

Choreographing Memory: Performance and Embodiment in Multimodal Narrative

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**Abstract**

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Drawing from a body of philosophical and theoretical reflection about movement, *Choreographing Memory* explores the embodied dimensions and inherent performativity of writing and reading multimodal texts situated in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century remix culture. Multimodal texts use multiple modes—textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, visual, etc.—to produce a single composition. Analysis of performance and embodiment in multimodal texts highlights the role of emotions in memory and the ways that memory is just as much about the body as about the mind. I introduce an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together media studies, affect theory, performance studies and dance scholarship on the body, disability studies, and social science studies of cognitive and cultural memory. I take as a case study an original assignment in my literature-based composition course on trauma and cultural memory that asks students to remix an element of Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred* (1979) into another mode for a contemporary audience. This practical application and demonstration of

reading method through reflective composition and literature pedagogy bridges my theoretical foundation with the following textual analysis, which takes up different multimodal genres through texts concerned primarily with memory and the body. These discuss e-lit and digital storytelling through Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), graphic memoir through Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), and photography and documentary film through Mark Hogancamp's *Marwencol* (2010). These authors deliberately insert themselves into narratives remixing a variety of other source texts in what I argue is inherently a performative, embodied act of composition. Likewise, the experience of reading these multimodal texts is also a performative, embodied act that expands a traditional conception of the static, finite text into a dynamic, ever evolving performance. I suggest that taking *choreography* as a critical term uniquely illuminates the connection between writing, memory, and performance.

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My time studying with Carolyn Allen contributed greatly to the shape of this final project. Carolyn introduced me to affect theory, and has been a fantastic influence on my scholarly exploration of memory and emotion. She cares as deeply for teaching as she does for scholarship, and the way she values the ability to translate research into the classroom has left an impression on me that will last the rest of my career. Her leadership in questioning the structure of doctoral education has also been a wonderful example of the ways our critical, analytical training can and should extend beyond our specific scholarly interests.

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*Empathy* in my mailbox one day and changing my life. Jennifer's intellectual passion for dance inspires me every day. I am forever grateful for my Seattle community that shares my love for literature, dance, music, and performance. I cannot possibly thank all of them, but I especially remember time with Will Arighi, Rachel Arteaga, Emily Bald, Allen Barros, Taylor Boulware, AJ Burgin, Carolyn Callaghan, Jessica Campbell, Bea Chang, Ed Chang, Stevi Costa, Leanne Day, Krista Daniel, Marcus Gorman, Ryan Helterbrand, JR Henneman, Bob Hodges, Rachel and James Kunert-Graf, May Lin, Ryne Maloney-Risner, Shane McCoy, Sharon Mitchler, Yasi Naraghi, Tesla Schaeffer, Anna Shajirat, Leisl Sackschewsky, and Linda Zygutis. Thanks to Alex Gray, who on the first day of EWP orientation shared that her pump-up song was Blur's "Coffee and TV," immediately drawing me to her and beginning a friendship that helped me survive grad school and life.

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Of course I want to thank my greatest role model, my mother, Carrie Pflapsen. After my father passed away, she continued raising my brothers, teaching dance at night, went to work full-time in public school, and earned her Master's in Special Education. When I struggled with the hardest part of the dissertation (getting started), she said, "It's no different than choreographing a dance. You just have to get everybody on stage and the rest will come." She was right. Thanks also to Chris, Erica, and Nick for being my cheering squad from afar and always being up for a family dance party when we're near.

Finally, I'll do my best to put into words how grateful I am for my partner in life and all things, Adam Turner. I remember in college when we used to argue about whether English or history majors had stronger research skills. I still can't believe we sat on the kitchen floor in Virginia almost seven years ago and decided that moving across the country to live 300 miles apart was a good idea. We both sacrificed so much to pursue these degrees and I truly could not have made it to this day without you. You are a brilliant writer, a compassionate partner, and you know better than anyone how to make me feel strong and confident in my own work and abilities. I can never thank you enough for all that you are to me.

