowing them to use this absence as a lacuna through which they can respond to the storyworld.

The *WKAP* storyworld is also told through a DVD featuring music-videos and interstitials that portray the music and sound-scape created on the *WKAP* album. The *WKAP* DVD is presented as “a surrealist mini-mystery” and attributed to Michael Pope. There is also the (now largely defunct) *WKAP* website that detailed—through blogging, photography and video—the production of the *WKAP* album. It also included a series of related social networking sites, and an on-line radio station (which is no longer active). Finally, there is Palmer herself who, with The Danger Ensemble performance group and a voice recording courtesy of Neil Gaiman, toured her demise around the world, performing it for new audiences, responding to audiences and subsequently implicating these audiences in the process of storyworld creation.

Each of these sites feeds into the others in terms of how they frame the narrative. The *WKAP* storyworld is one where the medium is, indeed, the message. The result is a transmedial storyworld that explores identity, popular culture and the cult of celebrity through representations of gender and death. The *WKAP* storyworld weaves together music, photography, fiction, social networking and documentary. Palmer developed this storyworld in collaboration with other artists including the Hugo Award winning author Neil Gaiman, musicians Jason Webley and Rohan Kriwaczek, and the producer-musician Ben Folds.<sup>101</sup> *WKAP* uses the “magic and danger of fiction... to see through other eyes.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Her recent work has continued this collaborative approach, with projects such as *Bin8*, *Evelyn Evelyn*, *Amanda Palmer Performs the Popular Hits of Radiohead on her Magical Ukulele* and most recently her recording with the Melbourne based Grand Theft Orchestra. However, these other collaborations have had less narratological direction

In *WKAP* Palmer explores subjectivity in all its abject glory: as feminine, as corporeal and as corpse. Palmer explores the subject as both narrative and relational: she provides moments of lived-experience for the reader to recognise. This is achieved by constructing both a macro, and a number of micro, storyworlds to negotiate her identity. This case study can be used to examine whether the transmedial form relies on an intersection between, rather than an opposition against, the various media that contribute to the storyworld. It is also an opportunity to explore how transmedial storyworlds can constitute the self and other through life-writing.

Palmer's storyworld is broader than any single narrative style. It incorporates metatextual engagements with, and epitextual ruminations on, the world in which Palmer is dead. These elements are traditionally understood as separate from the storyworld, and so it is pertinent to consider whether they contribute to how the reader engages with the storyworld.<sup>103</sup> To what extent are album and book covers, interviews and twitter feeds a part of how readers approach the storyworld, and to what extent, if any, can they be thought of as a part of that world itself?

Beyond *WKAP*, Palmer has continued to create storyworlds that reach beyond her music—including visual arts and stories (*WKAP*), crowd-sourced remixes (*Amanda Palmer Down Under*) and graphic novels (*Evelyn Evelyn*) – all while encouraging her fans to contribute their own creative responses to her music. However, I have chosen to focus on her independent releases, and as such have also looked at her more recent release, *Theatre is Evil*, focusing on the recorded music, the art-book, and live performance. In *Theatre is Evil* Palmer continues her life-writing project without, however, a central theme this time. The project differs from the other case studies in terms of its production: it was crowd-

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(the exception being the *EvelynEvelyn* storyworld which/that intersects with *WKAP*) although they are all still highly intertextual undertakings.

<sup>102</sup> Neil Gaiman, "Afterword" in Amanda Palmer, Jason Webley, and Cynthia von Bruhler, *Evelyn Evelyn: A tragic tale in two tomes, Vol. 2* (Milwaukie, Or.: Dark Horse, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, r. 2001).

funded. Crowd-funding shifts the economic and regulatory dynamics that surround her earlier work, allowing Palmer to maintain her proprietary interest in her own art, rather than licensing or alienating that interest to an intermediary. Palmer has been able to sell her music for little or no cost, and fans can act on her requests for art, and creative engagement with her work without fear of litigative reprisal. However, this was a particularly controversial move, and Palmer faced extensive criticism for undertaking the project in this way. It resulted in her invitation to talk at a Technology Education Design (TED) conference on the culture of asking and philanthropy in the creative arts. As a result of this talk, she was invited to write a book where she expanded on her talk. *The Art of Asking: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help*, was published in November 2014. It is a memoir where she elaborates on her philosophy regarding music making, crowd-funding and crowd-sourcing, and her relationship with her fans.

#### **1.4 Chapter Synopses**

The theoretical framework for this project is a hybrid approach to reader-response and deconstruction through a consciously feminist lens. It sits at the intersection of life writing and transmedia studies, and is influenced by feminist and poststructuralist narratology. It draws on the complementarities between the writings of Henry Jenkins, Roland Barthes, Emmanuel Levinas, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Elizabeth Grosz, Hélène Cixous, Ngairre Naffine, Scott McCloud and Louise Rosenblatt to name only a few. These scholars have placed a strong emphasis on reader agency and the imperative for readers to become writers.

In the second chapter of this thesis, “The Story Wars,” I draw on definitions of transmediality from Jenkins, Marie-Laure Ryan, Christy Dena, Elizabeth Evans and Colin Harvey in order to explore how transmedial narratives might be regulated according to practices of transmedial franchising, or transmedial storytelling. I frame these discussions with a consideration of how readers are encouraged to

engage with the storyworlds. I consider the work of Louise Rosenblatt—an early pioneer of reader response theory—who asserts in her 1938 book, *Literature as Exploration*, that the act of reading is a transaction that occurs between the reader and the text. I am not alone in identifying Rosenblatt as a useful resource in new media studies. In 2012, April Sanders published an article titled “Rosenblatt’s Presence in the New Literacies Research” which considers the pedagogical implications for applying Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading to non-print texts. In particular, Sanders identifies Rosenblatt’s claim that “If the text is more than a literal piece, “the reader must have the experience, must ‘live through’ what is being created during the reading.””<sup>104</sup> The idea that the reader can *live through* the articulation of subjectivity that is presented in transmedial life-writing offers a way of reading of self and other, an *embodied relationality*, that is absent from linear reading practices. Weaving this embodied relationality with Roland Barthes’ notion of the *writerly*, I consider whether the case studies dictate a single reading of the storyworlds or are open to diverse interpretations.

In the following chapter, “Rocking the Boat,” I consider how the lacuna can shape the storyworld. I draw on Scott McCloud’s theories of closure and the gutter, as explored in his book *Understanding Comics*, to determine how readers can approach a transmedial storyworld, and examine the temporal, physical, and experiential aporia that readers encounter when they immerse themselves in a transmedial narrative.

In “Wrecking the Infinite” I consider the narrative of the sovereign subject, and juxtapose this with the potential for a *writerly* form of subjectivity, while in “Beyond the Boundary” I consider how Levinas’ theory of alterity might provide a framework for elaborating on representations of self and otherness, and experiences of self and otherness in transmedial life writing.

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<sup>104</sup> April Sanders, “Rosenblatt’s Presence in the New Literacies Research,” *Talking Points*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2.

In order to tie the thesis together, the final two chapters consider how the subject and other are explored through life-writing. “Tell the Truth, but Tell it Slant” considers the practice of life-writing, including an overview and critique of autobiography as a genre. It examines the authors’ reflections on their relationships with their readers and returns to explore the effect that *writerlyness* might have on transmedial life-writing. It uses performance and performativity frameworks for understanding how the authors use life-writing to construct their subjectivities as embodied.

This leads to a discussion of reading autobiographical writing, in “Inhabiting ‘I.’” I elaborate on the idea of reading as embodied, and temporal, and consider the implications for embodying the authors’ recollection of their lived-experiences. I apply Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional literacy, and unpack the imperative of reading as an act of socio-political resistance.

Each of the chapters draws on close readings drawn from the case studies to support the arguments made. It is my intention to determine whether transmedial life-writing can open a view of subjectivity that is *writerly*, being rooted in collaboration and alterity. I want to consider how transmedial subjects perpetuate or subvert regulating subjectivities in order to determine how regulating discourses might undertake a more ethical approach to regulating story creation.

## 2 THE STORY WARS: TRANSMEDIAILITY, FRANCHISING, & STORYTELLING

Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant with comparison to ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.

—Paul Valéry, *Pièces sur L'Art* (1931).

## 2.1 Transmedial Narratives: Exploring Storyworlds

Marsha Kinder coined the term “transmedia” in her book *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games*.<sup>105</sup> She argued that transmediality is a way of reading signs and symbols across changing media contexts, and she described the reading method as engaging with a set of “*sliding signifiers*... words, images, sounds, and objects that—like the pronouns *I* and *you*, or the adverbs *here* and *there*—blatantly change meaning in different contexts and that derive their primary value precisely from that process of transformation.”<sup>106</sup> Much as the words *here* and *there* are geographically dependent signifiers whose meanings shift depending on who is uttering them—here might be my desk, but it might equally be a reference to the city, country, or even the cultural context that surrounds my desk—transmedial texts, especially musical texts, have significations that shift to reflect the cultural and literary context of individual readers.

Furthermore, because of these sliding significations, transmedial storyworlds provide an opportunity for authors and readers to expand and develop the storyworld, a practice that is at home with folk cultures (an issue I will address in the section of this chapter that focuses on transmedial storytelling). Transmedial narratives come together as communities, both physical (for example, at live performances), and on-line (through forums, social networking groups, and web-pages). These are precisely the communities that Henry Jenkins identifies as emerging from a *convergence culture*. Jenkins uses the term *convergence culture* to refer to two principal trends:

1. the tendency of modern media creations to attract a much greater degree of audience participation than ever before, to the point that some are actually influenced profoundly by their fan-base, becoming a form of interactive storytelling; and

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<sup>105</sup> Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Kinder, *Playing with Power*, 3.

2. the phenomenon of a single franchise being distributed through and impacting upon a range of media delivery methods.

These two trends are symbiotic, making it very hard to pull them apart and examine them separately. Convergence culture, of which transmediality is just one aspect, is invoked not just in relation to material objects and media, but as a cultural approach to textuality and literacy that is formed by “the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, [and] the infinity of languages.”<sup>107</sup> So in what ways are transmedial narratives more open than linear texts? It comes down to the fact that, while authors might have preferred ways for readers to engage with the transmedial storyworld, such decisions ultimately rest with the reader. Harvey further notes that:

In the context of intercompositional projects, each individual transmedial component might be seen as cross-promoting the other elements in the transmedia network.<sup>108</sup>

Anecdotally, my own experience of Carter’s performance as Jay-Z reflects this cross promotion: my first meaningful engagement with Carter’s work was reading *Decoded* and I came to his music after I read about it. My lived experiences are so far removed from Carter’s that I wasn’t interested in abstracting the texts to my own experience, until I had an entry into them as literary practice. This resulted in an heuristic bias that shapes my experience of Carter’s storyworld. It also demonstrates that each reader comes to the storyworld on their own terms.

Jenkins maintains that the convergence phenomenon is a response to a culture where “our ties to older forms of social community are breaking down, our rooting in physical geography is diminished, our bonds to the extended and even the nuclear family are disintegrating, and our allegiances to nation-states are being redefined.”<sup>109</sup> He sees this as ideal turf for the growth of communities across geographical and (some) socio-

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<sup>107</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990), 5.

<sup>108</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 171.

<sup>109</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.636 of 8270.

economic barriers. This is not to say that such communities are preferable to communities based on personal encounter, but that they are another element of contemporary social development. We have the opportunity to proactively shape this social development according to an ethical framework that accounts for current imbalances in power distribution. Transmedial narratives work with the unique properties that different types of communication provide, and rely intensely on the interpersonal and social aspects arising from this type of reading. As such, they have the potential to become tools for community building, Marie-Laure Ryan even discussing the need for community-building stories that transmedial storyworlds can provide:

When a narrative corpus acquires an identity defining status for a group, it tends to spill over multiple media... Through a feed-back loop effect, the ability of these stories to create worldwide communities has inspired transmedial franchises, which have strengthened the power of the stories to create communities.<sup>110</sup>

Transmedial storyworlds can enable two types of community building: the first is related to the provision of regulatory models that articulate appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in storyworld communities. The other enables the growth of a community identity. Transmedial storyworlds generally result in a hybrid of the two methods. This means that storyworlds can be strictly controlled by the corporations (and occasionally artists) that exercise copyright and editorial control over them in order to regulate how reading communities can ‘appropriately’ interact with the storyworld. However, storyworlds can also be creatively paralleled, adapted, and expounded upon by readers in defiance of that regulation. An ethical framework would help build and maintain storyworld communities, by guiding the relationships between authors, readers, and the storyworld itself.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of transmediality and offer a refined terminology that accounts for the differing political and economic

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<sup>110</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, “Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality,” *Poetics Today*, 2013, Vol.34(3), 385.

imperatives between *transmedial franchising* and *transmedial storytelling*. This chapter responds to the question posed in the introduction: how are readers positioned to engage with transmedial storyworlds? I then look to the issue of how the transmedial form can impact life-writing by putting readers at the centre of the meaning-making process. I examine whether transmedial storytelling might be positioned as a feminist engagement with transmedial storyworlds, where bodies, identities, economic imperatives, and a broader understanding of semiology come together. I ask: is transmedial storytelling a relational practice that might reinvigorate the reading process?

## 2.2 Transmediality as Reading Practice

In the years since Kinder and Jenkins first developed their theories of transmediality there has been a steady increase in the production of transmedial narratives. In her PhD thesis, submitted in 2009, Christy Dena noted that “a new text may not attempt to tell the “same” story, for instance, with a different mode of expression (adapt a novel into a play), but instead may explore other possibilities of the greater [story] world. This is significant in the context of debates about the split between form and content in adaptation.”<sup>111</sup> While many communications scholars have focussed on the differences of form in terms of modes of communication, it has only been in recent years that life-writing scholars have entered into discussions about mediation. For example, in *Identity Technologies* (published in 2014) Anna Poletti and Julie Rak bring together a collection of writings from scholars considering issues relating to identity formation, community development, and the impact of media on identity representations. In 2015, Zachary Leader edited a collection entitled *On Life-Writing*, which included a few chapters that considered the impact that on-line representations of the self could have on genre conventions and on the type of identities presented in that format. Still, the role of

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<sup>111</sup> Christy Dena, *Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments.*, (PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2009), 115.

readers in this negotiation of text and form is under-examined, and this thesis hopes to pursue that line of inquiry. I argue that it is imperative for literary scholars to engage with this form of storytelling. The roles played by readers in relation to transmedial narratives have been overlooked in most theory on transmediality. Colin Harvey's *Fantastic Transmedia*, published just as this thesis was submitted, draws on literary theorists, such as Farah Mendlesohn, to examine the historical development of transmedia storytelling. Importantly for my own research, Harvey, like myself, refers to Julia Kristeva's work on intertextuality as a significant influence on transmedial literary theory. In particular, Harvey refers to Kristeva's argument that dialogism, the relationship between the text and the reader, "ought to be part of the vocabulary used to analyse poetic texts because it emphasises relationality"<sup>112</sup> and he goes on to note that relationality is "crucial in [his] attempt to differentiate competing definitions of transmedia storytelling into multiple but related definitions."<sup>113</sup> Harvey goes on to argue that the idea of a transmedia storyworld only accounts for "relationships *within* the transmedia network"<sup>114</sup> specifically the relationship between the media that make up the storyworld. However, the relationship between the *author* and the *reader* has been a consideration of life-writing scholarship since its inception. The very question of the autobiographical contract as articulated by Philippe Lejeune privileges the readers' expectations about the text in a way that few other genres do. In this chapter I describe reader engagements that privilege the regulated storyrealm as *transmedial franchising*, while I use the term *transmedial storytelling* to account for those social and cultural contexts described by Kristeva that privilege readers' engagements with the storyworld regardless of their legitimacy under the intellectual property laws that seek to regulate the storyworld.

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<sup>112</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 20-21.

<sup>113</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 21.

<sup>114</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 23.

Although Jenkins popularised the term “transmedia storytelling”—a phenomenon he described as “[unfolding] across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole”<sup>115</sup>—his focus was on televisual and cinematic case studies and he did not consider how literature (as both a product and practice) might be affected by transmedial narratives. Similarly, Jill Walker is a narrative theorist who describes the process as “distributed narratives... [that]... can’t be experienced in a single session or in a single space.”<sup>116</sup> However, her focus is on the texts’ “unities of distribution and of delivery,”<sup>117</sup> rather than on their literary qualities. Marc Ruppel uses the term “cross-sited narratives” to describe “new structures that shatter the fixity of narrative as a single-medium endeavor and establish instead a multiply-mediated storyworld,”<sup>118</sup> and his focus is on the intersection between creators and the product, rather than reader practice. Christy Dena identified the importance of transmedia as practice, although her focus was on creators rather than on consumers of transmedial texts. Nonetheless, she raises three issues that are pertinent to a practice-oriented take on transmedial narratives: what is the role of interpretation, what is the effect of a “disjunction between the knowledge and skills of a transmedia practitioner and audiences,”<sup>119</sup> and what is “the role of audiences or players in co-constructing a (fictional) world.”<sup>120</sup> The issue of how transmedial narratives situate readers is therefore open for exploration, and it is this issue which informs my research on transmedial storyworlds.<sup>121</sup> Specifically, I ask: how might a developing transmedial

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<sup>115</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2049 of 8270.

<sup>116</sup> Jill Walker, “Distributed Narrative: Telling Stories Across Networks,” in *Internet Research Annual 2004*, ed. Mia Consalvo and Kate O’Riordan (Brighton: Peter Lang, 2004), 91.

<sup>117</sup> Walker, “Distributed Narrative,” 2.

<sup>118</sup> Marc Ruppel, cited in Christy Dena, “Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments” (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2009), 2.

<sup>119</sup> Dena, “Transmedia Practice,” 11.

<sup>120</sup> Dena, “Transmedia Practice,” 13.

<sup>121</sup> A full reader-response project is beyond the scope of this research, but would make a compelling study further down the line.

aesthetic influence the author's and reader's ontologies, and subsequently how might it affect the genre of life-writing?

The Internet provides ready access to “dispersed wisdom”<sup>122</sup> that readers can accumulate quickly and easily. In the early twenty-first century, readers are most likely to engage with reading communities and the storyworld through on-line fora such as websites, blogs, and applications. When Marshall McLuhan wrote that electronic technology “is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life”<sup>123</sup> in 1967, his call to awareness was considered “confused,”<sup>124</sup> “tendentious,”<sup>125</sup> “unconvincing,”<sup>126</sup> and overdramatic.<sup>127</sup> However, given the information networks of the early twenty first century, his predictions now sound like truisms. McLuhan's treatise *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*<sup>128</sup> pioneered the study of media theory: he proposed that media outlets, not their content, should be the focus of study. He focused on the ways in which media can affect readers. McLuhan suggested that each medium affects society not by the content delivered through it, but by the characteristics of the medium itself.

McLuhan's enthusiasm for new media is echoed in contemporary responses to the Internet as a platform. For example, Cynthia Freeland describes the Internet as an instrument that has “provided many common people with the means to express their own views and become

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<sup>122</sup> Cass R. Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2006), ix.

<sup>123</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967, r. 1996), 8.

<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (Glasgow: William Collins and Sons & Co Ltd, 1971), 11.

<sup>125</sup> Miller, *McLuhan*, 7.

<sup>126</sup> Miller, *McLuhan*, 15.

<sup>127</sup> Martin Esslin, “Marshalling McLuhan: Dr Miller on the Fringe,” *Encounter* (June, 1971), 80.

<sup>128</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, NY.: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

participants in a global creation of new media versions of reality.”<sup>129</sup> Anthony Loewenstein, a prolific Australian journalist and blogger, similarly describes the Internet as “arguably the greatest tool since the invention of the printing press to facilitate democratic change.”<sup>130</sup> Such enunciations situate the Internet as an instrument of the public sphere that reinvigorates the Habermasian call to deliberative-democracy, and wrests “authorial” power from a privileged few, thereby broadening the possibilities for discursive contribution from reading communities. Transmedial storyworlds, however, are not reliant upon one medium, and while the Internet certainly makes the storyworlds accessible to, and amendable by, a larger audience, it is not central to storyworld creation. What is important about the Internet-as-media is that, first, it enables readers to access the music, literature, recordings, and art in defiance of (some of) those economic and geographic limitations that otherwise might stymie their engagement.<sup>131</sup> Second, it provides readers with a tool that they can use to creatively and critically respond to cultural production: readers’ responses are made more broadly available than they are in the context of monomedial, or private response. The Internet is a platform that takes advantage of its relationality: a reader can make notes on a newspaper, but that doesn’t affect other readers’ engagements with their copies of that newspaper, while a reader can respond to hypertextual notes, reflections and critiques on an on-line article, if they so choose. This relationality is central to Jenkin’s understanding of how readers engage with transmedial narratives.

Jenkins has described the commercial practices associated with transmedial narratives as linked to the emergence of convergence

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<sup>129</sup> Cynthia Freeland, “Ordinary Horror on Reality TV” in *Narratives Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 261.

<sup>130</sup> Anthony Loewenstein, *The Blogging Revolution* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>131</sup> That is not to discount problems of accessibility faced in many regions and particularly across the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. This also fails to account for accessible tools for those people who have vision, hearing, or other physical disabilities.

culture.<sup>132</sup> In this context, he shifts his focus to the readers (although he uses the term “consumers”)<sup>133</sup> rather than the media. Jenkins asserts that recent technological developments encourage readers to participate in the circulation of media content across multiple media systems, economies, and national borders in order to maximise their entertainment experiences and access to knowledge.<sup>134</sup> He writes that the key skills required in order to engage as a reader with convergence culture (as the cultural phenomenon that frames contemporary transmedial narratives) include:

- 1) the ability to share knowledge with other consumers in a synergetic enterprise, the ability to accommodate different values systems by considering “ethical dramas”;
- 2) the capacity to make connections between various manifestations of information;
- 3) expressing an understanding of popular fictions through independent folk cultures and communicating these responses via the Internet;
- 4) and role-playing in order to explore the storyworld and develop “a richer understanding of yourself and the culture around you.”<sup>135</sup>

He describes transmedial storytelling as an aesthetic,<sup>136</sup> a process that is vested in appreciation, rather than production. This appreciation is related to the creation of stories as art, rather than in the production of art-objects. Jenkins also notes that transmedial narratives are a type of storytelling that pre-dates the development of the Gutenberg press, suggesting that it is linked to oral and performance-based narratives. His

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<sup>132</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*; Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).

<sup>133</sup> I use the term 'reader' in order to emphasise the agential potential of the individual responding to the text, over their performance of capitalist functionality.

<sup>134</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

<sup>135</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 3929 of 8270.

<sup>136</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 526 of 8270.

insistence that “transmedia storytelling is the art of world making” suggests that the artistic practice is undertaken by readers, as much as it is by the storyworld’s creators. This contributes to my assertion that transmedial narratives are *writerly*.

### 2.2.1 Transmedial Narratives and Writerlyness

The *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* (WKAP) photobook demonstrates how a writerly text can be constructed. The idea of *writerlyness* is drawn from Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*, where he asserts that “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”<sup>137</sup> He continues:

The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves *writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without the structure.<sup>138</sup>

Writerlyness culminates in a series of moments where the storyworld invites readers to imbue the texts with their pre-existing knowledge of the storyworld, their understanding of other storyworlds, and their lived-experiences. The purpose of this style of reading is to reconcile the reader’s knowledge, understanding, and experience with the storyworld. In the *WKAP* photobook words and images are juxtaposed, aligning Amanda Palmer’s lyrics and Neil Gaiman’s stories, with a collection of photographs of Palmer’s ‘corpse.’ These photographs were taken by Palmer and her friends from the mid-1990s to 2007. The book is a collaborative effort that brings together various collaborators’ perspectives of Palmer, and presents them as a literary and artistic exploration of the themes developed in the *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* CD and DVD. The apposition of lyrics, images, and stories also brings the

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<sup>137</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 5.

reader back to the storyworld's musical incantation in the CD. The photobook bears the hallmarks of a *writerly* text: it employs polysemous signifiers in order to open the text to readers.

More than this, Palmer consciously constructs the text as writerly. She asserts that the storyworld is “never just about music, ever... because behind the music is the people, and the emotion, and the intention... It's impossible to separate the art, and the artists who are making it and the story behind both.”(sic)<sup>139</sup> She is aware that the storyworld is a matrix of narratives and that her own narrative is not the only one that influences its development. Nonetheless, she claims a level of authority over the narrative, implying that its creators know the story behind the text. This claim still situates the storyworld as a transaction of exchange. This exchange occurs within an economic framework that privileges patriarchal definitions of property, control and oppression. Can writerlyness provide readers with an opportunity to shape a more ethical reading process?

Writerlyness certainly challenges the author's control over the text by identifying the reader as a site of meaning production. Barthes describes the writerly as “production without product”<sup>140</sup> and suggests that it is the point beyond the text: it is the result of the reader's transaction with the text. It is also possible for the author to create a text that encourages writerly reading practices. Just such an example can be found in Amanda Palmer's “Oasis” narrative.

“Oasis” fictionalises and conflates two events that Palmer experienced: a terminated pregnancy when she was seventeen, and the rape she survived when she was twenty. In “Oasis” Palmer explores these events through music, the photobook, and a film-clip. The song is the first-person reflection of a young woman who attends a party where an unidentified man rapes her. The character subsequently tests positive for

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<sup>139</sup> “Amanda Palmer / WIENER-Interview, January 2010,” Kanal von WIENER, accessed 08 January, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7qq92ZA\\_SU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7qq92ZA_SU).

<sup>140</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 5.

a pregnancy and decides to terminate it. At the health clinic she is harassed by Christian protesters on her way in, but ultimately has the termination. The song is told by this character, and Palmer's role as the vocaliser—as well as her admission that the song relates her lived experiences—facilitates a reading that conflates Palmer with the character who tells the story. The lyrics narrate these events through the lens provided by a tempestuous friendship between teenage girls; a relationship that traverses the boundaries between solidarity, betrayal, social economics and obliviousness, and that is grounded in a shared interest in popular culture, specifically the Brit-Pop band, Oasis. In her blog, Palmer writes “the song isn't even so much ABOUT [rape and abortion], it's about denial, it's about a girl who can't find it in herself to take her situation seriously. That girl exists, everywhere.”<sup>141</sup> The character articulates her identity through her fan-based interactions (fan-mail and responses) with Oasis, rather than through her lived experiences and trauma. She knows that her friendship—and therefore her social currency—is vested in her status within the fan-community shared by her peers. The song considers the role of the individual within a community, and the identity that is experienced as a result of those relationships.

In “Oasis,” Palmer writes pragmatically about her lived-experiences, but her lyrics are tinged with a playful knowingness, perhaps even melancholy for more innocent days. She employs colloquial language, singing about being given “a forty” (a bottle of alcohol that holds 40 fluid ounces), and delights that her former friend will be jealous of her letter from Oasis, proclaiming “Melissa's going to wet herself, I swear.” Musically, she employs a 1960s surf aesthetic, mimicking the Beach Boys, and this situates narrator as oblivious and naïve, a stereotype that is often associated with the surf-genre. Palmer's recollection of trauma is at odds with the playful music. This uncomfortable collocation is made explicit in the music video where her high-camp style and the large smiles on both

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<sup>141</sup> Amanda Palmer, “On Abortion, Rape, Art and Humour,” [amandapalmer.net](http://amandapalmer.net), accessed 27 Jun 2013, <http://blog.amandapalmer.net/on-abortion-rape-art-and-humor/>,

her and her rapist's faces testify to the social acceptability and normalisation of rape-culture. Neither party is narrated as responsible for the harm Palmer's character experiences: the rape survivor is never responsible for the crime committed against them, and the perpetrator is a "barbarian" rather than a man, and is therefore not positioned as responsible for his actions. When this narrative is contextualised by the surf-kitsch, it has the effect of illuminating the ways in which sexualised violence against women is essentialised as part of the relationship between bodies that are coded as masculine and feminine. It is worth noting that films associated with surf-rock (for example *Where The Boys Are*, 1960 and more recently *Black Rock*, 1997) do allude to the fact that women's sexualisation is often framed by an absence of consent and by violence. Given this suggestion of gendered and sexualised violence that underwrites much surf-culture, the 'barbarian' antagonist's oblivious naïveté is contextualised as entitlement. Thus, under the guise of twee-irony, surf-pop presents the social realities of masculine entitlement and highly regulated feminine embodiment in the early 21st century as a plea for consideration and critical reflection. As such, surf-pop is situated as an appropriate musical genre for unfurling the dangers of fantasies of retrospective innocence. The juxtaposition of boppy music with a trauma narrative that is told in an off-the-cuff manner invites the reader to undertake a critical reading of the themes presented, specifically of masculine entitlement, and the regulation of feminine embodiment.

*Figure 2.1: Stills from "Oasis" music video, directed by Michael Pope, performed by Amanda Palmer.*



This fantasy of retrospective-innocence is also addressed in the photobook, where, next to the lyrics for Oasis, Palmer's 'corpse' is slumped across a bed. She is wearing a child-like, pink dress, and her normally short, dark hair is covered with a dishevelled long, blond wig. She is wearing a tiara that slides off her head, and her make-up is smudged around her eyes. The presentation of her 'corpse' contrasts starkly with the lively video-clip, but it reiterates the threat of violence to women that underlies the song by highlighting the associations between sexualisation and violence in relation to feminised bodies. The reader is therefore invited to bring both media together in order to interrogate the passive ideologies that inform the narrative.



*Figure 2.2: "Oasis,"  
photographed by  
Kyle Cassidy, in Who  
Killed Amanda  
Palmer, np.*

The image references the Prom-Queen/Barbie aesthetic that elides women's sexual agency, while elevating their status as sexualised, but reified, icons. The objectification is belied by the evidence of sexual violence writ across Palmer's body. There is a bruise on her hand that is in shot and her legs are parted, with the pink, frilly skirts bunched around her knees. Her mouth is open. Sharon Marcus offers an incisive reading of how language inscribes masculine and feminine embodiment with reference to the language used to narrate rape. Rape itself is a manifested

signification of masculine power over, and entitlement to, feminised bodies: “The rape script describes female bodies as vulnerable, violable, penetrable, and wounded... The horror of rape is not that it steals something from us but that it makes us into things to be taken.”<sup>142</sup> Marcus notes that the masculine “*belief* that he has more strength than a woman and that he can use it to rape her merits more analysis than the putative fact of that strength, because that belief often produces as an effect the male power that appears to be rape’s cause.”<sup>143</sup> Palmer’s agency is taken from her. The costume and pose place Palmer’s body somewhere between a Beauty Queen and an inflatable doll, signifying her position as an object of the male gaze that is celebrated for its aesthetic appeal and as a tool for the gratification of heteronormative, masculine, sexual desire. In “Oasis” readers across genders are pressed into recognising their claims to agency, and subsequent attempts to deny that agency. They are asked to reflect on the times when they are “that girl.” This is a reflection not so much on the experience of gender, but on the experience of power and agency that can be shared by readers regardless of their gender identities. This agency is not just related to their position as a member of society, but to their status as a member of the storyworld’s reading audience. Rather than positioning them as passive readers, transmedial narratives ask readers to be active — critical or creative — in relation to the text. This destabilises narratives vested in a masculinist and isolated approach to creativity. Readers are invited to draw from the song, music video and photography in order to make the story coherent: there is no one “Oasis,” each reader creates their own from the texts provided.

By bringing together layers of narrative, “Oasis” and *WKAP* partake in a process that Jenkins calls “the art of world making.”<sup>144</sup> Each medium develops a different part of the storyworld, and while the authors can—through epi- and paratextual engagements, such as interviews or blurbs—

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<sup>142</sup> Sharon Marcus, “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention,” in Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York; London: Routledge, 1994), 398-399.

<sup>143</sup> Marcus, “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,” 390.

<sup>144</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 527 of 8270.

suggest how readers might approach the storyworld, it is ultimately up to the readers to decide how they will make the storyworld cohere. As such, it feels rather artificial to approach *WKAP* in a fragmented way—by examining each, or even just individual, media and experience—rather than to recognise the storyworld’s unity. In “Oasis,” readers can draw on their experiences as readers of the music, music videos, and images, but they might equally draw on their experiences as a fan within a community (as the character does in focussing on the band, Oasis), or perhaps their own lived-experiences that they responded to with a mixture of (inappropriate) humour and gravitas. Much as convergence culture constitutes active audience participation, and a range of media delivery methods, the *WKAP* storyworld is made up of the relationships between Palmer, the readers, and the text, in addition to the media that contribute to the storyworld.

### **2.2.2 Writerlyness and Relationality**

The connection between artists and their audiences is demonstrated in Thomas Whythorne’s life-writing. His *Autobiography* is addressed directly to his “good friend”<sup>145</sup> and follows the structure of a “commonplace book.” A commonplace book is a selection of excerpts that the author has found meaningful, juxtaposed with their responses to that information. As such, the text is a testament to Whythorne’s dual position as a reader and as an author. However, it varies from other commonplace books insofar as it abounds with self-reflection and observations on society, especially on the matrix of power negotiated by Whythorne as a tutor and a gentleman, and his employers, who were often women. Throughout the text, Whythorne discusses his artistic expression as a means of responding to those people with whom he had relationships. There is an early example of this in the text, in which he writes to his

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<sup>145</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 1.

master, John Heywood, in response to a conversation they had wherein Heywood discussed “the state of his life for a certain time”:<sup>146</sup>

My faithful friend, since that thou didst impart  
The secrets that lay hid within thy heart  
To me, when we together last did talk,  
To thee therefore, my heart and pen shall walk  
Not on toes, but by attorney right.<sup>147</sup>

The one hundred-line poem recounts the details of Whythorne’s early life, replicating in poetry information provided in the preceding seven pages of prose. Davis Shore muses that “when in 1576 Whythorne set out to compile his manuscript he saw in the opening of that near-to-hand youthful poem a convenient means of justifying to his reader the rather unusual task he was undertaking.”<sup>148</sup> That ‘unusual task’ was the act of life-writing, a genre little explored in English literary practice to that point.<sup>149</sup>

I find a synchronicity between Whythorne’s and Carter’s writing: *Decoded* is a means by which Carter and his readers can “make more connections”<sup>150</sup> by reflecting on Carter’s lyrical writing. In the afterword to the expanded edition of *Decoded*, Carter refers to a letter his publisher received from American poet Kathleen Norris. The two shared a publisher, and she had found the production proof on their publisher’s desk and started reading it. Norris lives a life very different to Carter’s. He describes her as “[not] exactly part of the hip-hop generation”:<sup>151</sup> a middle class, white woman and Benedictine oblate. However, they share an affinity as poets, and through their love for words. Norris wrote of *Decoded*:

... as a poet, I am just so pleased to be given a better sense of the workings of this vital art form. Just from the few hip-hop-rap lyrics I’d heard, I knew there was something important going on—street

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<sup>146</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 7.

<sup>148</sup> David R. Shore, “The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne: An Early Elizabethan Context for Poetry,” *Renaissance et Reformé* Vol. 17, No. 2 (1981): 80.

<sup>149</sup> The fifteenth century Book of Margery Kempe is an example of life-writing that predates Whythorne’s, however, like Whythorne’s manuscript, it remained unpublished until the twentieth century.

<sup>150</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 311.

<sup>151</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 309

news, social history, life stories of people who are so often invisible. But I had no idea how rich they were. I find myself making connections of my own—Jay-Z's comments about both poets and hustlers "bending" language, for instance, and I'm recalling Emily Dickinson's "tell the truth, but tell it slant." The notes to the lyrics had me riffing on T.S. Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*. Most of all, this book reconnected me with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. A teenage hustler in jail, realizing that his vocabulary is limited to street slang, sets out to learn English by reading the dictionary! It's really the story of a life saved, and a book written so that other kids our society considers "throwaways" might find a way out, another way to live.<sup>152</sup>

Norris positions herself as a reader who is familiar, indeed proficient, with the art-form of poetry, but who is outside of the Hip-Hop Nation, and therefore unfamiliar with the history and development of hip-hop and rap as art. She brings her own literary context, her familiarity with Dickinson and Eliot, to her interpretation of Carter's lyrics. She reads Carter's life against Malcolm X's, suggesting that both their life-stories reflect a continuing struggle for African-American identity, and socio-economic equality. By making these associations, Norris demonstrates the essence of *writerlyness*, of "the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages."<sup>153</sup> This 'opening' is at the heart of storytelling; offering forward a tale, mediating it to respond to the audience's interest or excitement, and listening to the audience retelling the story in their own voice. Carter reflects on this missive, and writes that:

the gratifying part of Norris's response was that, for her, the book opened up the conversation about the art of rap and gave some insight into the lives of the people "society considers 'throwaways'"... for her, the book wasn't a passive, one-way experience. She closed it hungry to make *more* connections. That was all I'd hoped for when I first decided to write a book.<sup>154</sup>

This response testifies to Carter's desire to open the texts' meanings to their readers.

Carter incorporates two conflicting readings into his dialectic—that through hard work and dedication the hustler can gain entry to the establishment and that the establishment can be hustled. These readings place the responsibility for socio-economic advancement onto those

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<sup>152</sup> Kathleen Norris, quoted in Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 311.

<sup>153</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 5.

<sup>154</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 311.

readers who are already outside of this financial and class narrative. *Decoded* opens hip-hop to readers who are outside of those social, political, economic and artistic spheres that have fostered hip-hop culture and art. Through *Decoded*, Carter's music and his live performances are narrated to an audience that is removed from the "Hip-Hop Nation." It provides these readers with a narrative that resolves their anxieties about the social and economic oppression experienced by working-class people of colour, by suggesting that hip-hop can provide them with the opportunity to 'rise-above' their economic station. This absolves the reader of any agency in perpetuating the economic and social oppressions that result in the class and resources divide in the first place. Instead, it shifts the responsibility for social and economic advancement onto the shoulders of those people who are already systemically disenfranchised. This means that any call for recognition and responsibility from working-class people of colour to privileged (predominantly white) America is silenced resulting in what Chantal Mouffe describes as:

a dualistic society, deeply divided between a sector of the privileged, those in a strong position to defend their rights, and a sector of all those who are excluded from the dominant system, whose demands cannot be recognized as legitimate because they will be inadmissible by definition.<sup>155</sup>

Subsequently, Carter's story can develop in response to the Randian ideology that its readers privilege; its meaning, whether progressive or conservative, is therefore shaped by its readers. An example of the tension that arises between these narratives is demonstrated in the song "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)."<sup>156</sup> Carter remixes Strouse and Charnin's "It's a Hard Knock Life," from their musical *Annie*, and juxtaposes white girlhood and African-American masculinity in order to highlight the economic inequalities that persist in the United States. In the

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<sup>155</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and New Political Subjects: Toward a New Concept of Democracy," trans. by Stanley Gray, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 97.

<sup>156</sup> Jay-Z, "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)," *Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life*, B00000AFF9, 1998, CD.

first verse he gives a flourished recapitulation of his economic and social ascent from New York's Macey project to the life of a media mogul:

From standin' on the corners boppin'  
to drivin' some of the hottest cars New York has ever seen  
For droppin' some of the hottest verses rap has ever heard  
From the dope spot, with the smoke Glock  
fleein' the murder scene, you know me well  
from nightmares of a lonely cell, my only hell  
But since when y'all niggaz know me to fail? Fuck naw  
Where all my niggaz with the rubber grips, bust shots  
And if you with me mom I rub on your tits, and what-not.  
I'm from the school of the hard knocks, we must not  
let outsiders violate our blocks, and my plot  
let's stick up the world and split it fifty/fifty, uh-huh  
Let's take the dough and stay real jiggy, uh-huh  
And sip the Cris' and get pissy-pissy  
Flow infinitely like the memory of my nigga Biggie, baby!  
You know it's hell when I come through  
The life and times of Shawn Carter  
nigga Volume 2, y'all niggaz get ready

The song utilises a series of juxtapositions—"From standin'" on the corners boppin'/to drivin' some of the hottest cars New York has ever seen"—in order to establish the "Cinderella" story of economic and social ascent. This juxtaposition is reinforced by remixing "It's a Hard Knock Life" as the song's refrain. It suggests a parallel between the experiences of poor white communities during the 1930s and the poverty experienced by many African American communities in the early twenty-first century. These lyrics critique the socio-economic structures that inhibit many African-Americans' access to equitable wage labour, and subsequently illuminates their exclusion from middle-class consumption.<sup>157</sup> In the music-video the children who sing the refrain are contrasted with adults who act as a portent of the futures these children might experience.

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<sup>157</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin, "Black Empires, White Desires: The Spatial Politics of Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 170-171.



Figure 2.3:  
 "Hard Knock Life  
 (Ghetto  
 Anthem),"  
 (online video,  
 March 01,  
 2007).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxtn6-XQupM>.

The children are also juxtaposed with signifiers of prosperity, such as cars and Carter himself. It is important to note that they are not inside these cars, or inside houses, rather they are seen in public spaces.

This demonstrates their lack of access to the interior of such wealth signifiers, and their status as outside of those narratives that reinforce middle-class consumption as virtuous.

Carter's adaptation borrows an attitude of playfulness from the musical: the act of remixing positions Carter as a prosumer himself, and through this prosumption—itsself a pleasurable form of consumption—Carter interpolates a working-class critique of middle-class aspirations as “a strategic manipulation of the opportunities made available in light of socio-economic inequalities.”<sup>158</sup> Carter utilises his birth name in the lyrics in order to embed his life-story within the mythos elaborated by Jay-Z, his *nom-de-plume*, and the story becomes “The life and times of Shawn Carter/nigga Volume 2.”<sup>159</sup> This turn of phrase puts the reader in mind of memoirs with variations of that title, such as John Forster's *The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*,<sup>160</sup> or even Laurence Sterne's experimental novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.<sup>161</sup> The result of this imagery is that his rags-to-riches story is narrated as mythical.

<sup>158</sup> Baldwin, “Black Empires, White Desires,” 170.

<sup>159</sup> Jay-Z, *Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life*.

<sup>160</sup> John Forster, *The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1873) <https://archive.org/details/lifeandtimesoli03forsgoog>.

<sup>161</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide) <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/sterne/laurence/s831/>.

### 2.3 Mapping the Storyworld

The Internet is a platform that enables the distribution of transmedial narratives. Christy Dena describes it as an activated semiotic environment. She notes that “rather than constructing or partially constructing an environment, an existing one is appropriated as part of the meaning-making process.”<sup>162</sup> This appropriation occurs, for example, in the form of the *WKAP* websites, or through the *Decoded* collaboration with Bing.com. Readers are invited into these sites as part of the storytelling process. Does this openness interpolate reading practices that are vested in embodiment? McLuhan’s assertion in *The Medium is the Massage* is that modern media are extensions of human senses; they ground us in physicality, but expand our ability to perceive our world to an extent that would be impossible without the media.<sup>163</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson make a similar claim about embodied subjectivity when they argue that “human concepts... are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains,”<sup>164</sup> suggesting that the media itself doesn’t shape experience, so much as embodiment shapes media. The question of physicality is also present in Walter J. Ong’s most widely known work, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*.<sup>165</sup>

Ong primarily conducted research on the cultural impact of shifting from orality to literacy. He identified the distinguishing characteristics of orality by examining thought, and its verbal expression, in societies where the technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) were unfamiliar to most of the population. He determined that writing as a technology changes people’s mentalities, shifting them from the holistic immersion of orality, to the interiorisation and individuation that dominates written cultures. Lakoff and Johnson expand on this assertion, and argue that the conceptual systems that support language

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<sup>162</sup> Dena, “Transmedia Practice,” 77.

<sup>163</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 11.

<sup>164</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York, NY.: Basic Books, 1999), 22.

<sup>165</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

are derived from the experience of embodiment and cultural iteration.<sup>166</sup> This suggests that changing the ways that we experience narrative or information, the shift from monomedial reading to transmedial reading, will affect our cognition of these events. Although my case studies incorporate written literary elements—graphic novels, prose, poetry, and analysis—they are also storyworlds that revolve around musical texts.<sup>167</sup> This demonstrates that transmediality has reinvigorated an extension from individuated literary practice to collective practices of orality and performance. Transmediality is therefore not a shift along a spectrum, but a broadening of narratological methods that operate with, rather than against each other. Transmediality is a way of reintroducing embodiment to textuality. This is perhaps best experienced during the live performance of music.

Music resonates within our bodies, and sound-waves manifest the story beneath our skin. Music is constituted through the body: Barthes describes music as “something which is directly the cantor’s body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages..., as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings.”<sup>168</sup> Musical stories are very much a felt—and lived—experience for readers.

But the conventions that readers use to engage with music, such as repeated and varied themes, refrains, or sampling, give that embodiment a sense of being centred. The body’s own experience is privileged over external chronological or linear temporal patterns: their origins cannot “be reawakened [nor their] end ... anticipated.”<sup>169</sup> In “Structure, Sign, and Play,” Jacques Derrida looks to illuminate the displacement of

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<sup>166</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, r.2003).

<sup>167</sup> While these musical texts are often privately “owned,” through copyright, for example, they are (as I argue in depth later in the chapter, collectively experienced.

<sup>168</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977)181-182.

<sup>169</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge Classics, 2001, r. 2005), 353.

structuralist thought, and this displacement is the transmedial text's most important contribution to art. Transmedial narratives require rupture: between media and across readers, and I explore these ruptures further in the following chapter, but for the moment I make the point that the texts orbit the reader, they provide a constellation of information that the readers choose to, or choose not to, incorporate into their engagement with the storyworld: the only form given to a transmedial text is the one that readers infer.

This decentring is fundamental to *The Amory Wars*, for example the "Second Stage Turbine Blade" theme, a leitmotif that signifies Claudio Kilgannon, occurs many times throughout the Kilgannon cycle,<sup>170</sup> and is used in such a way that the storyworld's temporal trajectory loops back on itself. The leitmotif becomes a more sophisticated composition with each iteration, and this has the effect of suggesting that Claudio Kilgannon comes into his divinity throughout the narrative. It frames each album, occurring at the open and the close of each "chapter" in the Kilgannon cycle. The theme occurs only briefly, and without resolution, in the opening song, "One," of in the KBI cycle (*Year of the Black Rainbow*) hinting at a possible future that is explored in the Kilgannon cycle, and it does not appear at all in the Amory cycle (*The Afterman: Ascension and Descension*), because Claudio Kilgannon does not figure as a character in those parts of the storyworld (as he isn't born yet). It is also absent from both *My Brother's Blood Machine* and *Half Measures*,<sup>171</sup> the recordings that Sanchez released as The Prize Fighter Inferno, a story that is set in the storyworld's far distant past. The Kilgannon leitmotif develops and fractures, with each variation suggesting a shift in Claudio Kilgannon's, and Claudio Sanchez's ontological resolution. It provides the storyworld with a concentric, rather than a linear sense of time—the story keeps

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<sup>170</sup> See: Coheed and Cambria, *Second Stage Turbine Blade* (New York: Equal Vision Records, 2002); *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3* (New York: Equal Vision Records, 2003); *Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV, Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness* (New York: Columbia, 2005); *The Year of the Black Rainbow* (New York: Columbia, 2010).

<sup>171</sup> The Prize Fighter Inferno, *My Brother's Blood Machine* (New York: Equal Vision Records, 2006); *Half-Measures EP* (Los Angeles: Evil Ink Comics, 2012).

drawing back to Kilgannon who is narrating the temporality, which is a narrative constructed by the character called The Writing Writer.

When these musical stories are re-told, adapted, and read, they perform as a kind of social practice and can be understood as an example of reiterative performance, as a way of asserting the power—specifically the ‘truths’—associated with the storyworld. It is useful to consider Judith Butler’s writing on reiteration. She argues that “it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm.”<sup>172</sup> This opening is made evident in the Vitamin String Quartet’s instrumental adaptation of the *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3* (IKSSE: 3) album. The VSQ are an American musical group best known for their covers and tributes to popular music. They released *The String Quartet Tribute to Coheed and Cambria’s In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3* in 2007, four years after Coheed and Cambria released *IKSSE: 3* as a way of celebrating the band’s increasing commercial successes. The original composition “Hanging in the Balance” closes the adaptation. In this composition, the VSQ draws on the motifs and themes used on the *IKSSE: 3* album to imagine a musical response from a reader. This composition “escapes the norm” of the text by virtue of its speaking back to the music: it is an example of an instance where the reader’s creativity is not fixed by the storyworld, rather it takes flight from it.

Ong described writing as a technology that must be laboriously learned, and which affects the first transformation of human thought from the world of sound to the world of sight. He drew heavily on the work of Eric A. Havelock, who suggested that there was a fundamental shift in the form of thought coinciding with the transition from orality to literacy in Ancient Greece. This transition saw storytelling shift from a relational engagement between storytellers and their audience, to a fetishised focus

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<sup>172</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), XIX.

on the art-object. By reintroducing a focus on the relationship that both authors and readers have with the storyworld through music, transmedial texts bring the narrative into each body. Orality involves the teller's body and transmedial texts play with this idea: the story is understood through the reader's individual conceptual systems, which are a result of both embodied experience and cultural reiteration. While literacy is still an aspect of transmediality, it is no longer centred on the symbolic. Instead, the storyworlds are semiotic—transmedial storyworlds also incorporate aurality (the ability to decode sound-based signifiers), illustration, photography, and the moving image into their semiotic environment.

While Ong's "media as a pipeline" theory—the idea that the author's intentions are affected by the different media—held prominence in the early days of new media theory, it is problematic when one considers the multifaceted construction of transmedial storyworlds, as there is no single start and end point. Readers and critics can approach each text as an individual art object—by listening only to the music, for example—however, they will have more of the narrative at their disposal if they engage with multiple media. In terms of providing a theoretical framework for engaging with transmedial storyworlds it is not only artificial to analyse each medial engagement independently from the others, it is counterproductive. There is no clear distinction between the diegetic components—a reader can derive some sense of the story from the music, some from images, some from play, and others from a book. These texts do not work in isolation, instead each reader approaches the storyworld with their own history of reading and culture and reads the texts with each other. This doesn't mean that readers have to engage with every element of the transmedial storyworld. It does mean, however, that once a reader engages with more than one text that constitutes the storyworld, "our previous experiences with that text, and whether we

have had any, play a part in the current experience.”<sup>173</sup> By this, I mean that if the reader engages first with the music, then with the books, videos, and other media that comprise *The Amory Wars* storyworld, then their understanding of the story will be grounded in their embodied responses to the music. In contrast, if they were to engage with a storyworld first through its literary component<sup>174</sup> (as modern readers do with Thomas Whythorne’s *Autobiography*, where it is difficult to track down contemporary recordings and performances of his compositions) then their encounter with the storyworld will privilege the narrative the author provided in their literary work. Although Ong’s ‘pipeline’ metaphor is less persuasive as a descriptor for how readers derive information from the texts, it might be appropriated to describe the way that meaning arises from the reader. The reader’s engagement with the texts that make up the storyworld is as a result of their own choices, the question therefore arises, and which texts do readers ‘filter’ when they read a transmedial narrative?

The question of which texts do, and which texts do not, contribute to a transmedial storyworld continues. Popular transmedial franchises, such as *Star Wars*, include a raft of novels and audiobooks that, while officially licensed, are often excluded from the storyworld’s canon.<sup>175</sup> The debate over which texts are categorised as canonical, and which are not, has its philosophical roots in those discussions about the sacred qualities of original art, and the anxieties surrounding representation as an expression of “the equivalence of the sign and of the real” and simulation

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<sup>173</sup> Frances Bonner and Jason Jacobs, “The first encounter: Observations on the chronology of encounter with some adaptations of Lewis Carroll’s Alice books,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, February 2011, Vol. 17, 37.

<sup>174</sup> Generally this is explored through the literary texts, where the story is told, rather than performed as it is through music or gameplay.

<sup>175</sup> Lucas Licensing maintain the Holocron continuity database in order to map out the various trajectories of the Star Wars universe. <http://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2014/01/op-ed-disney-takes-a-chainsaw-to-the-star-wars-expanded-universe/>.

as an assertion of “the radical negation of the sign as value.”<sup>176</sup> Reading practices that situate the author as the source of meaning in the storyworld demonstrate a desire to establish a storyworld canon based on the author’s status as the source of the storyworld’s Real. This method seeks to “make the real... coincide with their models of simulation”:<sup>177</sup> the author’s intention is seen as giving the storyworld its shape.

Geoffrey A. Long identifies property ownership as the deciding factor as to where a storyworld’s ‘realness’ lies. He writes that “in *Star Wars*, canon seems to be determined almost purely by the whims and decisions of the singular *auteur* behind the franchise.”<sup>178</sup> The distinction between authors and readers has been clearly delineated with the institutional support of art-world figures<sup>179</sup> and the field of cultural production,<sup>180</sup> which have solidified the fiction of artists as the sole creators of artworks. The figure of the *auteur* is useful for describing how the author functions in relation to transmedial creation. In film criticism, the *auteur* theory holds that the art-object is a result of the director’s personal creative vision, despite the collaborative nature of film production. This is an epistemological frame that transfers neatly, albeit problematically, to a transmedial context. The problematic aspects of this approach are a result of the theory’s investment in narratives of property ownership.

Property is a framework that is derived from libertarian and capitalist discourses that privilege the individual’s agency to possess and dominate other non-subjects. The *auteur* is a status that is associated with

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<sup>176</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, r. 2010), 6.

<sup>177</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

<sup>178</sup> Geoffrey Long, “Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company” (Masters Thesis: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 38.

<sup>179</sup> See for example: H.S. Becker, *Art worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, r. 2008).

<sup>180</sup> See for example: Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993); “But who created the ‘creators’?,” in *Sociology in Question* (London: SAGE, 1993); “Outline of a sociological theory of art perception,” in *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1968); *The rules of art: Genesis and structure of the literary field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992, r. 1996).

masculinity, and the issue of the woman-as-auteur has recently been subject to a wave of public discussion.<sup>181</sup> A collection of women musicians, Solange Knowles, Björk, Taylor Swift, and Amanda Palmer, have articulated concerns about “the tendency to assume that men are the *real* authors”<sup>182</sup> at the expense of acknowledging women’s creative agency. Joanna Russ addresses this very issue in her book, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*. Russ addresses the denial of women’s agency head on:

What to do when a woman has written something? The first line of defense [*sic.*] is to deny that she wrote it.<sup>183</sup>

Russ accounts for the impenetrability of the canon—and I would argue by extension, for the impenetrability of the auteur—as an issue of “centrality” or privilege that, essentially, is an abstraction of self and other that fails to take into account parallel traditions. More recently, Björk reiterated this exclusionary practice: “It’s invisible, what women do. It’s not rewarded as much.”<sup>184</sup> This claim is evidenced in *Decoded*: dream hampton<sup>185</sup> co-authored both *Decoded* and Carter’s unfinished autobiography, tentatively titled *The Black Book*.<sup>186</sup> She worked with Carter to position his narrative as “teachable.” She recalls:

[Carter’s] ruminations and his ideas about where he comes from—that kind of poverty, what our generation of boys did to get out of that poverty, what the consequences were—to me is far more of a zeitgeist than Hip Hop...We had all these conversations about whether or not that makes Hip Hop more valid. This is a very

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<sup>181</sup> Forest Wickman, “It’s Not Just Björk: Women Are Tired of Not Getting Credit for Their Own Music,” slate.com, accessed 22/02/2015, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/01/21/bjork\\_pitchfork\\_interview\\_she\\_s\\_tired\\_of\\_not\\_getting\\_credit\\_for\\_her\\_music.html?wpsrc=fol\\_tw](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/01/21/bjork_pitchfork_interview_she_s_tired_of_not_getting_credit_for_her_music.html?wpsrc=fol_tw).

<sup>182</sup> Wickman, “It’s Not Just Björk.”

<sup>183</sup> Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 21.

<sup>184</sup> Jessica Hopper, “The Invisible Woman: A Conversation with Björk,” pitchfork.com, accessed 22/01/2015, <http://pitchfork.com/features/interviews/9582-the-invisible-woman-a-conversation-with-bjork/>.

<sup>185</sup> hampton, like bell hooks, doesn’t capitalise her name.

<sup>186</sup> Rebecca Walker, “The Roots Interview: dream hampton,” theroot.com, accessed 22/01/2015, [http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2010/12/the\\_root\\_talks\\_with\\_decoded\\_coauthor\\_dream\\_hampton.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2010/12/the_root_talks_with_decoded_coauthor_dream_hampton.html).

important oral tradition and it doesn't need to be canonized necessarily.<sup>187</sup>

hampton, an author, film maker and cultural critic is known as an editor at *The Source* magazine, editor in chief of *RapPages* Magazine, and was a contributing journalist for *Vibe*, *The Village Voice*, *The Detroit News*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Essence*. It was she who directed the book towards a more academic structure, she focussed Carter on the zeitgeist of economic politics, taking his story and helping him frame an examination of culture and society through his art. Nonetheless, the book is attributed to Jay-Z and is copyrighted to Carter, with hampton receiving a brief mention in the acknowledgements. Regardless of the fact that Carter thanks hampton for "living [his] words and [his] life," his position as auteur is never questioned in relation to his collaboration with hampton.<sup>188</sup> By enforcing narratives of legitimacy and illegitimacy on contributions to the storyworld, rights holders try to close the storyworld to creative and critical expansions that are not sanctioned by the auteur. This results in an unstable canon that is subject to renegotiation at the rights holder's discretion, an issue that has most recently affected both the *Star Wars*<sup>189</sup> and *Doctor Who*<sup>190</sup> franchises. Again, this renegotiation of the canon focuses on the relationship between the author and the text, rather than on the relationship between readers and the texts. Generally, the author (whether as themselves, or as a synecdoche for a creative collective) is culturally narrated as the source of the real in the storyworld, while readers' contributions that creatively and critically respond to the storyworld are narrated as a threat to the integrity of that real. In this

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<sup>187</sup> Omar Burgess, "dream hampton talks transforming Jay-Z's *Decoded*," hiphopdx.com, accessed 22/01/2015, <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/news/id.13490/title.dream-hampton-talks-transforming-jay-zs-decoded>.

<sup>188</sup> Carter's status as *auteur* was, however challenged by one Patrick White of Las Angeles who claimed that Carter and hampton had plagiarized White's writing. The case did not progress.

<sup>189</sup> "Disney appoints a group to determine a new, official *Star Wars* canon," io9.com, accessed 20/12/2014, <http://io9.com/disney-appoints-a-group-to-determine-a-new-official-st-1497893812>.

<sup>190</sup> "Doctor Who is now immortal, reveals the BBC," theguardian.com, accessed 20/12/2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/oct/12/doctor-who-immortal-reveals-bbc>.

narration the author's property-in-self is extended to their textual creation, and the storyworld is imagined as bounded by the author's body. When that storyworld is 'penetrated' by a reader's creative or critical response, the author's bodily integrity is called into question: the "transcendental ego"<sup>191</sup> is feminised as it is unable to 'defer' the "interrogation of its... externality."<sup>192</sup> As the text is opened by readers, so too is the author's subject-status which is imagined as their body. This renders the author's body violable: it feminises the body.<sup>193</sup>

## 2.4 The Economic Context of Transmediality

Henry Jenkins places convergence culture firmly within an economic framework. He asserts that:

At the moment, we are on a collision course between a new economic and legal culture which encourages monopoly power over cultural mythologies, and new technologies which empower consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media images.<sup>194</sup>

Jenkins identifies convergence culture as "a cultural shift as *consumers* are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content"<sup>195</sup> (my emphasis). He highlights the commercial and economic context that facilitated the development of convergence media, but notes that the culture arose in response to this media. He writes "[i]ncreasingly, movie moguls saw games not simply as a means of stamping the franchise logo on some ancillary product but as a means of expanding the storytelling experience... They wanted to use games to explore ideas that couldn't fit within two-hour films."<sup>196</sup> Once this method was recognised and adopted by the 'moguls', commercial interests in

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<sup>191</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1986, R. 2002), 90.

<sup>192</sup> Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," 90.

<sup>193</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 23.

<sup>194</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars?: Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture," web.mit.edu, accessed August, 2010, <http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/starwars.html>. Originally published in *Rethinking Media Change*, eds. D. Thorburn and H. Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>195</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 199 of 8270.

<sup>196</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 302 of 8270.

using multiple-media engagements to expand the narrative process were still not explicitly regulated. The current regulating frameworks (specifically copyright laws) privilege producer controlled storyworld engagements, and stymie reader directed developments, even going so far as to counter reader created content with punitive actions, such as exorbitant fines.<sup>197</sup> Jenkins celebrates transmedia's encouragement of co-creation between creators and readers rather than its commercial imperatives. He acknowledges the commercial aspects of the storyworld, but his focus is on its folk-cultural potential. This co-creation, which often takes the form of prosumption, occurs in that space I have termed "the lacuna," which is explored in the next chapter. Jenkins elides the role of the production companies, who are generally the ones who control copyright, focusing instead on the creative potential for readers. However, creative potential is not the only exchange that is encouraged by transmedial narratives.

Economic transactions are essential to the development of this storytelling method, and it is at this juncture that Marsha Kinder's early analysis of transmedial narratology becomes pertinent. Kinder contextualises this literary style as an outcome of particular economic imperatives that are focused on the consumption of ancillary products:

Even when young viewers do not recognize many of the specific allusions, they still gain an entrance into *a system of reading narrative* [my emphasis]—that is, a means of structuring characters, genres, voices, and visual conventions into paradigms, as well as models for interpreting and generating new combinations.<sup>198</sup>

Kinder draws on children's television programming from the early 1980s—which was spearheaded by toy manufacturing companies—to demonstrate that transmedial narratives grew out of commercial frameworks. Storytelling through children's television programs was essentially an extended form of advertising for toys. *My Little Pony*,

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<sup>197</sup> In Australia, for example, copyright infringement is regulated under the *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)* and is read in conjunction with chapter 2 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)* which sets out the general principles of criminal responsibility and includes imprisonment for up to ten years among its penalties.

<sup>198</sup> Kinder, *Playing with Power*, 41-42.

*Rainbow Bright*, *The Care Bears*, *He-Man* and *She-Ra* were effectively twenty minute long advertisements. This suggests that readers' relationships with transmedial narratives are framed by an economic, as well as a cultural, context, both of which impact on the creation of, and engagement with, life-writing that is constructed using this method.

Convergence culture makes the commercial success of transmedial narratives more likely. However, the old model of commercial framework—which sets parameters for legitimate and illegitimate engagement with transmedial storyworlds—is challenged by reader engagements that blur the divide between producers and consumers, and that arguably “[ideologically recruit] consumers into productive co-creation relationships [that hinge] on accommodating consumers’ needs for recognition, freedom, and agency.”<sup>199</sup> I divide transmedial narratives into two practices: transmedial storytelling, and transmedial franchising. These states can be located on a spectrum of regulatory practices, and—to varying degrees—both can arise in relation to a single storyworld. However, the processes are differentiated by determining whether readers’ creative and critical engagements with the storyworld are softly regulated (storytelling),<sup>200</sup> or strictly regulated<sup>201</sup> (franchising).<sup>202</sup> At its most basic, ‘regulation’ might refer to whether the storyworld is managed under the laws of copyright, Creative Commons, or copyleft.<sup>203</sup> However, it also refers to the culture of prosumption fostered by the artists creating

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<sup>199</sup> Detlev Zwick, Samuel K. Bonsu, and Aron Darmody, “Putting Consumers to Work: Co-creation and New Marketing Govern-mentality,” *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 8 (2008), 185.

<sup>200</sup> Where the storyworld’s rights-holder is trying to accommodate reader’s critical and creative responses to the storyworld by protecting their property interests while accommodating the readers’ cultural practices.

<sup>201</sup> I use the term ‘regulate’ to describe the processes that legitimise and de-legitimise fans’ creative and critical engagements with the storyworld. In legal discourse, regulation is used to describe a legal norm intended to shape conduct that is a by-product of imperfection. In this instance, the ‘imperfection’ imputed are the unlicensed critical and creative responses to artwork.

<sup>202</sup> Insofar as they use legal discourse to protect the rights-holder’s property interests at the expense of the reader’s cultural practices

<sup>203</sup> Copyleft is the practice of using copyright laws to protect readers. It enables rights holders to offer the right to distribute copies and modified versions of a work, but requires that the same rights (to distribute and modify) be preserved in modified versions of the work.

the texts (who may, or may not, be rights holders in the storyworld). In this section I will consider *transmedial franchising*, which involves the licensed distribution of products related to a storyworld, and the strict enforcing of copyright by the rights owners and licensees.

#### 2.4.1 Transmedial Franchising

Perhaps the most infamous example of a strictly regulated transmedial storyworld is *Star Wars*. Until it was sold to Disney in 2012, the *Star Wars* storyworld (excluding the distribution rights for Episodes IV, V and VI, which are retained by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox) was owned by Lucasfilm. In 2002 Jim Ward, the vice president of marketing for Lucasfilm, told *New York Times* reporter Amy Harmon:

We've been very clear all along on where we draw the line... We love our fans. We want them to have fun. But if in fact somebody is using our characters to create a story unto itself, that's not in the spirit of what we think fandom is about. Fandom is about celebrating the story the way it is.<sup>204</sup>

It strikes me as perverse to let the regulators of a franchise who are dedicated to controlling fans' responses to their storyworld set the discursive framework for the whole of fandom, or fan-culture, as a cultural practice. Furthermore, I suggest that Ward's definition of 'fandom' is misguided and incorrect. Fandom is not about "celebrating the story the way it is." That is stagnation. Jenkins' definition of fandom is more appropriate: he describes fan culture as "the appropriation and transformation of materials borrowed from mass culture."<sup>205</sup> This is a definition that allows for the fans to respond to a text's writerlyness. It also demonstrates the point at which a heavily regulated storyworld can be brought into the storytelling process through fan-cultural practices. Initially Lucasfilm encouraged prosumption, and in 1977 it established a no-fee licensing bureau to review material, and offer advice on copyright

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<sup>204</sup> Jim Ward quoted in Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 3293 of 8270.

<sup>205</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 5431 of 8270.

infringement.<sup>206</sup> However, these arrangements broke down purportedly because Lucas discovered fan-erotica.<sup>207</sup> In 1981, Maureen Garrett, director of the official *Star Wars* fan club, warned its members:

Lucasfilm Ltd. does own all rights to the Star Wars characters and we are going to insist upon no pornography. This may mean no fanzines if that measure is what is necessary to stop the few from darkening the reputation our company is so proud of... Since all of the *Star Wars* Saga is PG rated, any story those publishers print should also be PG. Lucasfilm does not produce any X-rated *Star Wars* episodes, so why should we be placed in a light where people think we do?... You don't own these characters and can't *publish* anything about them without permission.<sup>208</sup>

The irony of Princess Leia as a bikini-clad slave was evidently lost on the regulators, but that is perhaps testament more to the representation of women in popular culture and is, sadly, beyond the remit of this research. Of course, fan-erotica continued to circulate in an underground capacity, and it was only with the shift from paper-fanzines to the Internet that the issue was raised again. Lucasfilm eventually created a free web space for fans, but placed the condition that all user-generated content published on the site should become the studio's intellectual property.<sup>209</sup> Jenkins discusses the licensing process adopted by franchises that enable only the slavish reproduction of concepts better explored through their original medium, declaring “[f]ranchise products are governed too much by economic logic and not enough by artistic vision.”<sup>210</sup> Transmedial

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<sup>206</sup> Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 164-171.

<sup>207</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.3306 of 8270.

<sup>208</sup> Maureen Garret, quoted in Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 31.

<sup>209</sup> This has now been updated to reflect that Disney retains “a non-exclusive, sub-licensable, irrevocable and royalty-free worldwide license under all copyrights, trademarks, patents, trade secrets, privacy and publicity rights and other intellectual property rights to use, reproduce, transmit, print, publish, publicly display, exhibit, distribute, redistribute, copy, index, comment on, modify, adapt, translate, create derivative works based upon, publicly perform, make available and otherwise exploit such User Generated Content, in whole or in part, in all media formats and channels now known or hereafter devised (including in connection with the Disney Services and on third-party sites and platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter), in any number of copies and without limit as to time, manner and frequency of use, without further notice to you, with or without attribution, and without the requirement of permission from or payment to you or any other person or entity”: “1. Contract between You and Us,” [disneytermsofuse.com](http://disneytermsofuse.com), accessed 15/01/14, <http://disneytermsofuse.com/english/#section1>

<sup>210</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2226 of 8270.

franchises are narratives in which the copyright holders and licensees enforce their copyrights, at the expense of readers' active and creative engagement with the storyworld. These restrictions are, of course, only relevant to my contemporary case studies,<sup>211</sup> and each of them has taken similar steps toward mitigating how much control a producer might have over the storyworld: Palmer and Sanchez have left, or are in the process of leaving, major record labels in favour of establishing their own publishing houses, while Carter established Roc-A-Fella Records in 1995 in order to release his first album, *Reasonable Doubt*, which had been rejected by several major record labels. This means that they can determine how, and when, readers legally interact with the storyworlds, and allows for the possibility of storyworld regulation that is based on the artists' desires, and that can include a more open dialogue between authors and readers. Palmer is, however, the only one of the case studies to pro-actively encourage this approach by registering the music that she maintains copyright in under a Creative Commons licence, and actively encouraging fans to "SHARE SHARE SHARE! COPY COPY COPY!"<sup>212</sup>

However, the application of this more open approach is not entirely unproblematic. One of the most damning charges directed at Palmer is related to the ways in which she has explored this new paradigm: she outsourced labour to people who would work in exchange for a rider, merchandise, and kudos. Joshua Clover of *The New Yorker* described this as the Oompa-Loompa defence: "outsourcing labor to people who will work for less is fine because they are 'happy' to do it."<sup>213</sup> He acknowledges that this "unpaid microlabor" is a permanent feature of on-line engagement, whether it is providing content for websites or inadvertently providing information to Google and Facebook that they can sell to advertisers, but is unwilling to extend the framework into the

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<sup>211</sup> Thomas Whythorne's musical publications pre-date copyright law by some 125 years.

<sup>212</sup> Amanda Palmer, "Welcome," amandapalmer.net, accessed 16/02/2015, <http://shop.amandapalmer.net/pages/frontpage>.

<sup>213</sup> Joshua Clover, "Amanda Palmer's Accidental Experiment with Real Communism," *The New Yorker*, accessed 15/11/2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/amanda-palmers-accidental-experiment-with-real-communism>.

material labour market. The criticism I have of the approach that Clover and other such commentators take is that it conflates Marxist praxis with a Capitalist framework. George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson anticipated this line of thought in their 2010 essay, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” in which they remind readers that:

In the case of traditional prosumers, [*those who operate in a production/consumption matrix where production economically and legally dominates consumption*] it is difficult to accept the idea that we have entered a new stage of capitalism. Rather, it appears that capitalists have found another group of people—beyond workers (producers)—to exploit and a new source of surplus value. In this case, capitalism has merely done what it has always done—found yet another way to expand (others are globally, as well as colonising the minds and bodies of those involved in the system).<sup>214</sup>

Ritzer and Jurgenson highlight capitalism’s ability to evolve in order to suit the market. Where Clover reads Palmer’s labour practices in a market shaped by the inequality, oppression and alienation of the proletariat from the product of their labour, it can be argued that Palmer instead, however imperfectly, utilises a market framework premised on socialist values, such as a more equitable relationship between producer and consumer that needs to be reflected by greater protection for consumers under laws that regulate transmedial storyworlds. This equality is explored through means that interpolate soft-Marxist values, such as:

1. public ownership (creative commons);
2. that each receives according to their need and each contributes according to their ability (pay what you can afford for digital downloads);
3. to meet human need rather than profit (the focus on community and connection, including the launch of the free Amanda Palmer iOS App); and
4. production characterised by social equality (Palmer sits at the merchandise stand and meets with every fan who wants to meet with her after a performance).

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<sup>214</sup> Ritzer and Jurgenson “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” 21.

Palmer's actions have illuminated that even in a shifting market framework "the relations in which many work and few gain, in which some dominate and others are subordinated... [is] the prime moment of politics."<sup>215</sup> This politics is vested in recognition that a traditional capitalist framework associates economic empowerment with masculinist agency and domination, while the consumer is positioned as feminised, and thereby rendered passive. Bodies that were feminised were expected to maintain the free domestic economy that underpins the capitalist system. As such they were outside of those frameworks that associated public (as averse to private) labour with a wage. Prosumption exposes this fiction by illuminating the ways in which the author's control over their text is subordinated to the reader's creative agency. How do these power dynamics influence transmedial narratives?

Transmedial narratives have been adopted by media producers as a means of responding to newly empowered and active readers, however many producers undertake this process within the paradigms that catered to monomedial texts, and often resist (or even prosecute) what they see as "renegade behavior"<sup>216</sup> on the part of consumers. This renegade behaviour generally takes the form of prosumption that breaches fair-use exemptions to copyright law (at the less extreme end), through to piracy and plagiarism at the other end of the consumption spectrum. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins provides a brief overview of how these transactions function in relation to transmedial narratives:

Under licensing, the central media company... sells the rights to manufacture products using its assets to an often unaffiliated third party; the license limits what can be done with the characters or concepts to protect the original property...

The current licensing system typically generates works that are redundant (allowing no new character background or plot development), watered down (asking the new media to slavishly duplicate experiences better achieved through the old), or riddled with sloppy contradictions (failing to respect the core consistency audiences expect within a franchise).<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>216</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 490 of 8270.

<sup>217</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2225 of 8270.

In 2007, Berthon and others addressed the ‘problems’ raised by ‘clever customers’ in their article “When Customers Get Clever: Managerial Approaches to Dealing with Creative Consumers.”<sup>218</sup> They identified four approaches taken by producers in response to prosumption—“a simple early ignoring, to a threat of legal action, to a begrudging condescension, to an active embracing of customer creativity”<sup>219</sup>—and describe readers’ relational engagement with texts<sup>220</sup> as “paradoxical”:

On one front, they can represent a black hole for future revenue. Breach of copyright is rife, and the notion of intellectual property is often treated with cavalier disregard. There is also the distinct possibility that customers who meddle with proprietary products can produce something truly dangerous! On the other hand, creative consumers can be a gold mine of ideas and business prospects, as customers identify opportunities and implementations that become sources of revenue, apart from being significant improvements.<sup>221</sup>

Hyperbole aside, this article does provide a concise overview of the concerns capitalist producers have in relation to the flourishing folk-cultures surrounding transmedial storyworlds. However, where Ethan Mollick called on producers to “try to establish a dialogue with those elites who might make positive contributions,”<sup>222</sup> Berthon and others see this process as “encouraging” consumers, and imply that it is rewarding bad behaviour. Perhaps most problematic among the methods they describe for engaging with prosumers is the idea of “symbolic capital” borrowed from Marxist sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>223</sup> They assert that:

Creative consumers *need not benefit directly from their innovations*, although they may obviously benefit indirectly through thanks, peer recognition, and so forth. This is often referred to as ‘symbolic capital.’ Conversely to economic capital, the more one “gives away,”

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<sup>218</sup> Pierre R. Berthon, *et. al*, “When customers get clever: Managerial approaches to dealing with creative consumers,” *Business Horizons*, Vol. 50 (2007), 39-47.

<sup>219</sup> Berthon, “When customers get clever,” 40.

<sup>220</sup> For the sake of consistency I use the word “text” although in this context I acknowledge that it would also be a product, or other object.

<sup>221</sup> Berthon, “When customers get clever,” 40.

<sup>222</sup> Ethan Mollick, “Tapping into the underground: companies typically have antagonistic relationships with hackers, ‘modders’ and others who alter their products, but is there a way to work with--instead of against--such underground innovators?” *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 46 No. 4 (2005), 40.

<sup>223</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

the more symbolic capital one accumulates in the form of prestige, status, and reputation.<sup>224</sup>

They indicate that since prosumption is “here to stay,” businesses should treat readers as a source of unpaid labour, by adopting their innovations as a means of informal outsourcing that is more cost-beneficial than in-house processing before their competitors take advantage of this value-creation. How does Palmer differ in her approach? While she does, to an extent, trade in symbolic capital, her requests for assistance, and contributions from her readers are mediated as a consequence of opening her storyworld to readers. She does this by licensing her music under a Creative Commons licence and using a ‘pay what you can afford’ market for her digitised music. She takes from her readers when they choose to give, but she also gives to them when they ask her.

#### 2.4.1.1 Venus and the Market: Economics and Gender

Transmedial storyworlds destabilise narratives that situate authorship and authority as vested in masculinity. The author is often allied with legal and economic benefits, such as the ability to own (intellectual) property, to exclude others from accessing that property, and to exercise other rights associated with property ownership in a capitalist context. In their 2010 article, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson bring together online practices of capitalism that are marked by an abundance of product, rather than its scarcity,<sup>225</sup> with the utopian ideals of “cyber-Libertarians”<sup>226</sup> to argue for the development of a new form of capitalism, one that is hallmarked by the difficulties capitalists face in “controlling prosumers” and the “greater likelihood of resistance [to control] on the part of prosumers,” and a recognition of “abundance rather than scarcity,

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<sup>224</sup> Berthon, “When customers get clever,” 41.

<sup>225</sup> George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital ‘prosumer’,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* (2010), Vol. 10, No.13, 30.

<sup>226</sup> Ritzer and Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” 20-21.

a focus on effectiveness rather than efficiency.”<sup>227</sup> They identify methods by which the new producer-consumer paradigm is developing. The first is through a shifting labour-power dynamic between capitalists and contemporary prosumers that limits the capitalists’ control over the way, and to the degree, that such prosumers interact with the product. The second method speaks to the pleasure that prosumers derive from their interactions with a storyworld, and Palmer summarises this argument in her interview with *The New York Times*, “If my fans are happy and my audience is happy and the musicians on stage are happy, where’s the problem?”<sup>228</sup> Clover responds to this question, reminding his readers that “As a society, we’re supposedly committed to the principle that workers, the poor, those struggling to get by, deserve a share of the wealth for practicing their craft.”<sup>229</sup> Ritzer and Jurgenson extrapolate on their defence by arguing that prosumption heralds “at least the possibility of the emergence of a whole new economic form.”<sup>230</sup> What is the shape of this ‘new economic form’? Where capitalism results from the exchange of money for goods and services and profits are made in those exchanges, the eradication of money (although not value) from exchanges (for example the exchange of information for marketing purposes in order to access digital content) is not capitalism in its traditional sense, although it is currently capitalist in nature. Value no longer has to be determined by the public (masculinised) market, rather, it can be negotiated through a social exchange. This enables a non-capital cultural currency that can benefit those people who are economically disenfranchised, or passive actors in the market (feminised), who are otherwise excluded or alienated from capitalist means of attaining middle-class consumption. It still, of course, passively privileges consumption as ideologically desirable.

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<sup>227</sup> Ritzer and Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” 31.

<sup>228</sup> Daniel J. Wakin, “Rockers Playing for Beer: Fair Play?,” [artsbeats.blogs.nytimes.com](http://artsbeats.blogs.nytimes.com), accessed 05/01/2015, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/rockers-playing-for-beer-fair-play/?r=0>.

<sup>229</sup> Clover, “Amanda Palmer’s Accidental Experiment with Real Communism.”

<sup>230</sup> Ritzer and Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” 22.

In *How to Fix Copyright*, William Patry addresses the idea of 'artificial scarcity', and notes that these new digital markets put that threat to rest. He contends that continuing to use traditional legal-economic methods to regulate such capital is premised on a myth, and that in a new market economy, unlimited resources, including people, can devote themselves for pleasure (rather than be devoted by an employer) to expanding storyworlds. By recognising that a capitalist approach to storyworld creation is an expression of masculine dominance, the abstraction of class and gender power imbalances are exemplified in the production and regulation of transmedial storyworlds. These factors speak to an increasing recognition that feminised economic agency is not essentially a form that can, or should, be subordinated to the interests of the masculinised economic actors. A complete consideration of this matrix is beyond the scope of this thesis, but, again, raises questions for future research. This leads us to transmedial storytelling as an examination of a creative praxis that can comfortably operate with the shifting dynamics between authors and readers.

#### 2.4.2 Transmedial Storytelling

While Palmer has been subject to criticism for her class and context blindness,<sup>231</sup> for refusing to engage in critical discussions of her art (specifically the *Evelyn Evelyn* storyworld),<sup>232</sup> or of her methodology<sup>233</sup> (her support for crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter and IndieGoGo have been described as manifestations of entitlement)<sup>234</sup> she nonetheless has initiated a conversation around the

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<sup>231</sup> Rachel Edidin, "The Art of Asking Why We Hate Amanda Palmer," wired.com, accessed 20/12/2014, <http://www.wired.com/2013/03/amanda-palmer-2/>.

<sup>232</sup> Anaham, "Evelyn Evelyn: Ableism Ableism?" disabledfeminists.com, accessed 20/12/2014, <http://disabledfeminists.com/2010/02/09/evelyn-evelyn-ableism-ableism/>.

<sup>233</sup> Marah Eakin and Tasha Robinson, "Policing Amanda Palmer: How Crowdfunding has changed expectations for artists," avclub.com, accessed 20/12/2014, <http://www.avclub.com/article/policing-amanda-palmer-how-crowdfunding-has-change-85283>.

<sup>234</sup> Kitty Stryker, "Will Work for Compensation: Amanda Palmer, Interns, and Entitlement Culture," huffingtonpost.com, accessed 20/12/2014,

relationships between artists, art objects, audiences, and economics. Subsequently the form of her work is salient to a discussion of transmedial storytelling, in particular to the ways in which rights holders can open texts to readers.

Palmer releases her music under the Creative Commons “Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA)” license, which enables her fans to adapt, and create in response to her work, as long as they do not do so in a commercial capacity. The adaptation or creative work must also be licensed under the same license as the source text. What this means is that she encourages her readers to creatively respond to her artwork:



Figure 2.4: Screenshot of the fan-forum linked to [www.amandapalmer.net](http://www.amandapalmer.net)



Figure 2.5: Screenshot from official music video for “The Bed Song” by Amanda Palmer, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sW4dwXXX7Q>.



Figure 2.6: Screenshot from fan-made music video for “The Bed Song” by Amanda Palmer, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4E0UQA6Q6k>.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kitty-stryker/will-work-for-compensation-amanda-palmer-interns-and-entitlement-culture\\_b\\_1879297.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kitty-stryker/will-work-for-compensation-amanda-palmer-interns-and-entitlement-culture_b_1879297.html).

This invitation to creative responses means that the storyworld can be extended to incorporate these epitextual endeavours. Where storyworlds lack a single creator, or where the auteur's artistic intent is to open the storyworld (as is the case with Amanda Palmer's *WKAP* and *Theatre is Evil (TIE)*), what (if any) are its boundaries? In particular, to what extent do readers' unlicensed creative and critical contributions shape the storyworld? And what is the function of the fan whose contributions are incorporated into the canonical storyworld?

The most noticeable difference between creators such as Palmer and Lucasfilm, is scale: the larger organisations create content for an audience of millions over the course of generations; Palmer has a large niche audience (although her Twitter account does boast a cool 1.06 million followers) and has been creating this storyworld for a little more than seven years. However, public listing on the stock exchange also shifts the corporation's responsibilities. Providing a return for shareholders, and not the fans, or even the storyworld itself, becomes the rights holder's legal obligation. But beyond this, Palmer's more 'intimate' audience means that she fosters a type of intimacy with her fans by performing short-notice and free 'Ninja-gigs', by maintaining an active on-line presence across Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, and through the *Theatre is Evil* iOS app. She provides readers with insight into the mundanities of her life, whether it is waiting for a cab, her thoughts on whatever zeitgeist catches her attention, or as a means of notifying fans of performances (both her own, and the efforts of others). This contributes to a narrative of intimacy that links Palmer, as a producer, with her readers, as prosumers. It discursively prioritises the relationship between the creator and the prosumers, over the relationship between creators and currency: even at its most cynical—the shift from “trademark” to “lovemark”<sup>235</sup>—is

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<sup>235</sup>“Lovemark” is a marketing strategy promoted by Kevin Roberts, the CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, in his books, *Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands*, (New York: Power House Books, 2004), and *The Lovemarks Effect: Winning in the Consumer Revolution* (Brooklyn: Power House Books, 2006). In these texts, Roberts argues that successful Capitalist

a step toward that which Marx described as the means by which capitalists could overcome crises in the market (crises of overproduction that negated the desire for wholeness that propels the market): they must “constantly [revolutionise] the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.”<sup>236</sup>

Palmer revolutionises her ‘instruments of production’ by focussing on collaboration as a means of expanding the storyworld. In a documentary on the *WKAP* DVD, Palmer describes her artistic practice as a means of creating connections between people, specifically between herself, and her audience. She says:

I love connecting with the people and I love hearing what they have to say. And I think the reason ... the music works, and the art works is because... of why I’m doing it. I’m doing it because I want... to connect with people, I want people to feel things. I want people to feel like they’re not alone.<sup>237</sup>

Palmer recognises that dialectic is central to transmedial storytelling, and she incorporates it into her storyworld, drawing contributions from other artists, writers, and musicians, as well as from her fans. These examples are found in her art books, where art and photography has been sourced from artists such as photographers Kyle Cassidy and Beth Hommel, and painters such as Nicole Duennebier and Steven Bogart. The collection of Palmeresques by Rohan Kriwaczek in the book *On the Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer (and the Many Crimes of Tobias James)* is another example of the dialectic manifesting as part of the canon, as are the performances with Palmer by The Danger Ensemble that are included on the *WKAP* DVD. Each creative contributor must first situate themselves as a reader, drawing on the contributions that preceded them: both author and reader

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practice requires a shift from treating the product as an object (that might be respected, but is not incorporated into the consumer’s self-narrative) to treating it as a narrative replete with mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. This approach was summarised by Kevin Duncan thusly: “Creating loyalty beyond reason requires emotional connections that generate the highest levels of love and respect for your brand.” Kevin Duncan, *Marketing Greatest Hits: A Masterclass in Modern Marketing Ideas* (London: A&C Black, 2010), 7.

<sup>236</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin Classics, 2002, r. 2014), 327.

<sup>237</sup> *Who Killed Amanda Palmer: A Surrealist Mini-Mystery*, DVD..

communities are engaged in the process of storyworld creation. However, there is still an element of the auteur's centrality to this project. Like Narcissus staring into the pond, Palmer relies on her readers to reflect her countenance; she just acknowledges that sometimes that image will ripple. This practice also necessitates an industry and economy that is synergistic with this storytelling culture. Often the texts that make up the storyworld are licensed to a variety of intermediaries such as Sony BMG, Warner Brothers, and other publishing houses. While a text might have an *auteur* (the *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* album has Amanda Palmer, or even Roadrunner Records, her then-publisher), when a narrative is constructed across a number of media, it necessitates more than one creator. Not just text-writers, but the entire creation team—illustration, sound-production, the programming—are capable of framing and creating new meaning in the story.

In her TED speech of March 2013, Amanda Palmer spoke about *The Art of Asking*. Although the talk focused on economies of kind, Palmer also addressed the issue of her relationship with her fans, and her position as the instigator of these economies. She said:

For most of human history musicians and artists, they've been a part of the community. Connectors and openers, not untouchable stars. Celebrity is about a lot of people loving you from a distance, but the Internet, and the content that we are freely able to share on it, are taking us back. It's about a few people loving you up close and about those people being enough.<sup>238</sup>

In *The Grand Theft Art Companion*, Palmer reiterates this element of communion with her readers as part of the storytelling process, stating that “[she] saw music as a way to reach fans and find friends. Connection,”<sup>239</sup> and noted that “people loved making art inspired by the music,”<sup>240</sup> contrasting this with her former record label whom she maintains “saw music as a way to reach fans and make money. Profit.”<sup>241</sup> For Palmer, the heart of her storytelling is in her relationship with her

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<sup>238</sup> TED, *Amanda Palmer: The Art of Asking* (on-line video, 02/03/2013), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMj\\_P\\_6H69g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMj_P_6H69g).

<sup>239</sup> Amanda Palmer, *The Grand Theft Art Companion* (Self Published, 2012), 15.

<sup>240</sup> Palmer, *The Grand Theft Art Companion*, 16.

<sup>241</sup> Palmer, *The Grand Theft Art Companion*, 15.

audience. One of the most volatile spaces in which to both create and explore a storyworld is on the stage, where the interaction between performer and audience shapes the story. This crafting is a more intimate experience than general engagements with the text, and Palmer enriched these interactions by undertaking question and answer sessions with her audience during the *WKAP* tour.<sup>242</sup> This enabled the audiences to develop their personal engagements with the stories through Palmer. For example, it was during a performance from the *WKAP* tour that I first became aware of the autobiographical elements of the storyworld, as Palmer recounted the story of Matt Brooke, the voice behind the hushed panic that fills the gutters between songs on the *WKAP* album and the DVD. This simple recording that fills the spaces between songs on the *WKAP* album invites the readers into the lived-experiences that inform the storyworld: it re-directs readers toward the texts' writerly qualities, hinting at its polysemous nature, and encourages them to search out commentary on the story.<sup>243</sup>

In late 2014, Amanda Palmer released a book *The Art of Asking or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help*. The book explores the relationship she developed with her fans that culminated in the successful Kickstarter campaign for her *Theatre is Evil* recording, art project, and tour. In the book, Palmer recollects an event from her early days as a performer in The Dresden Dolls:

From the dawn of The Dresden Dolls, I saw our fans making art inspired by our music, and I loved it. Anything that was band-inspired was uploaded to the website and celebrated, and as video came to the Internet and YouTube exploded, the fans started to make their own unofficial music video using our tracks. Some artists pulled and punished content like that, since the fans didn't own rights to the music.

We not only allowed it, we encouraged it. One year, while opening up for another band, we booked a string of sideshows in art-house cinemas and ran a film festival with content made by our friends

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<sup>242</sup> Palmer still undertakes these Q&A sessions, both in performances and on-line, through Twitter and Facebook.

<sup>243</sup> Such sessions also sparked my academic interest in the text as Brooke's failure to recognize Palmer as a living subject (while she performed as abjected corpse) was symptomatic of the endemic dehumanisation and otherness experienced by women under patriarchy.

*and* the fan base, including fan-made Dresden Dolls videos and the fans' own original animations and shorts. We called it "Fuck the Back Row."

To this day, some of the fans' unofficial videos surpass the view counts of our official videos on YouTube. We not only don't mind it — we openly celebrate it.<sup>244</sup>

This is one of many episodes recounted by Palmer where fans were invited to contribute to the development of the storyworld, and is an example of how convergence culture, specifically *prosumption*,<sup>245</sup> is challenging capitalist production-consumption based markets. This is the path that Amanda Palmer is tentatively, although not entirely successfully, following as she tries to facilitate a reading community around her life-writing.

While transmedial franchising and transmedial storytelling often operate within the same storyworld the agency required to enact transmedial storytelling strongly positions it as a reader-based response to the storyworld that can be used in order for readers to respond to both the storyworld's content, and its format.

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<sup>244</sup> Amanda Palmer, *The Art of Asking: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2014), 130.

<sup>245</sup> See also: Ritzer and Jurgenson, "Production, Consumption, Prosumption, 13-36.

### **3 ROCKING THE BOAT: THE LACUNA IN TRANSMEDIAL NARRATIVES**

The work of art can have this effect because it does more than merely recall to us elements out of our own past insights and emotions. It will give them new resonance and make of them the basis for new awareness and enriched understanding. It will tend to supplement and correct our own necessarily limited personal experience.

—Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (1938).

### 3.1 Getting Textual: Readers and Storyworlds

Having considered how storyworlds can become transmedial, I now consider how readers are positioned by transmedial texts. As the reader comes to the text through the lens of their own social and cultural experiences, the broader transmedial storyworlds are replete with the reader's experience of their subjectivity in relation to the narrative. The prolific inter- and intratextuality that permeate transmedial storyworlds suggest that authors rely on readers having knowledge of significant cultural narratives, or experiences that they are then able to invoke when they read the texts that shape the storyworlds. Given that transmedial storyworlds are reliant on the broader context of literary practice and traditions, are readers positioned to turn to their own cultural framework in order to negotiate their reading practices? And by turning to their own life experiences and understandings of culture and society, does the reader help to shape, or even create, the storyworld?

All narratives rely on readers' knowledge of intertextual reference points: this may be through language, as a collection of symbolic orders arranged following the rules of grammar and syntax, or as references to other narratives that don't have to be explicitly articulated. Jenkins sees transmedial storyworlds as indebted to narrative intertextuality because they are constructed from layers of "quotes, archetypes, allusions, and references drawn from a range of previous works."<sup>246</sup> He asserts that these layers result in a plurality of reader experiences, and posits that it is this element that imbues transmedial storyworlds with their "cult" status.<sup>247</sup> These layers of meaning are evidence of the transmedial storyworld's writerly qualities, they demonstrate the connotative qualities in the text. In using the term "connotative" I refer to Barthes' use of the term to describe a type of intertextuality where the signifier possesses a "common nucleus we [the reader] sense even while the discourse is leading us toward other possibilities, toward other related

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<sup>246</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.2092 of 8270.

<sup>247</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2091 of 8270.

signifieds.”<sup>248</sup> Therefore, when a reader comes to a piece of transmedial life-writing, they make sense of the author’s representations of subjectivity by corporealising it, that is, they make sense of the written, sung, illustrated or performed identity by understanding analogous experiences from their own lived experiences. I propose that readers of transmedial narratives use a space that I call the *lacuna* in order to respond to the text’s writerly qualities. In this section I examine storyworlds’ borders and terrain to determine where and what a *lacuna* is in terms of transmedia storytelling. I turn to Henry Jenkins pillars of transmedial literacy and Scott McCloud’s grammar of comics to frame that interrogation. I draw on readings performed on public web-forums to demonstrate the ways in which readers make use of this space, and I consider whether the lacuna has a choric potential, that is whether it is a pre-semiotic space that “precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality,”<sup>249</sup> that positions readers to approach narratives with a mind to the ways in which signified subjects are constructed as relational. The “I” in transmedial life-writings situates the reader to recognise the self as “an illegal, impersonal, anachronistic configuration of symbolic relationships.”<sup>250</sup> This chapter lays the groundwork for answering the question posed in the introduction: if a story becomes a part of a reader’s lived experiences, what rights and obligations do readers have in relation to the storyworld?

### 3.2 Reading Writerlyness

The connotative qualities in the text are left to the reader to determine. In turn, the reader draws on their broader social and cultural understandings to determine the effect of these connotations. In some instances, the authors are conscious of, and explicit about, these significations. For example, in Thomas Whythorne’s *Autobiography* he references Scripture, proverbs, and Classical literature to passively

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<sup>248</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 92.

<sup>249</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” 94.

<sup>250</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 68.

demonstrate that he lived a morally 'good' and virtuous life. In particular, Whythorne considers a network of proverbs in order to justify his choice to write, and make public, his life story. Initially, he is concerned with the public perception of and response to his work:

Do I not see daily how they who do set out books be by their works made a common gaze unto the world, and hang upon the blasts of all folks' mouths and upon the middle-finger pointings of the unskilful, and also upon the severe judgements of the grave and deep wits?<sup>251</sup>

He recalls an Italian proverb that "*El mal vien per libra, e va via per oncia*" ("The mischief cometh by pounds and goeth by ounces"),<sup>252</sup> a warning against his undertaking, the implication being that by making his likeness public he invites public criticism and that the negative outcomes of this criticism were likely to have an ongoing effect on his life. He fortifies himself against this imagined difficulty with the counter proverb "*Tal biasma altrui, chi se stesso condanna*" ("Such do blame others, who would condemn themselves").<sup>253</sup> Finally he turns to Boccaccio to justify his life-writing project, citing "*Che semina virtu, raccoglier fama... et vera fama supera la morte*" ("He that soweth virtue, reapeth fame, and true fame overcometh death"),<sup>254</sup> implying that his success would be answered because he was morally virtuous. He draws on Favorinus, Cicero, and Seneca to substantiate his choices, before he resolves that "We are not born into this world altogether for ourselves, but to do good in our professions and to our abilities every way."<sup>255</sup> By referring to these various sources of authority, Whythorne intimates that his readers should consider his writing as fulfilling the same purpose as those writers he cites. This demonstrates the inherent relationality of Whythorne's writing: he positions readers to understand his life in relation to pedagogical texts. Given that life-writing was not a literary convention or genre that Whythorne would have access to, his use of proverbs in order

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<sup>251</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 140.

<sup>252</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 141.

<sup>253</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 141.

<sup>254</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 141.

<sup>255</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 142.

to constitute his identity suggests that the genre originated as an exercise in intertextuality. In his book, *Genre*, John Frow asserts that “stories of origins... [can] be stories about the Intertextual work by which the genre shapes and reshapes itself in an ongoing and open-ended process”<sup>256</sup> and this is precisely the practice that readers are positioned to engage in with Whythorne's *Autobiography*.

Sanchez undertakes a similar intertextual practice in order to perform his own take on life-writing, which expands the genre by exposing it to other genre practices (namely science-fiction and fantasy) that are often considered antithetical to the "truth" claims associated with life-writing. In *The Amory Wars*, Sanchez is creating a narrative that mythologises his lived experiences, and so he references Biblical literature as a way of suggesting to his readers that they approach the text with their knowledge of that particular mythos in order to understand how he positions himself in his life narrative. By borrowing archetypes and tropes drawn from Judeo-Christian tradition, a narrative tradition that Sanchez can rely on as at least passingly familiar to Western readers, Sanchez can frame *The Amory Wars* with a genre that interpolates readers in order to position Sanchez's life-writing as his own "origin" story. He even describes Coheed and Cambria Kilgannon, the band's namesakes, as “the Adam and Eve of [the] whole mythology.”<sup>257</sup> He writes three prophetic characters: Mariah Antillarea, Chase, and Claudio Kilgannon/The Crowing. Antillarea, like Chase, figures as an analogy for John the Baptist, while Kilgannon reads as the ‘true’ Messiah.

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<sup>256</sup> Frow, *Genre*, 147.

<sup>257</sup> Ryan Reed, “Coheed and Cambria's Claudio Sanchez on His Band's High Concept,” [rollingstone.com](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/coheed-and-cambrias-claudio-sanchez-on-his-bands-high-concept-20121009), accessed 20/12/12, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/coheed-and-cambrias-claudio-sanchez-on-his-bands-high-concept-20121009>



Figure 3.1: Maria Antillarea leading the Rebellion, in Claudio Sanchez and Mike Miller, "Chapter 5," *The Amory Wars: The Second Stage Turbine Blade Vol. 1 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010).



Figure 3.2: Tri-Mage Wilhelm Ryan with Antillarea's severed head, in Claudio Sanchez and Javier Tartaglia, "Chapter 5," *The Amory Wars: The Second Stage Turbine Blade Vol. 2 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010).

Figure 3.3: Eugene Delacroix, *Death of John the Baptist*, 1858.

Antillarea receives very little attention in the graphic novels, noted only as a leader in the resistance<sup>258</sup> and as the significant other of Jesse Kilgannon. However, in the *Sketchbook*, Sanchez describes her thusly:

Not much is known about Mariah Antillarea... but it's believed she was conceived through Immaculate Conception. She was found as an infant, on a riverbank and was taken in by the Tra-Nuvis Monks. Three years later, a rare viral plague swept through the monastery. As the monks attempted to remove Mariah from the facility she escaped their grasp and ran to embrace the monk who had served as a father to her. The man, who lay on his deathbed, was instantly cured. Mariah proceeded to heal all of the afflicted, in turn strengthening her powers. Mariah left the monastery on her

<sup>258</sup> See: Figure 3.1.

twenty-first birthday to use her powers for what she believes to be the greater good. Mariah is believed, by her followers, to be God's messenger, a Messiah, sent to overthrow Wilhelm Ryan's regime and restore God's harmony, and His place in Man's affairs.<sup>259</sup>

This passage uses prophetic narratives as a framework for Antillarea's character. The 'immaculate conception' is a reference to both John the Baptist's and Jesus' conceptions, a common trope in the births of a number of deities and a feature of Hellenic aretalogies, while the discovery of Antillarea by a river invokes the literary trope of the exposed child, seen in figures such as Moses, Oedipus, Semiramis, Attis, Ptolemy Soter, and so on. Donald Redford notes that the story often indicates the birth of a hero-god who is associated with death and resurrection, a symbol of vegetation, harvest, and renewal.<sup>260</sup> Sanchez also describes Antillarea as "leading a large mass of people across the desert wastelands,"<sup>261</sup> reiterating her position as a Moses-like prophet. Finally, Antillarea dies when she is beheaded by General Mayo Deftinwolf, and her head is presented to Wilhelm Ryan as a gift. This comic depicts this event with an image that echoes the story of John the Baptist and Salomé: the illustration of Antillarea's death in Second Stage is reminiscent of Eugene Delacroix's 1858 painting, *Death of John the Baptist*.<sup>262</sup> Although Antillarea is *not* the Messiah (as explored in *IKSSE:3*), Sanchez utilises tropes from Judeo-Christian mythology to situate Antillarea as a prophet.

Claudio Kilgannon, the character modelled on Sanchez himself, becomes The Crowing, a figure prophesied in the religious text that informs the series' mythology, the Ghansgraad. The Crowing/Claudio Kilgannon is a hybrid character that is unequal parts organic, cybertronic, and divine. He is the embodiment of the blended genres that are presented as guides to the reader: part mythology (descended from the *Prise*, and a prophesied saviour), part biography (the representation of Sanchez as the child of Coheed and Cambria Kilgannon), and part science-

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<sup>259</sup> Sanchez and Vazquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook*, 23.

<sup>260</sup> Donald B. Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," *Numen*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Nov 1967), 214.

<sup>261</sup> Sanchez and Vasquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook*, 10.

<sup>262</sup> See: Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

fiction (as the organic offspring of the cyborg IRO-bots, Coheed and Cambria). Sanchez also incorporates motifs from canonical texts such as Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, in the form of the lost love, Newo Ikken, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, through Ambellina, the fallen Prise, in order to interpolate the reader, so that they approach the storyworld as they would an Epic, that is, they should afford it the literary gravitas that they would extend to the *Illiad*, or the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. *The Amory Wars*, like *Paradise Lost*, follows the pattern of an expulsion story. It is positioned in our earth's far distant history, and *SSTB* reads as a contemporary take on Milton's epic poem. Sanchez also references contemporary science fiction, playing with Asimov's *I, Robot* (as referenced through the IRO-bots) and George Lucas' *Star Wars*. Each of these cultural signifiers can guide readers in their reading of the storyworld. These references can provide clues as to the narrative's direction, and they can also help readers determine which genre conventions they apply to the story: some readers might look to Science Fiction, while others turn to Fantasy, or even Myth.



Figure 3.4: An Example of intertextual imagery between in Sanchez and Miller, "Chapter 5," *The Second Stage Turbine Blade Vol. 1* and Gary Kurtz, *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas, (Los Angeles: Lucasfilm & Twentieth Century Fox, 1977), DVD.

Drawing on these literary traditions means that the case studies are driven by greater and lesser invitations to presumption. Each time the reader draws on these intertextualities they have the opportunity to act

as a prosumer<sup>263</sup> by interpreting the text against their cultural knowledge and thereby understanding the subjectivity explored in the storyworld as “refracted through the stories of others.”<sup>264</sup> Moreover, the texts invoke a variety of semiotic<sup>265</sup> signifiers such as non-verbal systems for mediating ideas (such as images and music), and verbal systems that subvert language’s position as the “condition for meaningful existence of all other practices”<sup>266</sup> (such as song lyrics and poetry). These conflated significations encourage readers to enter into the storyworld, and actively compare the texts in order to determine their potential meanings. This means that readers are confronted with the signification hierarchy that privileges the symbolic over the semiotic, and are positioned to challenge the authority of that system. The symbolic, which is predicated on the rejection of the mother, is confronted with the semiotic which “through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play and repetition”<sup>267</sup> brings forth the symbol of the other. Readers are provided with the opportunity to either reinforce or subvert this hierarchy by unpacking the phallogocentric focus of symbolic signification, and its associations with reason, and the law, and to instead consider the semiotic’s prenominal and embodied potential to create meaning. When the meaning that is created is a series of knowledges about a person’s lived experiences, about their subjectivity, the symbolic subject, bounded and constrained by its body is challenged, and the sovereign subject is decentered from the life-writing project. This positions the reader to consider this threat and disruption not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to re-articulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Defined in the Introduction.

<sup>264</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 216.

<sup>265</sup> Defined in the Introduction.

<sup>266</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 39.

<sup>267</sup> Judith Butler, “The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva,” 107.

<sup>268</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (Abingdon: rout ledge Classics, 1993, R.2011), xiii.

This chapter uses the reader's agency in the storyworld to consider how reading transmedial stories might destabilise symbolic language and grammatical structures, and thereby offers a reimagining of the textual "I" that functions as a call and response for the reader. It does this by questioning the hegemonic signification of the phallus in terms of the reading process, as well as in the ideologies that passively frame the storyworld. It raises questions as to how readers might practice a consciously active and collaborative literacy. I question the limits placed on the reader's 'authority' within the storyworlds that constitute the case studies. I also ask how can the reader engage with a storyworld in a way that resists ideologies of oppression and control that underlie the text, in favour of engaging ethically with the story world, with other readers, and with the author as well?

### 3.3 A Consideration of Transmedial Literacy

*The Amory Wars* is an example of a transmedial storyworld where comic books operate with, and around, the musical texts that preceded them. In order for the storyworld to cohere across music and comics, for example, it relies on readers to read each media in light of the others. This results in the reader remembering the narrative—which, as a brain function, is also a form of embodiment—as part of its storytelling process. Harvey describes this process as cultural memory, and draws on Jan Assman's theory of cultural and communicating memory to underpin his discussion, but largely positions it as vested in embodiment.<sup>269</sup> He draws on a collection of researchers, including memory theorist, Jenny Kidd, and contemporary research in neuroscience from Steven Rose. He brings philosophy and science together, noting that:

Consistent with the ideas of Spinoza, Rose suggests that the human body –including, of course, the brain –exists in a perpetual state of flux [...] Such descriptions also chime with theories of autobiography, with Eakin describing the autobiographical form as relational.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 34-35.

<sup>270</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 36.

This confluence of methodological approaches is necessary in transmedia scholarship which often takes on transmedial qualities. Music especially provides a physicalised narrative that is simultaneously remembered and embodied.

The idea that music can express meaning—its semiotic (particularly emotional) force—is part of its culturally prescribed situation in Western audio-literacy. It is important to understand that although music is a universal human phenomenon, and even though there might be some shared bio-acoustic universals of musical expression, “the same sounds or combinations of sounds are not necessarily intended, heard, understood or used in the same way in different musical cultures.”<sup>271</sup> For example, at a micro level, there may be tones employed in hip-hop that differ in their significations from the same tones in prog-rock.<sup>272</sup> Music influences the reader’s approach to *TAW*’s comic books insofar as the books assume the reader is familiar with the music. This is a reasonable expectation given the readers will generally engage with the music first, as the comics, graphic novel, and prose novel are often hard to source outside of specialist on-line stores, whereas the music is readily available through on-line and physical music stores. When the reader does read the book texts, it is expected that they already have some knowledge of the storyworld, having learnt about them from the fan community or from the band’s merchandising. This demonstrates a presumption that intratextual reading practices will inform the readers approach to the storyworld. The books incorporate and play upon knowledge of the storyworld that is derived from the music by illustrating song-lyrics or directly quoting them in the narration. However, Sanchez acknowledges that the same does not hold true the other way around:

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<sup>271</sup> Phillip Tagg, “A Short Prehistory of Western Music,” tagg.org, accessed October 2010, <http://www.tagg.org/teaching/Origins1-2.html#>

<sup>272</sup> “Progressive Rock”: a musical genre practiced by bands such as Pink Floyd, Rush, and (of course) Coheed and Cambria.