*For my father.  
I remember you every day.*

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## PREFACE

### Choreographers Notes on an Embodied Reading of this Dissertation

The genesis of this dissertation occurred on the night of October 3, 2013, as I sat in the darkened auditorium of Meany Hall for the Performing Arts in Seattle, Washington. AXIS Dance Company, as part of the UW World Dance Series, delivered a stunning performance of three repertory pieces, closing with “What If Would You” choreographed by Victoria Marks. AXIS, founded in 1987, paved the way for a powerful contemporary dance form called physically integrated dance, which involves a company of both disabled and able-bodied dancers. They exist “to change the face of dance and disability,” and in doing so I believe they also change the face of performance itself. The final piece I saw that night studies “the ways we make sense of conditionality and ways in which this logic creates unreliable truths.” As Marks stated in an interview on the creation of the piece, “this company has tons of contingency statements built in because we don’t all move the same way.” The most surprising aspect of the performance was the audience participation at the end. Each of the company dancers went out into various parts of the audience to bring individual people on stage to perform with them. Like the company, the audience members brought on stage were also a mix of disabled and able-bodied people.

After the performance some of the dancers remained on stage to talk about the show. In response to a question about the audience participation portion of the last piece, one of the dancers spoke about her experience bringing a wheelchair-bound audience member on stage. She pointed out that most of the other performers were already on stage dancing, while she and her audience member took time to carefully traverse ramps, elevators, and more ramps to make their way to the stage. During this time, the audience member partner asked her “What do I do when it

starts? What if we take so long to get to the stage we miss the performance?” and she replied, “This is it. It’s happening right now.”

This sentiment electrified me.

*This is it.*

*It’s happening right now.*

She was saying that the performance was not confined to what was under the spotlights, that the time they were spending together was just as much a part of the performance as the formally choreographed dance. The notion of performance, what constitutes a performance space, and who constitutes a performer or an audience member had all been broken apart and reassembled in a moment. At the time I saw that performance I was at the beginning of research for my dissertation prospectus and planning a project on women’s memoirs and traumatic memory. The same central questions about memory, embodiment, and performance from that first project flow through this one you are now reading. But I knew walking out of the theater that night that I needed to push these questions in a direction traditional prose memoir would not accommodate. I needed multimodal texts. I needed multiple genres. And most of all I needed dance.

It took a very long time, and research following many paths I would end up not pursuing, but I arrived here. Many of the theorists I look to in the following chapters employ spatial or geographic metaphors to describe the process of reading a multimodal text and in doing so attempt to locate a reader in an exact location in relation to the text. The desire to know “You are here” on the map of a nonlinear, multimodal narrative highlights the active role of the reader in performing one of many iterations of that text. One of the greatest potential gains of making *choreography* operational in an analysis of embodied reading is imagining the possibilities of the extension of the text itself. Shelley Jackson speculates, “where you draw the line around the

work is very fuzzy...that you could include things that aren't normally thought of as part of the text, like the lights that you sit under...the noises that you hear on the street" (Grigar and Moulthrop). If the line you draw around a work includes the embodied act of reading whole new possibilities open up for understanding the work and the reading process itself.

Drawing on the connection between writing and dancing Ann Cooper Albright claims that, "translating reader-response theory into the performance context, one could say that not only is each dance 'read' and interpreted by the audience members, it is constantly 'read' and reinterpreted by the person performing those movements" (186). I view the person performing those movements to be the reader engaging with any of the multimodal genres explored in this dissertation. Perhaps the most exciting insight to come out of my engagement with dance, motion, and emotion in this project is the way I returned to my original questions about the nature of memory. There is an undeniable relationship between the fleeting, ephemeral nature of both performance and memory. Attempts to document, record, and resurrect a unique performance are not unlike attempts to translate memory into cohesive narrative, and they both engage the physical body as much as the mind. Multimodal texts choreograph memory in infinite iterations. Susan Leigh Foster's *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (2010), the influential and inspiring book to which I pay tribute in my title, argues that a dancer's performance draws upon and engages with prevailing senses of the body and of subjectivity in a given historical moment. This claim can be fruitfully applied to a reader's multimodal performance as well. As you read this dissertation my hope is that you grow more aware of the way you read and the way in which your prior knowledge, reading experiences, and memories shape your emotional, critical, and interpretive responses to this current reading. This is it. It's happening right now.