A lot of the songs are very universal... It's not like the lyrics are submerged in the concept. It's almost coming from a more open sort of angle.<sup>273</sup>

This suggests that the music and lyrics are semiotic and therefore associated with the *chora*, that state that exists prior to signification. Sanchez asserts that “the lyrics are [not] submerged in the concept” which suggests that they are other to the concept, but nonetheless influence its shape. For example the lyrics often come across as an experiment in surrealism; the song “Feathers” opens with the line “History’s made its mark in anger./As everybody knows, it’s what we do,/ It’s nothing new” a passage that doesn’t really contribute to the storyworld’s plot, but nonetheless conveys a feeling of reconciliation in terms of the past shaping the present and the future. It also suggests that there is an understanding that actions are “genred,” that is, that they draw on precedent in order to reiterate their authority. The reader’s literacy is therefore not merely acting to decode narrative, but to understand emotional context. This demonstrates the semiotic potential of transmedia texts; it is the Kristevan semiotic, the language of “drives, erotic impulses, bodily rhythms and movements”<sup>274</sup>that underwrites the narrative. In *TAW* even Sanchez’s distinctive tenor contributes to the significations that can be drawn from the text, particularly when it is juxtaposed with technically proficient choralists, as in the track “Welcome Home.” The “grain of [his] voice”<sup>275</sup> makes the text’s emotional drive, its *genotext*, explicit. Their semiotic significations precede the books, and while they can add layers of meaning to the symbolic signifiers, they are not constrained by them: they exceed the limitations placed on the narrative that have been constructed through symbolic signifiers. The reader must therefore perform a more active form of reading in order to locate meaning in the text. A proficiency in active literacy helps readers to create meaning from transmedial storyworlds, and Jenkins outlines a

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<sup>273</sup> Reed, “Coheed and Cambria’s Claudio Sanchez on His Band’s High Concept.”

<sup>274</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, 48.

<sup>275</sup> Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 179-89.

series of literacy skills that assist authors and readers of transmedial narratives. These are:

1. The ability to pool knowledge with others in a collaborative enterprise.
2. The ability to share and compare values systems by evaluating ethical dramas.
3. The ability to make connections across scattered pieces of information.
4. The ability to express your interpretations and feelings toward popular fictions through your own folk culture.
5. The ability to circulate what you create via the internet so that it can be shared with others.<sup>276</sup>

These skills illuminate a trajectory in literary theory that incorporates critical engagement, play, and multi-literacy. Jenkins follows on from Roland Barthes' writing on the 'readerly' and 'writerly' space,<sup>277</sup> and Marshall McLuhan's more pedagogic assertion that "education must shift from instruction, from imposing stencils, to discovery—to probing and exploration"<sup>278</sup> by insisting on a literacy that is as much about the reader's creative output as it is about the ability to read and write. Jenkins notes that consumers must actively participate with transmedial literatures in order to complete the stories' meanings.<sup>279</sup> Readers expand on the process of meaning making, and create reciprocal relationships between themselves, with the author, and with/in the story. This is an invitation to innovation: the reader must bring together, through their own remembering and imagination, the author's experienced, and creatively emoted worlds.

### **3.4 Applying Jenkins' Pillars of Transmedia Literacy**

#### **3.4.1 The ability to pool knowledge with others in a collaborative enterprise.**

Both the Cobalt and Calcium fansite and the Coheed and Cambria Wiki are examples of public fan-sites where the readers have collaborated in order to further their understandings of *The Amory Wars* storyworld. For example, a reader using the screen-name gr3yh47 initiated a post on

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<sup>276</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.3927 of 8270.

<sup>277</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*.

<sup>278</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*, 100.

<sup>279</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.180 of 8270.

the Cobalt and Calcium website that read the *IKSSE: 3* album against the comic books. Rather than working through their analysis of every song on the album, I focus on the title track, “In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3,” an eight minute long battle-hymn, and consider their reading against the text to determine how they arrived at their conclusion. This song recounts a battle between the Tri-Mage Wilhelm Ryan’s Red Army and the Rebel forces headed by Jesse Kilgannon. The song regularly shifts its focalization, jumping from character to character, and this shifting perspective is reminiscent of a battle montage scene in film. The second movement introduces a vocal line that seems to shift between Jesse Kilgannon and General Mayo Deftinwolf as they ruminate on the battle and call their troops to war. gr3yh47 points to the song’s chorus to demonstrate this shifting perspective:

Man your own jackhammer,  
Man your battlestations [*sic.*],  
We’ll have you dead pretty soon.  
And now:  
Sincerely written from my brother’s blood machine,  
Man your battle stations.  
We’ll have you home pretty soon.  
And now.<sup>280</sup>

gr3yh47 writes:

The chorus could be either a reference to the underwater battle on Donar... or the battle on silent earth... Donar seems more likely based on the dialogue in the comic, but ‘man your own jackhammer’ makes it seem like there are multiple jackhammers, pointing toward the battle on [S]ilent [E]arth.<sup>281</sup>

Using the song lyrics and the comic book, the reader weaves multiple narratives out of two different texts. The first interpretation refers to an under-water battle between the forces lead by Deftinwolf and Jesse Kilgannon on the planet Donar. This reading is supported by the reference to the Jackhammer, which is a weapon that was used in the battle by

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<sup>280</sup> Coheed and Cambria, “In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3,” *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3*, 2003.

<sup>281</sup> “In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3 album lyrics meaning - line by line,” cobaltandcalcium.com, accessed 08/09/2013, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?48731-In-Keeping-Secrets-of-Silent-Earth-3-album-lyrics-meaning-line-by-line&p=2646548#post2646549>.

Definewolf against Kilgannon. It is described in the comic book as “Ryan’s Masterpiece”:

A star destroyer in space, but perfectly capable of functioning underwater and changing its shape...into the ground-pounding battle-station that could get you coming and going. It could drive seismic shocks into the ground that, underwater, was like being pounded by the mother of all currents.<sup>282</sup>

Supporting this reading, the reference to “my brother’s blood machine” might be read as a reference to Kilgannon’s organic bio-ships, the Dragons. The term “blood machine” might be considered a more poetic turn of phrase than “organic bio-ship.” Under this reading the song’s chorus shifts perspectives from Mayo to Kilgannon, with Mayo ordering his troops to “Man your own jackhammer/Man your battlestations” followed by a threat sung to Kilgannon, “We’ll have you dead pretty soon.” The second part of the chorus provides a response from Kilgannon that takes the same form as Mayo’s threat, “Sincerely written from my brother’s blood machine/Man your battle stations,” however rather than issuing a threat to Mayo, Kilgannon appears to offer support to his troops, “We’ll have you home pretty soon.” Again, this suggests a call and response between opposing sides in battle, a musical pattern that recurs in the instrumental reprise. The repeated “[a]nd now” has the effect of distancing the vocaliser from the focalized, it acts like an enunciative intervention on Sanchez’s behalf, signifying his shift between perspectives, and performs as a form of verbal punctuation.

The second, and in my opinion less persuasive, reading submits that the song refers to the later battle between the Red Army and the Rebellion on Silent Earth: 3. This reading relies on a bringing together of the IRO-bot Sizer’s envy of his ‘sister’, Chase, that is demonstrated during that second battle-scene, and the lyric “Jealous envy for the youngest one/To be the hero is all I’ll ask.” The singular point of reference between the song and the battle on Silent Earth: 3 as it is depicted in the comic book suggests that, while this layer of reading is not necessarily incorrect,

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<sup>282</sup> Claudio Sanchez and Chris Burnham, “Chapter 3,” *The Amory Wars: In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2012).

it is not as evident as the former reading. By considering knowledge pooled about the storyworld on CobaltandCalcium.com, gr3yh47 is able to propose which reading they see denoted when the texts are read against each other.

### 3.4.2 The ability to share and compare values systems by evaluating ethical dramas.

However, the practice of reading the texts as a discourse between readers is not universally accepted amongst *The Amory Wars*' readers. In the same thread that gr3yh47 offered their readings of *IKSSE: 3*, [21]MATT[13] rejects this method of interpretation:

I think it's impossible to pull the story apart line-by-line. Claudio has stated countless times that the vast majority of Coheed's music is only really loosely crafted to fit with the story, and the story itself was only created because he didn't feel all that comfortable pouring his heart out on record. It's full of plot-holes, inconsistencies and bits that just don't really make sense. It is not the flawless, multi-layered metaphysical mindfuck a lot of people seem to think it is.

By no means am I saying you shouldn't speculate, but I just think trying to find meaning in every line of every song is kind of pointless.

The music is awesome. The story is awesome. I just try to appreciate them as separate entities with a common theme! :)<sup>283</sup>

[21]MATT[13] is not contributing their knowledge of the storyworld's diegetic content, instead they are sharing information about epitexts that might frame the storyworld, and discussing the ethics of engaging in the storyworld in the first place. This is an example of a reader who is responding to a transmedial storyworld with linear literacy practices: the reader resists reading the comics and music with each other, and instead advocates treating them as separate artistic entities. However, the reader privileges the books as the texts that provide 'meaning' and convey the story. This reading method arises from a belief that the *auteur* is the only source of knowledge for the storyworld, that the storyworld is closed to the reader, and as such any gaps or excesses that arise in between the texts are evidence of the texts' statuses as independent art-objects, rather

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<sup>283</sup> cobaltandcalcium.com, "In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3 album lyrics meaning - line by line."

than invitations to the reader to resolve or elaborate upon the narrative. It is a position that understands literacy as simply the ability to read and write, and denies the reader's *expression* as an act of literacy. In relation to *The Amory Wars*, Sanchez has recently rejected this style of reading, and instead asserts that the band makes "concept" music:

For me as a writer, it kinds of opens up a little more in terms of the songwriting. I can take [these] songs and morph them into something more wild, and I find that really rewarding.<sup>284</sup>

[21]MATT[13]'s assertion that "the music is only loosely crafted to fit the story" and Sanchez's statement that the songs are "coming from a more open sort of angle" harks back to my earlier point about music as a semiotic signifier that exceeds the text. [21]MATT[13]'s reading demonstrates that the process of reading the storyworld is an ethical<sup>285</sup> engagement that readers consciously negotiate. They are confronted with readings of the text that they can negotiate between in order to arrive at their own understanding of the storyworld. [21]MATT[13]'s concerns about Sanchez's intentions for the storyworld demonstrates the conflicts that arise between literacy practices that insist on the *auteur's* authority over the storyrealm's parameters, and literacy practices that demand the readers' agency to explore the *storyworld* as they choose. The former understands each media as an art-object, while the latter looks to each media as part of the storyworld's grammar. By approaching transmedial storyworlds as a type of grammar readers can destabilise the *auteur's* control over the text. This is a point I shall return to later in the chapter.

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<sup>284</sup> Claudio Sanchez, quoted in Reed, "Coheed and Cambria's Claudio Sanchez on His Band's High Concept."

<sup>285</sup> Ethics are generally understood as rationalist self-legislation and freedom (deontology), the calculation of happiness (utilitarianism), or the cultivation of virtues (virtue ethics), however, I also draw on Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of alterity. I elaborate on this further in Chapter 6, however for the moment it can be understood as an interpretive, phenomenological description of face-to-face encounters— the inter-subjective relation— at its precognitive core: it is the act of being called by another and responding to that other.

### 3.4.3 The ability to make connections across scattered pieces of information.

The ability to make connections across scattered pieces of information is the third pillar of Jenkins' transmedial literacy skills. This is demonstrated during the song "In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3."<sup>286</sup> The time delay between the release of the album and the release of the comics resulted in an uncertainty among readers as to how the world itself was experienced by the characters. The outcome of this uncertainty was that reading communities entered into a discussion as to whether vocal lines that constitute the bridge in the song are focalized first through Chase, the girl-IRO-bot, or through Sizer, her adult-sized 'brother.' The lyrics in question articulate an anxiety for approval:

For you,  
I'd do anything just to make you happy,  
hear you tell me that you're proud of me  
For them,  
I'll kill anything cut the throats of babies for them  
break their hearts for they were them  
Waiting for you to say: I love you too.

They are directed to a beloved figure and the character who is singing wants both this figure's approval, and to demonstrate their own adoration for the figure they are singing to. The two competing theories are that it was either Chase or Sizer who focalize this section. In a thread entitled "A Darker Meaning" a reader named Sap\_Happy\_Sucker asks:

Does anyone besides me think that [Sizer] is telling Chase that he will kill Jesse? ... The reason I am saying this. That maybe Will<sup>287</sup> tried to be a hero and was further rejected by Jesse. I think this because in the GN Jesse tells his children that he is going today and that his wish he could be their father not their general. So I believe after Will failed to impress him during the battle he tells chase I will kill Jesse for you so we that we may have normal lifes. [sic]<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Coheed and Cambria, *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3* (2003).

<sup>287</sup> Prior to the release of the comic books, some readers argued that the adult IRO-bot, Sizer, was also known as Will (just as Jesse Kilgannon is also known as The Inferno), however there is no evidence to support this claim in the graphic novels, and subsequently readers have made the argument that "Will" is a diminutive for Wilhelm Ryan, the antagonist.

<sup>288</sup> "A Darker Meaning," cobaltandcalcium.com, accessed 16 July 2012, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?27621-a-darker-meaning>

Sap\_Happy\_Sucker reads the lyrics as a conversation between the IRO-bot ‘siblings’ Sizer and Chase. She refers to the ‘GN’, shorthand for graphic novel, as providing evidence for her reading. At the time that the readers were having this conversation, *The Amory Wars* comics were not written, but a prototype comic, which was only two editions long (*The Bag On Line Adventures of Coheed and Cambria*) had been published. The opening pages of this prototype revealed a grown man talking with two children, who are identified by the readers as Chase and Sizer/Will.



Figure 3.5: Chase, Unnamed IRO-bot, and Jesse Kilgannon, in Claudio Sanchez and Wes Abbott, *The Bag On Line Adventures: The Second Stage Turbine Blade* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2004, r. 2012).

A reader named Drizzt responds to Sap\_Happy\_Sucker’s proposition that Sizer is telling his ‘sister’ that he intends to kill their ‘father’ with a counter reading:

[I] thought [W]ill was thinking about [J]esse when he said that: that [he] would do anything for [J]esse to love him more than [C]hase  
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Drizzt positions the lyrics as a conversation where Will/Sizer is trying to attain the approval of Jesse as a father figure. Readers called HorribleApollo and Deadpool both reject Sap\_Happy\_Sucker’s reading that the song is Will/Sizer explaining to Chase that he plans to kill their father. HorribleApollo counters that “[Will] doesn’t wanna [sic] kill his father, he wants his father to be proud of him. [I] don’t think killing your

<sup>289</sup> cobaltandcalcium.com, “A Darker Meaning.”

dad would make him proud of you”<sup>290</sup> and Deadpool argues that “I don’t think that Will would kill Jesse anyways,[sic] after all, Jesse is Will[’s] father. ([A]lthough I know there are story [sic] in with [sic] the son(s) kills the father.)”<sup>291</sup> Deadpool’s reading not only draws on the information presented in the song lyrics, but it also acknowledge a literary history of Oedipal stories where sons kill their fathers in order to attain full Subject status. This is an example of a reader not just drawing on information scattered throughout the storyworld to develop their understanding of the narrative, but also drawing on the corpus of art and literature that contextualizes the literary work. This sort of reading is an example of intertextuality, or the way that a text’s meaning is shaped by another text.

The term ‘intertextuality’ was coined by Julia Kristeva as a way of explaining that texts consist of “several utterances, taken from other texts, [which] intersect and neutralize one another.”<sup>292</sup> Intertextuality invites the application of ethics, specifically a system of mutual recognition and care between agents, insofar as intertextuality makes meaning Other: in arriving at an understanding of the text, the reader’s subjectivity is confronted with the face of the storyworld, and meaning is constituted through embodiment in a world where words have significations, but the reader is also confronted with the permeability of language. In his primer on intertextuality Graham Allen notes that the “authors of literary works do not just select words from a language system, they select plots, generic features, aspects of character, images, ways of narrating, even phrases and sentences from previous literary texts and from the literary tradition.”<sup>293</sup> While this access to strands of the cultural web varies from reader to reader, there are often elements—in Deadpool’s reading a passing familiarity with influential Classical Greek narratives, such as the Oedipus story—that contribute to a readers’ understanding of the

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<sup>290</sup> cobaltandcalcium.com, “A Darker Meaning.”

<sup>291</sup> cobaltandcalcium.com, “A Darker Meaning.”

<sup>292</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Leon S. Roudiez ed., trans. T. Gora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 36.

<sup>293</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, (London: Routledge, 2000),11.

storyworld and how it situates itself in terms of the readers' lived experiences.

#### **3.4.4 The ability to express your interpretations and feelings toward popular fictions through your own folk culture; and the ability to circulate what you create via the internet so that it can be shared with others.**

The fourth literacy skill that Jenkins discusses is that readers are able to express their interpretations and feelings toward the storyworld through their own folk culture. Jenkins describes this folk culture as a “new vernacular culture [encouraging] broad participation, grassroots creativity, and a bartering or gift economy.”<sup>294</sup> Readers engage with fan fiction writing, art, music writing and performance,<sup>295</sup> and in sharing these creative explorations of culture, the readers also perform the fifth pillar of transmedial literacy, they circulate their creations via the internet so that they can be shared with others. By exercising these literacy skills readers are empowered to reflect on their position in relation to language, society, and themselves. This suggests that, rather than being about the text alone, the meanings that readers draw from a text in the form of literature—Rosenblatt's poem, Barthes' work—is about readers: specifically, literature is a way to describe the relationship between readers and texts.

### **3.5 Media as Grammar**

Scott McCloud, a renowned comic book theorist and creator, published *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* in 1993. In this book McCloud provides a definition, a vocabulary, and a grammar for reading

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<sup>294</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.2972 of 8270.

<sup>295</sup> “Thread: Anyone Ever Inspired Enough to Write a Story?” forums.cobaltandcalcium.com, accessed 28/12/2014, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?34462-Anyone-Ever-Been-Inspired-Enough-To-Write-A-Story&p=1571587&highlight=chase#post1571587>; “Thread: Your Artwork, Digital or Not,” forums.cobaltandcalcium.com, accessed 28/12/2014, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?22378-Your-Artwork-Digital-or-Not&highlight=fan-fiction>

comic books. I suggest that this grammar can also be applied to reading transmedial narratives. So what is this theory and how are comic books analogous to transmedial storyworlds?

The grammar of comics accounts for the way that readers interpolate the various signifiers against their lived and cultural experiences. McCloud accounts for a grammar of comics, which he describes as “closure”—a process whereby readers see the parts, but perceive the whole—that is similar to the way in which readers can derive meaning from a transmedial storyworld. He also extrapolates on comics’ syntax by demonstrating how readers negotiate the panels and gutters within a comic to determine the appropriate form of closure. McCloud explores the grammar used to represent time, emotion, and sensation in comic books, and focuses on how readers bring together words and pictures to make meaning. I use this grammar to determine if, when life-writers abstract their lived experiences, it opens the text to the reader and allows them to make an account of the life-narrative in relation to their own experiences by substituting their own subjectivity for that of the author.

In a prose-text, grammar is confined to the page: the author directs the reader’s progression through the text from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and chapter to chapter. In serialised books this grammar might extend between texts, from the first book to the sequel, and so on. This reading method can be destabilised by texts such as “Choose-Your-Own-Adventures” which encourage readers to move between a series of parallel narratives. Comic books take this reading agency a step further, and McCloud describes the way that comics readers move from panel to panel, crossing gutters.<sup>296</sup> Each panel is a moment in time, and it is the panel that the reader’s eye rests on that dictates the present moment: all other panels signify either the past or the future.

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<sup>296</sup> I elaborate on this grammar of comics later in the chapter.

Each panel read becomes a memory of a part of the reading process.<sup>297</sup>

McCloud notes that:

Unlike other media, in comics, the past is more than just memories for the audience and the future is more than just possibilities! Both past and future are real and visible all around us [...] Where the eye hits land, we expect it to begin moving forward. But eyes, like storms, can change direction!<sup>298</sup>

This illuminates a reading agency in comics that has not traditionally been explored in linear texts, but that is, as I have previously argued, an essential part of the reading process in transmedial narration and particularly as an element of transmedial storytelling. Where readers are encouraged not just to approach the texts, but to interact with them, the storyworld's grammar is determined by the reader as they move from text to text, and media to media, rather than by the author. In a comic book the author might encourage this style of reading:



Figure 3.6: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 105.

This style of reading is also used in transmedial storyworlds where readers are encouraged to seek out information across media in a way that suits them, rather than at the author's explicit directive. This process of abstraction, of making meaning through a confluence of images, words, and symbols, is a necessary part of the reading process for transmedial storyworlds, which are themselves a conflation of the semiotic and the symbolic. The confluence of signifiers is reiterated when readers abstract

<sup>297</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 104.

<sup>298</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 104.

the author’s lived experiences in order to incorporate their own subjectivity into the storyworld to, as McCloud notes, “make the world over in [their] image”:<sup>299</sup>

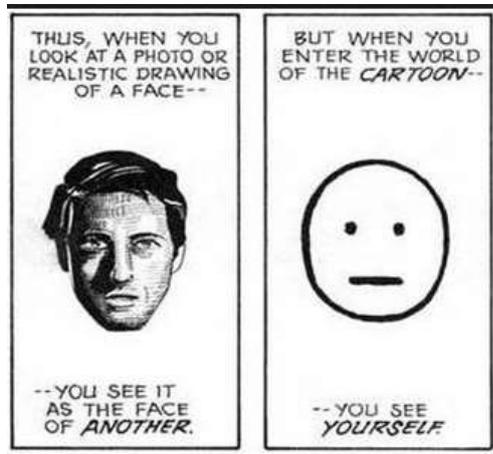


Figure 3.7: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 36.

In particular McCloud focuses on “closure.” He notes that closure between scenes often occurs at such speeds—such as in cinema or television—the reader is unable to recognize their own complicity in the process. However, transmediality makes closure between media a conscious choice for the reader, as they decide with which texts they will engage and when. McCloud notes that comic books also enable readers to consciously participate in closure in order to manifest change, time and motion in the text. He identifies the gutter as the space in which closure occurs. McCloud describes the gutter, the space between panels in a comic book, as the space where readers exert agency in order to derive meaning from the story:



Image 3.8: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 66.

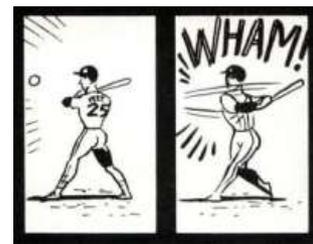
In a transmedial storyworld, the temporal, physical, and experiential spaces between media perform a similar function to the gutter, which in this thesis is constructed as the *lacunae*. Etymologically derived from the Latin *lacus*, or lake, lacuna has been adopted as a term across a number of

<sup>299</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 33.

disciplines to describe an *aporia*. In the study of texts it might refer to a missing section of a manuscript, while in music scholarship a lacuna is an extended silence. In linguistics the lacuna is a lexical gap in a language, a string of letters that follow the rules for word formation, but that have no corresponding signification in the language. In transmedial storyworlds the lacuna is the space where the reader can locate themselves: it is a space in the story where they need to fill in information, where they have to make meaning from reading media together and against their cultural knowledge, as well as from reading language, where they have to regulate the storyworld, to make it cohere. Lacunae are temporal and physical spaces between media within a storyworld. They are spaces that revitalise reading by placing it firmly in the reader's control. Like a lake, the lacuna can be a space that is refreshing and invigorating for the reader, but it can also be home to unseen dangers, and the reader needs to know how to keep their head above the story. Lacunae enable the second and third pillars of Jenkins' transmedial literacy: the ability to share and compare values systems by evaluating ethical dramas, and also the ability to make connections across scattered pieces of information. In McCloud's grammar of comics the lacunae are analogous with the gutter.

McCloud notes that the gutter operates in four different ways, it can divide:

1. moment-to-moment panels;



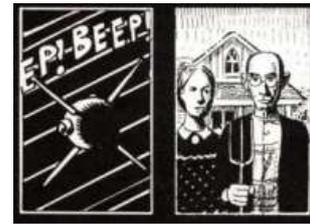
2. action-to-action progressions;

3. subject-to-subject movements;



4. scene-to-scene transition

5. Aspect-to-Aspect transition; and



6. Non-Sequitur<sup>300</sup>

These transitions help readers to make sense of the images. They provide a grammar of visual literacy. They indicate six syntactical applications of closure that can be extrapolated to transmedial reading. However, unlike the clearly defined panels in a comic, once media such as music and performance are incorporated into the reading process, the boundaries that separate canonical and non-canonical readings are more mellifluous: some readers might locate a transition between media—such as a scene-to-scene or aspect-to-aspect—that for other readers is merely a non sequitur. An example of this arises in music videos: where Palmer uses her music videos to enable an aspect-to-aspect transition between her album and her DVD, Coheed and Cambria's music videos are often, but not always, non sequitur in their transition between song and music video. In his TED talk from February 2005, *The Visual Magic of Comics*, McCloud describes transitions as a type of call and response between the artist and the reader:

Comics is [*sic*] a kind of call and response in which the artist gives you something to see within the panels, and then gives you something to imagine between the panels.<sup>301</sup>

<sup>300</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 70-72.

The same process occurs in the space between media in transmedial storyworlds, but instead of bringing together words and images, readers also read music, movement, play and text and can derive meaning from the storyworld by reading these texts against each other as a transmedial grammar.

### 3.6 Reading as Resistance

By drawing on a more expansive understanding of what constitutes grammar, transmedial literacy seems to offer a challenge to some profound social anxieties about “the breakdown authority, hierarchy, order, and tradition.”<sup>302</sup> By constructing a storyworld where the reader controls the order, manner, and number of texts that are engaged with, authors relinquish at least some control over the structure of the storyworld. This means that rather than the narrative’s authority resting in “that incontrovertible and indelible trace, supposedly, of the meaning which the author has intentionally placed in [their] work,”<sup>303</sup> it is instead found with the reader who, in choosing how to arrange the text as they read it, writes the text anew.

In *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, Louise Rosenblatt provides an account of reading practices that accounts for reading as a creative process. She asserts that the text is “merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols.”<sup>304</sup> She insists

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<sup>301</sup> “The Visual Magic of Comics,” ted.com, accessed 29/02/2015, [http://www.ted.com/talks/scott\\_mccloud\\_on\\_comics/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/scott_mccloud_on_comics/transcript?language=en)

<sup>302</sup> Ilana Snyder, *The Literacy Wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2008), 38.

<sup>303</sup> Roland Barthes, “Theory of the Text” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Robert Young ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 32.

<sup>304</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, r. 1994), 23.

that “the poem”<sup>305</sup> is a transaction that arises between the reader and the text:

The poem... must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his [*sic*] past experiences and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he[*sic*] marshals and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being.<sup>306</sup>

She goes on to deny that recognizing the reader’s agency in inducing the poem inevitably leads to a circumstance where all readings have equal validity—that *de gustibus non disputandum*—and instead asserts that:

nothing prevents our evaluating the adequacy of any particular reading of a particular text... If what one reader has made of the text is being compared with another’s reading of it, the standards of adequacy by which they are being compared can be and should be made explicit.<sup>307</sup>

Rosenblatt also warns against the “traditional” approach of reading the work as an “expression of a particular person, time and place.”<sup>308</sup> This warning seems less persuasive in the case of life-writing, where the expression of a person’s lived-experience is the general theme of the text. However, she does not deny that the text is “the outward and visible result of an author’s creative activity,”<sup>309</sup> instead she reminds us that:

once the creative activity of the author has ended, what remains for others—even for the author himself [*sic*—is a text. To again bring a poem into being requires always a reader, if only the author himself.<sup>310</sup>

If, as Rosenblatt suggests, the author also performs as a reader in relation to the text once it is written, does that suggest that life-writing articulates the Other, rather than the Subject? In order to respond to this question, I need to consider how the case studies, as examples of transmedial life-writing, invite the reader to respond to the storyworld.

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<sup>305</sup> I use the term 'literature', but their significations are the same.

<sup>306</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 12.

<sup>307</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 124.

<sup>308</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 125.

<sup>309</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 15.

<sup>310</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 15.

### 3.7 The Lacuna

The *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* storyworld is an example of storytelling that makes use of the storyworld's syntax—spaces between texts—to open the storyworld to the readers: it is a tapestry of remembered and imagined happenings, of creators and readers and their corporeal experiences of the narrative. *WKAP* is akin to Barthes' woven text, where each word signifies a starting point from which to unravel the text's connotative and denotative readings.<sup>311</sup> The text is a braid, a collection of stories and parallel universes wrapped around each other to create a cohesive whole. In terms of its structure, the *WKAP* photobook operates in a similar way to a comic book: photographs of Palmer's 'corpse' are juxtaposed with her own song lyrics and with stories by Neil Gaiman in such a way that the open spaces between the words and the images operate in a way that is analogous to McCloud's gutter as it appears in comic books. Likewise, the *WKAP* album fills the usually silent gutters that lie between recorded musical tracks on a CD: these normally soundless spaces are filled with a recording of Palmer's own lived-experience, her feigned death, and a former partner's discovery of her body. This destabilises the reader who comes to the CD expecting silence between tracks, and is instead forced to reconsider the functions that those spaces can provide. Where these spaces were once a necessary break that occurred on vinyl records as part of the production process, they are now a considered and deliberate space that is determined by the artists. Palmer explained that the final step of record production, mastering, is the time when she:

had to finalize the track sequence, decide on the amount of seconds (or sometimes, milliseconds) between each track, and do all the stuff that nobody ever really thinks about. (yes[sic]: you know how every song on a CD has space before it starts and after it ends? that's[sic] NOT random. the[sic] artist has to sit there and decide exactly how much "space" will exist between tracks.)<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 8.

<sup>312</sup> Amanda Palmer, "OH MY GOD IT'S UPDATE NUMBER TWO," [www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com), accessed 15/05/2012, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/amandapalmer/amanda-palmer-the-new-record-art-book-and-tour/posts/227211>

I find it interesting that she does not talk about the “silence” between the musical tracks, it is not discussed as an absence, or a nothingness. She frames it as “space,” and drawing on McCloud’s gutter, this space between songs can be approached as a place where readers can create meaning within the storyworld. Palmer, like McCloud, recognises that this space is something that she creates. This is especially the case when she takes the time that lies between musical tracks and, instead of leaving it as silence, fills it with the recording of her then lover finding her ‘dead’ and trying to rouse her. The reader then frames the musical text not with silence, or their own reflection on the music, but with Palmer’s story about her death. This no-longer-silent space on the album still operates in the same conceptual way that the gutters between comic panels do: it enables readers to observe the parts and perceive the whole.<sup>313</sup>

This phenomenon is described by McCloud as *closure*. It is a process that involves readers engaging with fragments and interpreting those fragments in light of previous experiences, information, or beliefs in order to form a coherent understanding of the whole environment. McCloud uses the gutters to direct the readers’ closure, specifically their ability to contribute to meaning-making process. He also appears to take an ethical stance on the relationship between the reader and the author:



Figure 3.9: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 69.

Where McCloud sees “closure” in linear graphic novels as a space where readers create their own understanding, I see this space fulfilling a slightly different purpose in transmedial narratives. For McCloud

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<sup>313</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 63.

“closure” is a writerly practice that is nonetheless directed by the author.<sup>314</sup> The author depicts a plot-point in words, pictures, or both, and the readers decipher both the completed image, and signification:

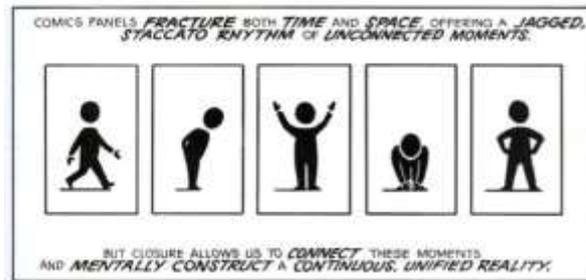


Figure 3.10: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 67.

Where graphic novels are read through a series of closures between images,<sup>315</sup> transmedial narratives are read by a series of closures between media. Readers rely on their own knowledge: some is washed off the panels from either side into the gutter, other knowledge is drawn from the readers’ previous engagements with this or other storyworlds. The author presents information; the reader is positioned to decipher it based on the information presented to them. Where McCloud calls the space where closure is invited between panels “the gutter,” I use the term *lacuna* to describe the space where closure occurs between media. When readers engage with the storyworld they utilise the lacunae for three purposes:

- 1) to determine the temporal passage between texts,
- 2) to recall the layers of narrative invoked by intertextual references within the texts; and
- 3) to recall and embody the storyworld as it is extrapolated through other media.

In the following section I consider the ways in which Palmer uses the lacuna as a way of encouraging active reading and has subsequently incorporated these creative contributions from readers into the *WKAP* storyworld.

The recurring motif throughout the *WKAP* storyworld is Palmer’s ‘dead’ body. This ‘death of the author’ is the point at which she invites

<sup>314</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 63.

<sup>315</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 67.

readers into the storyworld. Their engagement with the storyworld is, however, directed by the individual reader. She started taking, and having other people take, photographs of her ‘corpse’ when she was nineteen years old (she jokes that it was back when she had eyebrows), and some of these images have been collated in the photobook. The text reads as Palmer’s exploration of her role as a performer, as one who hands her art across to her readers in a self-described “communion.”<sup>316</sup>

Palmer also incorporates references to previous artistic movements, thereby locating herself in a reading tradition. Within her art, she re-imagines themes and motifs that were popular in the Neo-Classical, and Romantic traditions. She has a particular focus on the literary and artistic trope of the dead woman. The stories crafted around her death speculate as to her deaths at the hands of, among others, a lover, a future self, a sibling, and a doppelganger. Palmer draws on a Victorian aesthetic to perform as Amanda Fucking Palmer, and subverts the sartorial signifiers of femininity—corsets, long skirts, stockings—by combining them with militaristic regalia such as boots and jackets, with overt sexuality (Palmer often performs topless or naked), and with a feminised body that rejects social embodiment conventions related to the performance of femininity. Palmer rarely shaves her legs or underarms, and is outspoken on issues of body hair and feminine bodies (in her song “Map of Tasmania” she encourages her audience to “grow that shit like a jungle”<sup>317</sup>) and with her drawn on eyebrows, which suggest a sort of grotesquery, she performs femininity as drag. Palmer contrasts extremes of gendering in order to engage in “feminine culture jamming”<sup>318</sup> and is conscious of her position within a sorority of women performers.<sup>319</sup> She

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<sup>316</sup> Palmer, *The Art of Asking*, 40.

<sup>317</sup> Amanda Palmer, “Map of Tasmania,” *Amanda Palmer Goes Down Under* (Liberator Music, 2011).

<sup>318</sup> Amanda Palmer “Fame Whoring,” amandapalmer.net, accessed 07/01/15, <http://blog.amandapalmer.net/fame-whoring/>.

<sup>319</sup> The song “Gaga, Palmer, Madonna: A kitchen-ukulele blog song” explores this very issue: Amanda Palmer, “LADY GAGA, PALMER, MADONNA (A KITCHEN-UKULELE-BLOGSONG),” amandapalmer.net, accessed 16/08/12, <http://blog.amandapalmer.net/lady-gaga-palmer-madonna-a-kitchen-ukulele-blogsong/>.

subverts depictions of virtuous femininity advocated by the “Cult of Invalidism”:<sup>320</sup> instead of perpetuating the “wan, hollow-eyed beauty”<sup>321</sup> that was associated with desirable performances of womanhood in the Victorian era, Palmer embodies a violent, loud and aggressive death. She doesn’t welcome her end, rather she riles against it with bloodied hands and bruised thighs. She takes the trappings of a femininity lauded in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature, a femininity that is cloistered and immobile, and places it in plain sight in fountains and street corners, exposing the violences that were, and are, committed against women behind closed doors and drawn curtains. Palmer takes the silence that these women were commended for, and she ruptures it; loudly, vociferously. She sings and shouts and screams. Her death does not make her quiet and demure; it makes her a fucking rock-star.

An example of how Palmer creates and uses space is found in the vignette that precedes the video for “The Point of It All” on the *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* DVD. This song is read as a response to her now dead lover, Matt Brooke, whose voice is heard in the vignette, and between tracks on the CD. The vignette begins with Palmer resting her head on the dresser as the camera focuses on her face: her eyes closed and her expression sorrowful as she listens to this recorded exchange between herself and her now dead lover. She opens her eyes:

“What is this stuff, is it real blood?”

“No, it’s not real bl-”

“Oh, bitch! Oh God, you’re amazing.”

She then squeezes them closed again, burrowing her face into the crook of her arm. This passage can be read as Palmer’s reflection on her relationship. It contributes to the pool of biographical information that readers can draw from, and simulates her reflection on that information. But that reflection is mimetic; it is a performance of sorrow, regret, or rage dependent on the reader’s perspective. What does this tell us about the lacuna and transmedial literature?

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<sup>320</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25.

<sup>321</sup> Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 25.

The practical experience of the lacuna is inadvertently expounded by Palmer, who writes:

There are lots of people who interpret “have to drive” in ways that [I] never would have thought, but when [I] hear their interpretations it’s as if their thoughts and emotions have actually extended the song beyond itself. [S]o where is the line drawn? [I] still stand by my original assertion that once the song is out there, it’s all you guys. [T]here can be my original intention, for sure, and you can see that as the “correct” meaning of the song, but it’s just not that easy. [N]ot to mention that [I] often deliberately write things to be widely interpretable, and sometimes even purposefully tricky. [A]nd if we were not at personal liberty to attach our own meanings to songs, paintings, films, rainbows of gasoline in puddles of rain, however random and bizarre those meanings might be, art would lose one of it’s [sic] most powerful and profound qualities: to be personal to each and every beholder.<sup>322</sup>

Palmer recognizes and legitimates the extension of her stories beyond their ‘original’ context. This is an example of how an author can be consciously writerly without being obtuse. The text’s meaning is divined by each reader, it is opened to the reader’s own exploration of subjectivity, what Barthes describes as “ourselves writing.”<sup>323</sup> This approach also destabilises the auteur’s authority over the text: Palmer subsumes her textual intention (although she acknowledges that some readers will still insist on her reading of the text as the “legitimate” one) and opens her art for readers to derive their own meaning. By opening the text to a plurality of meanings, Palmer destabilizes the phallogocentric reading process that positions the author as the “owner” of textual meaning. This “ownership” is invested in those masculinist discourses (namely law and economics) that are devoted to determining a single and universal meaning, and therefore privilege the auteur (who is often conflated with, but is generally not, the texts’ rights holder) as the arbiter of meaning. Palmer subverts this dialectic by claiming that the readers’ interpretations are simulations<sup>324</sup> of their own Real and are no less

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<sup>322</sup> Amanda Palmer, “Obamanda Fucking Palmer,” [amandapalmer.net](http://blog.amandapalmer.net/obamanda-fucking-palmer/), accessed 23/10/2013, <http://blog.amandapalmer.net/obamanda-fucking-palmer/>

<sup>323</sup> Barthes *S/Z*, 5.

<sup>324</sup> “[S]imulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false,” the “real” and the “imaginary.””: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, r. 2010), 3.

infused with the aura of sacredness than Palmer's own reading of her work.

### 3.7.1 Physical, Temporal, and Experiential Lacunae

The lacunae arise in response to ruptures in the storyworld, and there are three types of rupture that demonstrate the storyworld's terrain. These are *physical*, *temporal*, and *experiential lacunae*. The *physical lacuna* refers to the different physical manifestations of the text in the storyworld. Engaging with the different texts that contribute to a storyworld might involve the process of reading and listening at the same time, of repeating song passages, or of re-reading pages against a number of songs. However it manifests, the often physical differences between symbolic and semiotic expression have an effect on how readers engage with the storyworld. There is a physical separateness to the texts: the book is not a recording, a live performance is not a game. This results in spaces between the texts: the reader engages with each media separately. The reader must choose which text they are going to engage with when they approach it as a part of the storyworld, and in each of the case studies the literary (and often symbolic) component of the narrative hinges on the musical (semiotic) component.

The temporal lacunae are the breaches between the readers' immersion in the storyworld. They might arise in response to:

1. a time delay between the release of the physical texts;
2. as a result of the fact that the reader (often) cannot engage with multiple texts at once;
3. due to the uncertain temporality that shifting back and forth in time within the storyworld engenders;
4. or as a result of the cyclical representation of time as an experience for reader who engage with music and performance.

*WKAP* explores the different amounts of time it might take to experience a certain manifestation of the storyworld by crafting each media experience as stylistically independent. The texts are not necessarily crafted to be read at the same time, but rather to resonate within the reader while they

engage with each media: they are intratextual. They do, however, imply a certain level of repeated reading in order to ensure that each media can influence and be influenced by each other. For example, a reader is unlikely to read the photo book and watch the DVD at the same time, however the images that are shared between the two remind the reader of the places where these sites refer to each other.

*The Amory Wars* provides an example of how the staggered release of texts can affect the reader's immersion in the storyworld. The time lapse between the release of the albums and the graphic and codex novels affects how the readers have engaged with the text, and this reiterates the non-linear temporality that shapes transmedial storyworlds, and is evidenced on the *Cobalt and Calcium Forum*, a fan created website. Since 2004, fans of Coheed and Cambria have joined this forum in order to discuss the storyworld, to speculate on its narrative, to share fan-created stories and art, to speculate as to how the story might develop, and to advocate for new media to explore the story, such as role-playing, or computer and card gaming. This website is a hypertextual manifestation of the lacuna that enables readers to consolidate their understanding of the storyworld between each text's release date. It is always developing and expanding upon the storyworld's potential. One discussion thread that has inspired much discussion among readers involves speculation regarding the story that informs *No World for Tomorrow*, the album that is—at this time—the only articulation of the concluding arc of the storyworld.<sup>325</sup> This discussion thread opened in October 2007, and was most recently updated in October 2014. It consists of over fifteen hundred posts discussing the story and its potential for development or exploration through other media. Readers speculate as to what the music might indicate. They provide close readings of the lyrics<sup>326</sup> and respond to

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<sup>325</sup>“Thread: No World for Tomorrow Story Discussion,” forums.cobaltandcalcium, accessed 29/09/2013, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium/showthread.php?33227-No-World-For-Tomorrow-Story-Discussion>.

<sup>326</sup>“Thread: No World for Tomorrow Story Discussion,” forums.cobaltandcalcium, accessed 18/10/2014, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?33227-No-World-For-Tomorrow-Story-Discussion/page01>.

each other's readings. P7K responds to other readers' concerns that No World for Tomorrow (*NWFT*) was supposed to introduce a new character to the storyworld, and draws together information derived from interviews with Sanchez, and the comics to speculate that:

[With] regards to the new character, perhaps it also could be the character he [Sanchez] introduced in the comic books – Admiral Vielar Crom. Seems to be an opposition to Mayo and another commander for Wilhelm [*sic*]. He could, in fact, be the one doing the interrogating.<sup>327</sup>

This is an example of the lacuna, the readers are coming together in the time between the music and the as yet unreleased comics, to pool the knowledge of the storyworld that they have derived from the music, and from interviews that Sanchez has given over the years. They discuss how the storyworld might develop in the absence of a comic book component. This demonstrates the temporal distance between texts that exists as a result of, and in accordance with, the physical lacuna within the storyworld.

It is also important to consider time as it is represented in the storyworld. Time is not a linear construct within transmedial narratives: where monomedial narratives utilise prolepses and analepses in order to mediate a chronological representation that is premised on a narrated “present,” transmedial narratives shift that “present” from the text to the reader. This is what McCloud was referring to as the effect of the eye hitting the page in comics reading. In transmedial narratives, not only are stories told out of chronological order, but within the storyworld the invocation of music, game-play, and performance means that time often loops back on itself. This temporality is experienced by different readers in different ways, and is often dependant on the individual reader's chronology of encounter with the storyworld.

This relationship between the reader and the time in which they experience the storyworld also provides a space where readers can exercise resistance in terms of persuasive social narratives that shape

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<sup>327</sup> “Thread: No World for Tomorrow Story Discussion,” forums.cobaltandcalcium.

how readers think of their position in time. In her examination of subjectivity and temporality, Elizabeth Grosz writes that:

The subject's relation to space and time is not passive: space is not simply an empty receptacle, independent of its contents; rather, the ways in which space is perceived and represented depend on the kind of objects positioned "within" it, and more particularly, the kinds of relation the subject has to those objects. Space makes possible different kinds of relations but in turn is transformed according to the subjects affective and instrumental relations with it.<sup>328</sup>

Grosz locates space as an Other that gives shape to the subjects and objects it contains, and that also provides a context for the relationship between those subjects and objects. However, space is permeable: it is also shaped by the subjects who interact with it. Time is one of the tools that subjects use to explore space. Grosz describes time as "more psychical and somehow less objective than space"<sup>329</sup> and this is demonstrated by its importance for readers in their engagement with the storyworld. She goes on to draw on both Emmanuel Kant and Luce Irigaray to describe a social narrative that aligns space with an externalised, feminised state (that is, outside of, and therefore penetrated by the subject), and time with an interior and masculinised subjectivity. The author's intention for temporality might be obscured within the text, but it is the reader's sense of time that actually gives the text its ultimate shape. Grosz concludes that "[the] interiority of time links with the exteriority of space only through the position of God (or his surrogate, Man) as the point of their mediation and axis of their coordination."<sup>330</sup> Grosz identifies that "time is the projection of a (masculine, divine) interior, while space is represented as the exteriorisation of a (feminine) subject."<sup>331</sup> By privileging the storyworld space and the reader's performed, or manifested, experience over the narrative's internal chronology, transmedial storyworlds transgress determinist approaches

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<sup>328</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 92.

<sup>329</sup> Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, 98.

<sup>330</sup> Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, 99.

<sup>331</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 173.

to time. This transgression is even more evident in the case studies as transmedial explorations of lived-experiences.

In the case studies as transmedial life-writing, the authors jump back and forth between events in their lives, conflate fiction with truth, and invite readers to do the same. For example, in *TAW* the narrative's chronology is almost an inversion of Sanchez's lived experiences. The first-story arc reflects Sanchez's more recent life, *The Year of the Black Rainbow* recounts his experiences prior to that text, and the storyworld's conclusion, the Claudio Kilgannon arc, draws on the experiences that inspired Sanchez to create the storyworld. This narrative structure then inverts Sanchez's lived experiences. Grosz writes that:

[temporality] is defined as a relation of addition rather than one of order, in terms of numerical units, rather than as a progression – as “1,2,3” rather than “first, second, third.” It is considered more psychical and somehow less objective than space. ... This may explain why Irigaray claims that in the West time is conceived as masculine (proper to a subject, a being with an interior) and space is associated with femininity (femininity being a form of externality to men). Woman is/provides space for a man, but occupies none herself. Time is the projection of his interior, and is conceptual, introspective. The interiority of time links with the exteriority of space only through the position of God (or his surrogate, Man) as the point of their mediation and axis of their coordination.<sup>332</sup>

Her reference to Irigaray, particularly to the feminisation of space, is a useful metaphor to incorporate into an understanding of the lacuna as a space in which readers approach the text. By drawing on my previous discussions of the reader as the source of coherence in transmedial storyworlds, it stands to reason that, in transmedial storyworlds, the “godly” surrogate is the reader, not the author. The reader's active relationship with time is evident in those storyworlds that utilise music: repeated leitmotifs, recurring *ad hoc* lyrics, and choruses all serve to disrupt the representation of a linear temporality. While symbolic language and time are situated as internal, impermeable, and masculinised—as a conduit for the auteur's intention—semiotic signifiers, such as music and space, are open to the subjective physiological responses that each reader embodies. This is endemic of the mind/body

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<sup>332</sup> Grosz, *Time, Space and Perversion*, 98-99.

divide that informs Cartesian subjectivity. Irigaray unfurls the “problematic of space and time”<sup>333</sup> from the monotheistic conceptualisation of God. The ideal of ‘God’ signifies the ultimate experience of truth, and therefore of power, those very signifiers that shape and regulate how bodies interact within society. This singular approach to determining the locus of power is also found in that other leg of contemporary Western philosophy, the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions that were developed in Classical Greece. She goes on to illuminate an often obscured, but still fundamental dichotomous hierarchy that perpetuates the privileges and oppressions that regulate who has access to power and when:

Gods, God, first creates space. And time is there, almost in the service of space. ... God would be time itself which I unsparingly given or exteriorised in his act in space, in places.

... This subject, the master of time, becomes the axis of management of the world, with its beyond the instant and eternity: God. He effects the passage of space and time.

Is this inverted in sexual difference? Where the feminine is lived as space, but often with the connotation of the abyss of the night (God being the light/space?), the masculine as time.<sup>334</sup>

Where God is identified with internalized and masculine perceptions of time, and the feminine is inscribed as space that is made by God, a system that seeks to assert masculine dominance over the feminine will purport that it is superior through pre-existence. This notion is destabilised in transmedial storyworlds, which, as intertextual iterations, are perpetually made and remade not just by their author-God, but by their mortal readers. Irigaray’s concern is with the disparity accorded to the masculinised and feminised bodies that in turn regulates their access to agency, subjectivity, and power. For example, where Palmer tries to open her text to a myriad of readings, Carter’s *Decoded* both opens language to readers who are unfamiliar with the semiotics of hip-hop, but at the same time closes the possible readings of his texts, by putting forward his intentions through a collection of annotated song lyrics. Palmer releases

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<sup>333</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 173.

<sup>334</sup> Luce Irigaray, *L’Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1984), in Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 173.

her status as author-god, while Carter clings to it. This demonstrates that authors are still using transmedial narratives to insist on their trace, like a Derridean signature, in the storyworld's meaning. These different ways of determining "meaning" demonstrate that the lacuna is the domain of the reader,<sup>335</sup> while still being a space that the author can influence.

The chronology of encounter with the music also affects the readers' understanding of the storyworld. I noted earlier that the first point of encounter with these storyworlds is mostly the musical one. In each case-study the music pre-dates the release of written storyworlds. The renegotiation of the story by readers is embarked upon when they reconsider the music in light of new engagements with the storyworld. These manifestations shift and re-contextualise the music's signification. For example, on the Cobalt and Calcium forum, a contributor called Humie writes:

That's the beauty of the way the albums correspond to the comics. The album is still completely open to interpretation, though we now have a written out story too. One could interpret the album as having things in it that were not flat out shown to us in the comics, while someone else could still interpret that every single lyric in the album does happen in some form in the comics.<sup>336</sup>

This observation is followed by a series of posts by contributors speculating as to potential readings of the comic books with the music. I'mTheCrowing considers the interaction between the comics and the music, reconsidering his understanding of the music in light of the new diegesis provided by the comic books. They write:

I think that it could very well be the writer talking about Newo in "Crossing the Frame" instead of Claudio talking about or visiting Newo. It makes sense because "Crossing the Frame" is too early for the ending of IKSSE: 3 and "Feathers" seems to fit more with the timeline. In "Crossing the Frame," maybe the writer is simply analyzing the relationship he has created between Claudio and Newo.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 66.

<sup>336</sup> "Thread: Amory Wars In Keeping New Secrets Discussion (SPOILERS)," forums.cobaltandcalcium, accessed 15/11/2014, [http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?46263-Amory-Wars-In-Keeping-NewSecrets-12-Discussion-\(SPOILERS\)](http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?46263-Amory-Wars-In-Keeping-NewSecrets-12-Discussion-(SPOILERS)).

<sup>337</sup> Forums.cobaltandcalcium.com, "Thread: Amory Wars In Keeping Secrets Discussion (SPOILERS)."

Re-codifying music with new, or clarified, significations, is not outside the realm of narrative construction in a literary context. It is similar to the process of intertextuality, whereby motifs are rewritten with new, or subversive, significations. Rather than progressing through a linear narrative, a reader's return to the music ultimately brings the reader back to themselves, rather than the text, as the central temporal experience; their sense of time is the place from which they can reach out to bring the remainder of the song-story together. This has the effect of de-centring the text as a point of return, perpetually shifting it to a new reading within the reader's experience. Time becomes something that can be experienced and re-experienced. It highlights the difference, but not opposition to, the readers' subjectivities. A returning musical motif, or even the repetition of chorus and verse within an individual song, leaves this signifier open to reader, thereby destabilising time, and subverting the gendered practice of lineality and temporal cohesion. This renders time a "process of becoming,"<sup>338</sup> rather than a static, perspective based retrospective phenomenon. Unlike internalised, masculinised time, this is a temporality that is shared by readers and authors, particularly during live performance: it is a collective, rather than a subjective, temporality.

Finally, there are the lacunae that readers occupy based on their individual experiences of the storyworld. A reader might enjoy reading the *WKAP* photobook while listening to the album, however it would be impractical to listen to the album and watch the DVD simultaneously, or to read the photobook and participate at a live performance in the same breath. These are textual experiences that are designed to resonate with each other, but not to be stuffed together in a single moment. Rather than losing themselves in a story, as readers are want to do in traditionally monomedial storyworlds, transmedial readers are expected to lose the story within them, and to find it again in each engagement with the storyworld. For example, 'The Ring in Return' (the opening track of

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<sup>338</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *In the Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 7.

Coheed's second album "In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3") opens with a ringing telephone and a woman in heels walking across to answer the telephone before the recording swings into the *Silent Earth* theme and then an electronic segue. The track ends when a man's voice (the protagonist, Claudio Kilgannon) says "Hello, Apollo. Where should I begin?" The song title signifies Kilgannon's return to his home, Paris: Earth, where he visits his high-school sweetheart, Newo Ikken's, house and tries to call her to explain his prolonged absence. When Ikken answers the phone, he is unable to speak and hangs up on her. This exchange is also depicted in the comics: it is a moment where the semiotic and the symbolic bounce off of each other.



Figure 3.11: Claudio Sanchez, Peter David and Aaron Kuder, "Chapter 12," *The Amory Wars: In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2012).

He then visits her house, and sits in her garden, narrating his adventures to her dog, Apollo. The musical track establishes a narratological framework for the remainder of the *IKSSE: 3* story: it is Kilgannon's voice that focalizes the this embedded chapter of the storyworld. It draws on the story of the returning adventurer and his inability to return to the life he had before whatever disturbance destabilised his storyworld. For Claudio Kilgannon, this includes his inability to reconnect with his childhood love, Newo Ikken.