## CHAPTER ONE

## “Feeling with fiction”: Empathetic Readings and Remixed Storyworlds

My study of how memory functions in multimodal composition begins with the body.

Multimodal here refers to composition that involves multiple modes—textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, visual, etc.—to produce a single composition. I look to authors who explicitly incorporate their own bodies into narratives remixing a variety of other source texts in what I argue is inherently a performative, embodied act of composition. Likewise, the experience of reading these multimodal texts is also a performative, embodied act that expands a traditional conception of the static, finite text into a dynamic, ever evolving performance. I suggest that taking *choreography* as a critical term uniquely illuminates the connection between writing, memory, and performance. Common understandings of memory locate the act of remembering primarily in the mind, which grossly overlooks the very physical, bodily experience of memory.

A variety of questions examining the relationship between form and content guide my study. How does multimodal composition embody memory and the act of remembering? Where does such composition offer metacommentary on memory especially through the craft of storytelling? Affective dimensions of storytelling, most notably empathy, are the keys through which memories generate meaning, become meaningful in new contexts, and transfer meaning from one context to another. How do specific storytelling techniques craft representations of memory? How do these techniques change in different genres and mediums? How might a reader engage with a narrative when it has multiple mediums (text, image, audio, video, etc.)? If empathy is central to storytelling, what are different ways texts make a reader feel what another is feeling? How do we make sense of counterintuitive approaches, such as alienating a reader

rather than trying to make them identify with a character? How does technology change, limit, or expand this process? Technology affects both composition and reading practices: authors can compose and readers can interface with narrative in new ways.

This dissertation draws from a body of philosophical and theoretical reflection about movement to discuss the embodiment of memory in multimodal texts. In part, I build my analysis through application of dance scholars' theories of movement and identity to bodies of / in the text, and to interaction between reader and narrative. How does emotion move in a text, and between text and reader? One focus is on kinesthetics of the page: how is the composition consciously constructing movement in the narrative? Cross-genre analysis is particularly fruitful for this approach because it allows a way to look at different medium-specific narrative techniques and the ways in which these techniques choreograph memory in narrative.

Despite such invigorated interest in theorizing emotion, the body, and embodiment, the role the body plays in navigating the experience of reading is still overlooked, especially in contemporary literature and new media. Multiple scholarly ventures affirm a renewed interest in the contemporary. Columbia University Press's series *Literature Now* "seeks ambitious books that analyze the literature of 'now,' while considering what counts 'now' as literature." The *Post\*45* series at Stanford University Press focuses on popular and avant-garde culture from multiple genres. *ASAP*, The Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present, is an international, nonprofit association dedicated to "discovering and articulating the aesthetic, cultural, ethical, and political identities of the contemporary arts," and they proclaim, "We refuse the corporate division of the arts into disciplinary slivers; we create interdisciplinary dialogue. We reject the alienation of creative artists from the world of scholar-critics. We insist on poetic relation." The most striking aspect of these scholarly ventures is their obsession with

simultaneously identifying generic markers (what “counts” as literature), while also eschewing such categorical divide in favor of “interdisciplinary dialogue.”

In order to understand The New we have to be able to articulate what it is, or is not, and theorization of new media demands an equally interdisciplinary approach. What does multimodal writing and reading look like? In this chapter I will first briefly examine a multimodal novel as an introductory example, and second I will outline an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together media studies, affect theory, performance studies and dance scholarship on the body, and social science studies of cognitive and cultural memory. This framework will guide and inform analysis of the other genres of multimodal narrative discussed in *Choreographing Memory*. More so than the relationship between literature and other arts such as music, the relationship between literature and dance has been overlooked. Scholars theorizing the body from any discipline can benefit from what dance studies has to offer. My dissertation seeks to demonstrate the value of bringing dance scholars’ insights on embodiment and performance center stage.

### The Multimodal Novel as Introductory Example

“I was in Zagreb the day that Michael Jackson died.”

This is the opening line of Barbara Browning’s multimodal novel *I’m Trying to Reach You* (2012), which blurs the lines between literature, performing arts, technology, academia, and popular culture. Part mystery novel, part work of grief and mourning, and part meta-commentary on art, community, and isolation in the twenty-first century, Browning’s work combines

traditional prose fiction with a series of interrelated dance videos, linked directly to YouTube in the text of the novel itself. The non-verbal artistic expression conveyed through the body of the dancer—the author, a professionally trained dancer herself—is just as integral to the narrative as the words on the page.

The protagonist in Browning’s novel, Gray Adams, is a former ballet dancer with a PhD in Performance Studies. The narrative takes place over the year Gray holds a postdoctoral fellowship as a visiting scholar at NYU, during which he finds ample time to attempt to single handedly solve what he believes to be a conspiratorial systematic murdering of the greatest performers of our time. Following the opening line, Gray immediately sets the mock-serious, somewhat obsessive tone that will characterize metacommentary on writing fiction that will run throughout the rest of the novel:

When I heard the news, the first thing I thought was, “That’s it. That’s the first line of my novel. ‘I was in Zagreb the day that Michael Jackson died.’” It seemed exactly right – odd, bizarre even, incongruous, an appallingly sad event viewed from an eerie state of helpless remove. It encapsulated all the feelings I’d been wanting to get off my chest, without having any actual story to attach them to. I’d been toying with the idea of writing fiction – probably as a way of avoiding the real task at hand, which was my academic writing. (Browning 5)

Gray’s flair for the dramatic animates his cyber sleuthing and real world stalking. His comical tone and constant jabs at scholarly discourse and the dismal state of the academic job market remain a constant undercurrent of bigger questions. Gray contemplates a digitally saturated world where we are at once the most connected and the most isolated we have ever been as a society. He views the novel, and by extension his murder mystery quest, as a way to get all these

“feelings off his chest” without having “any actual story to attach them to.”

To consider the ways in which Gray comments on his own process of grappling with the emotions embodied in his real (or imagined) conflict, I am interested in Laura Micciche’s distinction between *emoting* and *rhetorics of emotion*:

Rather than characterize emotion exclusively as a reaction to a situation or a tool used to create a reaction in an audience, we need to shift our thinking to examine how emotion is part of the ‘stickiness’ that generates attachments to others, to world-views, and to a whole array of sources and objects. The distinction to press here is between the study of *emoting*, or the expression of feeling, and that of *rhetorics of emotion*, or emotion as a performative that produces effects. To speak of emotion as performative is to foreground the idea that emotions are enacted and embodied in the social world. (Micciche 1)

Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), explains that “Emotions are what move us, and how we are moved involves interpretations of sensations and feelings not only in the sense that we interpret what we feel, but also in that what we feel might be dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us, but that come before us. Focusing on emotions as mediated rather than immediate reminds us that knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation” (171). While the protagonist in Browning’s novel comments explicitly on this very concept, both in the context of his mystery quest, and in his musings over his scholarly work, the novel itself moves the reader forcibly from the pages of the narrative to whatever device – phone, tablet, laptop, etc. that that reader – might have at hand to seek out the YouTube videos linked in a dozen different instances throughout the book. The plot motivation is that Gray, upon hearing of Michael Jackson’s death, takes to YouTube to

watch an obsessive quantity of moonwalking videos, and happens on a particularly intriguing video of a woman dancing alone in her tiny apartment living room. This sets off a months long interaction between Gray, the dancer, and several other characters whose paths cross in multiple ways online, and eventually in real life.