Figure 3.12: Claudio Sanchez, Peter David and Chris Burnham, "Chapter 1," *The Amory Wars: In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2012).

Using these two texts a reader can bring together a moment in time within the storyworld. The ringing telephone in both the song, and the

panels in the comic, causes music, images, and words to resonate in the synchronous press of the ringing telephone. The space, time and experience involved in bringing these together arise from the “gaps and fissures” that are not merely within the transmedial storyworld, but that surround it, as the lacuna, and that the reader must consolidate.

### 3.8 Bringing it Together

Henry Jenkins states that “[none] of us really know how to live in this era of media convergence, collective intelligence, and participatory culture,”<sup>339</sup> and this is reinforced by the taxonomic discourses’ seeming failure to negotiate the new parameters explored by transmedial creative practice. In transmedial storyworlds neither author, nor reader is “an individual producer of texts,”<sup>340</sup> rather, their roles are the “function and effect of the social order,”<sup>341</sup> and these new parameters include a shift towards literary practices that recognise, and privilege, readers. In the previous chapter I argued that transmedial narratives enable the reader to shift from their marketable role as a consumer into the position of prosumer. This renegotiation of commercial power challenges the system that Barthes identifies as “narratives of exchange”<sup>342</sup> which have traditionally resulted in the commercialization and commodification of literature. Instead, readers of transmedial literature situate themselves within the story’s lacunae: spaces within, and on, the borders of the storyworld. It is in these murky depths that readers exert agency: these are the physical, temporal, and experiential spaces between works, and storyworlds. Every reader negotiates the storyworld on their own terms and in their own time. In these case studies transmedial storyworld-creation is not about eliding or subjugating the role that the written word, rather it expands language’s potential by recognising the matrices of signification across the visual, aural, and embodied arts that can affect

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<sup>339</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.3804 of 8270.

<sup>340</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 41.

<sup>341</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversion*, 41.

<sup>342</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 88-90.

and effect the storyworld's creation, reception, and development. Transmediality inscribes the storyworld into the reader's memory, it enables the reader to corporealise their reading experience: they associate the storyworld with times, locations, and experiences within their own lives. The lacuna is not a *chora*, or a space that exists prior to the storyworld: it is not a passive receptacle into which the storyworld is poured. Rather, the lacuna is an active space that arises because of the reader's transaction with the storyworld, and it is replete with the reader's agency. It is not empty, it is teeming with literary, artistic, and experiential encounters. It is not a pre-linguistic, pre-signification *tabula rasa*. Lacunae are filled with readers' subjectivities.

## 4 WRECKING THE INFINITE: TRANSMEDIAL SUBJECTIVITIES

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality... in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem I see with a myriad of eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, love, in moral action and in knowing, I transcend myself, and am never more myself than when I do.

—C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961).

#### 4.1 Who is the Subject?

There are few questions that have inspired as much debate, discussion, and art as the simple “Who Am I?”: it is a query that resonates across cultures, ages, and disciplines, and motivates much philosophical enquiry. In the twenty-first century—when identities are constructed and reconstructed across social networks, both on and offline, and these identities are perforated, matrixed, and uncertain—this question is as pressing as it has ever been. There are some deep, cultural assumptions about what self-hood is: it is associated with performativity—a process that Judith Butler describes as producing the effect of a static or ‘natural’ role, such as gender, while obscuring the indeterminate nature of any gender act<sup>343</sup>—with gender, with race, choice, possession and with consumption. One of the most pervasive stories we tell ourselves about selfhood relates to our “perceived agency.”<sup>344</sup> Anthony Elliot describes this agency as “the degree of active involvement we have in shaping personal and cultural experience.”<sup>345</sup> In an analysis of literary practices such as life-writing and transmedia storytelling, that are vested in the exercise of agency by both readers and writers, it is important to consider how identity is constructed across multiple media.

Smith and Watson identify life-writing as a “[site] of agentic narration where people control the interpretation of their lives and stories, telling of individual destinies and expressing “true” selves.”<sup>346</sup> They go on to note that “there are many ways in which the liberal notion of human agency might be challenged”<sup>347</sup> and I suggest that the impact of transmediality on life-writing practices is one of these ways, as it destabilises the author’s “authority” by positioning agency with other

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<sup>343</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

<sup>344</sup> Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of Self* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers), 2.

<sup>345</sup> Elliot, *Concepts of Self*, 2.

<sup>346</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 54.

<sup>347</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 54.

readers (including the non-authorial intellectual property rights holders).<sup>348</sup>

The self that is articulated in transmedial life-writing is shaped not only by the author's experiences, but also by the experiences of contributing artists, and (potentially) by the readers themselves. In the case of transmedial life-writing, the inclusion of multiple media platforms into the storyworld's form might provide a stage for explorations of subjectivity as writerly: as narrated, relational, performative, and embodied. This narrated, relational, performative, and embodied subjectivity supports a theory of identity vested in alterity (a form of difference that precedes the subject), rather than in self-same otherness. This is significant because regulatory discourses, such as law, medicine and economics are premised on an understanding of subjectivity that is vested in self-same otherness, and in a belief that the subject is sovereign. By suggesting the ontology that underpins transmedial storyworlds is other than the ontology that regulates them, we can destabilise, or at least call into question, the regulatory ontology. Leigh Gilmore unpacks the idea of genre as a juridical space in order to examine "the kind of agency such a text can claim and the quasi-legal authority it possesses."<sup>349</sup> Her assertion that "jurisdiction is a physical boundary as well as a rhetorical and discursive entity"<sup>350</sup> is exemplified in transmedial storyworlds which are made up of a collection of texts that have physical limitations, and suggests that readers can shift between jurisdictions depending on the individual text with which they are engaged. Gilmore argues that:

The work of jurisdiction is to make meaningful the practices and modes of judgment in a particular context. Jurisdictions are forms and representations of legitimacy that confer status and identity on persons and acts. Some have suggested that because individuals can move among jurisdictions, jurisdictional identity resembles a

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<sup>348</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 27; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 3043-3060 of 8270; Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 148.

<sup>349</sup> Leigh Gilmore, "Jurisdictions: I, Rigoberta Menchú, The Kiss, and Scandalous Self-Representation in the Age of Memoir and Trauma," *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Winter 2003, 696.

<sup>350</sup> Gilmore, "Jurisdictions," 697.

voluntary contract. However, the hold jurisdiction has on a person produces something much less flexible and geographically mutable, something more akin to status and identity.<sup>351</sup>

In transmedial life-writing, the function of jurisdiction, particularly of who interprets what and how, and whose intentions should be privileged in cohering the transmedial cannon, needs closer examination. This chapter provides an examination of the sovereign-self that has set the framework for how Western culture depicts the subject as a masculinised construct. It responds to the query posed in the introduction: where the author's life-story is told through the storyworld, does relationality affect the way in which readers can *effect* the author's Subjectivity? I then consider how 'death' is used as both a theme and as a function in order to construct identity across the four case studies. I undertake an examination of how subjectivity is framed across the case studies, with a particular focus on the metaphors invoked to describe the subject. This is followed by a consideration of the ways in which death is invoked both as means of constructing transmedial storyworlds, and as a lens through which subjectivity is narrated, with a particular focus on a feminist reading of the dead body as abject and object. This will lead back into a discussion about transmedial life-writing's position as subject or object.

#### **4.2 The Writerly Subject**

Thus far this thesis has examined how readers, writers, and texts might interact in transmedial storyworlds. It is my contention that, in the context of life-writing, the outcome of this interaction provides evidence of how identity as storytelling, relationality, performativity, and embodiment can be manifested in these storyworlds, particularly the extended capacity of the storyworld's to impact on the physical world. The subjectivity that is constructed in transmedial life-writing differs from that constructed in monomedial autobiographies. This is not to assert that monomedial subjectivity is entirely contained within the covers of a book; monomedial life-writing straddles book-covers, and

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<sup>351</sup> Gilmore, "Jurisdictions," 697.

dust-jackets. It has its fingers in reviews and advertisements, but each of these directs the readers *to* the pages in the book, while transmedial life-writing encourages readers to look beyond the written word.

The self that is examined in linear life-writing differs from the self that appears in transmedial life-writing. How is the subject asserted in linear reading? Linda Anderson notes that seventeenth-century England saw a publishing boom of memoirs and autobiographies, mostly from among political and religious thinkers.<sup>352</sup> She dates this phenomenon to 1640, and notes that it was contextualised by the breakdown of government censorship due to the civil war and the increasing access to printing materials. Anderson looks in particular to the spiritual memoirs by authors such as John Calvin, John Bunyan and Martin Luther to determine that the seventeenth century saw a shift from narrating subjectivity as an extension of the divine to understanding it as “a unified private selfhood with divine authority.”<sup>353</sup> This understanding of subjectivity was encapsulated in Rene Descartes’ aphorism, “*Cogito, ergo sum*”; where the body was evidence of the cognitive self, which was considered separate to the flesh. It is a subjectivity that accords with the shift in discursive power with the rise of Protestantism: the Crown’s power to control its citizens was mitigated, while the private citizens’ control over their own bodies was increased.<sup>354</sup> The philosophies that describe and inscribe this sovereign subjectivity are entwined with the divine, as is the practice of manifesting subjectivity through linear life-writing. In contrast to a subjectivity that is constructed as separate from its body, transmedial life-writing can lead readers to a *writerly* conception of subjectivity which is vested in embodiment and agency.

There are a number of social sciences that are vested in the exploration of identity, but the emphasis on agency in relation to identity varies between sociological, psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, and critical

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<sup>352</sup> Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, (New York: Routledge, 2001, r. 2009), 27.

<sup>353</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 32.

<sup>354</sup> These private citizens were, of course, male, landed, white and of a certain social station.

approaches. The framework that informs my research argues for a plurality of narratives of self as “a site for reconfiguring relations between society, culture, and knowledge.”<sup>355</sup> It is rooted in George Lakoff’s “methodology of convergent evidence”<sup>356</sup> which contends that any theory of concepts and reason that purports to be adequate must be dedicated to locating evidence that supports whichever argument is being made from as many sources as possible.<sup>357</sup> This particular approach rejects the doctrine of a disembodied and singular reason, arguing instead that:

the very properties of concepts [such as selfhood] are created as a result of the way the brain and body are structured and the way they function in interpersonal relations and in the physical world.<sup>358</sup>

As such, I contend that subjectivity results from converged evidence that is derived from physical, interpersonal, and temporal experiences, from cognitive engagement, and from the way our bodies shape our interactions with the physical world, and I borrow the term *writerly* from Barthes to describe this subject. The writerly subject is, like the writerly text, constructed from layers of meaning and signification, and it forces each subject to produce an identity or identities that are inchoate. They derive their significations only in transactions with other (writerly) subjects through performative reiteration, which functions as a form of embodied intertextuality. This is important in relation to transmedial storyworlds because the embodied reader hears, sees, or otherwise physically engages with the texts in order to make the story cohere. This extends the storyworld’s capacity to interact with, and even shape, the physical world through the readers. The decision to perceive the extended capacity for subjectivity in a transmedial context is, however, reliant on the readers’ exercise of their agency. Agency, understood in this context as the conscious exercise of choice (that may or may not be influenced by various socio-historical forces), is a necessary component of a

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<sup>355</sup> Elliot, *Concepts of Self*, 3.

<sup>356</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 81.

<sup>357</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 80.

<sup>358</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy In The Flesh*, 37.

“writerly”<sup>359</sup> form of subjectivity. Therefore a writerly subject is one who chooses to recognize that their identity is constituted by a matrix of cultural and ideological signifiers that are interpolated through embodied experiences of the physical world: relational, narrated, performative, and embodied.

The writerly subject is by no means wholly knowable, or even coherent. It is comprised of both conscious and repressed personality formations, the implications of which are often revealed to the subject via their interactions and relations with other (writerly) subjects. Transmediality provides a powerful tool with which agents can explore this post-modern self. It is not only the thematic content of the transmedial storyworld that elucidates the writer’s subjectivity, but also the way in which the writer positions themselves in relation to the storyworld’s structure. The author’s identity is narrated across the media that contribute to the storyworld, but it is up to the reader to pull the different threads of that identity together. The writer stands *with* the reader in the lacunae that punctuate the storyworld. Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps recognize that subjectivity and self-narrative are inseparably “grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced and... that narratives are an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness.”<sup>360</sup> Drawing on the above definition of a writerly subject, it might be useful to think of the storyworld as a metaphorical ‘subject’ and the lacuna as the repression of the text’s consciousness; the storyworld’s identity has not yet been reconciled into its conscious narrative of self. The reader then takes on the function of the other writerly subject who reveals to the storyworld-subject those parts of its repressed identity that it has yet to resolve with its conscious identity, and helps the text come to terms with those cultural and ideological signifiers.

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<sup>359</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 5.

<sup>360</sup> Elinor Capps and Lisa Ochs, “Narrating the Self,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 25, (1996), 21.

It is the part of the self that awaits resolution with the conscious self that is identified by feminist thinkers, such as Kristeva, as the unnamed feminine “which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity.”<sup>361</sup> Kristeva associates this delving into the subject as a meeting between the known and knowable subject with *jouissance* that is “enunciated as ecstatic” rather than as abject.<sup>362</sup> In a transmedial storyworld it is the unrealized part of the text that is where the known and the unknowable curl around each other.

How might the reader have an influence over the author’s sense of self? I propose that the subjectivities explored through transmedial life-writing strain the boundaries of sovereign-selfhood that have dominated regulatory ontological frameworks. In order to understand the possible roles for readers who engage in transactional literary practices, it is necessary to consider how subjectivities can be constructed across transmedial storyworlds, and to illuminate the discourses that purport to regulate those storyworlds. This will be the focus of the following chapters.

As projects engaging with life-writing, the case studies explore different methods of constructing subjectivity (or subjectivities). Each of them uses the construction of the musician’s identity as a springboard for exploring social realities, either through explicit commentary and critique, or through fiction. Transmedial storytelling also offers readers storyworlds that they can actively negotiate with, and contribute to. For this reason it is not just the form of the storyworld—the shape it takes for each reader—that the readers can influence.<sup>363</sup> Readers can also influence the storyworld’s content. In the case studies this content includes an exploration of the author’s identity.

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<sup>361</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 58-59.

<sup>362</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 59.

<sup>363</sup> For example, by choosing specific media to enter or exit the storyworld.

### 4.3 The Sovereign Self

It is important to consider how bodies are depicted in the case studies as the subject is often understood as bound by the body. These representations provide evidence as to whether the identity represented in the text is depicted as open and writerly, or as impermeable and sovereign. I make the claim that the writerly subject can be read against the self-contained and autonomous subject. This figure has, since its articulation during the early Enlightenment, taken on the reiterative powers associated with archetypes. Bruce Lincoln observed that “the frequent repetition of the same authoritative story can help to maintain society in its regular and accustomed forms,”<sup>364</sup> an observation that Judith Butler consolidates in the notion of reiterative performativity.<sup>365</sup> Further, this ‘authoritative story’ of the self as isolated, and identified in opposition to the Other, is, according to Ngaire Naffine, “often treated as a background condition of law and society—a legitimating story which is assumed to have some basis in historical truth and which continues to shape reality, which has real effects.”<sup>366</sup> This means that the sovereign other can be thought of as a reiterative performance of subjectivity, rather than as its own essential state.

The narrative of the sovereign subject is utilized to exclude relational bodies, and the prime example of a relational is the pregnant body, which sovereign subjectivity reads as an amalgamation of subjectivities where the “penetrated” subject, the pregnant body, loses access to its sovereignty in favour of the colonising subject, the foetus. The pregnant body is extended to signify all bodies that are read as open to colonisation by another body. Bodies that are coded as ‘female’ or ‘feminine’ have for much of material history, been located as “dark continents” that were ripe for masculine colonisation. It is therefore

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<sup>364</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 25.

<sup>365</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xii.

<sup>366</sup> Ngaire Naffine, “The Legal Structure of Self Ownership; Or The Self-Possessed Man and the Woman Man,” *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1998), 196.

important to consider how bodies are depicted in the case studies, as this will demonstrate whether the subjectivity explored in the storyworld is narrated as relational or sovereign.

#### 4.3.1 Sovereign Subjectivity and the Feminine Body

Ngairé Naffine writes persuasively about the status of women in Western regulatory systems as a way of understanding how gender affects (and effects) subject-status. Naffine notes that the narrative of the individual as “self-proprietor” is nested within Western economic, political and legal discourse. She describes it as shorthand which “serves to accentuate the fullness of the rights enjoyed by persons in relation to themselves and to others.”<sup>367</sup> John Locke initially used the idea to describe men’s autonomous economic relations with other men,<sup>368</sup> and common sense dictates that in a twenty first century context this designation must be equally applied to all people, although (as we shall see) this application is increasingly fraught. To begin with, the idea of property-in-self relied on the divided subject—a split between the mind (the self that owns) and the body (the self that is owned). This divide of consciousness from flesh is contradicted by evidence that suggests there is not an autonomous faculty for consciousness that is separate from and independent of the body’s capacities for perception and movement, and that it in fact develops from these capacities.<sup>369</sup> However, its social force is tangible, and the body is therefore “alienated and fetishized.”<sup>370</sup> Part of this “fetishization” is the inclination to consider the body a scarce commodity, the function of exclusion then takes on far more significance: “Self-ownership conceived of as body-ownership demands self-control and the ability to repel the encroachments of others.”<sup>371</sup> This property rhetoric is by no means unusual. Naffine notes that the subject is generally

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<sup>367</sup> Naffine, “The Legal Structure of Self Ownership,” 194.

<sup>368</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, (Project Gutenberg, 2010), iTunes E-Book.

<sup>369</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 16-22.

<sup>370</sup> Naffine, “The Legal Structure of Self Ownership,” 202.

<sup>371</sup> Naffine, “The Legal Structure of Self Ownership,” 202.

understood as “rational, self-determining, autonomous and... self owning.”<sup>372</sup> Her assertion is that this construction of subjectivity privileges a masculinised subject. Specifically it sets out that the subject that exercises property in itself is masculinised, while the subject that is feminised is unable to exercise property in itself, and can be owned by masculinised subjects.<sup>373</sup> Subsequently, this characterization of self-ownership is breached when the body is narrated as unable to repel such encroachments. It presumes a self-sameness between masculinised and feminised subjectivities, wherein permeability is the point at which the bodies are Othered. The script of feminised violability is linked to a grammar of gender that is predicated on the subject-in-property, where the masculine body is narrated as an agent of violence and the feminised body as an object of violence.<sup>374</sup> The sovereign subject is therefore positioned as masculine, but this masculinity is essentialised as a human, rather than as a gendered, trait. This allows the sovereign subject to deny agency to those bodies whose lived-experiences deviate from the experience that is embodied as masculinity. It is therefore important to establish a discursive framework that rejects masculinity and femininity as signifiers of agency and passivity, or at the very least, to make these significations visible and accountable.

In her most recent work, Naffine has argued for an understanding of legal personhood that is vested in relationality. She asserts that one’s status as a legal subject is “constituted by law within constellations of changing legal relations.”<sup>375</sup> She makes the case that the legal subject already operates with a Levinasian understanding of the person that “implicitly contains within it an important measure of respect for others, in that any right or duty always looks to another for its exercise.”<sup>376</sup> This

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<sup>372</sup> Naffine, “The Legal Structure of Self Ownership,” 193.

<sup>373</sup> I expand on this construction of subjectivity, particularly in relation to regulatory regimes, in the following chapter.

<sup>374</sup> Marcus, “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,” 392-393.

<sup>375</sup> Ngaire Naffine, *Law’s Meaning of Life : Philosophy, religion, Darwin, and the legal person* (Portland: Hart Publishing, 2009), 169.

<sup>376</sup> Ngaire Naffine, *Law’s Meaning of Life*, 170.

recognition of relationality leads into a discussion of transmedial subjectivities.

#### 4.4 Identity and the Author

How do the four case studies approach the issue of subjectivity? Thomas Whythorne's *Autobiography* provides contemporary readers with an example of how identity and creative endeavour were articulated in a pre-Enlightenment context. This means that his narration of subjectivity occurs at a time when authors were just starting to think about the self as sovereign. Whythorne, when invoking his sense of self in relation to his creative undertakings, wrote:

“Now, being entered again into a conceit and vein of making of music, I entered into a determination (if it should please God to further mine intent) not to leave off the same until I had made forty duos or songs of two parts.”<sup>377</sup>

In this passage Whythorne's creative achievement is articulated as a coming together of agencies that it is “furthered” by divine force. Whythorne does not consider himself an isolated subject, insofar as his mind is not limited to his lone subject; it is at the mercy of the divine. His creativity is therefore not his alone, it is a shared endeavour that only arises if his god wills it. This is a conceit of the classical era that persisted through early modernity.<sup>378</sup>

While the divine motivation for creativity is less persuasive today, the idea of creativity as an agential collective endeavour between subjects is regaining traction. In Palmer's recent TED speech, she elucidates something akin to this shared creative process, and in doing so tries to divorce her role as a musician, and her relationship with her audience, from the Romantic narratives of the independent creator:

An exchange ... was happening between me and my crowd... For most of human history, musicians, artists, they've been part of the community. Connectors and openers, not untouchable stars.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 211.

<sup>378</sup> Harold Osborn, “Inspiration,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* (1977) Vol. 17, No. 3, 242-254.

<sup>379</sup> TED.com, “Amanda Palmer: The Art of Asking.”

There is a transition between Whythorne and Palmer in terms of who the artist has a relationship with: for Whythorne it is a divine force, for Palmer it is the community she has built up around her art. The shifting idiom demonstrates the uncertainty faced by artists when they are discussing the intersection of their identity with their creative expression. Palmer's proclamation also provides an insight into the property rhetoric employed to establish and regulate subjectivity: the audience is located as a possession, "my crowd," but Palmer subsequently recognizes that as an artist she was considered a member of that community. To claim property in oneself is therefore to draw a boundary between one's self and the other: specifically it denotes the right to exclude the other from one's being as terrain. Palmer's rhetoric—though still vested in property metaphors—shifts from expressing her ability to possess others, to an expression of communal ownership through sharing. This is a subjectivity that is premised in a difference that is not self-same, but that is in excess of other subjectivities. Both Whythorne and Palmer draw their creative strength from relationships indebted to influence: an exchange (real or imagined) with external subjectivities (after all, what is God to a believer, if not the complete subject?).

In contrast to these relational articulations of subjectivity, Carter constructs a subject that is the product of a tension between a desire to operate outside of the regulating discourses, and indoctrination into those same liberal-democratic capitalist discourses. Specifically, Carter positions his art as his own creation<sup>380</sup> and, unlike Whythorne and Palmer, struggles to reconcile the collaborative nature of his artistic practice. He recalls an instance when a friend "peeked" inside his notebook and recited his rhymes at school the next day "like they were his."<sup>381</sup> As a result, Carter recalls that he wrote his lyrics in a smaller script so that nobody could "steal" them.<sup>382</sup> While recognising the richly

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<sup>380</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 7.

<sup>381</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 5.

<sup>382</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 5.

intertextual nature of his art form,<sup>383</sup> Carter nonetheless determinedly asserts ownership over these creations. However, there is an insightful comment in *Decoded's* "Acknowledgements & Credits" where Carter recognizes that dream hampton,<sup>384</sup> his literary collaborator, has "lived [his] words and life for so long that [she] might need therapy to get back to [hers]."<sup>385</sup> This phrasing implies that his lived experiences have been opened to another subject, who has in turn, opened her own subjectivity to his. His thanks is still framed as a response to her "suffering for my [his] art," evidence that he is still unwilling to perceive his creative endeavours as anything other than art-objects. Where Whythorne and Palmer open the labour of that subject, Carter does not acknowledge the reciprocal nature of his artistic endeavour, seeking instead to exclude uninvited creative transactions with the narrative.

Where Palmer draws on property-infused metaphors to locate her subjectivity, Carter is more explicit about the economic framework that underwrites his considerations about his lived-experiences. Carter links his art-form, hip-hop, to an underground market of hustling:

The story of the hustler was the story hip-hop was born to tell—not its only story, but the story that found its voice in the form and, in return, helped grow the form into an art... This is why the hustler's story—through hip-hop—has connected with a global audience. The deeper we get into those sidewalk cracks and into the mind of the young hustler trying to find his fortune there, the closer we get to the ultimate human story, *the story of struggle*, which is what defines us all.<sup>386</sup>

Like Palmer, Carter locates his identity in relation to a narrative—the 'hustler', rather than Palmer's 'artist'—and to the community found in "those sidewalk cracks" that gave rise to the narrative. He positions the story as property, but as property belonging to an archetype—the hustler—that he performs. Carter's archetype is manifested in his embodiment as Jay-Z. He acknowledges that this character is "essentially

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<sup>383</sup> Carter regularly samples other artists, both acoustically and lyrically, for example "American Dreamin'" samples Marvin Gaye's "Soon I'll Be Loving You Again."

<sup>384</sup> She uses the lower case, like bell hooks.

<sup>385</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 326.

<sup>386</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 18-19.

a conceit, a first-person literary creation”<sup>387</sup> and this acknowledgement complicates the representation of Carter’s identity throughout the storyworld. As an archetype, Jay-Z can be likened to trickster gods such as Anansi, who was a god of wisdom, or Eshu-Elegbara, a god of communication. He is a figure to whom Carter can turn in order to elaborate on his lived experiences. *Decoded* credits song lyrics, and the book itself, to Shawn Carter, but it is as Jay-Z that he is credited on the paratexts, and in the epitexts as the author of the storyworld. His subjectivity makes the socially performative, elements of his identity explicit.

Like Whythorne, Palmer, and Carter, Sanchez’s storyworld also explores identity as a relational exchange (real or imagined) with external subjectivities. However, his exploration is framed not only in terms of his relationship with readers and co-creators, but also addresses the issue of the self and agency. Sanchez inscribes himself, his wife, ex-partners, his parents and siblings across a number of characters. This enables him to focus on specific relational and emotional interactions between figures. For example, he is iterated in the text through Claudio Kilgannon, and the Writing Writer, but also through Sirius Amory. It is in his performance as Sirius that Sanchez explicitly invites readers to ‘flesh-out’ the first narrative arc in *The Amory Wars* storyworld, *The Afterman*.<sup>388</sup> Smith and Watson note that lives presented across media are “co-constructed” and “are linked to others,”<sup>389</sup> and this relationality is explored by Sanchez, who assures readers that “He’ll be there every step of the way” through their “wander around in the uncharted territory of *The Afterman*.”<sup>390</sup> Whether intentionally or as a mistaken synonym, Sanchez uses the adjective “unchartered” (meaning without regulation or lawless) rather than “uncharted,” which indicates a region that is unmapped, unexplored

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<sup>387</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 292.

<sup>388</sup> Sanchez, “Foreward,” in Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*.

<sup>389</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation,” *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self-Online*, Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, eds. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 71.

<sup>390</sup> Sanchez, “Foreward,” Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*.

or unknown to describe *The Afterman's* Storyworld. Both terms are equally applicable, but “unchartered,” combined with Sanchez’s invitation to readers to “fill [the storyworld] with their own thoughts,” suggests that Sanchez positions *The Afterman* as a text that shares its development between himself, as an artist and his readers as prosumers. This invitation opens the possibilities for a subjectivity that is vested in relational experience between the author and the reader.

Sanchez also demonstrates a form of relational subjectivity that is experienced by the character Sirius Amory. Relational subjectivity has been posited as feminine, while masculine subjectivity is narrated as individual and sovereign (but universalist).<sup>391</sup> Relational subjectivity opens itself to otherness, and recognises the ethical obligation to protect the other as a means of experiencing the self. Amory’s male body is narrated as permeable: he shares consciousness with the deceased “souls” or consciousnesses that power the Keywork, and this gives rise to questions of agency in terms of relational subjectivities. For example, in “Key Entity Extraction I: Domino the Destitute,”<sup>392</sup> Sirius embodies Domino the Destitute, a fist-fighter. The figure of Domino himself is an amalgam of Sanchez’s brother, Matthew, who is an amateur boxer, and ex-Coheed and Cambria band-mate, Michael Todd. The melding of these identities, the Sanchez brothers and Todd, through their analogues (Sirius and Domino) speaks to this relational rendering of subjectivity. The identities in the narrative arise as a result of Sanchez’s relationships with these other figures in his life. The characters that signify these people are represented as able to explore their subjectivity through a form of mind-meld between themselves and Sirius Amory. The book reads:

Sirius is bewildered, as from out of the silence, tiny scattered noises begin to fill the space around him, leaking into his helmet.

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<sup>391</sup> Wong makes a point that relationality is, itself, a colonising metaphor, and notes that the relationality that is ascribed to Indigenous Americans operates differently from the theorist of feminine-relationality, however I do not have the capacity, nor would it be appropriate for me as a non-Indigenous woman, to expand on that discussion: Hertha D. Sweet Wong, “First Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women’s Autobiography,” in *Women, Autobiography and Theory: A Reader*, eds. Smith and Watson, 168.

<sup>392</sup> Coheed and Cambria, *The Afterman: Ascension*.

*La la la...la la la la.*

The eerie whispers grow. [. . .] Without warning, one entity forcefully makes his way through the mass of entities, pushing them aside with pure muscle. This is the soul of Domino, who bursts from the mass into Sirius, overcoming and possessing him, his essence churning through every organic fiber in his body. He struggles desperately for control.<sup>393</sup>

The “he” in this last sentence is uncertain: is it Sirius or Domino who struggles? Is it both? To whom do we attribute the agency involved in struggling? There is also the penetration of Sirius’ cognisance by another subject. The question of how agency as a “degree of active involvement we have in shaping personal and cultural experience,”<sup>394</sup> is exercised in such relational subjectivities is left to the individual reader to determine.

Relational subjectivity therefore asserts that our perception of self—the way that the *I* is constructed—is given shape by virtue of its relationship with power dynamics that regulate discourses of ethnicity, race, gender, and class.<sup>395</sup> These power relations are iterated by the formal institutions that govern a society, and are more intimately iterated (and reiterated) by social intimates, such as friends and family.<sup>396</sup> Relational subjectivity recognises that identity is a matrix of kinship relations between individuals, communities, and (in some experiences) also incorporates relationships with the natural world, including flora and fauna.<sup>397</sup>

#### **4.5 Thematic Thanatos: Death and Subjectivity**

Each of the writers—Whythorne, Carter, Palmer, and Sanchez—have disparate life-experiences, however they share one anxiety across their storyworlds: death. Whythorne grapples with the deaths of family and associates that shaped his modest wealth and professional

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<sup>393</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, “Key Entity extraction I: Domino the Destitute,” *The Afterman*.

<sup>394</sup> Elliot, *Concepts of Self*, 2.

<sup>395</sup> See, for example: Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 216-217; Eakin, *How Our Lives*, 56; and Nancy K. Miller, “Representing Others: Gender and the Subject of Autobiography,” *Differences*, 6:1-27.

<sup>396</sup> Naffine, *Law’s Meaning of Life*, 168-172.

<sup>397</sup> Wong, “First-Person Plural,” 168-173.

development. Carter addresses the culture of violence and death that frames hip-hop culture, particularly as he explores the artistic and cultural legacies of his predecessors, Biggie Smalls and Tupac. Death permeates *The Amory Wars*, with most of the characters facing untimely and violent ends, and the storyworld's chronology seemingly resolves in an apocalypse.<sup>398</sup> In Palmer's storyworlds her subjectivity is explored through her imagined and symbolic deaths. Death is invoked at two levels in these case studies. The first relates to the Barthesian death of the author, which factors into the structure of the transmedial storyworld. The second level is related to death as a lens through which subjectivity can be re-imagined.

#### **4.5.1 The Death of the Text: Transmedial structures and life-writing**

Death signifies the subject's rupture from life and consciousness, and it is through this signifier that anxieties about the vulnerable nature of subjectivity are explored (generally with an aim toward resolution).<sup>399</sup> Whether as a phenomena or a psychopomp, death serves as punctuation, as a space where the reader can consider what else might have happened with the text. Barthes' declaration that "[as] soon as a fact is narrated... outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself... the author enters into his own death"<sup>400</sup> has relevance in a transmedial context where death has functional and symbolic value. Death figures as a theme within the case studies, and it also provides a metaphor for the series of 'deaths', or ruptures, that form the storyworld's lacuna. By inviting readers to contribute to the storyworld Palmer opens the narrative's grammar to the influence of others. This "recasting of syntax and vocabulary"<sup>401</sup> is an integral feature of transmedial storyworlds. It subordinates narrative and theme to method and

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<sup>398</sup> The comic book extrapolating on the final album in *The Amory Wars'* chronology has not yet been written.

<sup>399</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

<sup>400</sup> Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," *Music, Image, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142.

<sup>401</sup> Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 141.

embodiment, and it recasts reading as a return to the body, to the “experience that goes from mouth to mouth.”<sup>402</sup> Readers can use the lacuna as an opportunity to give the text a new life: to reincarnate it, to embody it, to make the word flesh.

The binding that contains the codex book, the silence at the end of a recording, even the applause at the end of a performance, generally signals the text’s death. These limitations are exceeded by transmedial texts because authors and readers can continue to contribute to them. The text self-signifies the space that lies beyond its borders where the reader can take control of the storyworld. In transmedial storyworlds the author’s death, and the deaths of the texts themselves, are no longer permanent—they are a *petit mort*; a pause, a breath, a chance for the reader to choose where and how they will continue in the storyworld, and for the author to respond to these choices. The lacunae offer a space where readers can confront the possibility of the infinite by fulfilling their desire to extrapolate on the storyworld, and authors can incorporate those interpretations back into their self-narration, changing the shape and content of the storyworld again: making it reborn.

We see these contributions in Amanda Palmer’s storyworlds. *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* is a literary and performative expression that relies on contributions from other artists and writers who respond to Palmer’s music from their position in the lacuna. This collective approach to the storyworld is wrapped up in Palmer’s theoretical and symbolic deaths.

#### 4.5.1.1 The Lacuna as Styx

In *WKAP* death is, to borrow from Heidegger, the “possible impossibility of every way of existing,”<sup>403</sup> and ‘possible impossibilities’ are the point from which Palmer’s collaborators launch their contributions to the storyworld. The representations of Palmer’s death in *WKAP* depict a

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<sup>402</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov” ed. Dorothy J Hale, *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1.

<sup>403</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), §53, 307.

crisis of subjectivity: the person who dies should no longer be able to experience, or express, their subject status. However, in *WKAP*, Palmer's dead body serves as the gateway into the storyworld: images of it adorn the book-covers, and her voice performs as an audio-shadow to the "living" Palmer whose death was the catalyst for the storyworld. Readers come to Palmer's symbolic death as "an event in the intersubjective time of human history."<sup>404</sup> Palmer's fictionalized death is the point at which readers are confronted with the limitations placed on their subjectivity by the possible impossibility of existence that arises in death. The photographs of Palmer performing as corpse provide a particularly writerly quality to her life-writing. They are a catalyst for her life stories, which are constructed in reverse, with her death as a polysemic outcome: as such her life is a negotiation between her readers and her self as it is embodied in her music and performances.

This subjectivity is explored through Neil Gaiman's short story, "The Sword" which was inspired by Kyle Cassidy's photograph of Palmer's death. Cassidy depicts Palmer's Amanda Fucking Palmer (AFP) persona (associated with the *WKAP* storyworld) triumphantly wielding a sword while her Dresden Dolls (DDP) persona lies prone on the ground with blood trickling from her lips and a separate wound that has blood pooling on her throat and clavicle. Both figures are dressed in costumes that reiterate performative femininity, and repurpose it, illuminating its cultural artifice. AFP wears a black bra, under-bust corset, thigh-high fishnet stockings, and a Victorian-style, ruffled skirt that is cutaway at the front, such that it falls like a peacock's tail. She performs the feminine as drag, as a heightened rendering of that which is narrated as natural. Drag destabilises normative readings of gender as essential, rather than performative, by revealing the social coercion that belies gender identity.<sup>405</sup> In this image it has the secondary effect of situating death as drag. Death is, like the masculine subject, usually scripted as

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<sup>404</sup> Sara Heinämaa, "The Sexed Self and the Mortal Body," in *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 83.

<sup>405</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186-189.

impermeable, inflexible, and as not open to compromise. However, in Cassidy's photograph Palmer's death results in a compromised subjectivity and a compromised mortality, as AFP severs her own self-narrative. Death itself becomes a performance, and the rupture of identity that results from death is called into question. Her Other, DDP, wears the costume associated with her Dresden Doll performances: a black shift, black and white striped stockings, and mime makeup. This costume continues the metaphor of death as a performance by associating death with the mime, a type of performance that is drawn from embodiment and silence, as a symbol of the pre-linguistic state.



*Figure 4.1:  
"The Sword,"  
Kyle Cassidy in  
Who Killed  
Amanda  
Palmer, np,  
2008.*

In Gaiman's story, "The Sword," the older Palmer (AFP) travels back in time to assassinate her younger self (DDP). DDP is situated as Laius to AFP's Oedipus, and I turn to Kristeva's analysis of the Oedipal story to understand how this murder of the self can reframe agency. Kristeva writes:

If the *murder* of the father is that historical event constituting the social code as such, that is, symbolic exchange and the exchange of women, its equivalent on the level of the subjective history of each individual is therefore the *advent of language*, which breaks with perviousness if not with the chaos that precedes it... Poetic

language would then be, contrary to murder and the univocity of verbal message, a reconciliation with... the "beginning."<sup>406</sup>

DDP is the younger, but chronologically preceding, embodiment of AFP's subjectivity, and as such she takes on the role of AFP's 'father.' However, the feminised embodiment performed by the two figures suggests that this 'father', the pre-linguistic mime, is more closely associated with the open and permeable 'beginning', or the *chora*, than with the impervious 'advent of language.' She is a Jocasta in Laius' clothing. By slaying her mother-as-father, AFP is claiming agency. She is severing her subjectivity from the threat of a return to the womb, to the permeable *chora*. If this death is read as drag the story becomes a satire directed at that reading of subjectivity that perceives itself as sovereign and independent.

The story opens with the line: "You only get to kill yourself once."<sup>407</sup> The second-person form of address implicates the reader in their own death, as well as in Palmer's. It has the effect of incorporating the reader's subjectivity into the narrative. The two Palmers converse as they walk through the streets of Boston, AFP carrying swords in order to "make [the death] fair."<sup>408</sup> The narrator recalls AFP's thought:

Amanda had thought it would be a hard thing, killing her younger self, but, at the end, she found it easy, almost pleasant, to administer the killing stroke.<sup>409</sup>

The sentences are loaded with sub-clauses, a practice that gives form to the uncertain temporality examined in the text, as the reader's breathing is staggered. The contronym, "stroke," connotes both gentle physical affection, and lethal force. In the Oedipal narrative the sword is associated with the phallus as the source of socio-cultural authority: it is a privileged signifier that is indexed to the real, indeed that often functions as the real, and is associated with material historical realities of social, economic, legal, and epistemological privilege for people whose bodies are narrated

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<sup>406</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 61.

<sup>407</sup> Neil Gaiman, "The Sword," *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, np.

<sup>408</sup> Neil Gaiman, "The Sword," *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*.

<sup>409</sup> Neil Gaiman, "The Sword," *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, np.

as male.<sup>410</sup> The phallus signifies subjectivity, and AFP claims this subjectivity by rendering her other, her earlier consciousness, into a state of oblivion. Death is associated with both the abject and the sublime. DDP embodies the abjected corpse, while AFP embodies the *jouissance* of the sublime.

The sublime is the exquisite other that we long to open our subjectivities to. AFP is photographed in just such a state of exultation: the sword is held aloft, an erect phallus, her head is thrown back, her mouth open in joyous exclamation, her body glowing as if spot-lit from on high. This light reads as the experience of the “sublime alienation”<sup>411</sup> that occurs as AFP makes her earlier subjectivity abject. The image depicts a “time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth”<sup>412</sup> where “the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the other.”<sup>413</sup> The other is the penetrated corpse: DDP’s death is as a result of the phallus, of entering the symbolic, and her body emphasizes its femininity as essential, rather than performative—she (as so many of Palmer’s corpses in WKAP) is prone, her legs parted, her death the result of a violent penetration. She is rendered subjectless in order to substantiate AFP’s continued subjectivity. AFP then returns to her own time, triumphant, and declares that she has won against her younger self because she has been practicing: “I guess I don’t have to practice any longer.”<sup>414</sup> This statement draws a parallel between Palmer’s swordplay and her creative development. It suggests that it is through artistic expression, notably though music, that Palmer asserts her subjectivity. Her relief is interrupted by the nameless narrator who prompts her: “What if you from the future arrives here?” AFP’s response is firm: “That isn’t going to happen. Not ever. I’m not going to fucken [*sic.*]

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<sup>410</sup> Jacques Lacan “The Subversion of the Subject” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Funk, (NY: Norton, 2002).

<sup>411</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

<sup>412</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

<sup>413</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

<sup>414</sup> Neil Gaiman, “The Sword,” *Who Killed Amanda Palme*, np.

compromise.”<sup>415</sup> This compromise is significant insofar as it seems to be the divider between Palmer’s subjectivities, the implication being that DDP was open to compromising her art in order to achieve financial success, while AFP is more confident in her artistry as a definer of success. Palmer’s death is always a consequence of her art. AFP has attempted to sever her relationality, to make herself the penetrator, rather than the penetrated, and the text reveals this intent as illusory, as a story, rather than as a naturalised state. The text therefore brings the idea of sovereign subjectivity to the reader, and offers it as just another type of costume.

In these contrasting articulations of Palmer’s identity, Gaiman and Cassidy use their position in the lacuna to explore a subjectivity that illuminates the gendered nature of self-hood. The confluence of their photography and writing brings to the storyworld an interrogation of feminised subjectivity. It tries, to greater or lesser effect, to reconcile that subjectivity against the archetypal narratives that have framed the formation of masculinized self-hood. Sara Heinämaa considers Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion of cis-gendered men and women that:

each of them lives the strange ambiguity of existence made body. [. . .] The same drama of flesh and spirit, and of finitude and transcendence, plays itself out in both sexes; both are eaten away by time, stalked by death, they have the same essential need of the other; and they can take the same glory from their freedom.<sup>416</sup>

Heinämaa goes on to read de Beauvoir against Levinas, and claims that “in order to live a human life we must necessarily reach beyond our own time.”<sup>417</sup> The embodied self is therefore not isolated from other selves, but is “intertwined with other moments, forming a multidimensional texture of living.”<sup>418</sup> This temporality draws on Levinas’ assertion that “time is not an achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but... is the

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<sup>415</sup> Neil Gaiman, “The Sword,” *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, np.

<sup>416</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier (London: Vintage 1949, r.2011), iTunes eBook, 864.

<sup>417</sup> Heinämaa, “The Sexed Self and the Mortal Body,” 84.

<sup>418</sup> Heinämaa, “The Sexed Self and the Mortal Body,” 85.

very relationship of the subject with the Other,"<sup>419</sup> an observation that fits neatly with Irigaray's concerns about the relationship between time and space that masculinises the temporal. By extinguishing DDP, AFP fractures her access to the life-experiences that contribute to her own life-narrative. In fact, by continuing to exist after her earlier self is exterminated (a time-travel paradox worthy of a *Doctor Who* episode), the AFP character is used to enact Sara Heinämaa's claim that "[human] life is a difficult struggle in which man tries to find balance between different aspects of his existence, between finitude and infinitude, temporality and eternity, freedom and necessity, psyche and body."<sup>420</sup> Gaiman and Cassidy use Palmer's body to bridge the gap between the subject and the infinite.

This relationship between the subject and the other is the central motif examined in "The Sword" and the balance between self (AFP) and Other (DDP) is indebted to an examination of otherness. In "The Sword" Palmer draws on a collaboration between Gaiman and Cassidy that responds to the death of Palmer's self, her body, with a narrative that layers bodies and times as a matrix of internalized relationships. The author and photographer depict her otherness as a part of her interrogation of self, and it is this otherness that I examine in the next section.

#### **4.5.2 Death and Otherness: The feminine body as abject and object**

The dead body is a potent symbol of inaccessible, or fractured subjectivity for both writers and readers. It is the point at which we can no longer relate to a subject, at which the subject is made irreconcilably other. It is therefore the prime location of the abject, of the visceral response caused by the loss of distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. It is from this rupture that the subject is confronted with "the recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language or desire

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<sup>419</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other [and additional essays]*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1982), 39.

<sup>420</sup> Heinämaa, "The Sexed Self and the Mortal Body," 75.

is founded.”<sup>421</sup> In *WKAP* Palmer’s corpse is a site for speculation, creativity, and wish fulfilment: it provides multiple trajectories for readers’ narrative impetus. She relinquishes her position as the author, as the one who controls the storyworld, and opens the possibility of storyworld agency to her readers. She issues an invitation to create from the site of her deaths. In transmedial life-writing, death is more than a symbolic turning point, it is the point of entry into embodied storytelling. In *WKAP* music provides a point of entry into the storyworld that is embodied by the reader. The relationship between death and music has a long history: music has been associated with mourning across a number of cultures. Julia Kristeva identifies music as a “pure signifier,”<sup>422</sup> as a place where the “boundary of language”<sup>423</sup> is fractured. In her exploration of abjection Kristeva recognizes that it is in abjection that the “I,” subjectivity itself, is “expelled.”<sup>424</sup> She positions death, manifested in the corpse, as the symbol in which meaning breaks down, and she later identifies music as a “metaphor for an imaginary rival where the voice of the mother and death is hiding.”<sup>425</sup> Kristeva argues that music is positioned as “the other of Law and Language.”<sup>426</sup> Music is often a means for counter-cultures to articulate their subordinated positions. As such it articulates positions in direct opposition to the taxonomic discourses. The readers take on this revolutionary state when they engage with, and potentially a manifest, the writerly identity explored in Palmer’s storyworld.

Rohan Kriwaczek’s book, *On the Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer (and the many crimes of Tobias James)* is another example of the audience’s elaboration of Palmer’s writerly subject becoming part of the transmedial literary experience. This branch of the storyworld takes a reader’s response to Palmer’s musical text and incorporates it into the

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<sup>421</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 5.

<sup>422</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 58.

<sup>423</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 58.

<sup>424</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 13.

<sup>425</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 155.

<sup>426</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 193.

storyworld as a metatextual commentary including a collection of short stories and poems that imagine how Palmer died. Kriwaczek calls these literary engagements “Palmeresques,” and they perform as a form of literary eulogy that arose within the storyworld as a response to Palmer’s purported death. They are prefaced by a fictional academic paper, by the character of Professor Richard D. Davenport, that elaborates on his theory of ‘doxithanatology’: the “study of macro-socio-psychological responses to the death of social icons.”<sup>427</sup> Kriwaczek, as editor, purports that the book is a second edition of the text, and that the ninth Palmeresque (which is entirely redacted) was censored because the details too closely reveal the circumstances surrounding Palmer’s ‘death.’ I undertake a reading of “Text Number Five: On the Unsung Death of Amanda Palmer” in order to explore how Kriwaczek responds to Palmer’s ‘corpse’ as a prompt for his own creations. The poem is presented as the writing of an unnamed fan, and tells the experience of an imagined passer-by who views one of Palmer’s imagined deaths:

He stood and watched, our passer-by  
And though he felt, as well he might  
A poet’s soul within his heart  
He watched the woman slowly die  
Whilst twisting tight his fine moustache:  
He acted not to soothe her pain  
Nor comforted the weeping child  
But stood in silence, helpless, drained  
Of power by sudden fright, deprived  
By cowardice of all he thought  
He might have been, or could become:  
He learnt His Truth, and that night wrought  
His impotence in future songs.<sup>428</sup>

This poem presents readers with a meditation on subjectivity that considers the relationship between death and gender. It explores the subject in confrontation with the feminised body as abject. The passer-by is ascribed subject status, and it is his perspective that shapes the poem. The lamentation is framed as an unsung death: trauma narratives are often articulated in non-linguistic or grammatically unstable semiotic

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<sup>427</sup> Kriwaczek, *On the Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer*, 15.

<sup>428</sup> Kriwaczek, *On the Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer*, 103.

forms as a way of expressing experiences that are outside the order of language, being entirely abjected and otherwise “unspeakable.”<sup>429</sup> The idea of a death being ‘unsung’ also suggests that the death is unmourned. Vigdis Songe-Møller notes that mourning ensures that the dead have “a place in the consciousness of the living.”<sup>430</sup> Mourning is an expansion of subjectivity: a recognition of the reciprocity between separately embodied beings to form subjectivity. Songe-Møller notes that sound plays an important function in the grieving process: “Grief is not merely an inner, solitary phenomenon; it is no less important that it is exclaimed out loud.”<sup>431</sup> Read in a Classical context, where the expression of grief was a feminised practice,<sup>432</sup> the male passer-by’s stagnation, his inability to mourn, is a reinforcement of his masculinity. Taking on the responsibility of remembering the deceased accords with the social narrative that positions women as “passive”: the mourner must open their subjectivities to the abject. The body that opens itself up in this way “is open to being “possessed,” which is to say, dispossessed of itself.”<sup>433</sup> This means that the mourning subject puts aside their status as a rational subject, and is instead an embodiment of the emotional semiotic.

The figure within Kriwaczek’s narrative maintains his isolated subjectivity, a subjectivity that is aligned with the Cartesian, rather than relational subject. Interestingly, however, the passer-by’s masculinity is estranged by his confrontation with death: he is “helpless, drained/Of power,” and his virility is absented in order to preserve his masculine subjectivity. The passer-by is made “impotent,” a state that signifies masculine anxiety regarding creation and destruction: he is unable to create or expand his own subjectivity by incorporating the otherness that

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<sup>429</sup> LJ Maher, “A Little Glass Booth: Auschwitz, Snow White and the Performance of Fear,” *ANTHESIS*, Vol 20, 2010, 55-71.

<sup>430</sup> Vigdis Songe-Møller, “Antigone and the Deadly Desire for Sameness: Reflections on Origins and Death,” *Birth, Death and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment*, ed. Robin May Schott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 236.

<sup>431</sup> Songe-Møller, “Antigone and the Deadly Desire for Sameness,” 237.

<sup>432</sup> Lada Stevanović, “Funeral Ritual and Power: Farewelling the Dead in the Ancient Greek Funerary Ritual,” *Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta SANU*, Vol. 57, Iss. 2 (2009), 49.

<sup>433</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 86.

he is confronted with in the dying woman. His “impotence” also suggests that he is unable to penetrate the other, to ‘possess’ her. This is evocative of the masculine anxiety that positions the corpse as abject: the corpse terminates the masculine experience of *jouissance*, which would otherwise necessitate some sense of “access and participation in connection with rights and property [...] Total access, total participation, as well as total ecstasy are implied.”<sup>434</sup> Whereas in “The Sword” AFP’s body is narrated as masculine, insofar as it was able to penetrate DDP, and AFP was able to experience the *jouissance* arising from that action, the protagonist in this narration is confronted with a body that is already abjected, and therefore is unattainable. It is the inevitability of the character’s death that abjects her: she is the danger of ambiguity—living and dead, woman and child—she is situated at the breach of socially sanctioned desire, at “the limit of primal repression.”<sup>435</sup> As a result of this liminal existence, Kriwaczek’s passer-by is confounded: he is unable to possess her, and she corporealises that “intolerable significance”<sup>436</sup> that he can only access through his “future songs” — the means by which he can “arouse the impure”<sup>437</sup> and arrange it by “contributing an external rule, a poetic one, which fills the gap inherited from Plato between body and soul.”<sup>438</sup> Kriwaczek’s character resolves his anxieties about his own mortality by mourning the breach of his own subjectivity: the confrontation “deprived” him of “all he thought/He might have been,” meaning his subjectivity is confronted by those elements it had repressed. In this text, Kriwaczek provides an examination of the limitations of Cartesian subjectivity when it is confronted with the abject.

This poem can also survive an ironic reading. The text is a Palmeresque which, as a literary eulogy, is a part of the mourning process in the storyworld. It takes the form of poem and lamentation. Both are related to the Kristevan *chora* as “mobile and extremely provisional

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<sup>434</sup> Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 165.

<sup>435</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 10.

<sup>436</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11.

<sup>437</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 28.

<sup>438</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 28.

articulation[s] constituted by movement and their ephemeral stases.”<sup>439</sup> This means that poems and lamentation have the effect of making the performative qualities of formal language explicit. Language is essentialised as a result of rational thought, and poetry (as well as other forms of the semiotic) demonstrates that language is as much a costume as Palmer’s corset is. In contrast, the *chora* is a state that precedes language that is “analogous to vocal or kinetic rhythm.”<sup>440</sup> In fact, there is an argument to be made that transmedial storyworlds, like the *chora*, are not self-evident<sup>441</sup> being, as they are, the culmination of rupture and articulation that is recognised by readers, rather than by the text itself. For example, reading poetry and music into the storyworld, the transmedial storyteller incorporates a “pre-verbal functional state that governs the connections between the body ... [and] objects.”<sup>442</sup> Those connections are experienced differently by each reader, and the individual texts do not determine what effect they will have.

Palmer’s body, as a site for creative response is constructed as writerly, it is the location of both the abject through death, and the sublime through music, and this leaves it open to interpretation by readers. Hélène Cixous is more explicit about the disconnect between the *chora* and the pre-linguistic state, associating “the first music of the voice of love” with the *feminine écriture*, a way of speaking that defies the strictures of masculinised language, and that “sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one’s breath away and re-appropriated it into language under its authority of separation.”<sup>443</sup> Cixous mourns that embodied subjectivity is feminised and symbolically silenced in favour of the cognitive subject. Taking this perspective the reader might consider whether, when the passer-by learns “His Truth,” this truth is personal or divine. The capitalization suggests that the truth is a sublime truth, an

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<sup>439</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, trans Seán Hand and Léon S. Roudiez (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 93.

<sup>440</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” 94.

<sup>441</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” 94.

<sup>442</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” 95.

<sup>443</sup> Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 93.

engagement with the Real and a reiteration of masculinised cognitive subjectivity. However, this truth is only accessed through the confrontation with Palmer's corpse which otherwise leaves the protagonist unable to linguistically signify. As such he turns to the *choric* enunciation, rejecting the limitations inscribed on his identity by the subject that is crafted by language. The poem contrasts music's pre-linguistic signification—the potential for “future songs” to fulfil the protagonist's need to come to terms with what he has seen—with a denoting silence in response to a sight of death as abjection, as intimated by his inability to act because he is “drained/of power by sudden fright” in the moment. The poet's visceral response to Palmer's death is belied by the literary and poetic representation of the experience. Rather than turning to a non-linguistic form of expression, such as visual, musical or physical responses, the narrator engages in the silence of a page and the ink cutting across that page. Reading facilitates the echo of sounds or images in the readers' ears, but the practice of private reading is mute. The fear of abjection is lived in still lips while the reader recasts Palmer's death with the “violence of poetry, and silence.”<sup>444</sup> The reader is confronted with Palmer's identity as Othered, as a body that exists beyond its death.

#### **4.5.3 Death and the Feminised Body in Relation to Constructions of Sovereign Subjectivity**

Palmer's deaths are violent and bloody, but they are also representations invoking artistic tropes that have Othered women's bodies and their agency. For example, the photography on the first page of the *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* photobook echoes both John Millais' painting of Ophelia and the opening scenes of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* with the discovery of Laura Palmer's body. By invoking the imagery associated with Maillais' and Lynch's work, Palmer associates her death with the systematized violence exercised by men against women. These

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<sup>444</sup> Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 141.

images speak to a long history of the feminised body as abject, and of the subject as excluding femininity as other. Palmer's subjectivity is complicated by her gender, and by her status as an artist. These images ask readers to consider whether Palmer is able to exclude others from her subjectivity in the same way that the masculinized sovereign subject can. Palmer's photographs illuminate the systemic and often elided violence committed by masculinised institutions and men against women's bodies. This violence has been largely ignored because it is read as an expression of sexual difference enacted by the feminised body, rather than as an expression of dominance enacted by the masculinised body. This sexual difference is outside of the experience of the masculinized sovereign subject.<sup>445</sup> The sovereign subject is unable to consider the experiences of the other who is not self-same, and as a result, the Othered and feminised body (signified in the text by Palmer's body) is fetishised and commodified: her voice, her performing body, images of her body, are all available for purchase.



*Figure 4.2: Beth Hommel, "From the Private Diary of Maia Carlisle," Who Killed Amanda Palmer, np; Still from David Lynch, Twin Peaks, c.1990; Sir John Everett Millais, "Ophelia," c.1851.*

<sup>445</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 41.

Images of her body are aligned with her own writing, or with Gaiman's writing, but also with blank, black or white panels—an absence of narrative context: just a naked body, open eyed, bruised, sometimes bloodied, staring beyond the reader. Palmer's body is depicted in both public and private spaces, in roads and bedrooms, in restaurants and laneways. The image depicting Palmer's bloodied body, in lingerie and fishnet stockings, curled up in a shopping trolley is particularly haunting. This image represents Palmer's position as consumable, both in her capacity as an artist, and as a woman. Her body is cast as an object that can be bought, sold, and used. Her body is her commodity.



*Figure 4.3: Nicholas Vargelis, "Untitled," Who Killed Amanda Palmer, np.*

This photograph, taken by Nicholas Vargelis, shows Palmer on her back, curled up into an almost foetal position in a shopping trolley. She is wearing a pink singlet and black fishnet stockings. Her eyes look bruised, perhaps even gouged. The image is not juxtaposed with lyrics or a story, but with another photograph, this time by Regis Hertrich.



*Figure 4.4: Regis Hertrich, "Untitled," Who Killed Amanda Palmer, np.*

The contrast between the images is stark: Vargelis' muted tones challenge Hertrich's chromatic tint, almost accusatory, sneering at the gauche brightness. Palmer's body is also thrown into relief: in Hertrich's photograph she is dressed (in her AFP costume) and sprawled on her stomach, her head and arms shielding a pile of *Kris Kross* puzzle books, and a poster of a guitarist whose face is obscured by Palmer's hair. Both images speak to the objectification of, and desire for, artists as commodities, or objects, but while Hertrich's image focuses that desire on a half-hidden poster (the iconography of teenagers), Vargelis locates Palmer as the object that is bought and sold. By presenting Palmer's body as chattel the reader is, in effect, invited to reflect on the intersection between the subject and the object in Palmer's body. This leads to questions as to how we read another person—a subject—as Othered. To what extent does the metaphor of 'the body as property belonging to the self' extend to those bodies that are Othered?

I have already noted that claiming property in oneself draws a boundary between one's self and the Other: it denotes the right to exclude the Other from one's being. How does this relate to the image of Palmer's corpse in a trolley? The image asks the reader whether Palmer is, in fact, able to exclude others from her subjectivity. Her access to subject status is complicated by her gender, and by her status as an artist. The picture of Palmer offers readers a depiction of commodified trauma, of the person as object. I would go so far as to suggest that, given Palmer's body is

crammed into a shopping trolley, which is usually associated with grocery shopping, the image suggests that this violence is linked to capitalism (the body as consumable).

Feminine bodies are Othered. This othering is often associated with the body's physical sex as 'different' from the masculine body. The images of Palmer are often sexualized: she is dressed in lingerie, or is in a state of undress. She is also depicted blood smeared across her thighs, or with bruises on her arms and thighs. These marks are signifiers of rape or, at the very least, sexualised violence. Such violence is symptomatic of treatment that is often experienced by women<sup>446</sup> because of their status as women. She is therefore textualised as other. The images confront the readers with their own otherness, and by depicting Palmer as an object they present the reader with a conflation of the subject and the other. Is the reader able to excise their otherness from their subjectivity? How does the reader's own experience of their gendered body shape their experience with the author's otherness? If we position the subject as a product of the mind, this might seem a possibility, but when we position the subject as embodied, the issue of auto-exclusion is complicated. Initially it is useful to consider how the narrative of the sovereign self is constructed, and then move on to an examination of the ways in which transmedial life-writing obfuscates that construction.

There is also a passivity to Palmer's body that is elaborated on in Vargelis' image, where it is presented as a feminised commodity. The reader might consider the image an exploration of Palmer's subjectivity, or equally as a consideration her otherness, an example of how the male gaze is enacted, by both the photographer and the readers. The scripting of the subject that is premised on denying women's property in their own bodies contributes to the fracture of the feminised subject. In this context, Palmer's battered and bloodied body also testifies to the inflicting of pain, specifically, pain of the sort that Elaine Scarry describes as "intense pain

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<sup>446</sup> I want to be explicit about the fact that when I use the term "women" this includes all women, including, but not limited to, professional women, short women, trans women, athletic women, and women who like coffee.

that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body, or the body swelling to fill the entire universe."<sup>447</sup> Scarry goes on to note that this experience of pain annihilates language, as well as subjectivity:

as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source subject.<sup>448</sup>

Again, the depictions of Palmer's body that represent her death as violent, can therefore be read as an attempt to divorce her subjectivity from her body, before it is made abject. Even the self-portraits in the collection, particularly "Rubies and Diamonds" depicts Palmer with jewels and precious stones pouring from her mouth, a reference to the fairy tale, "Diamonds and Toads" by Charles Perrault. This image is aligned with a reimagining of this tale by Neil Gaiman, where the blessing of precious stones falling from the protagonist's lips as she speaks becomes a Cassandra-like curse that chokes her to death.



*Figure 4.5: Amanda Palmer, "Untitled," in the Who Killed Amanda Palmer, np.*

This image can be read as a commentary on the value that is placed on language as a key to subjectivity, where words are aligned with valuable jewels that can rupture the body. It also illustrates Scarry's point that the disintegration of language robs the source of its subject. By rupturing the subject's access to language, and by extension to culture and community, the subject is subsumed. The reader is able to consider their own agency in relation to this image: what violences do they perpetuate? How do they

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<sup>447</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 35.

<sup>448</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 35.

regulate their identity through repressive othering? What is the alternative?

#### 4.6 Transmedial life-writing as subject, sublime and object.

Cixous examined the relationship between property-in-self and masculinity in "Sorties."<sup>449</sup> She asserts that, due to the rise of the reader as the source of creating meaning, writing has been denied its formerly masculinist position: it is no longer a form of scripted ejaculate. Therefore the assertion that a text's meaning arises from the reader, rather than the author, creates an anxiety for the masculinised author. Cixous writes that:

It is much harder for man to let the other come through him. Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who?—a feminine one, a masculine one, some?—several, some unknown which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars...It is distressing, it wears you out; and for men this permeability, this nonexclusion is a threat, something intolerable... Being possessed is not desirable for a masculine Imaginary, which would interpret it as passivity—a dangerous feminine position.<sup>450</sup>

This dangerous femininity is precisely the risk an author embraces in constructing their life-writing across multiple media. The transmedial storyworld is permeable, and results from the collaborative enterprise between an auteur, other creators and prosumers, all of whom come to the text as readers. In the case of transmedial life-writing this means that the life-explored in the storyworld is Othered by each of these readers who comes to the text through their own subjectivity. However, the revolutionary potential of transmedial, rather than monomedial, subjectivities is vested in the writerlyness associated with each subject. Transmedial life writing is reliant on readers actively reading each individual work against the text as a whole, as well as against other storyworlds. This results in a subjectivity that is simultaneously asserted by readers and writers.

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<sup>449</sup> Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 63-129.

<sup>450</sup> Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 85-86.

In traditional autobiographical practice, there is a conflict between the author's intention to construct their life-narrative in a 'readerly' manner—to imbue a particular understanding of their lived experiences into the text—and the reader's "I" that approaches that text, which is "already itself a plurality of other texts."<sup>451</sup> Smith and Watson address the position of readers who engage with performative texts, noting that "[when] someone tells his [*sic*] life story before a 'live' audience, that audience is palpably there, soliciting, assessing, even judging the story being told. *The audience directly influences the presentation of identity.*"<sup>452</sup> Because transmedial life-writing is often an ongoing, rather than singular, endeavour on the part of the author, their chronicle can be shaped by their readers' reactions and responses to sections of the text as they are released. This can affect how the author constructs their identity in subsequent textual engagements with the storyworld.

In transmedial life writing this conflict is alleviated by recognising that readers who engage with storyworlds that are constructed across multiple media are actively engaged in reading as a practice, as an art, in the process of making literature. These authors acknowledge that "reading is not a parasitical act, the active complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority,"<sup>453</sup> rather it is in itself creative and requires readers who can critically reflect on the text and on their own position with, or against, the storyworld. The readers and writers consider the levels of significance within a text and, if they consider that the text can/should be read critically as well as for pleasure, it is useful to provide them with an ethical structure to apply to their critical reading. This structure is premised on recognition and respect for mutual interrelated subjectivities. I do not assert that audiences are homogenous, or even that they all embody the same position within the storyworld, however, I do concur with Smith and Watson when they

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<sup>451</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 10.

<sup>452</sup> My italics: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, r. 2010) 97.

<sup>453</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 10.

describe such audiences as a “heterogeneous collective for whom certain discourses of identity, certain stories, certain truths make sense at various moments.”<sup>454</sup>

*Who Killed Amanda Palmer* asks us as readers to consider the “Who”: the Subject. When the reader asserts their Subjectivity it results in the authors’ death, in their abjection. Palmer lives though her death by rejecting identity as a coherent wholeness and recognising that she is in existence with, rather than against, her readers. The blurb on the back of the *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* DVD asks:

Who Killed Amanda Palmer?  
Obviously you did. But only after Michael Pope did. And he only killed her after Alex deCampi did her in, after Chip Yamada got a few stabs.  
... the late Miss Palmer made a video for every song on the album. The searing footage contained on this piece of plastic will make you realize why you have to get up right now and go see her live. RIGHT NOW. Even though she’s dead. It’s THAT good.<sup>455</sup>

This polemic frames the DVD, including the documentary footage, in the initial narrative that depicts a world where Palmer is dead. It poses an interesting assertion: subjectivity *did* kill Amanda Palmer. This is a statement, and not a question. ‘Who’ is the unknown subject—the reader. The statement is turned into a question in the blurb, but across the storyworld titles it remains unpunctuated. This blurb on the back of a DVD case aligns Palmer’s death with her life. The statement also echoes the cult television show, *Twin Peaks*, which commenced with the question of “Who Killed Laura Palmer?” The difference is that Palmer the musician did not pose a question: “Who Killed Amanda Palmer” can be read as a statement, and as a statement its meanings are more volatile, because it appropriates the readers experience of their ‘whoness.’ In a canny moment of self-promotion the reader is exhorted “go see her live.” This call plays with dual meanings in a single signifier: the reader can see Palmer “perform live,” as in physically present, or they can watch the DVD, where they can watch her live, living, and lived experiences.

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<sup>454</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 97.

<sup>455</sup> *Who Killed Amanda Palmer: A Surrealist Mini-Mystery*, DVD.

Where Cixous' examination of monomedial literature leads her to declaim that "Intention: desire, authority—examine them and you are lead right back... to the father,"<sup>456</sup> *the transmedial storyworld leads to the readers, to the lacuna*: all desire, intention and even authority is found in that choric space between texts. Palmer gives death an acoustic framing: it is a fading breath, a gasp, the rustle of a page—all sounds of transition, and possibility, rather than of knowingness and wholeness. The printed word replicates and popularizes; it disseminates models and invites incremental emulation by readers. Music invites the same sort of reading, but with the accessibility of memorisation and therefore, of embodiment. While Palmer's music does not directly relate the experiences of death as trauma, it follows the reader, beating against photographic stills and carefully crafted words that expand the storyworld. This allows the consumer to both recall Palmer's explicit narrative, and to incorporate their understandings of such horrors, in their own interpretation. Readers simultaneously experience the character's previous, existing and potential subjectivities, alongside their own lived experiences as narratives and histories. In this, transmedial life-writing offers readers and writers an opportunity to reconsider their identities, not as limited by bodies and symbolized by texts, but instead as pools of experience that can be shared and given over to others.

Life-writing is integral to this process of recasting the subject because it plays with moments of lived experience, either at a metaphorical remove (as in song lyrics or photographs of Palmer's corpse) or directly (as with recordings, interviews, documentary and live performance) to convey potential subjectivities to readers. In this, Palmer's life is as much a part of who killed her as her death is. Amanda Palmer dies every time she is sung, every time she is read: her meaning is wrested from her control and manifests within the reader. Roland Barthes' dark prophecy comes to fruition, and the author dies as she tells her own life. This brings us to the next chapter, which provides an

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<sup>456</sup> Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 64.

exploration of how death can become a pathway to alterity for readers in transmedial life-writing.

## 5 BEYOND THE BOUNDARY: ALTERITY IN WRITERLY ONTOLOGIES & TRANSMEDIAL LIFE-WRITING

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*.

— Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” (1951).

## 5.1 Framing Alterity

In the previous chapter I considered some of the ways in which the case studies use subjectivity and otherness to construct a writerly subjectivity. This chapter draws on ideas developed by Emmanuel Levinas, Luce Irigaray, and Elizabeth Grosz in order to illuminate how transmedial storytelling might enable a platform for transactional literary practices in which the other is not understood as modelled on the self (self-same), but is instead recognised as “irreducibly other, different, [and] independent”<sup>457</sup> to the subject. Continuing from the previous chapter, in which the abject and the sublime were used to differentiate the subject and the other, I consider how *alterity* might be applied to a writerly ontology. This chapter therefore addresses the question of whether transmedial life writing offers writers and readers a site for resisting narratives that privilege sovereign subjectivity. I provide two examples of the ways in which *alterity* can frame a discussion transmedial storytelling: the first is thematic, and considers an application of *alterity* through the characters Meri and Sirius Amory from *The Afterman* story-arc in *The Amory Wars*. This leads into a consideration of transmedial practice, and focuses on musical expression as a form of communication. Finally, I examine the ethical imperative behind reading writerly ontologies through *alterity*, rather than self-same difference.

## 5.2 Defining Alterity

*Alterity* can be broadly understood as *the other which is not an extension of the self*. It can provide authors and readers with a framework for transmedial engagement that is derived from a commitment to ethical engagement between the contributing subjects. In transmedial life-writing the recognition of radical otherness is experienced by readers who bring their own subjectivity to the text, and open their perspective to the author’s status as the other. In *Alterity and Transcendence* Emmanuel

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<sup>457</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 141.

Levinas offers a coherent model of otherness, ascribing four primary characteristics to alterity. Firstly he identifies alterity as *exterior*; that is unrelated to, and separate from, the subject.<sup>458</sup> Secondly, he locates alterity as a position of excess: the subject is unable to absorb or assimilate the other.<sup>459</sup> Thirdly, Levinas asserts that alterity is infinite: it exceeds any parameters that the subject tries to regulate it with in order to position the Other as self-same.<sup>460</sup> Finally, alterity is active, and the subject is passively positioned to respond to those initiatives taken by the other.<sup>461</sup> These four characteristics are also integral to transmedial narratives, which cohere in the reader. I have already discussed the storyrealm as an imagined extension of the author's property-in-self. The storyworld is therefore a space of excess that is beyond the control of the storyrealm, as it is constantly renegotiated by each reader. This means that the reader's engagement with the storyworld is active and the narrative itself is reliant on the reader to make sense of it. Readers can therefore approach transmedial storyworlds as alterity-in-practice. This is not a style of reading that most readers will be comfortable with. So what is the effect of readers confronting otherness in the form of transmedial storyworlds?

Levinas asserts that in the experience of encountering the other, the subject is confronted with the ethical obligation that initiates the subject's existence.<sup>462</sup> Levinas' ethical framework arises as a result of the face-to-face encounter between two bodies. This encounter results in the realisation that the other is different to the self, and that there is an imperative to, at the very least, not kill this other.<sup>463</sup> The obligation to "not

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<sup>458</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>459</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 95.

<sup>460</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 75.

<sup>461</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 109.

<sup>462</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 101.

<sup>463</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 84.

kill” is extrapolated to a responsibility for ensuring the other’s life and comfort, to “not leave the other alone to his deathly solitude”:<sup>464</sup>

The relationship between the same and the other, my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact, and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives.<sup>465</sup>

This ethical obligation is, for Levinas, the undertaking of living a moral life: his ethics consider the implications of inter-subjectivity and lived immediacy. For Levinas this responsibility to the other underwrites the subjective experience: the subject only comes into existence once it encounters the other. To demonstrate this premise by way of a transmedia-located metaphor, consider that books, music, and games can all contribute to a storyworld—they all have the capacity to tell stories—but they often go about this in different ways because they are media that are irreducibly different from each other. The process of reading between them to understand how they relate to each other is therefore a question of ethics if we wish to maintain recognition of their inherent medial differences. Elizabeth Grosz elaborates on how this otherness can be understood:

the other is a necessary condition of subjectivity. The other makes possible the subjects’ relations to others in a social world; ethics is the result of the need to negotiate between one existence and another.<sup>466</sup>

This ethical imperative provides the impetus for resolving the problems arising from transactional literary works, where authors, collaborators, property rights-holders, and prosumers are relationally engaged in mediating the storyworld. In order to apply this ethical imperative to transmedial storytelling, I first use Levinas four characteristics to elaborate on alterity in relation to transmedial life-writing.

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<sup>464</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 23.

<sup>465</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 77.

<sup>466</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 141.

### 5.2.1 The Other as Exterior

Transmedial storyworlds are exercises in exteriority: they result from a confluence of others with the reader. By exploring their lived experiences across multiple media platforms the auteur relies on the creative contributions of other writers, artists, and musicians as, to quote Jenkins, “storytellers are developing a more collaborative model of authorship, co-creating content with artists with different visions and experiences at a time when few artists are equally at home in all media.”<sup>467</sup> This means that authors are opening their self-narratives to other creators, they are inviting subject to subject contact with their collaborators. In transmedial life-writing the author is no longer associated with a particular temporal presence, so much as the reader is gifted with a perpetual immediacy in relation to the storyworld. The focus is no longer on the author’s experiences in time so much as it is reliant on the reader’s experiences in the time of the storyworld. It is the readers’ sense of time, whether chronological or rhythmic, that gives the storyworld part of its shape. This is a measure that is therefore divested of its standardization: it varies between subjects who engage with the storyworld. Therefore, each writer and reader is exterior to each other, their subjectivities are shaped by their different lived experiences filtered through their own embodiment, and they are confronted with that exteriority when they engage with the storyworld.

In identifying alterity as a state of exteriority, Levinas implies that alterity is unrelated to, and separate from, the subject,<sup>468</sup> and embodiment is the boundary that establishes exteriority between Subjects. He locates both the subject and the other as corporeal, tactile, embodied beings, and identifies the face as the site where the subject is exposed to the other’s alterity.<sup>469</sup> Otherness arises when the subject projects their identity into the world: it arises in the moment of two or more subjects coming

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<sup>467</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2063 of 8270.

<sup>468</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 10-12.

<sup>469</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 5.

together in a *frisson* of identities. It is the role of mediation between subjectivity and otherness that is under-theorised in linear engagements with life-writing, insofar as the author is often positioned as the subject who exerts agency over the reader-as-object through the text, while in transmedial life-writing mediation is extended and shared by author and prosumers. The author can recall their otherness: they are confronted by the boundaries of their embodiment—the feel of their skin against a pen, or against keys, or on an instrument—and it is from the point of these boundaries that their presence is exerted on the world.<sup>470</sup> The reader, in turn, brings their subjectivity to the text and, in meeting the expression of the author's otherness, is ethically obliged to, at least, regard that otherness.

### 5.2.2 The Other as Excess

I explored the storyworld's lacunae and described them as places where the storyworld is opened. The lacunae are also sites of the storyworld's excess. Each media that contributes to the storyworld is unable to limit or close off the lacunae: they keep expanding with the storyworld. This leaves the lacuna as a space for reader-engagement, insofar as no matter how many texts contribute to a storyworld, readers will still use the lacuna to expand the storyworld in new and different directions. As the subject is unable to contain excess, it represents that which the subject will attempt to control in order to maintain the masculinised impermeability associated with sovereign subject status. Transmedial franchises undertake this attempt at regulation, but it can be undone by readers who assert their own subjectivity in the storyworld: the storyworld is never limited to the auteur's sovereign experience. On this front, Elizabeth Grosz describes the other as "a form of independence, resistant to the subject's aspirations and wishes."<sup>471</sup> It is this potential for

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<sup>470</sup> Martin Heidegger, "*Building, Dwelling, Thinking*," *Poetry Language and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), 152.

<sup>471</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 142.

defiance—the rejection of a narrative of masculine impermeability as materially preferable—that is toyed with in transmedial texts. Neither the author nor the reader can determine a universal experience of the storyworld. Instead the storyworld manifests an excess of experiences. In her exploration of Irigaray’s take on alterity, Grosz surmises that “[the] other opens (up) the subject to others; it opens (up) things, the world itself, to the subject.”<sup>472</sup> The first half of this statement has a particular significance for transmedial storytellers, while the second part of the statement ties in with the idea that the masculinised subject is a penetrator, while the other is permeable and therefore feminised. The claim that the other opens (up) the subject to others is drawn from Levinas’ reflections on otherness and excess premised on the divine and infinity.<sup>473</sup> So, for example, transmedial storyworlds that incorporate music make the other’s semiotic qualities explicit. Music is exterior to the body—it is an effect of sound waves that project between bodies—and it is in excess of the body, insofar as if the body does not create the sound, it cannot exist. The self that is opened by otherness comes into its own in a transmedial context, either through live performance, recorded performance, or in the auditory capacity exemplified in music and the relationship between performance and the audience.

### 5.2.3 The Other as Infinite

In the transmedial storyworld the lacuna serves as an indicator of the storyworld’s infinite capability: “We cannot reintegrate its alterity into the same. The thinker who has an Idea of the Infinite goes beyond himself, exceeds himself, is more than himself.”<sup>474</sup> Levinas’ assertion that alterity is infinite implies that the subject is finite, and limited, but that it exists in response to the infinite and unbounded. The infinite cannot be contained within any concept or signification, it does not arise from any

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<sup>472</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 142.

<sup>473</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 91.

<sup>474</sup> Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 100.

structure of the self. Like the lacuna, the infinite is replete with unexplored possibilities. Where femininity is a type of gendering that arises as the infinite excess of prescriptive masculinity, transmedial storytelling lays siege to this masculine order by leaving the texts' significations, in all their infinite diversity, with the readers. In life writing this infinity is that moment of potential and connection between the subject represented and the subject interpreted. Gilmore argues that "The desire to locate the real self in autobiography is a consequence of its rhetoric; the self and language are privative, for they generate and deny the very thing they cannot render"<sup>475</sup> but the transmedial nature of the case studies, in particular their reliance on music as a means of manifesting subjective experience, suggests that the real, that is the semiotic, self can be explored by writers and readers through music: to quote from Jeff R. Warren's recent study entitled *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, "music creates a shared dimension for encountering others."<sup>476</sup> This is because music manifests in the listener's body their relationality with the author: "We never leave ourselves, and at the same time are always in relationship with other people and the world around us."<sup>477</sup>

#### 5.2.4 The Other as Active

Levinas' describes alterity as active, and this contrasts with the Cartesian traditions that identify the *subject* as active. The narrative of an active *subject* is persuasive, insofar as it is the basis for most writing that has considered the role and function of the subject and the other. It is for this reason that—even if Levinas' assertion is true, and the other is, in fact, the active force—we must still consider the narrative that positions the subject as an active force and seeks to inscribe the other as passive. However, it also opens some questions about where subject and other can

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<sup>475</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 72.

<sup>476</sup> Jeff R. Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Kindle eBook, 138.

<sup>477</sup> Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 136.

be read in a transmedial storyworld. As such it is important to apply alterity to the framework of self and other present in transmedial storyworlds in order to synthesise the concept of a writerly ontology. For Levinas the subject is only ever responding to the other as a model of the Real: the other predates, prefixes, and has prescience over the subject. Levinas asserts that the subject is not an active agent of moral choice, but is located as a being in space and time by otherness.<sup>478</sup> It is this idea of an active other that lends itself to transmedial storyworlds, where the author and readers respond to each other via their interactions with the storyworld in order to continually grow the storyworld, rather than to close it down, and where writerlyness renders subjectivity relational and permeable.

### 5.3 Alterity and Writerly Ontology

By introducing the concept of alterity into the framework of self and other in transmedial storyworlds I hope to make a case for the renegotiation of the author's subjectivity as writerly, rather than as an assertion of sovereignty.

One means of opening this discussion about writerly identity is to consider the ways in which transmedial life-writing signifies subjectivity. I have already noted that I draw on Barthes' concept of writerlyness in relation to the subject of life-writing as a means of recognising that "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."<sup>479</sup> The transmedial storyworld is a collection of texts that relies on the reader to bring them together, as echoes and reflections of each other, in order to make the narrative coherent: in this, transmedial storyworlds (whether as franchises or as storytelling) are inherently writerly. Barthes argues that "writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a

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<sup>478</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 176.

<sup>479</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.

bookstore”<sup>480</sup> and this assertion is true insofar as writerlyness is a feature manifested by readers in the lacuna. The writerlyness is a type of “infinite play”<sup>481</sup> by the readers; it is the otherness that the text itself relies upon in order to sustain the storyworld’s parameters.

The author and the reader experience their moment of face-to-face contact that results in the realisation of mutual otherness when they engage with the storyworld. Therefore the ontological process takes on a writerly element, where the author narrates their subjectivity-as-open. That openness is a state of otherness that can be examined by the reader who asserts agency in the storyworld, insofar as they are the subject who brings the author’s lived-experience into coherence by contrasting it against their own self-narrative.

In order to demonstrate how alterity can function in transmedial life writing, I will first consider the characters of Meri and Sirius Amory. I note that populist understandings of autobiography privilege “the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life-writing,”<sup>482</sup> and this is an idea that I will elaborate on in the following chapter, but there is nothing autonomous about the individual represented in Claudio Sanchez’s science fiction epic, *The Amory Wars*. Not only is Sanchez’s identity divested across three characters (Sirius Amory, The Writing Writer, and Claudio Kilgannon)—a move which can be read as an expression of Othered exteriority—but Sanchez relies on other artistic contributors, including author Peter David, comic book writer and copy writer Chondra Echert (also Sanchez’s wife), artists Nathan Spoor, Christopher Shy, Gus Vasquez, Wes Abbott, Tony Moore, and Mike Miller, and—of course—the ever changing line-up of the band, Coheed and Cambria, in order to create *The Amory Wars* storyworld.

These contributors open *The Afterman* storyworld. Sanchez works with Spoor, Echert and the band to explore the “unknown” regions of *The*

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<sup>480</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 5.

<sup>481</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 5.

<sup>482</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

*Afterman's* storyworld. His admission that—as the primary author of a work that explores his life-experiences through a fictional story, wherein he considers his identity through the lens of death and otherness—there are elements of the storyworld that are outside of his understanding accords with Levinas' conceptualisation of alterity as exterior, excessive, infinite, and active. Subsequently, Sanchez comes face-to-face with each of these realisations through his writing. He explores these confrontations through his storyworld, creating characters that demonstrate a multi-layered approach to subjectivity.

### 5.3.1 Thematic Engagements with Alterity in *The Afterman*

*The Amory Wars* storyworld comprises a number of story-arcs that each contribute to a more complete sense of the storyworld's history. Each revolves around a couple whose vocational focus destabilises their attempts at heteronormative monogamy, and each couple dies at their story-arc's conclusion. Sanchez has stated that these relationships are informed by his own experiences with previous partners, as well as with his wife, and through his understanding of his parents' relationship.<sup>483</sup> I argue that these deaths function as a cathartic release for Sanchez, because they enable him to explore repressed anxieties relating to his position as a relational and narrated subject. Coheed and Cambria's deaths enable Sanchez to resolve anxieties about his parents' relationship. Similarly, Ambellina's and Claudio Kilgannnon's deaths resolve his concerns regarding Sanchez's relationship with his former partner, Nikki Owen, while Sirius and Meri Amory allow Sanchez to reflect on his relational identity as influenced by his wife, Chondra Echert. This suggests that in *The Amory Wars* death signifies the Other, as it is a

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<sup>483</sup> "Claudio Sanchez of Coheed and Cambria: CraveOn-line talks to Claudio about his new album and comic, Amory Wars," [craveon-line.com.au](http://www.craveon-line.com.au), accessed 15 June 2012, <http://www.craveon-line.com.au/music/interviews/155354-claudio-sanchez-of-coheed-and-cambria>.

condition that lies beyond the subject's knowability. This alterity is narrated as experiences with the abject and the sublime.

*The Afterman: Ascension*<sup>484</sup> and *The Afterman: Descension*<sup>485</sup> take the reader back to a time in the storyworld before Wilhem Ryan's *coup d'état*, and before the invention of Claudio Kilgannon's parents, Coheed and Cambria. In this far distant, but hi-tech, past we meet Sirius Amory, a successful scientist who leaves his home planet, Valencine, on a quest to ascertain how the Keywork functions in the hopes of unlocking "the mysteries of humankind."<sup>486</sup> His wife, Meri, refuses to join him on this journey, instead begging him to "call off the entire endeavour."<sup>487</sup> Sirius' spaceship explodes while he is off-board, and he is left floating in space. While in this state, Sirius has a number of interactions with the souls of deceased humans—Domino the Destitute, Vic the Butcher, Holly Wood the Cracked, Evagria the Faithful, and Sentry the Defiant—where he experiences important moments in their life narratives as they take over his body and share his consciousness. At home on Valencine, Meri finds out about the explosion via news reports and believes Sirius is dead. Six months later she starts a relationship with another man, Colton. Five hundred and forty-seven days after he is announced dead, Sirius is able to contact a space station, and is rescued. He returns to Meri on Valencine. Meri struggles with the return of her "living ghost," having already grieved her loss and accepted a future "in which [Sirius] had no part."<sup>488</sup> Meri is concerned that she will be cast as "a villain" for moving on with her life, and questions whether loving Sirius is "reason enough to backslide into a life that at times made her feel like she was on the outside looking in."<sup>489</sup> Ultimately, Meri decides to continue her life with Colton, but before she can act on any decision, she dies from injuries sustained in a car accident resulting from Sirius' negligent driving, after she tells him

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<sup>484</sup> Coheed and Cambria, *The Afterman: Ascension*.

<sup>485</sup> Coheed and Cambria, *The Afterman: Descension*.

<sup>486</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>487</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>488</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>489</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

that she is pregnant to her new partner.<sup>490</sup> After Meri dies, Sirius returns to the Keywork to search for Meri's soul.<sup>491</sup>

Sirius provides Sanchez with yet another avatar through which to filter his own lived experiences, and Meri is his foil; a means of projecting his understandings of other subject's lived experiences. As such, she is the embodiment of his relationality. The song, "The Afterman," revolves around Meri's relationship with Sirius, and the refrain "If he's not here, then where?" a reference to his association with the infinite. The song establishes that Meri's access to language is ruptured, "the words distressed and unfamiliar, where feelings seared."<sup>492</sup> She acknowledges that Sirius was on a quest for the fulfilment of his sovereign subjectivity, and that "[his] selfishness has robbed [him] of the man [he] could have been." This intimates that Sirius disregarded his ethical obligations to Meri as an other. His decision to pursue self-interest demonstrates that denying relational subjectivity is unethical. Acknowledging relationality as an element of writerly subjectivity helps to develop "a society of equals, that of glorious humility, responsibility, and sacrifice, which are the condition for equality itself."<sup>493</sup> Meri is represented over and over again as "the abject [who] has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I."<sup>494</sup> That abjection is a part of Sanchez's subjectivity that he exteriorises through Meri. Using a female character to manifest the abject is an obvious symbolic choice because the feminine body, particularly the feminine body that menstruates, is narrated as abject by the masculinised sovereign subject. Meri, as a figure that demonstrates her fecundity to a man who is not her husband, demonstrates the misappropriation of the feminine body by patriarchal standards. Meri's agency is dependent on her ability to access language, a condition that arises through subjectivity. As a signifier for the abject she is restricted to the pre-nominal. It is for

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<sup>490</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>491</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>492</sup> Coheed and Cambria, "The Afterman," *The Afterman: Ascension*.

<sup>493</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 64.

<sup>494</sup> Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 1.

this reason that music is the only way that her character communicates in *The Afterman*. She is the *nostos*, the Penelope, “waiting for Sirius to defy the odds again, like he always does, and return home.”<sup>495</sup> Meri enables Sanchez to explore the fiction of sovereign subjectivity, while ensuring he can return to his relational and writerly subjectivity. Music provides Meri with the opportunity to respond to the abjection of Sirius’ perceived death through a semiotic means of communication. This results in a manifestation of the abjected singing for the abject.

### 5.3.2 Music and Alterity

Across each of the case studies music is central to the experience of alterity, due to its embodied exteriority, and its semiotic status as preceding language and as excess. The processes of both making and hearing music are embodied but also exceed the body. Indeed, music is a prime moment of an encounter between self and other. If we read semiotic (such as musical) expressions of life-writing as articulating otherness, rather than as a claim to sovereign subjectivity, transmedial life-writing has the potential to shift the dynamics of the autobiographical imperative by recognising the multiplicity of reading subjects who manifest the storyworld’s meaning.

I have already made the argument that the transmedial author is de-centred from their life-writing, and that the reader adopts an active role in bringing together the various inscriptions of the author-other’s lived experiences. Music provides an opportunity for this displacement: the authors’ vocalisations of their narratives, whether as an abstracted account of lived experience, or as a fictionalised perspective of subjectivity, situates the author as a voice of otherness. Singing is an excess of embodiment, a juncture at which the singer begins their presencing in the world. The reader experiences the author’s otherness as they hear the author sing. The author’s voice becomes, as Levinas writes, the “voice coming from another shore [that] teaches transcendence

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<sup>495</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

itself.”<sup>496</sup> In the following section I elaborate on how the song “The Afterman” is a musical engagement with alterity.

*The Afterman*’s eponymous title track was written by Sanchez as a response to death:

Chondra [Sanchez’s wife] and I were coming back from a long day lounging on a boat without cell reception, when she decided to hop on Facebook. In that moment she had discovered a very close friend had passed away. I remember the cold impersonal blue glare glowing against her face ... the emotions and tears released in an instant. It was unlike anything I had ever witnessed. Her questions started pedalling between reality and disbelief, but her emotions were too strong to know what to believe. I started to feel like this was the closest thing to her experiencing my death.<sup>497</sup>

The story in *The Afterman* book demonstrates an affinity between Meri Amory’s response to Sirius’ death and Sanchez’s account of Echert’s mourning over their friend:

She sees this information, but it is not real. How could it possibly be? ... Her body accepts the news a few moments before her brain, throwing her to the ground like a paperdoll [*sic*], the flood delayed. Then the tears come and they don’t seem to stop.<sup>498</sup>

In these excerpts rational and emotional responses are embodied—Meri’s consciousness, her reason, is shaped by her bodily response which ‘makes’ the information of her husband’s death a reality. Similarly, Sanchez observes Echert’s response to their friend’s death, and claims that “her emotions were too strong to know what to believe.”<sup>499</sup> He reiterates the narrative that women’s bodies give their reason its force and shape, that women’s minds are dominated by their bodies. This supports the understanding that relational and embodied subjectivities are feminised, when they are, in fact, closer to a universal experience of subjectivity than the sovereign subject. In the song “The Afterman” Sanchez explores his subjectivity through a feminised lens as a divided identity, represented by Sirius and Meri Amory. This allows him to

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<sup>496</sup> Levinas, *Totallity and Infinity*, 17.

<sup>497</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

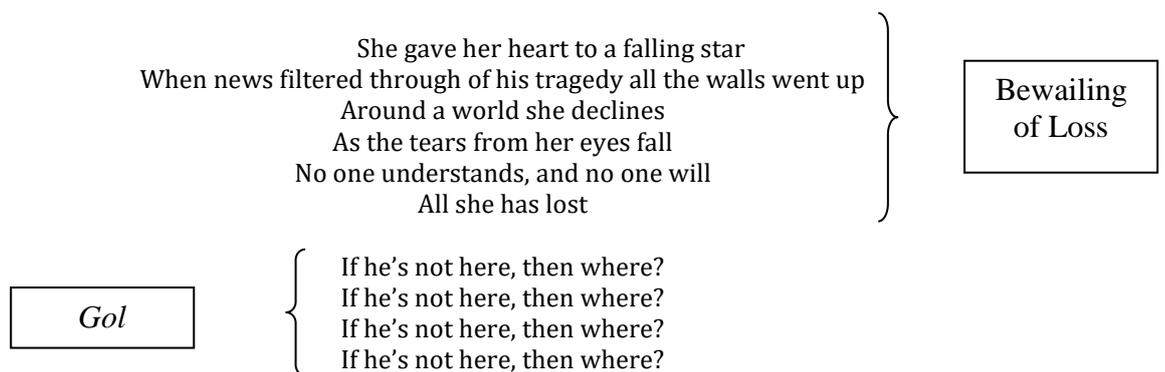
<sup>498</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>499</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

position himself as both subject and other, a state that results in a writerly ontology that is constructed from layers of signification.

The song “The Afterman” follows the tradition of a *keen* (or *caoineadh*), a traditional Irish and Scottish song that was composed and sung for the dead, to ease their transition into the afterlife (*Tir-na-n’Og*). By using this style of song Sanchez positions Meri as a liminal figure who can traverse life and death, thereby blurring articulations of subjectivity that are generally heirarchialised as masculine and feminine experiences. This results in an exploration of writerly subjectivity that is opened to and by readers. In the following section I look at how the *keen* is interpreted through “The Afterman” and consider which significations of femininity that enabled Sanchez to interpolate otherness through his own subjectivity.

The song also pays homage to some of the musical characteristics found in traditional keening, including the use of recitative style with a falling inflection at the end of each line; the employment of *rosc* metre which has short lines of two or three stresses linked by an end-rhyme and is arranged in stanzas of uneven length which give the *keen* a raced and breathless style;<sup>500</sup> and the three part structure of a *keen* (albeit inverted) which traditionally is made up of a greeting of the dead, the bewailing of loss and finally the *gol* or cry which was taken up by the mourners.<sup>501</sup>



<sup>500</sup>Angela Partridge, “Wild Men and Wailing Women,” *Éigse* Vol. xviii (1981), 25-37.  
<sup>501</sup> The *keen* is no longer a formal ritual practise, having made its own passing to *Tir-na-n’Og* with the repression of the Gaelic language and cultural practices throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

When she found it there in the cold, blue glare  
 The words distressed and unfamiliar where the feelings seared  
 An emptiness had hung,  
 And in her chest, she clenched  
 Reality settled as the memories raced  
 While on the screen he lived  
 She teared; "Your selfishness has robbed you of the man you could've been  
 I wouldn't change a thing about you. I love you dearly,  
 My friend"

Salutation

Gol
 {
   
 If he's not here, then where?  
 If he's not here, then where?  
 My love, Been searching for my Afterman  
 If he's not here, then where?  
 If he's not here, then where?  
 My love, Been searching for my Afterman

The lament is sung by a female character, Meri, who fulfils the role of *an bhean chaoineadh*, and speaks praise for the deceased, while also emphasizing the woeful condition of those left behind.<sup>502</sup> She inhabits a liminal state between the living and the dead for the duration of the mourning period, and enters into a kind of "divine madness" which allows her to "express the collective outpouring of grief through her voice and body, leading the community in a public expression of sorrow and lament."<sup>503</sup> Kristeva asserts that "musicalization pluralizes meanings"<sup>504</sup> and the expression of mourning is writerly and manifests differently for each mourner. This means that Sanchez uses the keen, and Meri, to explore a plurality of emotional truths in relation to grief, loss, and mourning. In this passage Meri adopts the physical actions associated with keening: the *Caoineadh* was "possessed for the moment with a profound ecstasy of grief, swaying to and fro, and bending her forehead to the stone before her, while she called out to the dead with a perpetually

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<sup>502</sup> Patricia Lysaght, "Caoineadh os cionn coirp: The lament for the dead in Ireland," *Folklore*, Vol. 108 (1997), 65.

<sup>503</sup> N.P. McCoy, "Madwoman, Banshee, Shaman: Gender, changing performance contexts and the Irish wake ritual," in *Musical Islands: Exploring Connections Between Music, Place and Research*, eds. E. Mackinlay, B. Bartleet & K. Barney (Newcastle UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), 207.

<sup>504</sup> Kristeva, "The Semiotic and the Symbolic," *The Portable Kristeva Reader*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002), Kindle eBook, 52.

recurring chant of sobs.”<sup>505</sup> Meri learns of Sirius’ death and her response to this perceived loss is narrated as corporeal. The guitar that opens the song repeats the same theme throughout this song, setting an uncertain emotional tone that is expanded upon by the introduction of subsequent instrumentation. The violins are both smooth and gentle, but sorrowful, a non-verbal lament that signifies Meri’s voice. Within “The Afterman,” the history of social control over this feminine mode of articulation can be read in the substitution of the funerary violin for the feminine voice, and also by the disembodied layers of whisper and “breathiness” in Sanchez’s vocalisation. This vocalisation hints at a sort of repression of the feminine, but also suggests that the singer is ethereal and liminal, and therefore able to traverse the imaginary of life and death. The keen is, according to Angela Bourke, “a highly articulate tradition of women’s oral poetry”<sup>506</sup> associated with pagan traditions and was subsequently repressed by monotheistic religious institutions from the Middle Ages until the twentieth century.<sup>507</sup> This can be read as Sanchez consideration of those aspects of his identity that he needs to keep regulated in order for his identity to be read as a masculinised sovereign subject.

Finally, Sanchez sings as Meri, and this demonstrates her character’s function as a foil for his analogue, Sirius. This is the only song where Sanchez invokes Meri’s perspective, and it is after this event that the character asserts her own subjectivity (and is subsequently killed off). Sanchez wrote the song as a way of imagining his wife’s response to his own death, and therefore, in terms of Sanchez’s exploration of his own identity, it can be read as his attempt to confront and mourn his mortality. This confrontation with imagined mortality is a longing for the self as an object that can be possessed and contained. This makes it a form of

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<sup>505</sup> John Millington Synge, *The Aran Islands* (London and Dublin: Elkin Matthews/Maunsel and Company, 1907; reprint Harmondsworth: Penguin Twentieth Century Classics, 1992), 32.

<sup>506</sup> Angela Bourke, “The Irish traditional lament and the grieving process,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 1988, Vol. 11, 287.

<sup>507</sup> This regulation of feminised modes of signification has already been discussed in terms of the economic and regulatory limitations placed on presumption as an element of transmedial storytelling folk-culture.

abjection described by Kristeva as a “narcissistic crisis”:<sup>508</sup> a desire to remove the self from abjection through articulating a rejection of death from the living body. Sanchez achieves this abjection by opening Sirius’ subjectivity to the Keywork’s alterity. Sanchez achieves the separation of the body from death by singing as Meri, rather than as Sirius, and the repetition of this process is achieved through the *gol*-like refrain “If he’s not here, then where?”<sup>509</sup> Sanchez’s vocalization as Meri is *pianissimo* and is accompanied by a whispered harmony, this suggests that the audience is hearing the sound of Meri’s mourning carried on the wind, an echo of her lament, rather than its immediate force. The readers are positioned with the lost Amory, now an Afterman, as the body that is absent from its own keening. As Sirius is in the Keywork, presumed dead, his body is not present when Meri keens. This has the effect of turning Meri from *an bhean chaointe*, a woman who mourns and reconciles death, to *an bhean Sídh*e, a woman who warns of death to come, who calls death in.<sup>510</sup> It is from this point that Meri is able to start a new existence without Sirius. Kristeva writes that “abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance.”<sup>511</sup> This life of new significance can be read as Sanchez’s attempt to explore the relational elements of his subjectivity through Sirius’ experiences in the Keywork. While such an undertaking might not instigate the death of his ego, by exposing the ego Sanchez is more able to offer a nuanced and ethical performance of his subjectivity, one that accounts for its obligations to others.

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<sup>508</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 14.

<sup>509</sup> Coheed and Cambria, “The Afterman,” *The Afterman: Ascension*.

<sup>510</sup> The *bhean sídh*e is associated with the mother-goddess from the Land of Women, or *Tir-na-m’Ban*. it was believed that upon physical death, a soul was reabsorbed into the womb of the Great Mother, or into some other female form, to await rebirth.

<sup>511</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 14.



Figure 5.1:  
Nathan Spoor,  
*The Afterman*,  
(*Los Angeles:*  
*Evillnk Comics,*  
*2012*).

When we read this feminised mourning against Spoor's surrealist art, the other is again positioned as feminine. Spoor's illustration depicts Amory floating in space, attached to a ruptured placenta via a labyrinth of umbilical cords. A woman, possibly Meri, perhaps the personification of the All-Mother, the computer program that runs Sirius spaceship, peers out at him. The image can be likened to the *choric* real that Kristeva locates as the lexus of language. This feminised alterity is identified as preceding Amory's subject, she is a locus for both his embodiment, for his relational subjectivity and she is the excess that precedes his selfhood. She is depicted as both within, and without the *chora*; a liminal other. The Kristevan *chora*, like Levinas' other, is exterior to the subject: the subject seeks to regulate and control the *chora* through the use of language, but the *chora's* "eternal return"<sup>512</sup> illuminates the ego as narcissistic, as seeking only "self-sameness" in the other, rather than respecting its radical otherness. This enigma is illustrated with the placenta and the Afterman figure linked in an infinite cycle of sustenance, one that invites, but also defers, a resolution of their boundaries. The feminine form is therefore located both within and without the Afterman's selfhood: she is both sustained by, but also an outsider to, his embodiment.

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<sup>512</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 14.

#### 5.4 Alterity and the Writerly Subject

The character Sirius Amory also demonstrates the ethical imperative that arises in relational subjectivity. His experience of alterity is the result of his pursuit of sovereign subjectivity. While he is in the Keywork he is made permeable by the others who possess him: he is a self that is opened to and by otherness. This is demonstrated by his shared experiences with characters that fill the Keywork: Domino the Destitute, Vic the Butcher, Holly Wood the Cracked, Evagria the Faithful, and Sentry the Defiant. During his five-hundred and forty-seven days in the Keywork, Sirius experiences these characters' lives with, their "essence churning through every organic fibre."<sup>513</sup> This embodiment ensures that Sirius shares the entities' "every emotion,"<sup>514</sup> thereby opening Sirius to the experience of writerly subjectivity. Sharing consciousness with these spirits "gives him a dual perspective, a perfectly clear view of the impact of another person's choices in life, juxtaposed with the reasons that drove the choices in the first place."<sup>515</sup> This alterity means that in the song, "The Afterman," Sirius Amory functions as both the other and the *chora* do: he is "the other man—absolutely other—the Other [*Autrui*]—[who] does not exhaust his presence."<sup>516</sup> Even Sirius' title, *The Afterman*, suggests that he has transitioned beyond sovereign Cartesian subjectivity, entering into alterity: he is beyond time, space and signification. The Keywork is only ever an amalgam of selves that tell and retell their identities. The Afterman's identity is formed by coming face-to-face through shared consciousness with the souls of Domino, Vic, Holly Wood, Evagria, and Sentry. Sirius is therefore confronted with the knowledge that his conception of subjectivity sovereign is actually a fiction. The self is writerly, it is open to, and shaped by, the others that it comes into contact with.

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<sup>513</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>514</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>515</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>516</sup> Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 56.

Sirius absorbs the consciousness of a “tyrannical Army Lieutenant General whose lack of empathy and disregard for rules made him very successful.”<sup>517</sup> In the story related in the art-book, Sirius is confronted with his own complicity in Vic’s violence:

It becomes clear to Sirius that THIS is the true epitome of Vic’s terrible crimes. Suddenly Sirius is Vic, the match flickering in his hands ... Yet Sirius stands conflicted. To remove himself from the possession, he knows he has to set the fire, but this experience is different: There are children involved. Would going through with this connect him in any way to the murder of innocent people? He’s nearly lost in Vic’s essence, but he can still make out the line of his own morality. Sirius simply can’t set the fire. He extinguishes the flame.<sup>518</sup>

Sirius has already shared consciousness with a number of others, although the storyworld has not yet explored how those selves might have responded to their new relationality with Sirius. He recognises, however, that there are individuals with whom he has not shared consciousness, but with whom he is nonetheless relationally engaged by virtue of existing and that he owes these figures the same ethical obligation that he owes to Vic as an other: to, at the very least, not kill them. Sirius Amory is made privy to the experiences of others and chooses to re-imagine those experiences in a manner that he understands as ethically coherent. The ethical relationship between the self and other in “Vic the Butcher” opens a conversation about the significance of alterity in terms of regulatory discourse that shape and disperse power. This confrontation between subjects requires an ethical negotiation of the relationship arising from that meeting. In his encounter with Vic the Butcher, Sirius is confronted with the conflicting interests between his responsibility to others, and Vic’s personal freedom. Sirius decides to privilege relational responsibilities to others, over Vic’s desires. This leads to a consideration of why a subject should ethically engage with those others that it finds itself in a relationship with.

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<sup>517</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

<sup>518</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*, np.

## 5.5 The Ethical Imperative for Reading Writerly Ontologies through Alterity

The still marked imbalance in how regulatory discourses attribute and reiterate power has material, social, economic, and political effects. These lead to the subjugation of those people whose subjectivities are feminised and Othered. This process of feminisation does not just occur to people whose bodies are coded by the regulatory discourses as female, it also happens to women whose bodies are narrated as male, and to those people identifying as men whose bodies are Othered on the basis of race, class, sexuality, and enablement. When it was written, Levinas' examination of alterity was sexed and gendered as a binary existence, but it does not—indeed, due to its investment in exteriority, excess and infinitude, it cannot—fail to account for embodied genders and sexualities that function outside of his initial presumptions. However, it is still on this point of sexed and gendered alterity that Levinas and Irigaray differ in their understanding of how sexual difference effects the subject and the other. Levinas accepts the autonomy of alterity as given, while Irigaray asserts that the sexes have only been conceived of according to the phallogocentric singularity that is engendered by the masculinised subject (the self-same).<sup>519</sup> For Irigaray the ethical relation between subject and other has only been negotiated between the phallogocentric subject and the self-same other, rather than with autonomous alterity. In “The Question of the Other” she asserts that:

the fundamental model of the human being remained unchanged: one, singular, solitary, historically masculine, the paradigmatic Western adult male, rational, capable. The observed diversity was thus thought of and experienced in a hierarchical manner, the *many* always subjugated by the *one*. Others were only copies of the idea of man, a potentially perfect idea, which all the more or less imperfect copies had to struggle to equal. These imperfect copies were, moreover, not defined in and of themselves, in other words, as a different subjectivity, but rather were defined in terms of an ideal subjectivity and as a function of their inadequacies with respect to that ideal: age, reason, race, culture, and so on. The model of the subject thus remained singular and the “others”

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<sup>519</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1985.

represented less ideal examples, hierarchized with respect to the singular subject.<sup>520</sup>

Irigaray makes clear that alterity is not just an unknowable and unimaginable force, but is made up of the lived experiences of people who are denied agency over their own subjective experiences. This reflects the way that power is regulated and speaks to the necessity of negotiating a more ethical and equitable framework for understanding ontology.

Irigaray goes on to note, as have many other feminist social theorists, that the model of the sovereign subject that is associated with masculinity is also the subject that is invoked as natural or essential by regulatory discourses. This means that the sovereign subject is reflected in the figure of a political leader, and that in the regulatory hierarchy, it is narrated as “capable of governing citizens more or less worthy of their identity as human beings.”<sup>521</sup> Indeed, the legal theorist Catharine MacKinnon, argues that the State’s invocation of sovereign subjectivity is masculine insofar as its institutions “[see] and [treat] women the way men see and treat women,”<sup>522</sup> elaborating that:

women have been economically exploited, relegated to domestic slavery, forced into motherhood, sexually objectified, physically abused, used in denigrating entertainment, deprived of a voice and authentic culture, and disenfranchised and excluded from public life.<sup>523</sup>

By illuminating the artificiality of this narrative of identity its, legitimacy as a dominating force is called into question. The power disparities usually ascribed on the basis of masculinised subjectivity and feminised otherness are destabilised in the transmedial storyworld itself, if not through progressive content, then through the storytelling methods where the texts function as a web, rather than as a singular pathway through the storyworld. As noted, this narrative structure shifts the

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<sup>520</sup> Luce Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” *Yale French Studies: Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminism*, No. 87, (1995), 7.