The dancer in the videos is, in fact, the author of the novel, Barbara Browning, who in addition to being a trained dancer, and a fiction writer, earned her PhD in comparative literature from Yale and currently teaches in the Department of Performance Studies at NYU. By offering up her own dancing body as part of this narrative, Browning literally blurs the lines between the virtual and real worlds Gray crosses in his quest, and makes it possible for the reader to ignore an array of external factors influencing the reading of this novel. Micciche contends that, “Attention to performance and embodiment is beginning to influence discussions about the value and relevance of academic writing, conventionally measured through the production of traditional essays. This assumption is being challenged, however, by calls for multimodal rhetorics that seek to reconfigure writing as a dynamic process involving a range of materials and strategies, in effect calling into question printed words as the best gauge for judging ‘writing.’” (19). Additionally, Browning not so subtly challenges the value of not only the medium of expression in academic discourse, but also the venues in which this discourse is meant to thrive.

While there are many scenes in this text that playfully chide academic conventions, the one that seems most appropriate to discuss at the beginning of a dissertation concerned with audience and performance is the traditional academic conference. In a painfully depressing, albeit comical, scene near the beginning of the novel, Gray is presenting his concert dance scholarship at the International Performance Studies conference, and arrives to his session to find that the prominent scholar headlining his panel has cancelled. The room is now empty except for

the one other presenter on the panel, a graduate student named Amanda Trugget, who is trying not to cry. The pair decides to “forge ahead stoically” and read their papers to each other. At the close of this scene, Gray addresses the reader and says, “Maybe now you will understand why I’d been toying with the idea of writing a novel. It’s not that I don’t enjoy academic writing, and it’s not like I want to be the next Stephen King. Honestly, I love the idea of a paper with an audience of one. Well, two if you count the tech guy” (Browning 19).

The idea of the “audience of one” echoes throughout what are arguably the most emotionally charged scenes in the novel. As readers, what we are made to empathize with is the overabundant *excess of feeling*: Gray’s paranoia, obsession, and desperation simultaneously move off the pages of the text he is writing in the storyworld of the novel, while also moving the reader away from the physical text to an internet browser, a real series of videos posted, and a whole onslaught of whatever other distractions come with falling down a YouTube channel rabbit hole. Being a dance scholar, Gray explicates his analysis of the choreography he sees performed in the videos – the type of movement, the relationship between the music, lighting, attire of the dancer, etc. – but what Browning ultimately choreographs here is the relationship and interplay of experiencing performance, of navigating media, in a public setting where public comments become parts of the narrative themselves. The anonymous YouTube comments trailing after each dance video pull Gray further into the plot as he reads what he believes to be clues regarding the sinister murder conspiracy. Much of the unbridled confidence, and violence, of the personalities performed in a public comment thread exist because they are anonymous. Browning uses this narrative to ask the question many probably ponder when reading such comments: what would happen if you met these characters in real life? While the plot-driven murder mystery aspect of the novel is deeply engaging, I will argue here that solving the mystery

is hardly the point of this narrative. Rather, Browning uses traditional prose fiction as a springboard into testing what constitutes a performance space, and how we as readers empathize most acutely with the protagonist's emotions when we perform the choreography set out by a multimodal text.

One point of entry into an analysis of how Browning's novel and its interlaced dance videos choreograph empathy is to consider a more inclusive and complex definition of "choreography." Susan Leigh Foster writes that:

Choreography can stipulate both the kinds of actions performed and their sequence of progression. Sometimes designating minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, sketching out the broad contours of action within which variation might occur, choreography constitutes a plan or score according to which movement unfolds. Buildings choreograph space and people's movement through them; cameras choreograph cinematic action; birds perform intricate choreographies; and combat is choreographed. Multiprotein complexes choreograph DNA repair. (Foster 2)

Foster proposes that choreography can productively be conceptualized as "a theorization of identity—corporeal, individual, and social. Each moment of watching a dance can be read as the product of choices, inherited, invented, or selected, about what kinds of bodies and subjects are being put forth" (4). Reading the relationship between mind and body, especially in the instances of spontaneous or unexpected performance on which Browning's project thrives, is key to understanding empathetic connection to a dancing body.