<sup>521</sup> Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” 7-8.

<sup>522</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward A Feminist Theory of State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 161-162

<sup>523</sup> MacKinnon, *Toward A Feminist Theory of State*, 160.

story's grammar from the author's exclusive control and posits it with the readers. Irigaray's identification of what is at stake in how we construct the other has a special significance for transmedial storytelling. She asserts that "the exploitation of woman takes place in the difference between the genders [*genre*] and therefore must be resolved within difference rather than by abolishing it."<sup>524</sup> When we understand the signifier "woman" as incorporating the feminised other we can locate the readers of transmedial storyworlds in this feminised position, and recognise the tenuous dual-status: they are subjects in relation to the transmedial storyworld, and others in relation to the legal and economic frameworks that regulate the narrative. It is not practical to abolish readers, and denying their narratological agency is a fiction in its own right. Instead, regulators must develop new paradigms for thinking about how readers can contribute to a storyworld without negatively impacting on the author's ability to source an income from their artistic practices. Without specific legal protections readers "remain nature-bodies, subservient to the State, to the Church, to father and husband, without access to the status of civilians, responsible for themselves and the community."<sup>525</sup> This type of treatment is manifested in the liminal legal position attributed to fan engagements (especially prosumption) with copyrighted storyworlds. Fans are often encouraged to create art, and to contribute to the storyworlds, but they are unable to economically profit from these engagements, and some rights holders go so far as requiring that prosumers relinquish their own copyright in their re-imaginings of the storyworlds. This type of regulation for readers would need to, as Irigaray suggests, be premised on the understanding that regulatory authorities should be "more ready to take an interest in rights having to do with the individual and with relationships between individuals, rather than in rights determined by assets—possessions, property, belongings—

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<sup>524</sup> Irigaray, "The Question of the Other," 10.

<sup>525</sup> Irigaray, "The Question of the Other," 14.

rights which make up the majority of masculine civil codes.”<sup>526</sup> Irigaray locates this interest as an ethical imperative, claiming that:

To succeed in this revolutionary move from affirmation of self as other to the recognition of man as other is a gesture that also allows us to promote the recognition of all forms of others without hierarchy, privilege, or authority over them: whether it be differences in race, age, culture, or religion.<sup>527</sup>

I have argued that transmedial life writing is a tool by which this recognition of a “dual being”<sup>528</sup> can occur, thereby fulfilling Irigaray’s prophecy of a new ontology, an ontology that I locate as “writerly.” In transmedial life-writing the reader is invited into an intimate exploration of the author’s life-narration that culminates in an opening of their own subjectivity to the author’s otherness. This writerly approach to self and other occurs throughout transmedial storyworlds, both as an issue within the texts’ content and their form. This enables readers to critically reflect on the author’s and their own otherness. By recognising how writerly selves operate in relation to transmedial storyworlds, the author and reader are confronted with the imperative to engage ethically with each other. This is a process that transmedial life-writing opens itself to by drawing readers into the role of the prosumers. It enables readers and authors an opportunity to collaborate in making meaning from the storyworld.

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<sup>526</sup> Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” 14.

<sup>527</sup> Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” 19.

<sup>528</sup> Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” 19.

## **6 TELL ALL THE TRUTH, BUT TELL IT SLANT: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, LIFE-WRITING, TRANSMEDIALITY, AND SUBVERSION.**

A person is he whose words or actions are considered either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by fiction.

— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651).

## 6.1 Autobiography: Life Stories and Storyworlds

In this chapter I examine the practice of transmedial life-writing, with a particular focus on performance and performativity. I want to explore whether life-writing is merely a recollection of events, or if it is about sharing experience and emotions arising in response to those events. In developing on the impact of alterity on writerly ontologies as addressed in the previous chapter, I want to consider how life-writing and performance can open the text to collaboration between the auteur, their professional collaborators and readers. In this section I provide a brief overview of autobiography as a genre, with a particular focus on its history as a masculine and discursively regulatory, framework that perpetuates narratives essentialising sovereign subjectivity. I examine how monomedial life-writing reinforces gendered discourses relating to autobiography and authority, and I consider whether transmedial life-writing subverts these dynamics through relationality.<sup>529</sup> In order to historically situate this reading I consider Whythorne and Carter's memoir practices. I undertake these readings in order to demonstrate the ongoing effect that transmediality, while it might be only recently named, has had on Western life-writing, and I raise the question of subversion in response to my findings that demonstrate how alterity can shape the relationship between authors and readers.

## 6.2 Documentary or Experience?

In their consideration of autobiography's historical framework Smith and Watson assert that the term 'autobiography' has been used in a limited fashion to describe "writing being produced at a particular historical juncture."<sup>530</sup> They continue:

*Autobiography...* became the term for a particular generic practice that emerged in the Enlightenment and subsequently became definitive for life writing in the West. It remains the widely used

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<sup>529</sup> In this context I use 'performance' in the sense of an artist's staged performance for an audience, and performativity is used in the Butlerian sense of performing a narrative of gender that is corporeally legible: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

<sup>530</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2.

and most generally understood term. But because the term privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life writing, it has been vigorously challenged in the wake of postmodern and postcolonial critiques of the Enlightenment subject.<sup>531</sup>

Although there has been considerable academic attention paid to the deconstruction of the autobiographical subject (a topic to which I shall return), the subject that has held autobiography's attention is the same sovereign subject that has also stalked the halls of power. The narrative of 'autobiography' privileges representations of sovereign subjectivity as the normative, ideal, and universalised performance of identity. It is therefore premised on an ideology of individualism that is complicit in the oppression of those bodies that it others: "Through the political discourse of individualism, the privileged *I* stands in for you and me so many times that its interests and trajectory in the social world represent our desire."<sup>532</sup> The solitary ego that is lauded in this context is discursively masculine: as such autobiographical practice is presented as the expression of the exceptional experiences of, to borrow a metaphor from legal discourse, "the ordinary man on the Clapham omnibus."<sup>533</sup>

The effect of this focus on universality of experience is that the masculine gender of the subject is obscured. Catharine MacKinnon, an acclaimed critical and legal theorist, posits this regulatory subjectivity thus:

Its point of view is the standard for point-of-viewlessness, its particularity the meaning of universality. Its force is exercised as consent, its authority as participation, its supremacy as the paradigm of order, its control as the definition of legitimacy.<sup>534</sup>

This reading of the story of a personality fails to account for the fact that every act of autobiography is necessarily an act of biography: autobiography is a way of constructing the personal truths of one's own experiences, as well as asserting a truth about the experiences of others

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<sup>531</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2-3.

<sup>532</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, r. 1995), 75.

<sup>533</sup> *McQuire v. Western Morning News*. [1903] 2 KB 100 (CA) at 109 per Collins MR

<sup>534</sup> MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of State*, 116-117.

whose lives are recorded in the narrative. It is therefore my contention that transmedial life-writing constitutes part of the challenge to the “autonomous individual and the universalising life story”<sup>535</sup> that substantiates the sovereign subject through its focus on practice and performance, as well as through critique. These challenges have sculpted new understandings of how autobiography can and does function, particularly in relation to the ways that new media renegotiates “notions of identity and the rhetoric and modalities of self-presentation, [in order to] prompt new imaginings of virtual sociality enabled by concepts of community that do not depend on personal encounters.”<sup>536</sup> This is precisely the ‘community’ that Henry Jenkins identifies as emerging from a convergence culture, a culture where “our ties to older forms of social community are breaking down,”<sup>537</sup> but where this constant exposure to the life-experiences of others invites a re-examination of how self and other are understood. One of the ways that transmedial life-writing achieves this is through a focus on experience over events.

Transmedial life-writing can be read for its extrapolation of the author’s otherness, rather than just for its assertion of their subjectivity. Unlike monomedial life-writing, which purports to operate under a contract of truth between the authors and readers,<sup>538</sup> the transmedial variety is less vested in objective documentary: it does not try to detail the events in an individual’s life that shaped their personality as a singular and coherent narrative. It shifts autobiographical practice to the interface between experience, emotion and embodiment. Transmedial autobiography is not so much about recounting the events of the author’s life, as it is about recreating the emotional truths experienced by the author. By subverting the readers’ expectations of access to ‘truth,’ transmedial life-writing invites readers to suspend their disbelief, to incorporate the storyworld’s reality into their lived experience. This also

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<sup>535</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>536</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 168.

<sup>537</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc.634 of 8270.

<sup>538</sup> Philippe Lejeune and Paul John Eakin, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

invites readers to indulge in the pleasurable *frisson* experienced as a result of the competitive play for historical authority between the conflicting accounts that detail the storyworld's departure from, or invocation of, the 'real' events.<sup>539</sup> *Frisson* is a pleasurable, and often physical, sensation experienced by readers when they interpret, or press against, a text. This play for historical authority makes the text writerly and leaves it up to readers to determine how they will invoke the author's lived experiences.

Sanchez, Palmer, Carter, and Whythorne all testify to the importance of their relationships with their readers in constructing their life-narratives and, in turn, their identities. This performance aspect of the story-telling, the affective loop between the author and their audience, suggests that they write their lives as a means of opening the subjective truths of their experiences to their readers. In this context, performance can be understood as "an action or series of actions taken for the ultimate benefit (attention, entertainment, enlightenment, or involvement) of someone else."<sup>540</sup>

Life-writing that purports to offer a 'new truth' of the author's experience, by relying on the intersection between memory (the events as they know them), and imagination (the events as they have been represented), directs readers to search out meaning across the texts. These emotional truths are the points of connection between authors and readers. For example, in "The Afterword to the Extended Edition" of *Decoded*, Carter invites his readers to consider the process that he undertook in order to write "a book that 'decodes' lyrics."<sup>541</sup> He writes:

I don't want to be the guy in the mask who gives away all the magician's tricks. I also don't want to reduce the songs to the gossip behind them (however interesting that gossip might be). "Lost One" is a very personal song, but the thing I love about it is how it takes three episodes from my life — intimate and, in many ways, painful incidents — and turns them into poetic fables about loss that I hope anyone can relate to. I don't want people to listen to "Lost One" after reading the decoding and say, *Oh, that verse is about so-and-so*;

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<sup>539</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 67.

<sup>540</sup> Robert Cohen, *Theatre* (Mountain View, Cal.: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1981, r.2000), 21.

<sup>541</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 313.

what I really want is for them to listen to the song and say, *Oh, that verse is about me.*<sup>542</sup>

In this passage Carter articulates his desire to find an accord between the life experiences he explores through his music and the life experiences of those who listen to his music. This is perhaps the most significant difference between linear and transmedial life-writing: the former asserts the author's subjectivity and presents it as definitive and readerly: it coheres through retrospection. Transmedial life-writing seeks an affinity between the author and the reader: it is not a retrospective declaration, but an ongoing exploration for both the author and the readers. Carter achieves this accord by turning to the folk-narrative genre, of which fables are a subset, and borrows from their tropes and structure in order to articulate his narrative.

Folk-narratives are community based mythologies that enable authors to situate their own lives alongside those of immortal figures; these tropes exist beyond the mortal coil, and allow the authors to associate their lived experiences with the infinite back and forth that arises between tellers and their audiences in the folk-tradition. This back and forth between authors and their readers is part of what shapes the author's lived experiences. For example, in the excerpt above, Carter refers to the song "Lost One." This is a song where Carter brings together his conflicted feelings regarding the blur between his personal and professional identities. It can be read as his laying aside the Jay-Z persona in order to rhyme as Carter. In the first verse Carter discusses his separation from his first managers. The story draws on narratives about overcoming temptation, and the dangers posed by privileging idolatry, or earthly pleasures (in this instance "fame"), over self-knowledge and the ability to "look in the mirror like "There I am." It is a song that articulates the importance of relational identity (a concept we will revisit), and that acknowledges the significance of privileging personal relationships over commercial interests—" [putting] friends over business"—in order to

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<sup>542</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 313-314.

secure his sense of identity. He reflects on the conflation of his identities, singing that “fame is/ The worst drug known to man/ It’s stronger than heroin/When you could look in the mirror like, “There I am”/ And still not see, what you’ve become.”<sup>543</sup> Carter’s reflection on this passage is poignant. He writes:

Watching people evolve as they become richer and more famous is fascinating... extreme situations don’t change us, they reveal us. But the worst is when we can’t even see what we’ve allowed ourselves to become—or rather, we can’t see what parts of ourselves we’ve allowed to grow out of control. It can happen to anyone. It happens to me, as I point out in the next line. But you have to find ways to check yourself.<sup>544</sup>

In particular, it is Carter’s admission that “we can’t see what parts of ourselves we’ve allowed to grow out of control” that can be read as an admission of his own alterity, of his inability to completely know or contain his infinite potential for positive and negative subjective embodiments. His admission that “you have to find ways to check yourself” speaks to the necessity of relationality by reflecting on his own ethical obligations in response to others, as a means of forming identity. This is more than a simple relationship between Carter and his audience: it is about a shared experience, one that both the artist and their audience can relate *through*. The second verse expands on this relationality, and considers how Carter’s professional success (which is vested in his readers’ function as consumers) has affected his intimate relationships. In particular, he considers his nephew, Colleek’s, death:

My nephew died in the car I bought  
So I’m under the belief it’s partly my fault  
Close my eyes and squeeze, try to block that thought  
Place any burden on me, but please, not that Lord  
Time don’t go back, it go forward  
Can’t run from the pain, go towards it.<sup>545</sup>

Carter reflects on how his own life has affected his intimates, such as Colleek. It also speaks to the fact that relationality does not necessitate a face-to-face contact that Levinas associates with alterity, but rather allows

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<sup>543</sup> Jay-Z, “Lost One,” *Decoded*, 322.

<sup>544</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 323.

<sup>545</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 322.

for the signature of the other, in this case Carter's voice, to stand in proximity: "Musical experience can create a shared experience that can allow difference to come into contact."<sup>546</sup> Where Levinas asserts that otherness arises when the subject looks into the eyes of the other, it is not Carter's face, but his voice, that identifies him to the reading-subject. In the song, Carter relates that Colleek's girlfriend was pregnant when he died and that "the son she gave birth to looked just like his father, like Colleek reborn."<sup>547</sup> Carter goes on to note that "even the greatest loss holds the possibility of redemption."<sup>548</sup> This is the point of experiential truth that Carter shares with his readers. In this instance the purpose of the life-writing is not to detail time and dates, but to share with readers the realisations drawn from experience.

This mediation of lived experience from the individual to the relational is an essential, and often elided, feature of life-writing: life writing is not merely about asserting sovereignty over one's own experience, but about seeking connection with others in order to "see oneself reflected in the stories of others."<sup>549</sup> This is why it is significant that Carter describes his music as a way to transform his life into a 'fable'—a folk-narrative that speaks to broader social practices and concerns. He implies that his relationship with his readers (an issue that I will revisit in the next chapter) is at the heart of his foray into memoir.

This claim is not unique to Carter's work, Amanda Palmer writes that

we make art as a way of relating to our fellow travellers... you connect, you lose sight, you don't stop flailing around, trying to grab a hand that will pull you forward on the road, or a hand that will yank you back, stop you from running too fast... the art we show each other is the disaster victim and the red-cross all at once: not just a cry for help but... also [a] signal, a call and a response: our black and white flag above the brown dustcloud [sic]. [W]e find each other. [W]e remind each other... I've found and created a

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<sup>546</sup> Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 8.

<sup>547</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 323.

<sup>548</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 323.

<sup>549</sup> Alessandra Micalizzi, "Cyber-Self: In Search of a Lost Identity?" *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self-Online*, Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, eds. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 223.

community around me because I overshare, because I try to write songs about the darkest, craziest, most personal parts of myself.<sup>550</sup>

Palmer narrates her life as a way of relating to and with her audience through her narrated experiences. However, unlike Carter, she takes her exploration of relational identities a step further by explicitly inviting her readers to contribute to her narrative through their own acts of prosumption. Where Carter expresses a desire to foster empathy through the process of listening or reading, Palmer's focus on reciprocal art practices encourages a type of active reading and fan engagement that facilitates a sense of community. However, before I look to the performance and performative components of transmedial life-writing, I want to consider how the relationship between the self and alterity underpins transmedial life-writing.

### 6.3 An Overview of the Autobiographical Genre

Autobiography is a term used to “[signal] the writer’s focus on self-reference through speculations about history, politics, religion, science and culture, and often involved developing a method of and vocabulary for self-study.”<sup>551</sup> The history and development of life-writing as a genre has been traced from its earliest examples in Renaissance Italy, through to its modern, and post-modern, incarnations in the early twenty-first century.<sup>552</sup> Anderson notes that, for the purposes of academic interrogation, autobiography has been considered an independent genre

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<sup>550</sup> Amanda Palmer, “Sharing the Cosmic Cold Sore: A Meditation on Life, Death, and Art (And Anthony’s New Book),” [amandapalmer.net](http://amandapalmer.net), accessed 29/01/14, [www.amandapalmer.net/blog/20131222/](http://www.amandapalmer.net/blog/20131222/).

<sup>551</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2.

<sup>552</sup> See, for example: Anderson, *Autobiography*; Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson eds., *Narrative and Genre: Contexts and Types of Communication*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998); Leon Edel, *Literary Autobiography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957); Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading feminist writing*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); James Osborn, *The Beginnings of Autobiography in England: A paper delivered at the fifth Clark Library seminar, 8 August 1959*, (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1960); Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*; Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*; Poletti and Rak, *Identity Technologies*; Leader, *On Life-Writing*.

since the late 1700s;<sup>553</sup> however, she traces its formal beginnings to St Augustine's *Confessions*,<sup>554</sup> describing this work as an early example of "a self-reflective person [asking] "Who am I?" and "how did I become what I am?"<sup>555</sup> Smith and Watson write that autobiography became a term that is used to describe a particular style of life-writing that developed during the Enlightenment, and that came to define Western life-writing.<sup>556</sup> They imply that autobiography has taken on a regulatory force, noting that its reiterated authority "has been vigorously challenged in the wake of post-modern and postcolonial critiques of the Enlightenment subject."<sup>557</sup> Determining the boundaries of the 'Enlightenment subject', which I have referred to as the *sovereign subject*, is pertinent to my interrogation of transmedial life-writing insofar as it identifies one of the parameters that transmediality breaches: the myth of the autonomous individual. It is for this reason that it is important to consider how life-writing functions in relation to transmediality. In the following section I provide a brief overview of autobiography, including its history and cultural currency.

Autobiography is the art of self-life-writing. It is popularly understood as a literary genre that conflates understandings of 'truth' and 'genuineness' within the representation of identity. Unlike other genres, it is shrouded in a kind of ethical responsibility that privileges "truth-telling," and this is often described as a contract between the author and their reader.<sup>558</sup> In one of the earliest known examples of autobiographical practice in the English language, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*,<sup>559</sup> Whythorne provides insight into the relationship between identity and truthfulness: he muses, for example, on why his employers commission portraits of their own likenesses for domestic display when they no longer maintained "the beauties and favours" of youth. He

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<sup>553</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 1.

<sup>554</sup> Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey, (c. 401, 1960), Kindle eBook.

<sup>555</sup> Karl Wintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>556</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2.

<sup>557</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>558</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*.

<sup>559</sup> Osborn, *The Beginnings of Autobiography in England*, 11-12.

determined it was because it enabled them to “see how time doth alter them.”<sup>560</sup> This desire to understand personal life narratives—the trajectory of life experience marked by portraits, or moments in time—impels Whythorne to both commission a small portrait of his own likeness, and prompts him to reconsider his creative writing, predominantly sonnets, as likenesses of his younger self. He writes:

[You] would say that they may see themselves when they will in a looking-glass, to the which I so say that the glass showeth but the disposition of the face for the time present, and not as it was in time past. Also it showeth the face the contrary way, that is to say, that which seemeth to be the right side of the face is the left side in deed; and so likewise that which seemeth to be the left side is the right. And also the perfection of the face that is seen in a glass doth remain in the memory of the beholder a little longer than he is beholding of the same.<sup>561</sup>

Whythorne’s life-writing—poetic, lyrical and prose—is similarly an attempt to make sense of his experiences through the lens of his creative writing, rather than through a mirror. His creative writing considers the past, but doesn’t reflect it uncritically. Unlike the mirror, which reveals only that which is shown to it, creative writing forces Whythorne to consider the other possibilities, and the parts of the experience that were obscured from his view. It is a means of documenting change, rather than securing immortality. It is the interiorisation of lived experiences that is subsequently exteriorised, in that the poems and songs are opened by his readers.

In his 1990 article, “Renaissance Selves and Life Writing: *The Autobiography*, of Thomas Wythorne,” Andrew Mousely considers the book’s “generic instability” and interprets it as an example of a “poet describing the genesis of his poetry.”<sup>562</sup> Given the poetry is largely drawn from Whythorne’s endeavour to narrate his personality, it is possible to argue that this non-prose life-writing is integral to Whythorne’s self-narrative. Andrew Mousely asserts that Whythorne’s *Autobiography* is largely confessional, a subversion of the genre known as commonplace

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<sup>560</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 115.

<sup>561</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *Autobiography*, 115.

<sup>562</sup> Andrew Mousely, “Renaissance Lives and Life Writing: *The Autobiography* of Thomas Whythorne,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. xxvi, No. 3 (1990), 222.

books, and speculates that it might be for the purpose of assuring an intended wife of his chastity and virtue.<sup>563</sup> Mousely points to Whythorne's reflection on the "many follies"<sup>564</sup> of his youth, and juxtaposed these with Whythorne's subsequent claims of virtue and chastity, labelling them as "reflective moments"<sup>565</sup> that evidence moments in Whythorne's self-articulation where "the pressure of a contradictory or difficult situation is registered."<sup>566</sup> This is a reference to one of the many affairs that Whythorne reports on in his memoir, but he maintains that these romantic encounters remained unconsummated. He notes that autobiography was not a genre that Whythorne had at his disposal, that "it was not a recognisable place or space in which to begin writing."<sup>567</sup> Rather, Mousely identifies the text as "a production of a text of his life... achieved through a gradual process of elaboration."<sup>568</sup> Mousely describes "elaboration" as a process whereby Whythorne used elements of a commonplace book—such as quotes drawn from the classics and scripture, as well as his own writing—as the bones around which he constructs a life-text that mends the "fractures in status and role"<sup>569</sup> he faced in the process of becoming "mine own man."<sup>570</sup> Katharine Hodgkin notes that Whythorne's *Autobiography* provides a valuable insight into Tudor performances of masculinity, particularly Whythorne's tenuous aspirations to the ideals of "independence and liberty, detachment and invulnerability."<sup>571</sup> These aspirations signpost the development of a theory of sovereign subjectivity during early modernity. He likens his creative efforts, namely the publication of his sheet music, to a type of paternity, "seeing the books with the music in them should be as my

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<sup>563</sup> Mousely, "Renaissance Lives and Life Writing," 222-230.

<sup>564</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *Autobiography* 4.

<sup>565</sup> Mousely, "Renaissance Lives and Life Writing," 225.

<sup>566</sup> Mousely, "Renaissance Lives and Life Writing," 225.

<sup>567</sup> Mousely, "Renaissance Lives and Life Writing," 222.

<sup>568</sup> Mousely, "Renaissance Lives and Life Writing," 222.

<sup>569</sup> Mousely, "Renaissance Lives and Life Writing," 225.

<sup>570</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 10.

<sup>571</sup> Katharine Hodgkin, "Thomas Whythorne and the Problems of Mastery," *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1990), 21.

children.”<sup>572</sup> However, the texts themselves, and the readers who engage with them owe no filial piety to the author, their obligation is only to respect the author’s otherness, and recognize their own subjective agency. Whythorne’s poems provide the same function as the portraits in his employers’ houses: they are “mnemonics for the past”<sup>573</sup> that remind the author of his lived experiences, and the ways in which he negotiated and re-negotiated the significance of those experiences. The truths that his poems once held for his sense of identity shift, they are the very essence of a sliding signifier: when he wrote them, he was expressing who he is, and when he reads them, he is confronted with who he was—he is forced to confront his otherness. Mousely asserts, and I concur, that “the narrative of status acquisition, of how he came to be his own man, forms an important part of Whythorne’s construction of his life as an exemplary text.”<sup>574</sup> This ‘becoming’ is explored in the text’s transmedial form: Whythorne refers his reader to his music and poetry, including to the sheet music that he published.

This process of becoming is relational, insofar as it depends on feedback from an audience. Whythorne recounts that he would often sing his songs and sonnets with musical accompaniment in order to “tell [his] tale with [his] voice as well as by words or writing.”<sup>575</sup> He elaborates on why he made this choice:

sometimes it should be better heard, because that the music joined therewith did sometimes draw the mind of the hearer to be more attentive to the song.<sup>576</sup>

By recognising the importance of his audience’s response to his writing as a means of divining meaning<sup>577</sup> he acknowledges that his intention,

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<sup>572</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 175.

<sup>573</sup> Mousely, “Renaissance Lives and Life Writing,” 224.

<sup>574</sup> Mousely, “Renaissance Lives and Life Writing,” 225.

<sup>575</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 40.

<sup>576</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 40.

<sup>577</sup> Whythorne writes of one of his love-poems that he sang to the object of his affections in order to “see how she would take it. And if I saw that she took it ... so thereby her good will toward me might continue, I would have said I meant it that way. But if she would take it the contrary way ... I thought to let her know that I had then no hope in her at all.” This is the classic move of the lovelorn: plausible deniability. David R. Shore goes so far as to describe Whythorne as “the kind of lover whom one occasionally expects to

specifically that his reason, is not inscribed in a text (in this instance his poetry), however his emotion can be inscribed. Therefore Whythorne's self-narrative depends on his reader's response: it is, in part, shaped by his reader. It is writerly. The recognition that life-writing can explore multiple subjectivities, drawn from the experiences of many writers, as well as the experiences of individual readers, is integral to the transmedial process, such that transmedial life-writing has the potential to destabilise this masculinised ideal in form, if not in content. The question, of course, is how might this happen?

#### 6.4 Destabilising Genre

In his 1975 article on 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness'<sup>578</sup> Keith Weintraub asserts that the proliferation of autobiographical writing from the 1800s was not entirely dependent on "mass literacy... or the greater ease of publishing."<sup>579</sup> Rather, he sees it as responding to particular cultural conditions that promulgated the "intense public mindedness of classical men, the relative insignificance of tragedy in a thoroughly Christianised world view, the disappearance of epic from a non-aristocratic world, [and] the powerful assertion of the novel."<sup>580</sup> These four elements encouraged writers to reclaim the mythologies that had been lost to them by casting their own lives in narratives that countered the finitude represented by their deaths with creative endeavours. Similar cultural elements and technological developments are at play in the twenty-first century. This includes the insignificance of tragedy in a world where devastation is reported upon with little consideration beyond page-click revenue, the proliferation of information capsules, the "powerful assertion" of the televisual series in an age of declining (and reclining) bourgeoisie, and the electronic

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encounter in the more satirical pages of Jane Austen." I concur, and raise him a #ByeFelipe: David R. Shore, "The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne: An Early Elizabethan Context for Poetry," *Renaissance et Réforme*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1981), 77.

<sup>578</sup> Keith Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 1 No. 4, (Jun 1975), 821-848.

<sup>579</sup> Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," 821.

<sup>580</sup> Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," 821.

timelines that follow so many people around, namely their social-media shadow, as carefully cultivated narrations of experience, memory, and opinion. Such cultural developments mean that we need to reconsider how we understand life-writing as a practice. So what has shaped the genre's development thus far?

## 6.5 Ontology and Life-Writing

Narrating one's life story is a means of asserting one's identity. That narration of identity includes a narration of the subject's relations with other people in their lives. However, certain identities and relationships are read as more worthy of public attention than others. This reinforces discourses that position Othered identities as subordinate. Nancy Miller asserts that the subject of autobiographical writing, as epitomised in St Augustine's *Confessions*,<sup>581</sup> is an example of masculine subjectivity. This masculine subjectivity is premised on an anxiety regarding multiplicity, and asserts that to turn away from the universal eternity of God is become scattered, multiplicitous, and therefore, flawed. It identifies the male body and therefore the performances of masculinity associated with that body, as the coherent and unified manifestation of divine wholeness, while the female body is identified as a deformation of masculine wholeness. This deformation is derived from Genesis 2:21-23, which asserts that female humans were created from the body of male humans, and is symbolised materially by female reproductive organs, which are narrated as an absence of masculinity. This masculinised subjectivity is therefore premised on the assumption that readers take on the author's position within the storyworld, in an attempt to achieve unity, and therefore accept the author's summation at the text's conclusion.<sup>582</sup> This assertion is reminiscent of Scott McCloud's claim that readers of comic books see themselves in the abstracted faces on the page

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<sup>581</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, 11.

<sup>582</sup> Miller, "Representing Others," 1-27.

of the comic book,<sup>583</sup> and is important because, as autobiography is traditionally considered a means of comprehending how subjectivity is understood, it is evidence of a culturally persuasive narrative that privileges sovereign subjectivity and self-same otherness. Specifically, it suggests that where the subjectivity that narrates the text is cast as a masculinised sovereign subject, the reader should narrate their own identity in the same way. However, the very fact that the reader is confronted with the author's otherness in the text means that this subjectivity does not exert itself into the world. Linda Anderson notes that Miller's call "to revise the canonical views of male autobiographical identity altogether,"<sup>584</sup> enables readers to define the self (across genders) "through relations with others."<sup>585</sup> Transmedial life-writing is precisely this relational practice of reading, but what is the form of otherness that transmedial life-writing fosters? Is it self-same otherness, or alterity?

Transmedial life-writing constructs a subject that incorporates emotional and physiological manifestations of identity. More than that, it writes identities as relational, privileging the relationship between the reader and the text, over that between the text and the author.<sup>586</sup> To quote Leigh Gilmore in *Autobiographics*, "Autobiography emerges as a special case in the definition of subjectivity because it interiorizes the specular play between the producer/producing and the produced."<sup>587</sup> This 'interiorization' of relations with others interpolates other subjects into the author's self-narration: it therefore suggests that the other is exterior, and that the subject is the passive and open subject that Levinas identifies as responding to alterity. Transmedial practice sends readers out from the pages, exhorting them to discover more about and around the text and to bring it back to the community who are engaged with the

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<sup>583</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 36.

<sup>584</sup> Miller, "Representing Others," 5.

<sup>585</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 27.

<sup>586</sup> Or the legal person who exercises intellectual property rights over the text. This is often a corporation or publishing house.

<sup>587</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 71.

storyworld. It is therefore salient to consider the relational element of subjectivity as an experience with alterity.

### 6.5.1 Relational Subjectivity and Life-Writing

Adriana Cavarero explores life-writing as a practice of relationality in *Relating Narratives*,<sup>588</sup> where she contends that “the life-story that memory recounts is not enough for the narratable self... because memory claims to have seen that which was instead revealed only through the gaze of another.”<sup>589</sup> Cavarero recognizes our reliance on others to construct and narrate our life-narratives, and critiques Philippe Lejeune’s ‘autobiographical pact’<sup>590</sup> as a *claim* to truthfulness, rather than truth in itself. The experience of truthfulness, therefore, can exist not in the recollection of events, but in the exploration of how those events shape the author’s subjectivity. The exploration of subjectivities that are open to the influence of others is central to transmedial life-writing. In her critique of the individualism that has been celebrated in autobiographical writing, Susan Stanford Friedman elucidates how “[i]ndividualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process.”<sup>591</sup> Friedman was responding to assertions from critics such as James Olney who claims that “separate selfhood is the very motive of creation.”<sup>592</sup> What is particularly interesting about her claim is her assertion that individuation is a process, rather than a natural or normative state, while Olney’s claim posits individualism as natural and inherent. What Carter and Palmer’s writing makes clear is that it is not an attempt to articulate or reconcile an isolated identity that motivates their autobiographical endeavours, instead it is a desire to

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<sup>588</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>589</sup> Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 40.

<sup>590</sup> Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Contract,” 199.

<sup>591</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice,” in *Women, Autobiography and Theory: A Reader*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 72.

<sup>592</sup> James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 23.

situate themselves within communities of, on the one hand, their kinship networks, and on the other, their aesthetic networks.

These are two types of relationships that can contribute to the exploration of relational subjectivity through transmedial life-writing. The first set comprises the relationships between the author and the other people in their lives, the relationships that are commonly explored in life-writing. The second set encompasses the relationships between the author and their audience, which is more evident in transmedial storyworlds that encourage prosumption (or other forms of active reading) by their readers. Both of these relationships are premised in experiences of self and otherness. This speaks to the notion that the subject exists only insofar as it recognises, and is recognised by, other subjectivities.

Being recognised by another subject involves the mutual acknowledgement of identity. This acknowledgement occurs during the performance of identity that is undertaken in life-writing where readers and authors recognise each other as agents in the storyworld. Elinor Capps and Lisa Ochs note that “the inseparability of narrative and self is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced and the notion that narrative is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness.”<sup>593</sup> The claim that “entities are given meaning through being experienced” is particularly poignant, as it hints at the idea that subjectivity is a text that only exists in the moment that it oscillates with otherness. This experience is not the experience of self, but each self’s experience of the other. We see this presentation of the self as other across these case studies of transmedial life-writing: each author takes on a performative identity, whether it is the personas of Jay-Z and Amanda Fucking Palmer, or the avatars of Claudio Kilgannon and The Writing Writer.

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<sup>593</sup> Capps and Ochs, “Narrating the Self,” 21.

It is common for the stories of those others who are systematically subordinated to be disregarded, ignored, or re-classified out of the genre.<sup>594</sup> One of the most distinctive features of the genre is its domination by public and historical figures who are generally masculine, white, commercially successful, and old enough to have some experience, but not so old that they can't contribute further to a society. The autobiographical genre is institutionally problematic, and its critics, such as Linda Anderson, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Karl Weintraub and Nancy Miller, consider life-writing a means of constituting discourses of authorship that privilege the textual assertion of sovereign subjectivity.

In their taxonomy of life-writing and reading methodologies, *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson provide a comprehensive history of autobiographical practices from the Renaissance through to the Enlightenment, and into the current day. They elaborate on the types of life writing that were practiced, privileged, and published and also identify those subversive methods that were and are excluded from the auspices of the label 'autobiography,' although they are examples of life writing. Smith and Watson identify texts that explore cohesive identities as privileged in cultural discourses<sup>595</sup> and point to critiques by theorists such as M.M. Bakhtin, who deconstructs this framework by highlighting the dialogical nature of identity construction. They note that "[r]eaders often conceive of autobiographical narrators as telling unified stories of their lives, as creating or discovering coherent selves"<sup>596</sup> and locate this conflation of identity and coherence with "myths of identity."<sup>597</sup> In her book, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*, Leigh Gilmore makes the argument that this positions autobiography as a "genre or mode."<sup>598</sup> She notes that this understanding of the autobiographic "moment" consists of "the specularly of authors and

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<sup>594</sup> See, for example: Anderson, *Autobiography*; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*; Smith and Watson eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory*; Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*.

<sup>595</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 61.

<sup>596</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 61.

<sup>597</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 61.

<sup>598</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 71.

readers staged in the text”<sup>599</sup>—it conflates life-experience with the author’s signature and the reader’s role as a regulator of that signature.<sup>600</sup> Gilmore argues that this is less a genre practice and more a reflection on a particular method of reading. She describes this reading method as an “oscillation that occurs between readers and [authors that] depends on a structure that contains both their differenced and their similarities and enables their “mutual reflexive substitution.”<sup>601</sup> We see this mutual reflexive substitution on the part of authors such as Carter and Sanchez when they seek to universalise their experiences by drawing on archetypes and tropes in order to construct their self-hood within life-writing. Gilmore argues that:

The self implicit in this theory ... is clearly a linguistic structure; it differs from the historical self and inhabits the text as a trope. The historical self, the “real” self of the signature, would be a trope passing itself off as the truth.<sup>602</sup>

While this is a fair assertion to make of monomedial life-writing generally associated with autobiography, it is an assertion that is confounded by transmedial life-writing, where the “historical” self is subordinated to a plurality of developing selves. These selves are not bound by the signature, nor are they an object of purely specular focus, or a single event in time: transmedial selves revisit, redevelop, and renegotiate their life-narratives, often incorporating reflections on how the writing process itself has effected and affected their selfhood. Smith and Watson argue that “[w]e might best approach life narrative... as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present.”<sup>603</sup> This identity is epitomised by the writerly subject; a subject who is open to the effects that their relationships with others has on the development and expression of their own identity.

Claudio Sanchez recognises that *The Amory Wars* is an attempt to narrate his identity in relation to his parents and siblings. He asserts that

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<sup>599</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 71.

<sup>600</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, 14.

<sup>601</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 71.

<sup>602</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 71.

<sup>603</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 1.

his family “had fostered his peculiar childhood persona [that] became inspiration for the story that would shape his adult life.”<sup>604</sup> Sanchez asserts that his own uniqueness, his ‘peculiarity’, propelled him to reconfigure himself as the protagonist within his science-fantasy epic. This contradicts his claim in a 2009 interview where he purports that he unintentionally entered into the story: “When I was writing the main character, I didn’t have a name for him and I remember in one song, ‘Everything Evil,’ I shout out the name ‘Claudio’ and I was like, ‘Now I have to be a character! What a fuck up on my part!’”<sup>605</sup> In *The Sketchbook* Sanchez also writes that *The Amory Wars* was intended to “dramatize and bring together [his] actual life.”<sup>606</sup> This contradiction speaks to a tension between the Sanchez’s expectations of life-writing, and *The Amory Wars*’ invocation of metonymic lived-experiences. The tension between reading life-writing that explores the author’s life, but not positioning the author within that narrative, is a peculiarity that is resolved by creating an analogue associated with mono-mythical story forms who fulfils the narratological obligations of a hero-protagonist. This allows the author to claim access to the character, but also to recognise that the character is constrained by a particular narrative form. This constraint swaddles the author, providing them with a sense of certainty about their life to the temporal point in their lived-experience that the text recounts.

As we have seen, Sanchez implies that his narrative is representative of a more universal experience in that it is “a modern tale of good and evil,”<sup>607</sup> and this assertion bounces off Joseph Campbell’s claim that the figure of the hero “is symbolic of a divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.”<sup>608</sup> Interestingly, this claim of a “hidden hero” is

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<sup>604</sup> Sanchez and Vasquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook*, 31.

<sup>605</sup> Claudio Sanchez, “Claudio Sanchez Brings Music to *The Amory Wars*,” comicbookresources.com, accessed 13/06/11, <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=23791>.

<sup>606</sup> Sanchez and Vasquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook*, 31.

<sup>607</sup> Sanchez and Vasquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook*, 31.

<sup>608</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 36.

framed in a discourse of interiority and exteriority: it is “within us” and the process of ‘knowing’ and ‘rendering’ is what makes this ‘divinity’ exterior. The transition of the hero from, per Irigaray, an internal and masculine state to an external and feminine state speaks, again, to the relational nature of transmedial life-writing—its performative qualities—as well as to the importance of folk-literary traditions (which are discursively feminised as “wives-tales” and “children’s stories”) that have influenced the writers’ life narratives. It suggests that authors position themselves as the Thousand-Faced Hero<sup>609</sup> within their own lives, but it also enables readers to enter into the texts in order to perform as helpers, villains, senders, or receivers.

Feminist scholars have often attempted to rename the practice to allow for a feminine experience; for example Domna Stanton’s theory of autogynography is vested in a different experience of life-writing that is rooted in a purported difference between the male and female psyche (in a Freudian context).<sup>610</sup> Stanton asserts that these psychological differences manifest themselves in writing, and that in autogynography women demonstrate a subjectivity that is vested in a profound mindfulness of alterity.<sup>611</sup> In contrast, Leigh Gilmore’s development of autobiographics speaks to the subject’s position in relation to different axes of power (in the Foucaultian sense), addressing the different subject positions that women life-writers negotiate in order to enunciate the “I” proscribed as the ordinary man, noted above.<sup>612</sup> Importantly for this research, Gilmore discusses the “changing elements of the contradictory discourses and practices of truth and identity.”<sup>613</sup> The feminist approach to autobiography runs counter to the masculine narrative that privileges the autonomous individual experiences of a fully-formed subject. Linda Anderson proposes that “[v]ocation would seem to be the key to

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<sup>609</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*.

<sup>610</sup> Domna Stanton, “Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?” in Smith and Watson eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 131-144.

<sup>611</sup> Mary Mason and Carol Green, *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women*, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), xiv.

<sup>612</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*.

<sup>613</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 13.

authorship and it is also the way in which ‘serious’ autobiography, that written by the few who are capable of sustained self-reflection, is to be distinguished from its popular counterpart.”<sup>614</sup> This raises questions as to the narratives we construct to justify *who* is capable of this ‘sustained self-reflection.’ It is in answering these questions that our reflections on gender, race, sexuality, and ability can impact on recognition of which subjectivities are valued as autobiographical writing. In light of these ongoing re-engagements with the self, I turn to Smith and Watson who suggest, and I concur, that it is best to approach “autobiographical telling as a performative act.”<sup>615</sup> The question as to whether this truth speaks to emotional resonance between the artist and reader, or a verisimilitude between the storyworld and the artist’s lived-experiences is my next consideration.

## 6.6 Truth and Truthiness in Life-Writing

In the *Theatre is Evil* art book, Amanda Palmer echoes Whythorne’s assertion about the ongoing effect of readers on writers and storyworlds, but contextualises it within the experience of early twentieth century autobiographical practice. She expands on the metaphor relating portraiture and life-writing, noting that:

People have been [commissioning art in their likeness] since the beginning of time. Especially in the days before photography, getting a decent painter to immortalize you was the long-form version of having the perfect charming avatar for your Facebook account. And there’s documenting your face and your likeness for your ego. And then there’s ART. There’s the idea of opening yourself up to interpretation, of making yourself a human cover song. I was interested to see if I could feel the difference.<sup>616</sup>

Palmer recognises that the self can take any artistic form—musical, visual, prosaic, or digital—and that the practice of exploring selfhood through art carries with it the invitation to the reader to interpret, adapt, and recreate the art object. This, in turn, aligns with Henry Jenkins’ assertion that, within a convergence culture, consumers of art objects will engage in folk

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<sup>614</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 8.

<sup>615</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 61.

<sup>616</sup> Amanda Palmer, *The Grand Theft Art Companion Book* (Kickstarter Backers Only Limited Edition, 2012), 19.

practices that renegotiate the source text.<sup>617</sup> I argue that when the self is constructed across media, readers are given the opportunity to engage with one, all, or a selection of those sites. They can entwine fingers with a portrait, or stroke a song's hair, they can curl up round a series of games and books, or they can step into the text, fit the pictures to their feet, and the music to their legs, robe themselves in words, and notes, and photographs and walk through the storyworld with the Othered self. Readers give shape to the artist's self, but they are also shaped by it. The lived experience is not just captured within the storyworld, but also an affect of it. The question of experience is therefore central to questions of truth in life-writing.

In Joan W. Scott's essay "Experience" she describes experience as "a process... By which subjectivity is constructed,"<sup>618</sup> while Teresa de Lauretis describes the process of constructing subjectivity as the means whereby "one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective those relations—material, economic, and interpersonal—which are in fact social, and, in a larger perspective, historical."<sup>619</sup> Reading these assertions together, "placing oneself...in a social reality" and "experience" are synonymous, and a social reality is inherently relational insofar as it necessitates a coming together of individuals. The experience of transmedial life-writing can therefore be understood as relational subjectivity in practice: by creating a series of texts narrating their life experiences Carter, Palmer, Sanchez and Whythorne have opened their subjectivities to the experiences that their readers can also have, and derive, from their relationships with the texts. So, how do the case studies explore relational subjectivity through life-writing? To answer this question we need to consider what sort of information is being offered to the reading community. In *The Amory Wars* much of the autobiographical content is obscured by fictional

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<sup>617</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, Loc. 2953 of 8270.

<sup>618</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 27.

<sup>619</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 159.

writing in the form of the Science-Fiction epic, and by meta-narrative through layers of embedded focalization. It is the performative element, the way in which the storyworld interpolates its readers, that brings the life-writing component of the text to the reader's attention.

This performative element is also seen in *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*. Whythorne addresses his autobiography to his "good friend," and the book uses the epistolary form as a stage on which Whythorne can position himself as an example of the archetypal man, writing: "When I was a child, I did as a child, and when I was a young man, weening then that young men were as wise as the old experienced men be..., but now I wot, though I am not very old, that there remains many follies in young men."<sup>620</sup> These wisdoms are drawn from his desire to impress his reader, and are influenced by his own position as a reader. The editor, James Osborn, notes that Whythorne's reference to the "follies in young men" is a reference to John Grange's *The Golden Aphroditis*, from 1577,<sup>621</sup> and—given the common book nature of Whythorne's text dominated by quotes and parables drawn from Classical philosophers or the Bible—his desire to position himself as philosophically in accord with these thinkers is analogous to both Carter and Sanchez's attempts to represent themselves as trickster gods, or superheroes. In order to explore relational subjectivity through life-writing the authors locate their identities in relation to social narratives with archetypal force within their communities. Each of these authors highlights the relational impetus behind their life-writing: the experiences and understandings shared between their readers and themselves. However, this idea of life-writing, specifically of autobiography, as extending to the elucidation of shared experiences by encouraging an active form of reading—of being 'writerly'—is often obscured from understandings of what life-writing is, and how it functions.

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<sup>620</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 1.

<sup>621</sup> "Yong men thinks old men fooles, but old men knoweth well/ Yong men are fooles.": John Grange, *The Golden Aphrodite: A pleasant discourse* (London: 1577) Google eBook.

## 6.7 Performance and Performative Life-Writing

The performance and performative aspects of life-writing are seen across the case studies. At a preliminary level, each of the authors is a musician; they all perform their music, including their autobiographical music, to audiences. They also take the performance of their identities in another direction: each author relies on a form of characterisation for their identity. Thomas Whythorne dons the mask of the virtuous man in order to gain his reader's esteem, Claudio Sanchez explores his life experiences through a series of character analogues, Amanda Palmer adopts the persona of Amanda Fucking Palmer in order to differentiate between her Dresden Dolls and independent performer personas, and Sean Carter adopts his persona as Jay-Z, to facilitate access to the narrative realms of archetypes and gods. Carter is the most articulate about the literary function this characterisation provides. He first created the character back in 1996 on his album *Reasonable Doubt*, although the name itself is derived from his childhood nick-name "Jazzy." Carter describes the character as "a conceit, a first-person literary creation,"<sup>622</sup> and he recognises this performance as a practice within hip-hop culture. He asserts that "[the] best rappers use their imaginations to take their own core stories and emotions and feed them into characters who can be even more dramatic or epic or provocative."<sup>623</sup> And it is this characterisation that informs Carter's 'conceit', Jay-Z. In order to develop this character Carter can draw on a plethora of tropes and archetypes, however many of these figures are premised in the intersection created by colonialism and race in the United States, particularly the conflation of the hustler with the old trickster gods. As such, the character of Jay-Z can be read as a way of speaking back to, or critiquing, colonial, white American perspectives of blackness, and of calling out narratives that exclude people of colour from discourses that establish subjectivity.

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<sup>622</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 292.

<sup>623</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 292.

Frantz Fanon addressed this issue in *Black Skin, White Masks*, when he articulated the trauma of performing his self-image as a black man:

I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. ... I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects. ... I took myself far off from my own presence. ... What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?<sup>624</sup>

Fanon's disturbance is borne of a colonising narrative, a story inscribed onto his body by whiteness which seeks to limit and patrol his black experiences, denying him the possibility of searching out new narratives of identity. Homi Bhabha responds to Fanon's agony, affirming that:

The white man's eyes break up the black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed.<sup>625</sup>

Fanon's expression of selfhood is, like Carter's, a self that has a fractured history and is denied sovereignty in and over itself by the force of a colonising ontology. Performing as Jay-Z provides Carter with a way of approaching his subjectivity that is outside of colonial parameters: Jay-Z can perform as subversive by critiquing white America's narratives about African-American urban culture, drawing attention to the deficit of reason implicit in those narratives. Carter demonstrates the practice of life-writing as speaking marginalized subjectivities.

In the final chapters of *Decoded* Carter revisits a number of his motivations for writing the text: to assert that hip-hop lyrics are a form of poetry, to "tell a little bit of the story of [his] generation, [and] to show the context for the choices [they] made at violent and chaotic crossroads in recent history."<sup>626</sup> He asserts that he wanted to demonstrate "how hip-hop created a way to take a very specific and powerful experience and turn it into a story that everyone in the world could feel and relate to."<sup>627</sup> Carter reflects on reconciling these philosophical impetuses at "the

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<sup>624</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110-112.

<sup>625</sup> Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 60.

<sup>626</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 235.

<sup>627</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 236.

moment when [he] fully crossed from one life to another,”<sup>628</sup> meaning, of course, his transition from drug dealer, street-hustler and cipher, to rap artist, boardroom hustler, and Roc-A-Fella mogul. Carter places his autobiographical practices within a sociological context: he maintains that he rapped his lived experiences to tell stories by, and on behalf of, his local community. He writes that “[k]ids like me, the new hustlers, were going through something strange and twisted and had a crazy story to tell. And we needed to hear our story told back to us, so maybe we could start to understand it ourselves.”<sup>629</sup> The relationality of stories is, in this practice, linked to an act of political performance, a making visible of narratives belonging to oppressed and disenfranchised urban and African American masculinity. Carter’s life-writing can be read as a process of bringing a face to his selfhood that has been narrated as outside of the concerns of autobiography, as outside the parameters of legitimised subjectivity. In an article appearing in *The New York Times* in 1999 entitled “The Hip Hop Nation” Touré summarises this performance as relational: “You must be the embodiment of your audience.”<sup>630</sup> He also recognises the political imperative to maintain this performative assertion of agency, proclaiming that “our senator-MC’s speak about themselves, their neighbourhoods, the people around them, playing autobiographer, reporter and oral historian.”<sup>631</sup> Carter performs these roles as Jay-Z when he asserts that his community identity is linked to the character known as the ‘hustler’; he doesn’t just perform this archetype on stage, it is also performative in the Butlerian sense, insofar as it is central to his life narrative. It informs both the stories he tells, and how he is able to tell them. It is his assertion of a community experience that has been *differended*, and through *Decoded* readers are given an opportunity to discern that transmedial life-writing has the potential for exploring a more complete understanding of subjectivity.

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<sup>628</sup> Jay-Z *Decoded*, 236.

<sup>629</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 16-18.

<sup>630</sup> Touré, “The Hip Hop Nation,” in *The Hip Hop Reader*, eds. Tim Strode, and Tim Wood (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 102.

<sup>631</sup> Touré, “The Hip Hop Nation,” 101.

Carter asserts that rapping and hustling are symbiotic, a coming together of art and economics as “two kinds of rhythm working together, having a conversation with each other, doing more together than they could do apart.”<sup>632</sup> In bringing together different narrative forms—the informal hip-hop with the more conservatively literary autobiographical text—*Decoded* offers readers an opportunity to both historically and experientially locate Carter’s lived experiences. Carter recognises that his life-writing as rap is most effective as a means of storytelling when readers are actively involved in deciphering their meanings from the text. He writes:

It’s a tribute to how deeply felt hip-hop is that people don’t just sit back and listen to the music—they have to break it down, pick the lyrics apart, and debate the shit with other fans who are doing the same thing. When people talk about forms of media, sometimes they compare lean-forward media (which are interactive, like video games or the Internet) and lean-back media (which are passive, like television or magazines). Music can be lean-back sort of media, it can just wash over you or play in the background—but hip-hop is different. It forces people to lean forward—lean right out of their chairs—and take a position.<sup>633</sup>

To ‘take a position’ the readers have to, to borrow from Hélène Cixous, put themselves into the text, not just as writers, as Cixous exhorted, but as readers. I have considered how Jay-Z is a ‘conceit’ that assists Carter perform his life-experiences in a literary framework, but he is also an other on whom Carter can draw in order to narrate his subjectivity: this is a symbiosis of self and other.

Carter also demonstrates this synergy between artistic creation and the readers’ responses to the narration of lived-experiences. However, there is a tension between these interests: where in one voice Carter raps “Now the question is, is to have had and lost/Better than not having at all,”<sup>634</sup> and labels this “a shout out” to Alfred, Lord Tennyson,<sup>635</sup> I earlier noted that Carter also recalls a high school friend peeking inside his notebook full of rhymes, and then reciting them at school the

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<sup>632</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 10

<sup>633</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 213.

<sup>634</sup> Jay-Z, “Most Kings,” *Decoded*, 98.

<sup>635</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 99.

following day “like they were his.”<sup>636</sup> The importance of acknowledgement cannot be underestimated in discussions about creativity and ownership, however, it should be noted that Carter used *Decoded* to make this acknowledgement, not the songs or CD sleeves themselves. The rules of ownership, both in relation to storytelling and objects, are still convoluted and confused by a neo-liberal, capitalist discourse. Ownership is aligned with economic agency, virtue, and masculinity,<sup>637</sup> and *Decoded* critiques the associations of legitimised subjectivity with financial success. Carter recognises that within hip-hop culture, but also as part of the broader American context, “success is supposed to be about accumulation and consumption...But the finest meal ends up as shit... Success has to mean something beyond that.”<sup>638</sup> Carter’s life-writing project speaks back to consumerist culture, specifically to a capitalist culture that was built through the exploitation of black bodies:<sup>639</sup> it is an attempt to reflect on how the intersections constituting his socio-performative context operate as a matrix, and considers how his work is constructed to reflect this matrix.

The first axis of the matrix that Carter considers is the community that he grew up in. Carter sings, first and foremost for those people he shares a cultural affinity with, and he wrote *Decoded* in order to contextualise that music for those listeners who live outside of that frame of reference. I previously referred to the letter that poet Kathleen Norris left Carter’s publisher after reading *Decoded*, where she writes “I am just so pleased to be given a better sense of the workings of this vital art form.”<sup>640</sup> Norris positions herself outside of hip-hop as an art-form, and aligns herself with Dickinson and Eliot—poets recognised by the academy as creators of art that shapes Western culture. Norris’ assertion that Carter’s book is “really the story of a life saved, and a book written so that

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<sup>636</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 5.

<sup>637</sup> Jeanne L. Schroeder, *The Triumph of Venus: The Erotics of the Market* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>638</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 103.

<sup>639</sup> I do not have the capacity, nor would it be appropriate for me as white person, to expand on that discussion in this thesis.

<sup>640</sup> Norris, quoted in Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 311.

other kids our society considers ‘throwaways’ might find a way out, another way to live”<sup>641</sup> grates on me more and more every time I read it. In this simple line, she positions Carter as “a throwaway” child, denying worth and value to his lived experiences before he achieved the financial success that gained him acceptance in a predominantly white, capitalist class-system. It highlights latent ideologies among communities that have motivated recent political unrest across the United States, spearheaded after the 2015 murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and encapsulated in the 2015/16 #BlackLivesMatter movement. Hip-Hop is an art-form that highlights the intersectionalities at work in narrating race, class, and gender: it makes visible “the severe economic barriers that increasingly divide ghetto poor blacks from middle- and upper-middle-class blacks.”<sup>642</sup> This is precisely why *Decoded* is directed at readers who are outside of the communities of the sort that Carter grew up in, outside of Touré’s Hip-Hop Nation. By opening his subjectivity, which is already Othered through a matrix of race and class, Carter invites readers to critically evaluate the privileges surrounding their own subjectivities. Carter’s performance of life experiences is autobiography as practice. As such, Norris’ determination as to what she thinks the book is about is appropriately incorporated into the afterword of the extended edition. It becomes part of the storyworld, and performs as a meta-commentary on white colonialist anxieties about African-American culture and community.

### **6.7.1 Transgressing genres: Transmedial life-writing as critical practice**

Anderson, Smith, Watson, Stanton, Mason, and Gilmore write back to the celebration of autobiography as the artistic pinnacle of Western individualism, asserting that such categorisations (which still carry considerable authority in popular understandings of how the genre

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<sup>641</sup> Norris, quoted in Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 311.

<sup>642</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, “The Culture of Hip Hop,” in *This is the Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 63.

functions) privilege a particular iteration of gender, class, and race, and are vested in a politics of exclusion.<sup>643</sup> With Julie Rak, Gilmore shifts the terms of this focus from a question of what autobiography *is* to one that queries what autobiographical discourse *does*. They consider how truth-telling is discursively positioned and “sustained by trappings of identification that have underwritten what the self is and how it has been seen in much of the Western World.”<sup>644</sup> Smith and Watson argue that this rhetorical shift from examining autobiography as a genre to autobiography as a discourse “opens ... the scenes of autobiographical inscription beyond the printed life story.”<sup>645</sup> More importantly, understanding autobiography as discourse opens questions as to how it reinforces or subverts both Foucaultian and Marxist power structures. Such power structures are also open to negotiation because transmediality is a means of writing and reading that can be used to demonstrate both the liminality of cultural production and property ownership, as well as calling into view the ontological instabilities that underlie the taxonomies of discourse. Given the dynamic nature of transmedial texts, and the ways in which the lacuna requires an embodied reading by both readers and authors, it is inappropriate to consider the media that contribute to transmedial storyworlds as independent art-objects: their very potential for subversion is located in the collision between readers’ creative rights and the property rights assigned to art-objects. These representations of subjectivity are therefore not only relational, but are also critical reflections on their own intersectionality. As Linda Anderson notes, implementing this condition is often challenging as such ‘identities’ “can never really be established except as a matter of *intention* on the part of the author”<sup>646</sup> and while this intention might be reasonably inferred by readers in response to the explicitly literary codex engagements with the storyworlds, it is often due to the texts’

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<sup>643</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>644</sup> Julie Rak, *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), ix.

<sup>645</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>646</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 2.

writerlyness that readers can infer one or all these identities across musical, performance and play components of the storyworlds. Intention alone does not speak to the veracity or otherwise of the subjectivity that the author can, as Cavarero notes, only realise through an other's eyes. Rather, the imperative force of authorial intention has been destabilised by postmodernist and deconstruction theory. So how can we reconcile the author's subjectivity through transmedial life-writing? The short answer is that rather than contend with the author's subjectivity, we need to consider their otherness.

In a transmedial context, subjectivity can be the realm of the reader. Anderson asserts that instead of considering the question of what sort of identity is articulated *in* autobiographical writing, we must consider how it is that:

a developmental version of the self, which is also socially and historically specific, has come to provide a way of interpreting the history of the genre: all autobiography, according to this universalizing and prescriptive view, is tending towards a goal, the fulfilment of this one achieved version of itself.<sup>647</sup>

This act of interpretation is not undertaken by the author, but by the reader. However, Anderson notes that, per Jacques Derrida's 'law of genre,'<sup>648</sup> "[w]hat is at stake here ... is not the power of individual texts to transgress the law of genre but rather the way the law of genre can only operate by opening itself to transgression."<sup>649</sup> Transmedial life-writing opens autobiography to this transgressive space by exposing the 'pact' between authors and readers and asking readers to look for truth, instead of having it presented to them. By forcing the reader to reconsider their function, responsibilities, and rights within the autobiographical pact, transmedial life-writing enables a renegotiation of subjectivity and otherness in the storyworld. Ultimately, autobiography "turns itself into a genre in order to 'place' the subject, the 'I', only to be undone by the

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<sup>647</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 9.

<sup>648</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Glyph*, Vol. 7, 1980, 202-229.

<sup>649</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 9-10.

instability and difference already instated within the law.”<sup>650</sup> The instability inherent in ‘I’ as a shifting signifier already indicates that the subjectivity explored in life-writing is a negotiation between the author and the reader. This instability is explored by Carter, who released *Decoded* as a part of a game process. The game process makes the readers’ contribution to the text explicit, as—much like *I*’s shifting signification—the game only exists while it is being played. Carter combined efforts with the search engine Bing, and created a scavenger hunt by hiding all 305 pages of *Decoded* across 200 locations that were significant in his life story. The reader who “decoded” all of the clues as to the pages’ locations was awarded a lifetime pass that gave them, and a friend, free access to every Jay-Z show for the rest of their lives.<sup>651</sup> This game situates Carter as a writer with authority, the one who has knowledge of what needs to be decoded.<sup>652</sup>

This assertion of subjectivity is reflected in his writing, where he situates himself as the author with intention, disregarding interpretations of his work that conflict with his own readings. This position was made most evident in one of his most famous songs, “99 Problems,” which has been hailed as “a well produced and well written story of an urban, working-class Black male life.”<sup>653</sup> The offending lyrics constitute the refrain, “if you’re having girl problems, I feel bad for your son, I got 99 problems but a bitch ain’t one.” Carter asserts that the controversial line is actually salient to the second verse, and is a reference to the absence of a police K9 unit during an exchange with a police officer:

The hook itself—99 problems but a bitch ain’t [*sic*] one—is a joke, bait for lazy critics. At no point in that song am I talking about a girl... And the joke is still potent. It’s hard to beat the entertainment

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<sup>650</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 10; I appropriate this understanding of autobiographical practice, and expand upon this intersection between narrative “placement” and subjectivity in the third chapter.

<sup>651</sup> Sheila Marikar, “Jay-Z’s ‘Decoded’: From Hip-Hop to Barack and Beyond,” abcnews.com, accessed 14/05/2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/jay-zs-decoded-hip-hop-barack/story?id=12156033>.

<sup>652</sup> I am not pursuing an inquiry of the corporate aspects of this collaboration as part of this research.

<sup>653</sup> Linda Chavers, “The Spot in the Mirror: The Role of Gender in Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*,” *Annals of the Next Generation*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fall, 2013), 21.

value of people who deliberately misunderstood the word, people dying to be insulted, running around looking for a bullet to get in front of.<sup>654</sup>

Carter's assertion that "[a]t no point in that song am I talking about a girl," that it is, in fact, about a police dog, can itself be readily critiqued: first, and foremost, the word "bitch" is juxtaposed with the word "girl" in the refrain, not with the word dog, not with a signifier for the law, and it is this correlation that creates an association with women and lends the word its derogatory power. The only point in the song where "bitch" is correlated with the law is at the end of the second verse where Carter rhymes:

"We'll see how smart you are when the K-9's come"  
I got 99 problems but a bitch ain't one.

This is the only point in the song where the word "bitch" is associated with the law, as signified by the reference to the K-9 unit. However, even with this correlation the music video cuts from a scene between the character Jay-Z and a police officer at the precise moment that Jay-Z sings "bitch" and brings up an image of three scantily-dressed women, gyrating:



Figure 6.1: Still from Jay-Z, "99 Problems," youtube.com, accessed 08/02/2015.

Secondly, the refrain itself is borrowed from Ice-T's song "99 Problems" from of his 1993 *Home Invasion*<sup>655</sup> album. The song's lyrics include the following:

I got a bitch that's old, a bitch that's new,  
A bitch who love velvet in the colours blue,

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<sup>654</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 61.

<sup>655</sup> Ice-T, *Home Invasion*, 1992, CD.

I got a bitch who's fat, a bitch who's built,  
 A bitch who all her titties give out powdered milk,  
 I got a bitch who's funny, a bitch who ain't,  
 A bitch who can sing, a bitch who cain't,  
 A bitch who loves fuckin' on a airplane.  
 I even got a bitch off "Soul Train,"  
 I got a bitch who rolls a rag-top Benz.  
 Long ends.  
 I got a bitch who's broke as a bum,  
 But she's the most fun.  
 I got a bitch who play piano, a bitch who don't,  
 A bitch who dances naked, a bitch who won't,  
 A bitch who's short, a bitch who's tall,  
 A bitch who burns my pager with priority calls,  
 And I love 'em all, I love 'em crazily  
 And they love me back—that's why they stay with me.  
 So, if you havin' girl problems, I feel bad for you son  
 Got 99 problems and a bitch ain't one—hit me.<sup>656</sup>

In this excerpt the word bitch is used to designate women with varying skills and interests. It is used to collectively reduce women to a singular experience of femininity as a sex object for the male heterosexual gaze despite, or perhaps in spite, of their unique experiences and embodiments of womanhood. The song has its cultural roots in playing the dozens, a lyrical form of boasting, most well-known for the "Yo' Mama" tradition of humour. However, as Kimberlé Crenshaw notes in her article "Beyond Racism and Misogyny," "[s]exual humour in which women are objectified... to serve whatever male-bonding/male competition needs men have subordinates women."<sup>657</sup> Given the intertextual reference within Carter's song to Ice-T's song of the same name, it seems disingenuous to suggest that the song does not invoke misogynistic language, even if it is as a shibboleth to separate privileged listeners from working-class African American listeners. Instead it is necessary to understand the song's relationship to the aesthetic elements of gangsta-rap that do reiterate the hierarchies of gender, sexuality and class that permeate the art-form in order to consider whether they are satirical, or merely ideologically conventional.

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<sup>656</sup> Ice-T, "99 Problems," *Home Invasion*.

<sup>657</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew," in *The Hip Hop Reader*, 126.

The word “bitch” has dual meanings; both its colloquial meaning of “woman” and as a password for to readers who share the author’s intention. It acts as a divider between those listeners who critique the use of bitch, and those who maintain that this criticism is invalid because it does not account for Carter’s intention. While this claim is curious in a transmedial context, it is not entirely unsurprising. I have already noted that the tradition of privileging Carter’s ‘intended’ meaning turns on the influential modernist fiction that posits the author as a unique and original subject. However, it does not take into account those relationships and narratives that we have already considered as giving shape to an individual. Even read at its most generous, Carter’s assertion that “99 problems” is not about having a girl, but about having a raft of other “problems” instead still carries a misogynistic overtone: the inference that a “bitch” is synonymous with a “problem” still suggests that women, as a synonym for ‘bitches’ are a problematic infraction on masculinised access to a comfortable life experience, and is unsubtle at best. Ultimately, Carter’s assertion that “bitch” is a reference to police sniffer-dogs suggests a reading of his own work that fails to account for some pervasive misogynistic undercurrents in the hip-hop genre he dabbles in. He locates this signification as a type of knowingness, as a joke: the reader has to share the songwriter’s intention to cast ‘bitch’ as an empty or shifted signifier, all the while being aware that there are readers who will attribute the usual colloquial signification to the word. Carter is clearly inconsistent in his approach to authorial intention. Where the previous quote indicates that he intends to control the meaning of his music, he also acknowledges that readers’ responses are integral to the interpretation process. He notes that his rap lyrics are “dense with multiple meanings,” but he still privileges the writer’s intentions regarding what those plural understandings are.<sup>658</sup> The implication is that these meanings will only be uncovered by readers who are within the hip

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<sup>658</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 54.

hop nation, and that the readings proffered by those individuals outside of the community will be flawed. He elaborates:

Great rap should have all kinds of unresolved layers that you don't necessarily figure out the first time you hear it. But great rap retains mystery. It leaves shit rattling around in your head that won't make sense until the fifth or sixth time through. It challenges you.<sup>659</sup>

Autobiography, specifically transmedial autobiography, operates in a similar fashion: the multifaceted representations of identity require that readers read beyond mere significations and representations of experience, and implement an alternative dynamic: one that inverts traditional associations of where readers and writers are positioned in relation to the subject of autobiographical writing. Transmedial storytelling does not have to create a space that is only for isolated agents who are insulated from their societies and cultures. In fact, the permeable and shifting discursive space explored in transmedial life-writing enables the exploration of both life-narratives as relational and narrated, as well as offering the opportunity to critically engage with the genre. I concur with Miller's assertion that "[by] turning its authorial voice into spectacle, personal writing theorizes the stakes of its own performance: a personal materialism."<sup>660</sup> When readers work with authors in a performance of life-experiences, and interrogate the authority of the conflicting histories offered by the stakeholders in the storyworld, they engage in the practice required to manifest the storyworld as an influence on their own lived experiences. In transmedial life-writing, it is therefore the reader's and not the author's subjectivity that is at stake.

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<sup>659</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 54.

<sup>660</sup> Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 24.

## **7 INHABITING 'I': LIFE-READING, TRANSMEDIALITY, & EMBODIMENT.**

We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank  
white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom.

We lived in the gaps between the stories.

—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

## 7.1 The Art of Life-Reading

The role of the reader in transmedial life-writing is uncertain: they are neither exclusively a producer nor a consumer of the texts. Instead they inhabit the liminal status of a prosumer, which is legally and economically fraught. Transmedial life-writing offers a unique take on how readers who perform as prosumers can have a material effect on the storyworld, and subsequently, on the author. This is because transmedial life-writing is an ongoing performance of identity that fluctuates in response to its audience: it revolves around the telling of experiences, reflections on how those experiences have shaped the subjects' perspective of themselves, and the recognition that other readers will draw different understandings from those life narratives on the basis of their own experiences and understandings. It is autobiography-as-action, not merely as a product. The 'action' is not exclusively the labour of the author; it is shared with readers. Transmedial life-writing can therefore enable the author to release textual control to readers, and this troubles Nancy Miller's claim that life-writing is "the solitary ego asserting the right (or need) to take up room in the public spaces of reading and writing."<sup>661</sup> Rather, it is a process of identity formation through both narrative practice and relationship building.

This narrational and relational approach to life-writing is expanded upon by the genre's openness to a number of different ways of narrating 'truth', including metaphor, and also incorporating practices associated with fiction writing into the autobiographical genre. It is acceptable for authors to draw on their lived-experiences to "flesh-out" their fiction writing, to write what they know, but to build a life-story with reference to narratological conventions associated with fiction is often considered a betrayal of the Lejeune's autobiographical pact.<sup>662</sup> The praxis approach to life-writing is supported by contemporary critics who

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<sup>661</sup> Nancy K. Miller, *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 125.

<sup>662</sup> Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Contract," 201.

are less likely to read an autobiographical text as a collection of facts, and instead are “more likely to see [it] as [an] imaginative form.”<sup>663</sup> Darrel Mansell goes so far as to assert that “there are no grounds for an essential distinction between autobiography and fiction”<sup>664</sup> and this is often reflected in contemporary critical studies that read autobiography for perspectives, rather than for representations and it is this refocus that is salient for transmedial life-writing. By making space for the truthfulness of perspectives, as well as considering the accurateness of representations, readers are confronted with the author’s viewpoint of their subjectivity, rather than with a simulation of it. This means that such readers of transmedial life-writing might choose to approach that perspective as outside of the author’s subjectivity: as an expression of otherness. The reader’s subjectivity incorporates that otherness into their own perspective, and reading the Othered-self is a radical recognition that identity is formed in relation to other identities as well as in response to cultures and societies. Does this recognition of otherness make transmedial life-writing a critical practice that examines *how one lives as part of a social context*, rather than as forms of “self-description or self-presentation”<sup>665</sup>? And if so, how can authors and readers ethically engage with each other, and the storyworld?

## 7.2 Reading as Social Resistance

It is practical to approach transmedial life-writing as an examination of social context: it juxtaposes both the achievements of the public figure—in this instance their music—with a reflection on how that achievement was accomplished, and an examination of the power dynamics that frame the public figure’s lived experiences. It also invites readers to examine their own creative endeavours and lived-experiences

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<sup>663</sup> Robert Bell, “Autobiography and Literary Criticism,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (June 1985), 191.

<sup>664</sup> Darrel Mansell, “Unsettling the Colonel’s Hash “Fact” in Autobiography,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 37, (1976): 127.

<sup>665</sup> Zachary Leader, *On Life Writing*, 3.

through a critical lens in order to consider how their own creative endeavours respond to culture and society. In this section I consider the political imperative to read life-writing as an act of resistance. This act of resistance is initially in response to characterisations of the subject as whole, coherent and independent, but it can (and should) be abstracted to account for a resistance to the systemic oppressions that result from discourses that privilege the sovereign subject over other experiences and narrations of subjectivity. In *Autobiographics*, Gilmore asserts that:

Our notion of the autobiographical is bound up in our notions of authenticity and the real, of confession and testimony, of the power and necessity to speak, and of the institutional bases of power which impose silence.<sup>666</sup>

This claim suggests that the “canon representative of self life writings”<sup>667</sup> has excluded voices, such as slave narratives, domestic narratives, coming-of-age, travel narratives, and (of course) women’s writing,<sup>668</sup> in order to preserve a particular narrative of the *real* that reinforces a hierarchy of subjective experiences. One of the main ways that such texts are regulated is by questioning their ability to convey knowledge, rather than subjective experience. The accepted scholarly description of life-writing positions life-writers as “subjects of historically and culturally specific understandings of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency, [who] both reproduce the various ways in which they have been culturally read and critique the limits of cultural modes of self-narrating.”<sup>669</sup> However, conservative scholars articulated highly influential definitions of autobiography which positioned life-writing as a window into the universal condition of human experience, through an individual experience. These definitions are still more aligned with the subject articulated by regulatory ontologies (such as law) and therefore, while they are considered a throwback in life-writing scholarship, they might still influence those jurisdictions which shape

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<sup>666</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 80.

<sup>667</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>668</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3

<sup>669</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 253.

transmedial encounters with the genre, and it is therefore necessary to understand how such narratives might inform the regulatory ontology. For example, Roy Pascal wrote in his 1960 treatise *Design and Truth in Autobiography* that autobiographical writing “[satisfies] a legitimate curiosity about the ways of men,”<sup>670</sup> suggesting that an individual life could be read for its universal qualities. However, this definition again elides the role of the reader, and of the broader culture, in laying out its perimeters. This focus on sovereign experience is echoed in those laws which align legal agency with a universalising imagined or real person, without recognising the effect of culture and community upon the creative process. Similarly, James Olney wrote in his highly influential book, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, that:

What is... of particular interest to us in a consideration of the creative achievements of individual men and the relationship of those achievements to a life lived, on the one hand, and an autobiography of that life on the other is... the isolate uniqueness that nearly everyone agrees to be the primary quality and condition of the individual and his experiences.<sup>671</sup>

Again, Olney’s reference to ‘isolate uniqueness’ infers a privilege to expressions of sovereign rather than relational subjectivity, and suggests this self-narrative is accepted by ‘nearly everyone.’ Both Olney and Pascal do, however, consider autobiography as invoked through the readers’ curiosity and consideration. Although Olney and Pascal were the product of a “new wave” of critical literary studies that emerged in the 1960s and 70s, their suppositions about autobiographical power and value have an ongoing influence on contemporary criticism and popular understandings of autobiography, as evidenced in such influential work as Philippe LeJeune’s writing on the ‘autobiographical pact.’<sup>672</sup> These writers are concerned with regulating the writing and reading of life-writing to account for a homogenous experience of subjectivity. Further, this elision

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<sup>670</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 1.

<sup>671</sup> Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, 20-21.

<sup>672</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*: More than this, these accounts of subjectivity accord with the types of subjectivities that are narrated through regulatory discourses such as law and economics.

of difference allows readers, critics and publishers to relegate the autobiographical work of writers who subvert the genre's form to its fringe, thereby effectively silencing their experiences, and practices. This process is demonstrated by Olney and Pascal in their marginalisation of writing styles such as the diary or letters,<sup>673</sup> which are literary styles that are typically associated with feminised literature.<sup>674</sup> Such definitions presumed that an interest in the life experiences of a particular class of individuals—men who have been publicly recognised for their achievements—was universal and natural. Unsurprisingly, this is the same class of individuals whose intersectional identities are privileged under those discourses with taxonomic force, such as the law, economics, medicine, and religion. Given these discourses regulate society no less (and possibly more) than they did during the time of the “new wave” critics who had such influence on contemporary autobiographical studies, it is important to understand the framework that legitimises certain creative expressions with economic force and legal protection, and ostracises other creative expressions.

Marginalised texts often face allegations of untruthfulness, with differing accounts of minutiae being used as evidence to call their authenticity, and legitimacy into question.<sup>675</sup> By taking into account the importance of perspective, as well as representation, across life-writing texts, particularly those texts that set the standards by which ‘legitimate’ autobiography is judged, readers can counter dominant narrative practices that regulate identity through exclusion. One of the methods used to silence these narratives is to conflate them with fiction writing. Life-writing that blurs the boundaries of the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’ is often not categorised as life-writing, and instead is framed as fiction: its concerns and commentaries are situated as frivolous, and it is denied

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<sup>673</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>674</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 34; Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 202; Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*.

<sup>675</sup> Sue Campbell, “‘False’ Memory and Personal Identity,” *Hypatia*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (Spring 1997), 51-82; James Olney, “I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and Literature,” *Callaloo*, No. 20 (Winter, 1984), 46-73.

legitimacy as a 'knowable' truth. While the autobiographer's central idea might be the shape of their life as they see it, their writing is often contextualised by either outright fictions, as in *The Amory Wars*, or *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*, or heightened realities, as in *Decoded* and *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*. In order to engage with such stories as life-writing, readers have to make a choice to renegotiate the boundaries and limitations set by genre, and to challenge systems that structure the way we talk about and understand subjectivity. In the following section I consider different ways in which Carter, Whythorne, and Sanchez have utilised practices associated with fiction-writing in their life-writing.

Drawing on the membrane of fiction allows the writers to refer to archetypes and stock narratives that are particular to their cultural and community practice, whether by drawing on motifs and tropes that are associated with fairy and folk tales, or with genre-fiction. This provides the readers with a narratological short-hand that they can draw on to contextualise the life-writing. Shawn Carter recognises music's potential as a site in which he can construct life stories that reflect a communal, rather than a sovereign, experience of reality. Carter's art-form, rap, is an artistic practice that developed in order to give voice to a working-class black community that is otherwise underrepresented or elided completely in mainstream media. It draws on traditions of community, variously articulated as a cipher, posse, or gang, and more broadly invoked as one's 'hood or borough.<sup>676</sup> Carter's raps are richly intertextual: they include references to literature, music, history, politics, economics, and popular culture. He plays with language and exercises poetic license (or braggadocio<sup>677</sup>) to explore the emotional truths he shares with his readers. An example of this is found in one of Carter's most popular tracks, "99 Problems":

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<sup>676</sup> If one is kickin' it East-side.

<sup>677</sup> Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009).

I got the rap patrol on the gat patrol  
 Foes that wanna make sure my casket's closed  
 Rap critics that say he's "Money Cash Hoes"  
 I'm from the hood stupid, what type of facts are those?  
 If you grew up with holes in your zapatos  
 You'd celebrate the minute you was having dough.  
 I'm like: fuck critics, you can kiss my whole asshole  
 If you don't like my lyrics you can press fast forward  
 Got beef with radio if I don't play they show  
 They don't play my hits, well I don't give a shit, so  
 Rap mags try and use my black ass  
 So advertisers can give 'em more cash for ads...fuckers  
 I don't know what you take me as  
 or understand the intelligence that Jay-Z has  
 I'm from rags to riches, nigga, I ain't dumb.  
 I got 99 problems but a bitch ain't one.  
 Hit me.

In this first verse of the song Carter provides an outline of his career progression and the antagonisms that his art-form faces from the mainstream media. He responds to critics who take issue with his lyrical lauding of consumerism with the accusation that "If you grew up with holes in your zapatos/ You'd celebrate the minute you was having dough." Carter invokes vernacular African-American English, the "you was having" rather than "you had" establishes a cultural divide between Carter and his critics. He invites them to focus their attentions on other art-forms by "pressing fast-forward" on his tracks. He also recognises that he is commodified by those who would criticise his capitalist sensibilities, calling out "Rap mags try and use my black ass/ So advertisers can give 'em more cash for ads." However, most tellingly for this examination, Carter directly addresses his readers, acknowledging: "I don't know what you take me as." The verb "take" connotes that the audience possesses Carter, that, through the transaction of performance, they take ownership of his simulated identity, and this reinforces the idea of a communal experience of both perspectives.

In the second verse, recounted in the previous chapter, Carter expands on his narrative as based in truths recognised by his community. He revisits stories narrated about the communal experiences of working class African-American communities. He purports that the song "99 Problems" recounts the tension between regulatory authorities and

working class African-American communities, and this tension is brought to the fore in this verse. Although the song was released in 2003, it is a commentary that reads as just as saliently today, especially given the spate of killings of unarmed black men and youths by police between 2013 and 2015. The crime of “driving while black”<sup>678</sup> has long been an issue that signifies the tensions between white and African-American communities in the United States. The fact that the ‘real events’ are elaborated on doesn’t interfere with the truth that the story presents: there is a power imbalance between police and African-American communities such that police cannot be entrusted with protecting and serving that community. Instead, they pose a threat to its security and well-being. If anything, hip-hop is the linguistically appropriate way to report such events, and “99 Problems” is evidence of Carter’s fluency in hip-hop culture. Robin Kelley discusses the issue of exaggeration and bragging in hip-hop, and argues that “playfulness and storytelling” are central to African-American vernacular culture:

[V]iolent lyrics in rap music are rarely meant to be literal. Rather, they are more often than not metaphors to challenge competitors on the microphone. The mic becomes a Tech-9 or AK-47, imagined drive-bys occur from the stage, flowing lyrics become hollow-point shells... Moreover, exaggerated and invented boasts of criminal acts should sometimes be regarded as part of a larger set of signifying practices. Growing out of a much older set of cultural practices, these masculinist narratives are essentially verbal duels over who is the “baddest.” They are not meant as literal descriptions of violence and aggression, but connote the playful use of language itself.<sup>679</sup>

I examined this “playful’ approach to language in the previous chapter in relation to the refrain from “99 Problems.” This linguistic playfulness is inherited from verbal trickster games, such as the dozens, which were practiced by Carter and his peers as they hustled on street corners, and is

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<sup>678</sup> The phrase describes a phenomenon where police officers stop, question, and even search African-American drivers who have not committed a crime, with the excuse of a traffic offense: David A. Harris, “The Stories, the Statistics, and the Law: Why Driving While Black Matters,” *Minnesota Law Review* (1999-2000), Vol.84, 265.

<sup>679</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, “Looking for the “Real” Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto,” in *That's the Joint!*, 130.

an example of the ways in which hip-hop is an art-form which demands a response from its listeners. The 'Hustler' can be understood as a trope that rappers can invoke in order to frame their socio-economic context, or to purport an affinity with urban African-American working-class communities. It gains its archetypal force from the ways in which black bodies are narrated in regulatory discourses that are constructed by predominantly white bodies. This also positions readers as participants in the cypher, drawing them into the artistic community.

In *Decoded*, Carter elucidates on the intersectionality between his life as a rapper and his life as a hustler by responding to criticisms of the song "99 Problems." He elaborates on the culture of word play that informs hip-hop music:

Poets and hustlers play with language, because for them simple clarity can mean failure. They bend language, improvise, and invent new ways of speaking the truth... if you get caught up on the hook of the song you miss something. Because between the incendiary choruses... is a not-quite-true story. The story-like language used to tell it-has multiple angles. It's a story about the anxiety of hustling, the way little moments can suddenly turn into life-or-death situations. It's about being stopped by cops with a trunk full of coke, but also about the larger presumption of guilt from the cradle that leads you to having the crack in your trunk in the first place. But forget the sermon: this isn't a song written from a soapbox, it's written from the front seat of a Maxima speeding down the highway with a trunk full of trouble.<sup>680</sup>

Carter concedes that, while based on a true story, the narrative is fictional:<sup>681</sup> he leaves a space for the readers to determine which parts of the song are telling the truth, and which parts are telling the story, and where they overlap. It is a means of exploring that "the realities and truths that hip hop reveals are not the transcendental external varieties of traditional philosophy, but rather the mutable yet coercive facts and patterns of the material, sociohistorical world."<sup>682</sup> Indeed, this seems to talk back to theorists such as Weintraub and Olney, by demonstrating that the experience of subjectivity varies across material and social contexts.

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<sup>680</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 56-57.

<sup>681</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 83.

<sup>682</sup> Richard Schusterman, "Challenging Conventions in the Fine Art of Rap," *That's the Joint!*, 464.

As such, it is the readers' ability to read and critically engage with their socio-historical context that can reinvigorate life-writing.

The author's status as a reader is integral to hip-hop. In "The Hip-Hop Nation" Touré elaborates:

Unlike rhythm-and-blues, hip-hop has a strong memoristic impulse, meaning our senator-MC's speak about themselves, their neighbourhoods, the people around them, playing autobiographer, reporter and oral historian. Telling the stories as they actually happened is what is meant by the catch phrase keeping it real. Outsiders laugh when that hallowed phrase is seemingly made hollow by self-mythologising—materialistic boasts that would be beyond even the Donald or the tales of crime that would be envied by a Gotti. But this bragging is merely people speaking of the people they dream of being, which, of course, is a reflection of the people they are.<sup>683</sup>

The aspirational elements to hip-hop that Touré refers to are the same "masculinist narratives" of "badness" that Kelley identifies. This "badness" is essentially a demand for respect among a group of people who have been systematically alienated and marginalized from the middle-class privileges of personal autonomy, economic stability, and political agency that are associated with "The American Dream." Carter surveys these feelings of disenfranchisement in "American Dreamin'." The rap opens with the line, "This is the shit you dream about," a call to the audience that situates them within the rap as the figures who share these desires that he narrates. He goes on to juxtapose a series of fractures from capitalism that are the result of being too poor to partake in the system: for example, the narrator is too poor to afford "pies" or food, but still daydreams about "rides" or cars. He also critiques middle-class aspirations vested in ideological assimilation:

Mama forgive me, should be thinking 'bout Harvard  
But that's too far away, niggas are starving.  
Ain't nothin' wrong with aim, just gotta change the target.<sup>684</sup>

This rhyme sets up the idea that the path to the American Dream can't be achieved by socially sanctioned means such as a college education and

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<sup>683</sup> Touré, "The Hip-Hop Nation," in *The Hip-Hop Reader*, 101.

<sup>684</sup> Jay-Z, "American Dreamin'," *American Gangster*, (2007), CD.

subsequent employment—if the narrator can’t afford dinner, there’s no way he can afford American college fees—instead the narrator turns to hustling as a way of achieving personal autonomy, economic stability, and the political agency that often follows the former. It also positions middle and upper class aspirations as a type of “white-collar” hustle, an image that is emblematic of the ways in which marginalised others in the United States have adopted the language of gangsta rap to signify socio-economic mobility.<sup>685</sup> Therefore the reader’s ability to read across socio-economic contexts gives this narrative both its shape and impetus.

Carter’s hip-hop creates an inspirational narrative premised on his reading of the ideologies that underwrite white American culture. The text is polyvalent, insofar as it can be read as both a treatise supporting dominant ideologies, and also as a critique of those ideologies. However, the choice to either read the text as ideologically reiterative, or as ironic is a choice that is left to the reader. This is an example of the social resistance that readers *can*, but admittedly are not compelled, to apply to *Decoded* as an example of transmedial life-writing. This resistance is nowhere more evident than in Carter’s interrogation of consumerism, particularly its association with virtue. It is a rhetoric that has seen him both demonised and embraced by conservative and capitalist pundits. For example, Rush Limbaugh (hypocritically) critiqued the misogyny in “99 Problems,” while Sonnie Johnson, a political pundit, argues that songs such as “Justify my Thug” advocate conservative principles such as limited government, individualism, and constitutional preservation.<sup>686</sup> Steve Forbes of *Forbes* magazine aligns Carter with pillars of white-American capitalism: Steve Jobs, Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, and Thomas Edison.<sup>687</sup> Carter is narrated as performing virtues such as entrepreneurial passion,

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<sup>685</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin, “Black Empires, White Desires,” *That’s the Joint!*, 161.

<sup>686</sup> Taylor Walters, “Rap is aligned with conservative principles, says pundit,” [campusreform.org](http://campusreform.org), accessed 05/03/2015, [www.campusreform.org/?ID=5999](http://www.campusreform.org/?ID=5999).

<sup>687</sup> Steve Forbes “Jay-Z: A Lesson On The Power Of Entrepreneurial Capitalism,” [forbes.com](http://forbes.com), accessed 02/01/2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/steveforbes/2012/09/05/jay-z-and-the-power-of-entrepreneurial-capitalism/>

‘independent’ creativity, “iron-willed self-discipline,” the control of self and others, and risk-taking, all personality markers that are celebrated in the dominant American economic discourse.<sup>688</sup> By positioning his narrative in a cultural tradition of braggadocio, and of archetypal characters, Carter calls forth the history of racial oppression that frames his access to, and defiance of, a capitalist structure built on the labour and dehumanisation of black bodies. Carter’s life-writing can be read for both its critique, and its embrace, of these cultural practices.

Carter’s rhetoric also leans toward elements associated with transmedial franchising over transmedial storytelling, and this challenges narratives that associate economic privilege with whiteness. He discusses how the narrative associated with his recordings incorporates a level of branding. Unlike the franchising generally associated with transmedial storytelling, which focuses on the creation of products derived from the storyworld, Carter brands his narrative by associating the storyworld with pre-existing products. Branding speaks to the capitalist aspirations that have come to underpin particular genres of hip-hop. The iconography of this capitalist discourse, including luxury items, subsequently came to feature as signifiers for whiteness, and social and economic privilege. Speaking of Cristal champagne, Carter writes:

We gave brands a narrative, which is one of the reasons anyone buys anything: to own not just a product, but to become part of a story. Cristal, before hip-hop, had a nice story attached to it: It was a quality, premium luxury brand known to connoisseurs. But hip-hop gave it a deeper meaning. Suddenly, Cristal didn’t just signify the good life, but the good life laced with hip-hop’s values: subversive, self-made, audacious, even a little dangerous. The word itself—Cristal—took on a new dimension. It wasn’t just a premium champagne anymore—it was a prop in an exciting story, a portal into a whole world. Just by drinking it, we infused their product with our story, an ingredient that they could never bottle on their own.<sup>689</sup>

This excerpt is evidence of a transactional approach to consumerism, one where the social, rather than economic, value of the icon is renegotiated

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<sup>688</sup> Forbes, “Jay-Z: A Lesson On The Power Of Entrepreneurial Capitalism.”

<sup>689</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 84.

between the producer and the consumer, in a process akin to prosumption. Like transmedial storytelling, which operates with the frameworks offered by folk storytelling traditions, hip-hop is a genre that appropriates popular texts and adapts them to reflect hip-hop sensibilities. In this particular excerpt the expensive champagne takes on a similar signification to, for example, a glass slipper: it is a key to wealth and privilege. This association with privilege through proximity speaks to the cultural anxieties of disenfranchised urban American communities. It is an art style that is invested in the author's role as a reader of their culture.

Transmediality and hip-hop are both narrative forms that rely on reimagining narratives already told. The reader is therefore invited to frame their approach to the text in light of those existing narratives. In his analysis of remix-culture and hip-hop, Mark Anthony Neal notes that the process of remixing culture has significant cultural and econo-legal ramifications: "[t]his phenomenon contextually questions, and ultimately undermines the notion of corporate ownership of popular music."<sup>690</sup> This subversive state is also identified by Harvey in relation to transmedia narratives. He asserts that the reader's memory of the transmedial storyworld "is circumscribed by the existence and non-existence of legal arrangements concerning IP rights."<sup>691</sup> This suggests that both hip-hop and transmedia are art forms that rely on collaboration between writers and readers.

The issue of reading culture is fundamental to narrating subjectivity, and Carter positions himself as a reader of the American zeitgeist, specialising in "corporate capitalism, mindless materialism and pop culture"<sup>692</sup> as expounded in the gangsta rap genre. He incorporates practices into his rapping that are associated with that culture, such as

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<sup>690</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, "Sold Out on Soul: the Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music," in *The Hip Hop Reader*, 80.

<sup>691</sup> Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 201.

<sup>692</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, "Gangsta Rap and American Culture," *Hip Hip Reader*, 180.

boasting, misogyny, and references to drug culture: he is one of many rappers telling the same, or similar, stories. The cumulative effect of these stories is where they gain their reiterative power. In “Hip-Hop Feminist,” Joan Morgan writes that “Truth can’t be found in the voice of any one rapper but in the juxtaposition of many”:<sup>693</sup> the author is a part of this community of storytellers and listeners, and the experiences that Carter narrates in his music contribute to a gallery of “compelling portraits of real social and economic suffering”<sup>694</sup> experienced by the broader community, juxtaposed with narratives that suggest the American Dream is just a hustle away. As such, Carter is able to exploit the boundaries between life-writing and fiction by emphasising hip-hop’s cultural history of playful exaggeration. He draws on braggadocio in particular to demonstrate linguistic proficiency that signifies self-education and performs as an action of knowledge-as-power. Marilyn Metta notes that such stories practices are “embedded in power relations”<sup>695</sup> and help readers to “unpack the individual identities, stories and themes and locate them within specific historical, social and cultural systems of power relations and knowledge-making.”<sup>696</sup> This opens a narrative mode to readers that is “adequate to the complexity of narrating life at various moments of paradigm shift.”<sup>697</sup> The paradigm shift in question is one that places readers in a more prominent position in relation to the storyworld: readers can shape the author’s on-going life-narrative by drawing on already existing cultural and narratological practices and performances. How can readers use that new influence in their interactions with transmedial life-writing?

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<sup>693</sup> Joan Morgan, “Hip-Hop Feminist,” *That’s the Joint!*, 281.

<sup>694</sup> Dyson, “Gangsta Rap and American Culture,” 175.

<sup>695</sup> Marilyn Metta, *Writing Against, Alongside and Beyond Memory: Lifewriting as Reflexive, Poststructuralist Feminist Research Practice*, (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2010), 24.

<sup>696</sup> Metta, *Writing Against, Alongside and Beyond Memory*, 24.

<sup>697</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 9.

### 7.3 Seeing Through Time: Readers and Time

Roy Pascal asserts that “true autobiography” is “a review of a life from a particular moment in time.”<sup>698</sup> In transmedial autobiographical practice this moment in time is fluid, while the author’s writing might be retrospective. The fact that the narrative is ongoing means that the authors are continually reflecting on their art, as well as life, which is open to influence from their readers. As such, it is more appropriate to locate this moment in time with the reader rather than the author, because it is the reader who decides through which texts they enter the storyworld. Pascal considers this life-review the result of “[altered] judgements”<sup>699</sup> and the realisation of “new significances that escaped [the author] at the time”<sup>700</sup> or a process of “considered judgement.”<sup>701</sup> While his subjectivist understanding of life-writing is often criticised for “[elevating] certain modes of self-representational texts, like autobiography, to the devaluation of others, like memoir,”<sup>702</sup> it is not unreasonable, in my estimation, to make the same claim that Pascal makes regarding the writer’s ability to reflect on and amend their life-writing, with regards to the reader: they come to the author’s life with significances that the author may not bring to their own interaction with the text. I maintain that the reader can approach the storyworld *with a view to the author’s otherness* in order to “[emphasize] the fact that the reading public is diverse.”<sup>703</sup> The author’s considerations of otherness speaks to the truths about otherness that are inaccessible to the author. Pascal does not see a need for “truth” in autobiography as “all autobiographies have their problems in this respect,”<sup>704</sup> however an agential life-reading might reconsider truth as perspective rather than

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<sup>698</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>699</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 4.

<sup>700</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 4.

<sup>701</sup> R.H.S. Crossman, “Review” in *The New Statesmen*, Feb 23 1957.

<sup>702</sup> Nicole Stamant, *Serial Memoir: Archiving American Lives*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

<sup>703</sup> Lauren Rusk, *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, and Winterson*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2002), 7. Kindle eBook.

<sup>704</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 6.

representations. This perspective can be shaped by the reader's point of view.

The reader's point of view can shape their experience of the storyworld. In a transactional theory of reading the reader and the text are not "separate, self-contained, and already defined entities acting on one another"<sup>705</sup> (Rosenblatt uses the example of colliding billiard balls), rather "transaction" indicates "an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are... [a]spects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other."<sup>706</sup> This suggests that the reader's own experience of truth is read with, and as, the text: reader and text are open to, or form a world for, each other. The author is also positioned as a reader in their own right, who "absorbs the linguistic and literary conventions of their culture"<sup>707</sup> and responds to them through their art.

#### 7.4 Time after Time: Readers and Negotiation

Drawing on Marlene Kadar's description of life-writing as "texts that are written by an author who does not continuously write about someone else, and who does not pretend to be absent from"<sup>708</sup> the story, and applying it to a transmedial context, it might be argued that each medial iteration offers multiple simultaneous 'moments' that readers can access at any time. I have suggested that when a transmedial text is read as part of an (often expanding) whole, the temporal qualifier is no longer associated with the relationship between the author and the text, but instead the text is opened such that the reader can determine their own temporal relationship with the text. As the lacuna allows readers to embody a less linear concept of temporality—it presents narratives as a series of moments that can be entered into at any point, without regard for chronology—the only meaningful temporality in relation to the

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<sup>705</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 17.

<sup>706</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 17.

<sup>707</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, the Poem*, 20.

<sup>708</sup> Marlene Kadar, *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 10.

storyworld is the one experienced by the reader in their relationship with the text.

This temporality is, as I discussed in the chapter addressing lacunae in transmedial storyworlds, a concept that is associated with space and embodiment. In her treatise on sexed corporeality, Elizabeth Grosz writes that:

[the] body is fundamentally linked to representations of spaciality and temporality. This relation to space and time is a precondition of the subject's relations with objects . . . space is understood by us as a relation between [different objectively located points] and a central or organising perspective which regulated perceptions so that they occupy the same perceptual field. This perspective has no other location than that given by the body.<sup>709</sup>

The storyworld is put into the world from Sanchez's body, but the reader comes to the storyworld through their own body. The only body that the reader has access to is their own, and as such the storyworld is perceived, spatially and temporally, through the reader. This coming together of reading, temporality and embodiment is central to Louise M. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literary work. Rosenblatt considers the reader's relationship with the text, and asserts that the reader must recreate the narrator—in the case of life-writing this is often the author—and that this recreation is influenced by the "aesthetic stance"<sup>710</sup> that the reader infers from the work; that is, the reader develops "a setting, a situation, a general context"<sup>711</sup> for the voice that they meet with in the text:

The reader is simply responding to cues set forth in the text, and because he has developed the habit of such response to such cues seemingly automatically adopts a similar stance. Yet the element of choice between alternative stances is still present.<sup>712</sup>

While many of these cues might be derived from literary constructs, such as the reader's consideration of genre, or from their incorporation of knowledges derived from epitexts such as book reviews or interviews with the author, transmedial life-writing offers readers a wider variety of

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<sup>709</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 90.

<sup>710</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 77.

<sup>711</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 77.

<sup>712</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 77.

textual cues than monomedial writing can, including the effect that embodiment can have on the reading process.

Claudio Sanchez' band, Coheed and Cambria, published *Second Stage Turbine Blade* in 2002, while the comic of the same name was published in 2008. This means that there was a time between the publications where fans could not be certain where the story was heading, or even what the story was. These temporal lacunae leave space for consideration among readers, and are often fertile space for reading communities to develop. It is therefore interesting to look to fan responses, such as those expressed on the fan-site, *Cobalt and Calcium* to examine how fans have read the texts between releases. Readers' responses to the storyworld's internal time speak to a shift from privileging an author/text temporality to one that considers the effect time has between the reader and the text. For example, a user by the name Bluesky Prophet<sup>713</sup> writes:

I believe that maybe a character could be traveling through time[,] or something dealing with time connect[s] these stories. Time consumer says "god grant you one wish, to turn back the time, correct and create, making sense of."  
Now, Maybe the lyric switch up between hearshot [sic] and junesong [sic] is a character changing something through time.  
"have you ever heard the lyrics he sang!, Sing his song, sing his song LOUD!, Wheres your song or have you lost the key or tone!!" all specify that the lyric switch is an intentional switch. Since these songs are in chronological order, skipping one song and singing lyrics from another would speify [sic] a rift in the time.  
Tell me your thoughts.<sup>714</sup>

The reader draws on the information presented in song lyrics and epitexts, such as the CD sleeve and interviews with the band members to construct a reading of the text's plot, complete with a character who is able to time-travel. This reading is not supported by the texts that provide a more explicit diegetic push to the storyworld: no such time-travelling character has appeared in the comic books or novel as yet. The readers go on to determine that the lyrics shared in the CD sleeve are actually a

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<sup>713</sup> I quote forum posts with original spelling and grammar (amended for readability in instances where they were almost illegible).

<sup>714</sup> "The Unofficial "concept" overspeculation Thread," cobaltandcalcium.com, accessed 06/01/13, <http://forums.cobaltandcalcium.com/showthread.php?14049-The-UnOfficial-concept-Overspeculation-Thread>.

misprint, however they note that both “Time Consumer” and “Junesong Provision” conclude with similar lyrics. “Time Consumer” ends with Coheed’s promise to his youngest children: “You know, good night/And I’ll promise you that” while “Junesong Provision concludes with “Wait for me alright, I’m still a boy down there/ When you want to promise me that.” A reader, krefton, notes that the lines “And I’ll promise you that” and “When you want to promise me that” follow a similar rhythm and notation, providing an echo in “Junesong Provision,” which is ostensibly Kilgannon’s breakup letter to Newo Ikken, of “Time Consumer.” krefton’s focus on the similarities between lyrical passages reflects the need to consider nonlinguistic signifiers in a transmedial context.

In the time since Bluesky Prophet and krefton made these observations about the acoustic and lyrical patterns in *SSTB*, the corresponding comic book was released and it became evident that time-travel was no longer a salient reading of the texts: “Time Consumer” was focalised through Coheed and tells of his angst after killing his youngest children. However, prior to the incorporation of this information, Bluesky Prophet and krefton actively built a poem out of their responses to the text. They drew on their past experiences with verbal and aural symbols, they selected appropriate significations from the various alternative referents that the text offered to them. Bluesky Prophet found some thematic context within which these referents could be related, specifically the deaths of Matthew and Maria, Coheed’s youngest children, but he also leaves open the possibility of alternative readings through a retroactive continuity enabled by a time paradox.



Figure 7.1: Claudio Sanchez and Gus Vasquez, "Chapter 1," *The Second Stage Turbine Blade*, Vol. 1 (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010).

The reader is able to create this time-travel narrative by reading the song lyrics against each other. The reader's interpretation of the song "Time Consumer" is affected by his interpretations of "Hearshot Kid Disaster," and "Junesong": there is a kind of scuttling back and forth between the lyrics as one or another synthesising element—a context, a rhythm, a character—suggests itself to the readers. Bluesky Prophet goes on to opine "whoa...[I] wish [C]audio would just tell us...be alot [sic] easier." The other readers reject his privileging of authorial intention, and stunneddock44 asserts that this knowledge would make their engagement with the storyworld "less fun," while hopeinside asserts that "half the fun with Coheed is that you get to overspeculate[sic]." Appropriately, Rosenblatt considers musical performance an analogy for transactional reading practices: "The artist who created the score—composer or Poet—has set down notations for others, to guide them in

the production of a work of art.”<sup>715</sup> The story itself is derived from the reader’s own interpretation of the text.

However by contrasting the lyrics with the comic books, readers who came to the music later (after the comics were published) are able to decipher a different narrative. The comics suggest that “Junesong Provision” is focalised through Claudio, after he has gone into hiding from Wilhem Ryan’s army. In this song Sanchez sings:

Good morning, sunshine, awake when the sun hits the sky.  
Look up the sounds that surround the day you died.  
She waits for me outside near a hole in the ground.  
In the one way thinking you might get the upper hand.  
Dear Newo Ikkin, how’s Apollo been treating you?  
Has he been a good boy since the day I left?  
Give him my love and a sweet kiss for his head.  
Cause I won’t be coming home, when you get this I’ll be dead.

It is part love letter to Newo Ikken, part reflection on his experiences as he goes into hiding. The comic shows Newo reading the letter that Claudio leaves for her.

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<sup>715</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader The Text The Poem*, 13-14.



Figure 7.2: Claudio Sanchez and Gabriel Guzman, "Chapter 2," *The Second Stage Turbine Blade Vol. 2*. (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010).

There is a distance between the letter that is sung, and the letter that is scripted into the comic, suggesting that the sung version is the letter that Claudio wants to write, or is an earlier draft of the letter, while the final product is a more considered epistle. On the Wikipedia discussion page for the *SSTB* album, fans speculate that "Junesong Provision" is sung from Claudio's perspective:

Claudio fled Newo's house as the FBI basically tried to hunt him down, and Claudio's feeling really confused. Claudio returns back to his house, crossing the yellow caution tape of the neglected crime scene and returning to his hiding place. He starts writing Newo a suicide letter, but doesn't finish or send it. In other news, the Gloria vel Vessa is having some problems and is sending out distress signals. Essentially, it goes down. After getting to a stopping point in his letter to Newo, he pockets it and grabs Coheed's gun. No longer able to stand the slight (sic) of the yellow tape, the blood, or the white chalk lines, he sets the house on fire and leaves.<sup>716</sup>

<sup>716</sup> "Talk:The Second Stage Turbine Blade," en.wikipedia, org, accessed 17/7/2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3AThe Second Stage Turbine Blade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3AThe%20Second%20Stage%20Turbine%20Blade).

This reading is at odds with the graphic novel, which shows Claudio fleeing the family home without any attempt at arson.<sup>717</sup> By suggesting that life-writing is apportioned to this psychological reading of the text, I recognise that Claudio Kilgannon and *The Writing Writer* are tools through which readers can infer Sanchez's emotional truths, but not necessarily read the events that shaped his lived-experiences. Something is therefore both lost and gained in reading and re-rendering "experience."

Lauren Rusk notes that the subject explored through life-writing is dependant on "the cultural and historical concepts of personhood that [the author has] been steeped in."<sup>718</sup> I have made the argument that in a Western context this culture and history includes the Cartesian subject, an inward turning self that "exists as the producer and owner of thoughts."<sup>719</sup>

This turn "inward" to understand the life-writer's experience, their subjectivity, speaks to the understanding of identity that is bound by skin, one that does not form beyond the confines of the embodied person. Weintraub discusses the philosophical trajectory of the Enlightenment as culminating in "self-conception as an individuality."<sup>720</sup> It is this issue of self-conception that is paramount to transmedial life-writing projects. Where Weintraub wonders, almost with a sense of awe, that:

The uniqueness of individuality is thus a uniqueness of style ... what immense individualized variety, for instance, has not been formed by combining and recombining twenty-six letters?<sup>721</sup>

I hear Foucault in my ear, like a conscience, reminding me that:

a certain structure of spirituality tries to link knowledge, the activity of knowing, and the conditions and effects of this activity, to a transformation in the subject's being.<sup>722</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> Indeed, the Kilgannon family home is only damaged, and even then not burned, when Ambellina, the *Prise*, lands in the house and takes Newo under her protection.

<sup>718</sup> Rusk, *The Life Writing of Otherness*, 4.

<sup>719</sup> Rusk, *The Life Writing of Otherness*, 134.

<sup>720</sup> Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," 841.

<sup>721</sup> Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," 841.

<sup>722</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell, eds. François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 28.

Even Weintraub's metaphor of choice, letters, are the building blocks of Western language, and testify to the argument that narratives of experience are discursive, and that subsequently subjects are understood as self-conceptual through language. They also substantiate the Barthesian argument which positions letters and language as a perpetually rewoven tapestry. To illustrate this argument I turn to Smith and Watson who write that "we retrospectively make experience and convey a sense of it to others through storytelling; and as we tell our stories, discursive patterns both guide and compel us to tell stories about ourselves in particular ways."<sup>723</sup> Thus, we can see that the coming together of temporality and language has been deemed essential to the formation of the sovereign subject, and that autobiographical writing is the artistic manifestation of a subject that articulates their life, the deeds they do, and their experience, or self-conception.