Deidre Sklar uses the term *kinesthetic empathy* in her dance ethnography to refer to such physical awareness of an other. Foster rightly points out "the fact that the experience of empathy

needs to be qualified with the adjective 'kinesthetic' belies the pervasive assumption that emotional and physical experiences are separate" (10). It is in the interactive realm of the social, where awareness of both spectacle and spectator elicit an embodied emotional response, that *I'm Trying to Reach You* creates an utterly boundless performance space. In a scene near the end of the novel that epitomizes the concept of the boundless performance space, Gray happens upon a flash mob on the streets of New York City wherein the dancers assemble unannounced out of the crowds. Gray speculates about the history of the flash mob and "the ways in which it demonstrated from its inception the complicated relationship between anarchy, choreographed spontaneity, and commercialism" (Browning 162). To bring the episode full circle, Gray encounters the actual man behind one of the YouTube handles he has been stalking for months. There, in real life, they share the same physical space and time, witnessing a performance, while also performing their own embodiment of their virtual selves, realized after months of navigating the narrative woven between text and dance. The spectacle of the flash mob happens around them, but they are positive spectacles for each other; an "audience of one" amidst the crowded city street.

A hallmark of an artistic orientation towards the social in the late twentieth century has been a shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist, and the audience. Claire Bishop postulates that, "the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*" emphasizing specific contexts of production, rather than the product, "while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder,' is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*" (2). Even as people on the street stop to watch the dancers in the flash mob Gray happens upon, they are just as aware of the idea of a performance framing the project as we are.

In the simplest sense, the dancing bodies in this text generate an empathetic connection to viewers not because they have artistic power to make others feel what it is to dance professional choreography, but rather because those dancing bodies can “wake up” the spectator to awareness of their own body and how it is traveling through everyday virtual and real spaces, how it is responding to and affecting others in that immediate moment, and how it is also part of the narrative.

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth declare that affect’s real potential is a body’s *capacity* to affect and be affected; that affect marks a body’s “belonging to a world of encounters,” and is synonymous with *forces of encounter* (2). Literature courses constantly orchestrate such forceful encounters, but do not always offer outlets to externalize experiences with fiction in ways that feel relevant to students outside the classroom. Suzanne Keen believes that, “narrative empathy means feeling with fiction,” and that “fictional character resides somewhere between the discourse and the storyworld, a projection of fictional worldmaking and the site of readerly creative collaboration” (296-298). I am interested in such sites of readerly creative collaboration as they extend beyond text and reader, especially through physical spaces on and around the body that offer new points of access to a broad readership, particularly through public venues encouraged by twenty-first century remix culture. Before investigating several different genres of multimodal composition in the chapters ahead, an understanding of the relationship between memory and embodiment, and the triangulation of empathy, performance, and remix is necessary.

## Affect and Theories of Movement

Some of the strongest vocabulary for studying motion between bodies and texts comes from dance scholars like Susan Leigh Foster, who, as discussed above, believes that “choreographing empathy” entails the “construction and cultivation of a specific physicality whose kinesthetic experience guides our perception of and connection to what another is feeling” (2). The term “empathy” was coined in 1880, by German aestheticians seeking to describe and analyze in depth the act of viewing painting and sculpture.<sup>1</sup> They posited a kind of physical connection between the viewer and art in which the viewer’s own body would move into and inhabit the various features of the artwork. Literary studies of empathy are equally relevant to this investigation. The kinds of passionate attachments that characterize the most important literature have been recognized as related to the compassionate ties that connect us to other things we love in the cultural world, as in Sarah Ahmed’s “sticky affect.”<sup>2</sup> The transitory form of affectively challenging narratives contributes directly to readerly empathy.

Crucial to this project is the foundation on which the field of affect studies has developed a discourse on emotions, and the relationship between actors and the greater networks to which they belong; particularly the ways in which an actor engages with, and is shaped by, a given environment. Sigmund Freud claimed in his very earliest project that, “affect does not so much reflect or think; affect acts” (357). In 1995, Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s “Shame in the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Theodor Lipps. See Dan Zahavi’s discussion that points out the need for a distinction between “Lipps’s definition of empathy in terms of inner imitation, and the subsequent analyses found in phenomenology. Whereas Lipps’s criticism of the argument from analogy found approval among later phenomenologists, they were by and large quite critical of his own positive account...phenomenologists offer a distinct and multilayered analysis of the intentional structure of empathy, one that differs rather markedly from recent attempts to explain empathy in terms of mirroring, mimicry, imitation, emotional contagion, imaginative projection, or inferential attribution” (111).

<sup>2</sup> In “Happy Objects” Sara Ahmed claims that, “affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (29). Also see Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* (2010).

Cybernetic Fold,” and Brian Massumi’s “The Autonomy of Affect” marked the moment in which theoretical content was generated, combining affect’s displacement of the centrality of cognition with affect theory’s own displacement of debates over the centrality of structuralism and poststructuralism. These essays have given substantial shape to the two dominant vectors of affect studies in the humanities. On one path Silvan Tomkins’ psychobiology of different affects (1962) influenced Sedgwick and Frank. On another Gilles Deleuze’s Spinozist ethnology of bodily capacities (1988) informed Massumi’s work. With Tomkins, affect follows a quasi-Darwinian “innate-ist” bent toward matters of evolutionary hardwiring. Meanwhile, Deleuze’s Spinozan route locates affect in the midst of things and relations (in immanence), and in the complex assemblages that come to compose bodies and worlds simultaneously. There is, then, a certain difference in directionality of the focus of each of these approaches: affect as the prime “interest” motivator that comes to put the drive in bodily drives (Tomkins); affect as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman (Deleuze).<sup>3</sup>

Countless trajectories of affect theory have developed out of these vectors. The most relevant affect scholarship to this project focuses on understanding how the “outside” realms of the pre-linguistic intersect with the “lower” or proximal senses (such as touch, taste, smell, rhythm and motion, sense, or the automatic nervous system), while also arguing for a much wider definition for the social or cultural. Frequently this work focuses on those ethico-aesthetic spaces that are opened up (or shut down) by a widely disparate assortment of affective encounters with new technological interfaces, music, dance, and other non-discursive arts. Numerous book-length studies have engaged with critical discourse that moves beyond conceptions of the interiorized self to account for matters of belonging that range from

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<sup>3</sup> See Anna Gibbs, Elspeth Probyn, and Megan Watkins.

postcolonial, migrant, and racially or sexually hybridized voices.<sup>4</sup> Recent MLA conventions have hosted a slew of related panels, notably the roundtables organized by Lauren Berlant, “Affecting Affect Theory” (2012), and Katherine Ann Jensen and Miriam L. Wallace, “Emotions: Theory, Practice, Knowledge” (2014), the latter of which previews a follow-up *PMLA* issue on emotions. I myself organized and presented on the special session, “Forces of Encounter: Affect, Audience, and Trauma in Contemporary Performing Arts” at the MLA 2015 convention.