## 7.5 Relationality, Temporality and the Self

When Sanchez sings "The world must know... My story"<sup>724</sup> it is emblematic of the Writer's acknowledgement in *Good Apollo Vol. 1* that he is creating a story out of his own life experiences, and that the way he can resolve his otherness is by creating characters that will reconcile the repressed elements of his subconscious. The moments of frisson between the musical and codex texts demonstrate that the Writer controls the storyworld's parameters, and—as the Writer is a synecdoche for Sanchez—these moments of textual accord can be understood as Sanchez's asserting control over the storyworld's parameters. However, the significances of these moments are left to the readers to decide. This section of the *Amory Wars'* narrative illuminates the tensions between life-writing, fiction, and transmedial storytelling that cause readers to

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<sup>723</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 32.

<sup>724</sup> Coheed and Cambria, "The End Complete V: On the Brink," *Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV Vol. 2: No World for Tomorrow*, 2007, CD.

constantly renegotiate the storyworld's perimeters. These renegotiations are the responsibility afforded to readers.

The reading process is a thematic focus of *The Amory Wars*' third comic book and its corresponding album, *Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV, Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness*. In this chapter the characters that signify Sanchez's autobiographical iteration, Claudio Kilgannon and The Writing Writer, breach their respective narrative spheres and engage with each other face-to-face. When, as the lyrics reveal, "the fiction will see the real."<sup>725</sup> The Writing Writer is a character who represents Sanchez's creative process: he is the author who is writing *The Amory Wars* as a means of coming to terms with the end of his relationship with the character Erica Court. He is Sanchez's Ego, and embodies Sanchez's conscious and knowing reflection on his creative process. Sanchez has elaborated on that creative process across a number of interviews, as well as in the *Sketchbook*<sup>726</sup> and *The Afterman* art book.<sup>727</sup> Sanchez maintains that the *Amory Wars* is an autobiographical piece, that it weaves Sanchez's lived-experiences, and his reflections on his relationships with various members of his family and other intimates, with a fantastical science-fiction epic. Sanchez elaborates on his writing methodology:

When I started writing music, I was very shy and didn't know how to express myself. I didn't want to come out and say that these songs are about me, so I created a science fiction mythology to hide behind. All of the imagery within *The Amory Wars* is very relevant - the fact that it's called *The Amory Wars* is very relevant to my life - and that's why there's a character in the comic called Claudio. It's actually a funny story; I was actually kicking my ass when it came time to do the adaptation. When I was writing the main character, I didn't have a name for him and I remember in one song, 'Everything Evil,' I shout out the name 'Claudio' and I was like, 'Now I have to be a character! What a fuck up on my part!' Again, it's very relevant to my life and my upbringing. All the stories are. They all parallel something I've gone through.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>725</sup> Coheed and Cambria, "The Willing Well: I - Fuel for the Feeding End," *Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV, Vol.1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness*, 2005, CD.

<sup>726</sup> Sanchez and Vasquez, *The Amory Wars Sketchbook*.

<sup>727</sup> Sanchez and Spoor, *The Afterman*.

<sup>728</sup> Josh Wigler, "Claudio Sanchez Brings Music to *The Amory Wars*," comicbooksresources.com, accessed 03/07/2010, <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=23791>.

Sanchez brings together different genres as well as different media in order to construct his storyworld. Part lived experience, part science-fiction fantasy epic, made up of music, pictures, movement, and words, the storyworld is the textual equivalent of Frankenstein's monster, and—like the monster—it is fearless, and therefore powerful.<sup>729</sup> Gilmore asks readers, is autobiography “a monstrous document produced by a subject become beastly through the act of writing?”<sup>730</sup> This certainly seems the case in *The Amory Wars* where not only the characters associated with Sanchez, but the form itself, is made uncanny through its fantastical interpolation. Smith and Watson note that life writing and the novel often share features, such as a plot, setting, characters, and dialogue, but their point of difference is their claim of access to a “referential world.”<sup>731</sup> The autobiography asserts access to this world, while the fiction rejects it. Sanchez explicitly rejects this claim to a referential world and instead sets his life narrative in the fictional universe known as Heaven's Fence. More than this, his characterization is divided between Sirius Amory, Claudio Kilgannon, and the Writing Writer, rather than with his authorial signature, and according to Philippe Lejeune, the relationship between the author and their signature in the text is the distinguishing feature of autobiographical writing:

What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text.<sup>732</sup>

What is central to this claim is the assertion that the reader must recognise the author as signified by the protagonist. By choosing to focus on the life-writing elements of the fictional storyworld readers choose to commit an act of resistance: it is acceptable for authors to incorporate lived-experience into their fiction, but to build a life-story with fiction is

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<sup>729</sup> Mary Wallstonecraft (Godwin) Shelley, *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* (Project Gutenberg, 1818), eBook, 240.

<sup>730</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 79.

<sup>731</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 9.

<sup>732</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, 19.

considered a betrayal, where “falsehood can look so like the truth.”<sup>733</sup> In the case of autobiography that is read through the membrane of fiction, the question is: What’s in a name? If readers and the author are both aware that a character signifies a particular individual, is Lejeune’s pact fulfilled? Does the rose still smell as sweet?

If the reader insists on the primacy of autobiography in determining the storyworld’s genre, they engage with “the politics of looking back”<sup>734</sup> and, as Gilmore notes, this results in a challenge to “the politics of how the past and present may be known in relation to a particular version of history.”<sup>735</sup> If the purpose of autobiographical writing is to create an account of the author’s subjectivity, then the point of autobiographical reading is for the reader to reflect on their own subjectivity through the author’s monstrosity, through their otherness. Sanchez has been explicit about his personal investment in the storyworld, but it is up to readers as to whether they read the storyworld in light of this information. Entering into the autobiographical contract is left entirely to the reader’s discretion.

Sanchez utilises conventions associated with comic book writing and speculative fiction to shape his life-writing. The comic books are focalized through the character Claudio Kilgannon from the beginning of *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3*. He relates the story that occurs between *SSTB* and *IKSSE: 3* to Apollo, the dog belonging to his high-school sweetheart, Newo. The comic uses a number of levels of embedding in order to frame the storyworld.

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<sup>733</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 124.

<sup>734</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 80.

<sup>735</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 80.



Fig. 7.3: Claudio Kilgannon hallucinating Coheed Kilgannon after the Battle of Silent Earth :3, Claudio Sanchez, Chris Burnham and Kyle Strahm, "Chapter 6," *The Amory Wars: In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth; 3* Ultimate Edition (Los Angeles: Image Comics, 2014), 100.

Kilgannon is narrating this section of the story to the dog, Apollo. His voice is situated as the focalizer via the use of yellow boxes of narrative that are situated in the panel, while dialogue is represented in speech bubbles. The illustrations depict the narrative that Kilgannon is talking about in the narrative squares, however the illustrations do not depict what Sanchez sees, as he (rather than his perspective) is often the focus of the illustration. This fractures Kilgannon's focalization by revealing that another viewer frames the reader's perspective of the character. Further, the illustration of scenes in which Kilgannon is not present, indicates that the focalizer is still the character called the Writing Writer. It can be inferred that the Writer's point of view shapes the panels depicted in *The Afterman*, *SSTB*, and *IKSSE: 3* comics, but he explicitly narrates the panels that depict his own reality in the graphic novel "Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV, Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness." Sanchez is therefore aligned, to varying degrees, with these focalising characters. They provide his perspective on his lived-experiences.



Figure 7.4: The Writing Writer sees Claudio Kilgannon outside of Newo Ikken's house, Claudio Sanchez and Christopher Shy, "Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV Vol. 1: From Fear Through The Eyes of Madness (Los Angeles: Evil Ink

Sanchez' affiliation with The Writer is extrapolated on in the *Good Apollo Vol. 1* graphic novel. Although the Writer is depicted as the object of focus in the *Good Apollo Vol. 1* graphic novel, the text's title hints at why this is a possibility: the graphic novel appears to depict a series of dreams, culminating in a confrontation between Kilgannon and the Writer, and the Writer scripting the death of Kilgannon's guardian and romantic interest, the Prise Ambellina. This clash is manifested between the songs "Apollo I: The Writing Writer" and "The Willing Well III: Apollo II: The Telling Truth" (see Figure 7.5) from *Good Apollo Vol.1*. In these songs the Writer reflects on his creative process and the way in which it affects his lived experiences. He then applies the creative process to his storyworld. These two songs demonstrate the reflective and active parts of this process: the lyrics, melody, and instrumentation between these songs are similar, although "The Telling Truth" also draws lyrics and instrumentation from the songs "Blood Red Summer" from *IKSSE: 3*, and "Everything Evil" from *SSTB*. These musical similarities are indicative of the fact that there is a voice outside of Claudio Kilgannon's storyworld that is narrating it.

**"Apollo I: The Writing Writer"**

In these words that crash my ears  
I now stomach this in fear  
With the turn I gathered name as the bastard's son  
Who by fire I would come  
Through this wire I might cut  
Atop this tower of loss and lust

I'll gravitate towards you  
I will, in the now, hate you

I'll make you wish  
You hadn't burned our time before  
I'll live through this  
In a manner cursed at my own accord

If my shame spills our worth across this floor  
Then tonight, goodnight... I'm burning Star IV  
Only I don't even think of you  
No I don't wanna think of you anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

In my presence you might wake  
Through this fiction I must fake  
Your death to grace the face of my character  
With these lessons he might learn  
That all worlds from here must burn  
For as God demands in the end we miss

If my shame spills our worth across this floor  
Then tonight, goodnight... I'm burning Star IV  
Only I don't even think of you  
No I don't wanna think of you anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

[Spoken:]  
There is no room for mistakes, my children.

**"The Willing Well III: Apollo II: The Telling Truth"**

In the worst of all your fears  
You have come so far to hear  
That in turn they've showered your name as  
the laughing stock  
Now by fire you must hang  
As my word holds course through vein  
You will walk to the end of days

I'll gravitate towards you  
I will, in the now, hate you

These days are numbered  
This close encounter  
To the heartland, through the madness

I'll make you wish  
You hadn't burned our time before  
I'll live through this  
In a manner cursed at my own accord

I don't want to go  
So come on bitch  
Why aren't you laughing now?  
You left me here to fend on my own  
So cry on bitch,  
Why aren't you laughing now?

In my presence you will make  
Sure the fiction meets its fate  
That death will grace your face my dear  
character  
Through these lessons you have learned  
All the worlds from here must burn  
For as God demands that the end we miss

I'll make you wish  
You hadn't burned our time before  
I'll live through this  
In a manner cursed at my own accord

I don't want to go  
So come on bitch  
Why aren't you laughing now?  
You left me here to fend on my own  
So cry on bitch,  
Why aren't you laughing now?

If my shame spills our worth across this floor  
Then tonight, goodnight, I'm burning Star IV  
Only, I don't even think of you  
No, I don't wanna think of you... anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

If, then should they come home  
With failed attempt we'll know

For as I have been told....today is the day I die.  
I'm sorry I never played the part as your father, as I  
should have,  
and from the looks on your faces...it seems that's all  
you've ever asked of me  
it is time for you to go into these worlds alone..  
with all of my love.  
I'm sorry.  
But I love you all so very much.

I'll make you wish  
You hadn't burned our time before  
I'll live through this  
In a manner cursed at my own accord

I don't want to go  
So come on bitch, why aren't you laughing now?  
You left me here to fend on my own  
So cry on bitch, why aren't you laughing now?

If my shame spills our worth across this floor  
Then tonight, goodnight... I'm burning Star IV  
Only I don't even think of you  
No I don't wanna think of you anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

Only I don't even think of you  
No, girl, I don't wanna think of you anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

I won't leave a stone unturned  
These worlds will surely burn

Wait  
But what did I do to... to deserve all of you

Jesse, bad boy  
Just come look at what your brother did,  
To that girl's precious little whore of a body  
[x4]

I'll make you wish  
You hadn't burned our time before  
I'll live through this  
In a manner cursed at my own accord

I don't want to go  
So come on bitch Why aren't you laughing  
now?  
You left me here to fend on my own  
So cry on bitch, Why aren't you laughing now?

If my shame spills our worth across this floor  
Then tonight, goodnight, I'm burning Star IV  
Only, I don't even think of you  
No, I don't wanna think of you anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

Well, I don't wanna think of you  
No, girl, I don't wanna think of you anymore  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye  
Goodnight, tonight, goodbye

*Figure 7.5: Lyrics, Coheed and Cambria, Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV, Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness, 2005, CD.*

In Figure 7.5 the song lyrics are laid out side by side to demonstrate their structural and lyrical similarities. I will consider their differences in lyrics to elaborate on the divergent perspectives represented by the songs. The first point of departure is the spoken word passage in “Apollo I: The Writing Writer” where a gruff voice says:

There is no room for mistakes, my children, for as I have been told...today is the day I die.  
 I'm sorry I never played the part as your father, as I should have, and from the looks on your faces it seems that's all you've ever asked of me. It is time for you to go into these worlds alone... with all of my love. I'm sorry, but I love you all so very much.<sup>736</sup>

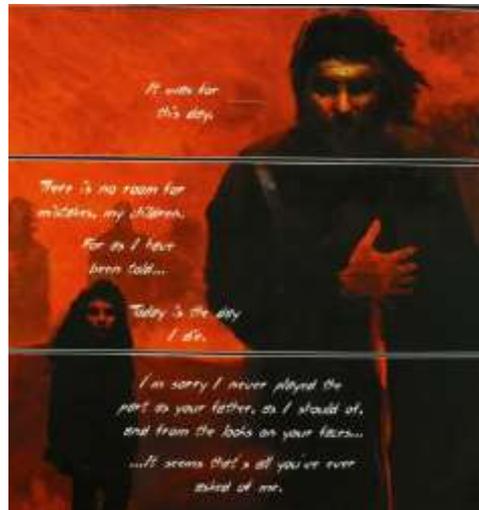


Fig. 7.6: Jesse and the IRO-bots, Sanchez and Shy, *Good Apollo Vol. 1*, 79.

These words echo some of the anxieties between the IRO-bots, Chase and Sizer, and Jesse Kilgannon that I addressed in the previous chapter, and this reading is substantiated in the graphic novel with a series of panels depicting the conversation between Jesse, Chase and Sizer, as depicted in Figure 7.6. However, in the context of *Good Apollo Vol.1* it might also be interpreted as the Writing Writer using Jesse to talk to his characters, Claudio Kilgannon and Ambellina, as he comes into his role as their ‘god.’<sup>737</sup> He aligns himself with Jesse as a creator-god, and Claudio and

<sup>736</sup> Coheed and Cambria, “Apollo I: The Writing Writer,” *Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV Vol. 1: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness*, 2005, CD.

<sup>737</sup> The Ten-Speed of God's Blood and Burial (a Ten-Speed bike that is the Writer's muse. I shit you not. Prog rock's gonna prog.) beckons to the writer: “Come follow me, the one who writes, to the end of days through the dark and light. Your veil makes hidden their

Ambellina with chase and Sizer as the created offspring. This narrative echoes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* insofar as in each reading the creator-father takes on the role of a narcissistic Miltonic God, intent on controlling and regulating his creations, rather than aiding their emotional and psychological development. Positioned as such, it reads as a farewell from the author to their work, an acknowledgement that creative work will make its own way, without the author exercising paternalistic control over it.

At about the same point in the song, "The Willing Well III: Apollo II: The Telling Truth," Sanchez sings:

If, then should they come home  
With failed attempt we'll know  
I won't leave a stone unturned  
These worlds will surely burn

Wait  
But what did I do to... to deserve all of you

Jesse, bad boy  
Just come look at what your brother did,  
To that girl's precious little whore of a body

The first section refers to Ambellina and Claudio Kilgannon stepping through a mirror into the Writer's reality. Their 'failed attempt' was an uprising led by the Jesse and his IRO-bots that ended in Jesse's death at Admiral Mayo Deftinwolf's hands. The second two lines refer to the Writers' intention to end the story. This is the moment where Kilgannon and Ambelina cross over to the Writing Writer's 'reality', and the temporalities of the storyworlds are breached. This is demonstrated through the inclusion of the lyrics "What did I do to deserve?" from "Blood Red Summer" from *IKSSE: 3*, and also with a reference to "Everything Evil" from *SSTB*. In "Everything Evil" Josephine calls out to her uncle, Jesse, and demands that he bear witness to her death at her father's hands: "Jesse! Just come look at what your brother did here! He did away with me." This is echoed in "The Telling Truth" when The Writing Writer sings "Jesse, bad boy. Just come look at what your brother did, to that girl's precious

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world unseen, but their blood is yours as their god you are." Thanks for that, Yoda-bike: Sanchez and Shy, *Good Apollo I'm Burning Star IV, Vol. 1*, 28.

little whore of a body.”<sup>738</sup> Such lyrical parallels occur throughout the albums and illuminate the relationship between the readers and the texts as an event that occurs in time. This time between the readers and the texts is also the time that shapes the storyworld.

The title of the song “The Telling Truth” also signifies the conflation of confession and truth-telling that is central to life-writing. Sanchez draws on these conventions associated with life-writing to make explicit his use of both fiction and truth in his storyworld. Gilmore writes that the:

act of confessing seems almost to conspire against the one bound to tell the truth. That is, in telling the *truth*, autobiographers usually narrate and thereby shift the emphasis to *telling* the truth.<sup>739</sup>

This telling requires an audience, a penitent, it also needs a confessor and in this the reader takes on the role of intercessor to god. These temporal echoes are not entirely lyrical, either: the “Second Stage Turbine Blade” theme, a leitmotif that signifies Claudio Kilgannon, occurs many times throughout the Kilgannon cycle. This theme is heard first in the eponymous opening track to the *SSTB* album, and returns as “Everything Evil” fades out. It recurs as a brief variation after “Junesong Provision,” and again as a variation after “God Send Conspirator” at the end of the *SSTB* album. In *IKSSE: 3* the theme again opens the album in “The Ring in Return,” however in this incarnation the instrumentation is more filled out, and less tinny. This has the effect of suggesting that Claudio Kilgannon has come into his divinity by this point in the narrative, since his leitmotif is a more sophisticated composition. The opening bars of the theme also appear toward the end of the song, “One,” on *YOTBR*. However, the theme does not resolve.

The Kilgannon leitmotif develops and fractures, with each variation suggesting a shift in Claudio Kilgannon’s ontological resolution. It is used as a signifier of both the story’s temporality and to demarcate different

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<sup>738</sup> Coheed and Cambria, *Good Apollo, I’m Burning Star IV, Vol.1.CD*.

<sup>739</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 121.

narrative arcs within the storyworld. The theme returns after “The Light and the Glass,” again closing the second chapter in the storyworld. The third chapter, *Good Apollo Vol. 1*, again opens with variations on Kilgannon’s leitmotif in the track “Keeping the Blade.” The theme is revisited very briefly in *Good Apollo Vol. 2* during “The Reaping.” Finally in “The End Complete V: On the Brink,” the song that provides a perimeter to the storyworld as the last song in the Kilgannon cycle, the theme is revisited a final time, more as a chord progression. It frames each album, occurring at the open and the close of each “chapter” in the Kilgannon cycle.

In undertaking a reading of *The Amory Wars* that reconciles the storyworld’s branches against Sanchez’s lived experiences, the reader brings to the storyworld the socio-physical context of their “whole past experience of life and literature.”<sup>740</sup> This manifests as a pleasurable *frisson* between the reader and the text, and can signify to readers their membership in a reading community that is aware of these moments.

By insisting on the reader’s presence within the literary work I am confronted with the realisation that a transactional theory of reading “recognises the text is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for any literary work of art,”<sup>741</sup> and that the remaining conditions for a literary work of art are vested in the reader’s ability to bring together the texts that contribute to the storyworld. Readers can search out moments of *frisson* between the texts in order to identify where the media speak to each other directly. One such *frisson* occurs in “Everything Evil” from Coheed and Cambria’s first album, *SSTB*. In this song Sanchez sings about Claudio Kilgannon’s initial realisation of his divinity.

And she screamed,  
Claudio! Dear Claudio!  
I wish, God damn it, we’ll make it if you believe!  
And she screamed,  
Claudio! Dear Claudio! (FBI)  
I wish, God damn it, we’ll make it if you believe!

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<sup>740</sup>Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 81.

<sup>741</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 83.

This passage refers to a series of panels where Kilgannon briefly resurrects his murdered sister, Josephine, and she warns him to flee from the Onstantine Priest, a demonic assassin in the thrall of The Tri-Mage Wilhelm Ryan that is in their family home. The lyric “we’ll make it if you believe” is amended in the comic to “you’ll make it if you believe,” a shift from the collective pronoun to the second-person personal. This shift speaks to the different forms of reading required to engage with the two different media: the “we” in the song lyrics acknowledges the shared vocalising between Sanchez as the singer, and the character Josephine, whom Sanchez is singing as. This line has become a proverb among readers who are active in *The Amory Wars* and Coheed and Cambria communities (the self-proclaimed Children of the Fence); it reflects the fan’s integration of that lyric into their community identity as Coheed and Cambria fans, and is used as a hashtag, as well as an identifier for the volunteer street-team who are responsible for poster and flyer for upcoming performances. As a proverb, it brings fans together as more than appreciators of Coheed and Cambria’s music, but as a community that shares knowledge about the storyworld.

In contrast to collective reading practices articulated in music as “*We’ll* make it if you believe,” (my italics) the comic book instigates a shift from “we” to “you” recognising the often isolated and silent experience associated with private and monomedial reading. The pronoun is directed from Josephine to Claudio. Ostensibly, it is a call to Kilgannon to have faith in his own divinity as The Crowing, in his otherness. It is quoted on a panel that illustrates Claudio in combat with the Onstantine Priest, an image that echoes Michaelangelo’s “The Creation of Adam.” Autobiographically, it can be read as Sanchez’s realisation that his selfhood is taking on a fictionalised iteration.



*Fig. 7.7: Claudio Sanchez and Mike Miller, "Chapter 3," The Amory Wars: The Second Stage Turbine Blade, Vol. 1 Ultimate Edition (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010).*

The self and other are opened in this frisson between the music and the comic book when Kilgannon demands of the Priest “what the hell **are** you?”: the figure that he is in combat with is so outside of his understanding of self and other that he must first determine where the Priest is ontologically located before he attends to its narrative, experience, and relationality. My own reading of these texts provides an example of how a reader can approach the frisson of life and creative writing. I determine that it is only by identifying the other, by constraining it to its position as not-a-subject, that Kilgannon can explore his own identity. The natural order of the universe presented deems everyone Mage, Priese or Human. Neither Kilgannon nor the Onstantine Priest precisely fit these identities. Kilgannon is the result of a union between organic cyborgs, and the Onstantine Priest is a tortured and mutated Mage, therefore both of the characters are outside of the natural order of their universe: the Priests, like Kilgannon’s IRO-bot parents, are made. However, Kilgannon like many messiahs is born, not made. He is the sublime made flesh. It is during his confrontation with the Onstantine Priest that Kilgannon first experiences his supernatural powers, specifically his ability to become invisible and insubstantial at will. Kilgannon experiences the total annihilation of his body, its complete absence, in response to the trauma of losing his family. This is a moment where his identity is fractured: he is torn from every relationship he has, and his body betrays him by acting in ways that are beyond his conscious control.



Fig.7.8: Claudio Kilgannon, Claudio Sanchez and Mike Miller, "Chapter 3," *The Amory Wars: The Second Stage Turbine Blade, Vol. 1 Ultimate Edition* (Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2010).

The encounter with the Priest is what forces Kilgannon to confront his own otherness, a state of which he had previously been ignorant. This otherness is subsequently associated with Sanchez as well.

## 7.6 Reading Performance

One of the main criticisms levelled at the conceptualisation of life-writing by critical theorists is that "it is inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life writing not only in the West, but around the globe."<sup>742</sup> Smith and Watson consider the limitations placed on autobiography as a genre vested in exclusion<sup>743</sup> and advocate instead for a more inclusive approach to life-writing that "open[s] the scenes of autobiographical inscription beyond the printed life story."<sup>744</sup> Transmedial life-writing operates as part of the "shift from genre [as product] and discourse [as practice]"<sup>745</sup> and music is a particularly vibrant platform for this expansion. Telling life stories across multiple media platforms also puts into practice the challenges thrown at autobiography by critical theory: it incorporates different forms of life-writing—music, performance, literature, art, even gameplay

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<sup>742</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>743</sup> "Early twentieth-century theorists installed this master narrative of "the sovereign self" as an institution of literature and culture, and identified a canon of representative self life writings. Implicit in this canonization, however, is the assumption that many other kinds of life writings produced at the same time have lesser value and were not "true" autobiography": Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>744</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>745</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 3.

— into the one autobiographical storyworld, *ideally* without privileging any particular platform over another.

Transmedial life-writing provides a physical experience of Levinas' aural command of the ethical imperative. One of the key features of transmedial life-writing is that the various media sites used as platforms for the narrative have separate physical incarnations. These differing media can affect the way readers interpret the storyworld. One of the earliest proponents of this concept was Marshall McLuhan, and in the 1980s academics such as Walter Ong and George Landow also wrote about the effect media has upon narratological representation and development.<sup>746</sup> Ong asserts that "print both reinforces and transforms the effects of speech and writing on thought and expression"<sup>747</sup> While much of Ong's writing addresses how the advent of the printing press enabled "a shift from sound to visual space,"<sup>748</sup> he focuses on the two spaces as mutually exclusive. He indicates that this shift toward visual thinking is dominant to the extent that it has created a new framework for sound-based thinking.<sup>749</sup> Ong argues that "[b]y contrast with vision, the dissecting sense, sound is thus a unifying sense."<sup>750</sup> He elaborates on this assertion, by considering the importance of "clarity and distinctness"<sup>751</sup> that are associated with visually-framed epistemologies. In contrast he argues that the auditory ideal "is harmony, a putting together."<sup>752</sup> This idea of harmonization provides an epistemological framework that supports transactional reading practices, and transmedial narratology, as readers can bring together and renegotiate these modes of perception in harmony, rather than in opposition to each other. More than this, it can be

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<sup>746</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Routledge: London, 1982).

<sup>747</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 115.

<sup>748</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 115.

<sup>749</sup> Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958); *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967); *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971); *Interfaces of the word* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>750</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 70.

<sup>751</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 70.

<sup>752</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 70.

read alongside Levinas' aural framework for the ethical imperative, as the voice that commands respect for otherness. Ong concludes that "Knowledge is ultimately not a fractioning but a unifying phenomenon, a striving for harmony,"<sup>753</sup> and that unification between self and other is precisely the process that is undertaken by readers of transmedial life-writing.

The unifying qualities of performance, particularly music, are juxtaposed with the narrative of universal subjectivity. In his foreword to the first publication of Whythorne's autobiography, Osborn notes that:

Whythorne's poems are really the heart of the autobiography, providing its basic structure. For it is clear that when Whythorne sat down to write his life story he opened up a manuscript wherein he had inscribed his Songs and Sonnets in chronological order, and used each poem as a peg on which to hang his narrative.<sup>754</sup>

The metaphor of a peg as art and the narrative as clothing speaks to the relationality between the two items. Neither is privileged over the other: a coat is no good for hanging things on, and a peg won't keep one warm, but when they work in conjunction with each other, they come into their strength. Osborn's observation also indicates that early autobiographical practices had traits that have since been rediscovered in transmedial autobiography, namely the melding of visual and aural signifiers.

The issue of accessibility is also central to the issue of aural signifiers. Ong writes that in oral-aural cultures, due to low levels of literacy and the economic prohibitiveness of accessing print texts, "[m]emorization was encouraged and facilitated also by the fact that in highly oral manuscript cultures, the verbalisation one encountered even in written texts often continued the oral mnemonic patterning that made ready for recall."<sup>755</sup> This method is evident in Whythorne's autobiography, which was written in what the author described as "a new Orthographie." The original text (as replicated in the 1960 publication by James Osborn) favoured a phonetic approach to language in an attempt to

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<sup>753</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 70.

<sup>754</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, iv.

<sup>755</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 117

insert “reason” into the written language.<sup>756</sup> Phonetic text is a method used to make it easier to memorise sections of narrative in aural-cultures. This approach also provides some interesting indications as to how Elizabethan English was spoken. However, Whythorne writes that “in things reasnable I had rather vse the awntiet order than any newe,”<sup>757</sup> indicating that he had a desire to keep to the lettering system already used in English writing at the time, even if he reimagined the way it was used. The intent was to make the text accessible to a broader audience.

Carter uses a similar linguistic method to Whythorne to make his texts accessible to his audience. In “Breathe Easy (lyrical Exercise),” Carter writes, “So I had to memorise these rhymes until I got home/ Ya understand? Once you memorize a sentence/ It’s like an exercise.”<sup>758</sup> In *Decoded*, he explains that he “developed that habit of holding rhymes in [his] head from working so hard on the streets... [He] created little corners in [his] head where [he] stored rhymes.”<sup>759</sup> For Carter this memorisation is at the core of what rap is as an art. It is the method through which his readers can internalise his stories. Carter elaborates on his desire to write *Decoded* as a means of opening his life to readers:

Oh, that verse is about me... It comes back to the reason I wanted to write a book in the first place... It’s about connections. What still excites me about rap is that it’s an open thread, a cipher that listeners find their own meanings in. The point of [Decoded] is not to settle arguments or transform rap songs into neat stories with a beginning, middle and end. Rather, I’m trying to point readers to some ideas and information, get them to see deeper into the music than they saw before and learn more about worlds different from their own... To find their own meaning and connect them back to their own lives.<sup>760</sup>

By making the narrative accessible, Carter’s readers can memorise the songs and make them a part of their own self-narrative. Carter refers to hip-hop as “the CNN of the ghetto,”<sup>761</sup> borrowing the term from another artist, Chuck D. It is not just an artistic form, but a means of

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<sup>756</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 4.

<sup>757</sup> Whythorne and Osborn, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, 5.

<sup>758</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 144.

<sup>759</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 145.

<sup>760</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 314-315.

<sup>761</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 18.

communicating news and editorialising. More than this, it is a way of synthesising experiences through both a philosophical (lyrical) and an embodied (rhythmic) lens. The use of colloquial language is intended to exclude listeners who are outside of the class and racial demographic that use the language in their day to day speech: the language is “a code, using simple words and phrases to convey complex meanings, which are understood because the users share a body of knowledge and experience.”<sup>762</sup> Hip-hop uses particular signifiers that are divorced from their standard English definitions, and that take on new meanings. The familiar pattern of the speaker-listener relationship (speaker — encoding — message — decoding — listener)<sup>763</sup> hints that reading is a complex and social nexus of simultaneously personal and social signifiers.<sup>764</sup> In the song “Renegade,” Carter addresses this socio-linguistic rupture, and interpolates his critics from outside of the hip-hop sphere, particularly addressing their criticisms about the violence, misogyny, and the capitalistic focus of “gangsta” hip-hop:

Motherfuckers —  
 say that I’m foolish I only talk about jewels (bling bling)  
 Do you fools listen to music or do you just skim through it?  
 See I’m influenced by the ghetto you ruined  
 That same dude you gave nothin’, I made somethin’ doin’  
 What I do through and through and  
 I give you the news with a twist it’s just his ghetto point of view.  
 The renegade; you been afraid  
 I penetrate pop culture, bring ‘em a lot closer to the block.  
 ...  
 How you rate music that thugs with nothing relate to it?  
 I help them see they way through it, not you.  
 Can’t step in my pants, can’t walk in my shoes.<sup>765</sup>

In this song, Carter indicates that the threat to white, mainstream America posed by hip-hop is not its bravado and bluster, but is instead that listeners will find an affinity with the culture represented. The threat is not, therefore, premised in the advocacy of superficiality or sexism, but is

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<sup>762</sup> Elijah Wauld, *The Dozens: A History of Rap's Mama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>763</sup> C.E. Shannon and W. Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949).

<sup>764</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 19-20.

<sup>765</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 104.

in the *frisson* between different classes and races, and that terrifies privileged, white listeners. Memorising and internalising the stories told through hip-hop opens people to otherness. This manifests musically during Carter's collaboration with Marshall Mathers, who performs as Eminem, in the song "Renegade." Carter draws on the socio-political impetus behind his music, by speaking the perspectives—a "ghetto point of view"—that challenged the "modern American myth."<sup>766</sup> Carter offers a narrative of the emotional truths associated with racial and economic oppression that readers who are fluent in vernacular African-American can recognise. In doing this he is working at the perimeters of the discursive power, confronting the truths narrated in formal and legitimised narratives in standard American English, and he is shifting the terms of the discourse, claiming power through a linguistic style that is rapidly gaining aesthetic and cultural legitimacy. This demonstrates the aporia between experiences of power in the United States and illuminates the injustices that result from it. Transmedial autobiography is therefore vested less in an attempt at objective documentary, or in detailing the events of an individual's life that shaped their personality as a singular and coherent narrative. Instead it lies in the interface between experience, emotion and embodiment.

In "Renegade" Carter explores the dual functions undertaken by hip-hop music: on the one hand he reports on the day to day experiences of working class urban African American communities, on the other hand he plays with the "bling bling" aesthetic—the counter-capitalism—that critics often focus on in their analysis of his work. As regards his function as a social commentator, Carter writes, "Most of us come from communities where people were just supposed to stay in their corners quietly, live and die without disturbing the master narrative of American society. Simply speaking our truths, which flew in the face of the American myth, made us rebels."<sup>767</sup> The use of the phrase "master

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<sup>766</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 107.

<sup>767</sup> Jay-Z, *Decoded*, 105.

narrative” is particularly telling, and suggests that the history of slavery and oppression is reiterated in the contemporary class and economic hierarchies that incite Carter to speak truth to power. This interface balances at the edge of a labyrinth made of intersecting stories, and relayed across music, performance, text, and games. Transmedial life-writing is therefore both a situation, and a reflexive commentary. It incorporates creative endeavour, and also facilitates an implicit (or explicit) commentary on the production process.

### 7.7 Life-Reading and Embodiment

Reading’s corporeal qualities are at the heart of my assertion that transmedial stories invigorate the reading process. Specifically, embodiment refigures the readers (as well as the author) as textual sites. I draw on feminist theories of embodiment as they disrupt the hierarchical forces perpetuated by taxonomic binaries that have been used to divide the subject from the body. The production of transmedial storyworlds is not just based on the material texts, but on the readers’ embodiment of the narrative. Transmedial autobiography is an interdisciplinary practice. It requires multiple skills across a variety of art forms (written, aural, visual, and audio visual), often necessitating multiple authors in order to construct the storyworlds. More than this, it requires critical artistic ability: the suspension of disbelief must operate congruently with critical thought. Both the author and the reader must be able to immerse themselves in the storyworld in order to read each medial engagement against the other. It is only through this transactional approach to reading that readers can tie together the truths and fictions that constitute transmedial life-writing.

I concur with Anderson’s claim that “[the] question is recast, therefore, in relation to autobiography, becoming not ‘what is it’ but instead ‘what does it do.’”<sup>768</sup> She answers that the purpose of autobiography can never be definitive, only descriptive. Autobiography is

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<sup>768</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 91.

a verb, rather than a noun—it is a means of accessing alterity within the fluid matrix of privileges and intersectionalities that have dominated socio-economic power hierarchies within Western cultural practices. Elspeth Probyn suggests that autobiography is a strategy that does not require a “universal model of subjectivity and its representations”<sup>769</sup> but rather “local uses, of the self as a way of expressing a subject which arises from the situation as it comments on it.”<sup>770</sup> Transmedial autobiographies are therefore both a situation and a reflexive commentary on that situation’s context: the reader’s subjectivity is localised, and arises in response to the situation of bringing together the transmedial storyworlds to create meaning through the frisson of the reader’s knowingness with the author’s imaginative truthfulness. Transmedial autobiographies incorporate creative endeavour as well as facilitate the implicit or explicit commentary on the production process.

The reader’s own creativity in bringing the text together is an essential element of the individual’s experience of the storyworld. Ilana Snyder notes that this process of creative engagement decentres the text, it makes the “marginal” a new “node” of meaning and challenges the concept of a single meaning or perception.<sup>771</sup> This idea is developed by George Landow who writes “the basic experience of text, information and control... moves the boundary of power away from the author in the direction of the reader.”<sup>772</sup> Whether the critical engagement materialises as a response, or as the recognition of a text’s *différance*, it is still embodied in the reader. It is a moment where two or more texts are read/re/membered in the same time and space within the reader. In “Narrating the Self”<sup>773</sup> Capps and Ochs note that the fragmentation of identity manifests in an urge to create narrative out of lived experience as

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<sup>769</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 90-91.

<sup>770</sup> Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 8.

<sup>771</sup> Ilana Snyder, *Hypertext: The electronic labyrinth* (Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 1996), 59.

<sup>772</sup> George P. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>773</sup> Ochs and Capps, “Narrating the Self,” 19-43.

a means of constructing identity. They write “[r]egardless of their elaborateness, tellings of personal experience are always fragmented intimations of experience. While telling surely assists the construction of a tale, the tale necessarily lies beyond the telling,”<sup>774</sup> namely the tale lies in its relationality. It is up to the reader, or in this instance the listener, to pull together the various narrative strands and to manifest the story as their own experience.

In determining otherness and subjectivity autobiographical studies have largely focused on the development of the individual’s cognitive, rather than their embodied, identities. Gilmore notes that:

[T]he mind/body split is reproduced through the public/private, outside/inside, male/female categories that order perception and experience and is derived from a way of knowing which cannot account for the knowledge of the body.<sup>775</sup>

This knowledge of the body is fundamental because it informs the metaphors that frame our experiential language. Sanchez’s performance as the lead vocalist for Coheed and Cambria makes his body a site within the storyworld: he voices Sirius, Kilgannon, the Writer, and a raft of other characters. That embodiment is fluid: Sanchez’s narrators shift, sometimes presented in the voice of the first person addressing their intended audience directly, other times as an objective third person, and occasionally the narrative is focalised through a character that is not one of Sanchez’s explicitly autobiographical representations. The author’s ontology is fluid and amorphous; it is excessive and infinite, and it is therefore left to the reader to determine where boundaries occur between themselves, including their bodies, and the text.

## 7.8 Language and Storytelling

Transmedial life-writing is not solely reliant on language as a means of examining life-experiences: the transmedial approach to life-writing focuses on diverse reading experiences, rather than the sovereign authorial experience. Transmedial life-writing is therefore not just a study

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<sup>774</sup> Ochs and Capps, “Narrating the Self,” 21.

<sup>775</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 83-84.

of the “interdependence between discourse and identity,” but an examination of personal and professional relationships, and embodiment. In her discussion of autobiography, without consideration of a transmedial context, Gilmore argues that:

The ontological “irreducibility” of the self as reducible, across temporal and textual boundaries, to a unified and unifiable category of being and knowing is a representational fiction produced by the mapping of patriarchal ideology onto the subject it inscribes, the relentless objectification of persons.<sup>776</sup>

This process of inscribing subjectivity is inherently linguistic, and language is phallogocentric. In “Revolution in Poetic Language” Julia Kristeva asserts that “modern linguistic theories consider [language as] a strictly ‘formal’ object.”<sup>777</sup> She notes that this understanding of what language is and how it works is vested in the idea that language is linguistic’s “self-assigned object,”<sup>778</sup> but that it “lacks a subject or tolerates one only as a *transcendental ego*... and defers any interrogation of its ‘externality.’”<sup>779</sup> This linguistic introversion is endemic of the “inward” turn that Weintraub describes in terms of narrating self-conceptualisation, and is exploded by transmedial life-writing which denies the primacy of language as a means of expressing subjectivity, and instead relies on non-linguistic signifiers, including music, movement, play, and images in order to construct subjectivity. These methods of expression are, per Kristeva, “signifying practices... that are irreducible to the language ‘object.’”<sup>780</sup> However, in exploring her transactional theory of literary work, Louise Rosenblatt reminds us that:

Part of the magic—and indeed the essence—of language is the fact that it must be internalised by each individual human being, with all the special overtones that each unique person and unique situation entail. Hence language is at once basically social and intensely individual.<sup>781</sup>

Forms of communication, such as music, movement, and play, are reliant on a process of corporealisation that is also transactional and is always

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<sup>776</sup> Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 82.

<sup>777</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” *The Kristeva Reader*, 90.

<sup>778</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language” 90.

<sup>779</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language” 90.

<sup>780</sup> Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” 91.

<sup>781</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 20.

embodied by readers. Music moves through the listener: it moves their body, their ear drums, their skin, their muscles. It corporealises the text, vibrating against and within the body. The listener becomes a part of the physical telling and subsequently their own emotional and experiential narrative is merged with the authors. This is the process that Carter, Palmer, and Sanchez describe as a form of connection with their audience, an embodied contact zone between the author and the reader. Anthony Storr writes that “[i]t must be emphasised that making music is an activity that is rooted in the body”<sup>782</sup> and I expand on this idea, recognising that hearing music is also an action that is essentially embodied. Storr notes that listening to music manifests in “a condition of heightened alertness... and excitement” and he describes this as a state of arousal.<sup>783</sup> He continues:

Arousal manifests itself in various physiological changes, many of which can be measured. During arousal the electrical resistance of the skin is diminished, the pupil of the eye dilates, the respiratory rate may become either faster or slower, or else become irregular. Blood pressure tends to rise as does the heart rate. There is an increase in muscular tone, which might be accompanied by physical restlessness.<sup>784</sup>

Transmedial life-writing is polyvocal: there are many voices that contribute to the end product, and this contributes to the text’s writerlyness. In contrast to monomedial texts, which—with their physical borders of covers and pages—tend towards the contained message and the silent reader, transmedial life-writing can give readers opportunities to construct subjectivities that interrogate the author’s, and their own, otherness and exteriority, especially by showing how life-narratives can be opened to other artists and collaborators. The *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* DVD is an example of collaborative creativity. It includes a recording of a live performance of Palmer’s song, “Have to Drive” that opens with Palmer playing the piano and pans out to reveal string players. The musicians are framed by the audience, whose heads are visible along

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<sup>782</sup> Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), 24.

<sup>783</sup> Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 24.

<sup>784</sup> Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 25.

the bottom of the screen. Dancers from The Danger Ensemble enter the performance space and move through the audience. "Have to Drive," a song written about a dead deer on the side of the road, is reshaped by The Danger Ensemble into an exploration of depression and isolation. This clip demonstrates reading-in-action, the interpretation of Palmer's song by performance artists and the audience's response to both the music, and the dancers who interact with them.

The dancers corporealise an experience of tenderness and desolation, their movements are slow, their facial expressions tired and sorrowful. The song becomes a means of embodying depression. Each dancer enters the stage and pauses, as if looking into a mirror, and the audience is positioned as that mirror. Each dancer takes their turn to straighten their hair, or adjust their tie, to dust off their jacket and then stop, and "look" at themselves, clearly unhappy with their reflections. The audience responds to this: they are silent and still, their attention shifts from Palmer to the dancers. The dancers enter the audience, pushing them back to create a space in their midst, an emptiness, a manifested lacuna. The dancers use this space for their performance: they run at each other. The first couple clings together for comfort, hands always moving. In one breath their fingers digging into each other's backs, in the next a palm gently cups a cheek in an intimate display of emotional kinship. The next two dancers enter, carefully climbing onto the first dancers' shoulders. They are unsteady, again, clawing at each other but also reaching up. There is a beautiful moment where the camera fades out on their arms entwined and their hands, stretching, reaching for the unattainable. They, of course, fall and scatter, then slowly pull themselves to their feet again, a movement which can be read as a commentary on the crests and nadirs of combating depression, in all its interminable continuance. The clip ends with The Danger Ensemble embracing members of the audience, drawing them into the performance, and with the image of one of the dancers and an audience member holding each other, relocating the audience from the position of observer to that of participant. This clinging together of both dancers and the audience

members is a manifestation of the loneliness and isolation associated with sovereign subjectivity.

The storytelling in “Have to Drive” is multifaceted: a song that is, ostensibly, about roadkill is writerly, interpreted by the performers as a commentary on loneliness, isolation and despair. The tautness corporealised in the dancers’ bodies can be read as the subjectivities straining to connect with others through the membrane of flesh. The authors’ and readers’ interpretations of the text do not restrict or exist in opposition to each other. This reading demonstrates how the reader “brings the pressure of [their] personality and needs to bear,”<sup>785</sup> meaning is not derived exclusively from the text, but also from their own lived-experiences. Readers must also take into account the acoustic elements of the song, such as expressive playing, the utilisation of F-sharp minor key, and the narration corporealised through dance. The performance enables readers, in this instance The Danger Ensemble, to corporealise the “psychic interior”<sup>786</sup> that they have drawn from the text. This is an example of how readers are experimenting with “elasticities of subjectivity, identity, and embodiment.”<sup>787</sup> Readers, as much as writers, are determining what might be legible in transmedial storyworlds. They contribute to the shape of the storyworld. Readers are engaging in autobiographical play with the public figures that they are reading about. Life-writing is transforming into social interaction: a relationship premised on the invitation from the author to the reader, to contribute, to play, to look for information. Life-writing is identity-in-action. Therefore the aesthetic value of the work as experienced by the reader is also a function of the “close attention to the qualitative nuances produced by [their] own handling of [their] responses.”<sup>788</sup> This brings us back to the question: are transmedial life-narratives a practice that is navigated by readers as well as by authors?

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<sup>785</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York : Modern Language Association of America, 1995), 51.

<sup>786</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 176.

<sup>787</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 179.

<sup>788</sup> Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, 132.

When authors and readers blur the boundaries of author and reader they engage in embodiment. This process constitutes both creative responses to a text, as well as the process of critical engagement. Anderson asserts that “writing the self involves moments when the self is lost, when cracks appear and unconscious memory floods in.”<sup>789</sup> These rivers of forgotten memory are the spaces that music, movement, and embodiment flood. They are the gutters between panels and paragraphs, the lacuna. They are the spaces where consumers can enter the storyworld. In an age where privileged Western identity is increasingly manifested across and through media, particularly social networking sites, it would be nonsensical to suggest that narrated identities are solely the realm of prose. Our identities leak out of our bodies and onto screens and pages and into speakers. We shout, we tell, we sing and type our stories. We dance and perform our lives. Our identity is transmedial. In this new culture the self is conflated with body, machine, and text. By embodying the multi-layered and transmedial storyworld, our identities become writerly—“a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures; we know only its departures and returns; the units which have resulted of it... are themselves, always, ventures out of the text, the mark, the kind of virtual digression toward the remainder of the catalogue.”<sup>790</sup> The self is therefore always extending itself to the other, and opening itself to difference.

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<sup>789</sup> Anderson, *Autobiography*, 95.

<sup>790</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 20.

## 8 CONCLUSION: NOT SHAPED BY FORCE

This is the time for every artist in every genre to do what he or she does loudly and consistently. It doesn't matter to me what your position is. You've got to keep asserting the complexity and the originality of life, and the multiplicity of it, and the facets of it. This is about being a complex human being in the world.

— Toni Morrison, Interview in *O: The Oprah Magazine* (2003).

In the early weeks of 2015 Amanda Palmer returned to Melbourne as part of her book tour for *The Art of Asking*. During her talk, she invited Australian musician and comic Justin Heazelwood to join her on the stage. Justin had recently released his own manifesto on succeeding while artistic, *Funemployed*.<sup>791</sup> Heazelwood describes his book as Palmer's "book's cousin." Palmer, Heazelwood and Tom Dickens (another Melbourne musician) discussed the benefits and pitfalls of crowdfunding, including the sense of obligation or otherwise that they felt toward their fans, as well as over committing creative energy to projects that they have outgrown in order to fulfil obligations arising from the crowdfunding. Palmer recounted that she was regularly asked "If you're pre-selling your album to all these thousands of people, don't you feel invaded? Like you owe all these people something and they're going to be really nit-picky about the product and they've got ownership over you?"<sup>792</sup> Palmer, Dickens and Heazelwood all responded in the negative, and Dickens explained that:

People take pride in being a part and getting to see... to peek behind the veil, but also are pretty respectful in the way that they gave you money because they believe in your capacity to create art. Therefore, as long as the dialect is open [they'll respect what you make].<sup>793</sup>

This open dialectic, a back and forth between author and readers as they move through and around the storyworld, is the focus of this thesis. I have explored how creators and consumers reclaim ownership and agency of their relationship in order to take it back from those intermediaries who regulate it. This enables new means of communicating, engaging with and understanding each other. One of the methods of communication that has developed in response to this shift is transmediality, which I elaborated on in the second chapter. I explained how transmediality subverts

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<sup>791</sup> Justin Heazelwood, *Funemployed: Life as an Artist in Australia* (South Melbourne: Affirm Press, 2014).

<sup>792</sup> Tom Dickinson in conversation with Amanda Palmer and Justin Heazelwood, Northcote Theatre, *An Evening with Amanda Palmer: The Art of Asking Book Signing*, 23 January 2015.

<sup>793</sup> Tom Dickinson in conversation with Amanda Palmer and Justin Heazelwood, , 23 January 2015.

hegemonic narratives regarding the status of authors and readers, and by extension how this challenges dominant ontological narratives. One of the material effects of this discursive shift is that the legal fiction that supports the exercise of property rights, namely the right to exclusion, over creative output is destabilised, and this destabilisation should be the focus of further research. Under the current market system intermediaries such as publishing houses position themselves as the arbiters of property rights in relation to creative work. While intermediaries had provided a form of economic boundary between consumers and creators, as they are excluded these boundaries blur. This coming together of authors and readers, of consumers and creators is, as we have seen, not just a new economic paradigm, but also a new creative one.

In her phenomenology of narrative, Katharine Young identifies boundaries as a means of framing and locating conceptual limits.<sup>794</sup> She writes that:

Beginnings and ends are the points where the events are about to start and finish; openings and closings are the points where the stories start and finish. Beginnings and ends create boundaries in the taleworld; openings and closings constitute the boundaries of the storyrealm.<sup>795</sup>

Through the course of my research I have determined that, in transmedial storyworlds, those boundaries are at the most still porous, and at the least, virtually non-existent. Where the case studies do lean into a boundary, they do so only to make its performative qualities explicit. For example, the case studies invoke a number of genres beyond autobiography, and thereby destabilise the performance of an overarching genre practice. I have taken a different approach to some of my contemporaries who study transmedial storyworlds by considering how genre, specifically life-writing, is practiced in a transmedial context. For example, *The Amory Wars* bears the marks of science-fiction, “a

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<sup>794</sup> Young, “Frame and Boundary,” *Narrative Across Media*, 78.

<sup>795</sup> Young, “Frame and Boundary,” *Narrative Across Media*, 83.

literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment."<sup>796</sup> In contrast, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer* stumbles from the absurd, the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any, as exemplified in Rohan Kriwaczek's *On The Many Deaths of Amanda Palmer (and the many crimes of Tobias James)*, to the mimetic in Palmer's most recent memoir, *The Art of Asking. The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne* follows the conventions of a commonplace book, while *Decoded* practices a style of corporate memoir meets critical essay. By weaving together life-writing with other genre practices the case studies make the cultural and performative components of literature explicit. Transmedial storyworlds are therefore a form of interpolation: they call out to the readers and make them aware of both their agency in the storyworlds, and the restrictions that regulatory regimes place on that agency. They demonstrate to readers the author's role as a performer staged on the page, and the reader's own position as a member of an audience. However, much as theatre is increasingly returning to the type of interactivity that preceded the proscenium arch, so too are readers taking on more and more agency in the storyworlds with which they engage. Therefore, in the third chapter, I argued that readers act from a position that I have identified as the lacuna: a series of temporal, physical and experiential spaces that invite readers to actively contribute to and engage with the storyworld.

Throughout the fourth and fifth chapters I argue that the readers' agency has illuminated the writerly qualities of transmedial storyworlds, and that in transmedial life-writing that writerlyness is manifested in the

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<sup>796</sup> Quoted in: Brian Stableford, John Clute and Peter Nicholls, "Definitions of SF," in *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* eds. John Clute and Peter Nicholls (London: Orbit/Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 311-314. He later elaborated on this, stating that Science Fiction "is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional "novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic."

authors' and the readers' ontologies. This theory of writerly ontology draws on post-structural and feminist critical theory to renegotiate subjectivity in response to alterity, rather than as determining otherness. It also recognises subjectivity as embodied, as a corporealisation of language, emotion and reason. By illuminating subjectivity as embodied, permeable, open, and influenced by otherness, my research offers a model through which regulatory authorities can be challenged by those who are subject to their governance.

In the sixth and seventh chapters I expand on how each of the case studies open themselves to the reader's authority. Readers can, dependant on their release and availability, determine in which order they will approach the texts that constitute a transmedial storyworld. They can also respond to the storyworld, expand and elaborate on it through fan-art, literature, performance, and critique. Transmedial narratives therefore necessitate an ethical meeting between the subjectivities that converge through the storyworld. This ethical connection, while it is not premised on material equality between agents, can pull into focus the imperative to maintain a form of the social contract premised on equality of outcomes, rather than merely equality of access to resources. This also opens a space for research into the commercial implications arising from the challenge posed to legal and commercial frameworks by transmedia storytelling practices.

Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism that the medium is the message has been exceeded in transmediality. Where the message is conveyed across multiple media, where the interactions of that message are excessive and infinite, and where the message that is conveyed is the very assertion of subjectivity itself, we, as readers, perform unity through our diversity. However, it is up to us as readers to insist that this diversity is not hierarchialised, or used to sublimate and silence already subordinated narratives.

This thesis provides the ground work for interdisciplinary research that considers the impact of reading, storytelling and narrative practices on regulatory discourses, such as law and economics. It offers a methodology for questioning the material effect resulting from narrations of power by both the storyteller and those who try to control the stories.

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I texted him when I'd finished writing the thesis: "You free for a quick chat?" He called me back immediately, "Hey, 'sup?" I told him it was done. I talked him through what I had done with the storyworld he had introduced me to. "That... that wasn't the path I thought you'd take with it. It's so different. I need to read it." I told him I'd finished writing the conclusion the night before, while watching *Torchwood*, itself a satellite in the *Doctor Who* storyworld. "Well," he said "John Barrowman certainly gets the juices flowing, and I'm sure some of them must be creative ones." I told him I was incorporating our conversation into my conclusion. It was part of who I am, it is part of my relational, open and infinite identity. "We need to catch up for a drink," he said. I sipped my coffee.

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## 9.5 Cinema and Television

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