In addition to theories of affect, dialogue pursued by scholars directly linking literature and dance is critical to how I intend to theorize the body, embodiment, and choreography in this project. Dance scholarship takes several different shapes. Some scholars explore dance as a way of conceptualizing, reinforcing, or redressing political systems or situations.<sup>5</sup> Others are concerned with ways that dance can illuminate understandings of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Some work offers dance as a possible model for a nonessentialist valorization of the body; dance presents a gendered identity that is grounded in a particular, biological dancing body—carrying clear signs of sexual difference—and at the same time constructed through performance. These dances work over, play with, and exceed any notion of gender as a stable biological category.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between dancing bodies and theories of writing or composition also utilizes this interdisciplinary dialogue. These scholars engage with a historical period in which written meaning was differentiated from bodily meaning, and in which,

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<sup>4</sup> See Patricia Clough and Jean Halley, Sianne Ngai, and Ann Cvetkovich.

<sup>5</sup> See Barbara Browning, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, and J. Ellen Gainor.

<sup>6</sup> See Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, Elizabeth Dempster, Gaylyn Studlar, and Michael Moon.

<sup>7</sup> See Ann Cooper Albright, and Felicia McCarren.

subsequently, bodies were divorced from their capacities to theorize.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the single most relevant contribution dance studies can make to my project is the use of *choreography* as a critical term. Susan Foster proposes that choreography can productively be conceptualized as a theorization of identity - corporeal, individual, and social. She believes that “each moment of watching a dance can be read as the product of choices, inherited, invented, or selected, about what kinds of bodies and subjects are being put forth. These decisions, made collectively or individually, spontaneously or in advance of dancing, constitute a kind of record of action that is durable and makes possible both the repetition of a dance and analysis of it” (4).

#### Reading and Writing in the Digital Age

This dissertation engages with lines of inquiry that attempt to understand what “counts” as literature in a digital age, as well as the ways in which such narrative is composed, performed, and distributed. All of my primary texts choreograph movement visually between print and image, demanding the interaction of readers’ specific subject positions in the process of navigating narrative. All of them were produced using digital technologies. While many scholars have explored and theorized new media as a site for rethinking subjectivities and modes of intersubjectivity, critique has focused on the bodies *in* the text.<sup>9</sup> This first chapter, via a unique interdisciplinary discourse combining theories of affect and embodiment with approaches from the social sciences to understanding networks and remix, will expand the conversation to include

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<sup>8</sup> See Susan Leigh Foster, Mark Franko, Ellen Goellner, and Jacques Derrida.

<sup>9</sup> See Neil Badmington, Thomas Foster, Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, Laura Shackelford, and Catherine Waldby.

composition, or a process of co-creation, and reading or viewing experience, as legitimate objects of inquiry.

In addition to drawing on affect and dance theorists to formulate and critique close readings of performance of both bodies *in* the text and bodies *experiencing* the text, I will also be situating my argument in discussions of composition and co-creation in mixed media art via Claire Bishop, Miwon Kwon, and Bruno Latour, among others.<sup>10</sup> In *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age*, Margot Lovejoy offers a definition of representation as “a system of iconography containing both the perceptual and the aesthetic when related to art and having conventions of both tool and medium inscribed in it. . . . Images or objects that artists construct are not just simple responses to individual experience. They are always ordered, coded, and styled according to conventions which develop out of the practice of each medium with its tools and process” (4). In *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green contrast “stickiness”—aggregating attention in centralized places—with “spreadability”—dispersing content widely through both formal and informal networks, some approved, many unauthorized. Stickiness has been the measure of success in the broadcast era (and has been carried over to the online world), but “spreadability” describes the ways content travels through social media. This focus examines the nature of audience engagement, the environment of participation, the way appraisal creates value, and the transnational flows at the heart of these phenomena (Jenkins et al.). Considering representation and spreadability in these contexts will allow me to situate close readings of choreography in, on, and through my primary texts that account for meaning making in multimodal genres. The relationship between conceptual understandings of stickiness and attachment points again to the very affective

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<sup>10</sup> See also Branden Joseph, Erin Manning, and Steven Shaviro.

dimensions of social networks. Jenkins sees stickiness as aggregating media attention in centralized places. Ahmed sees sticky affect as what glues ideas, values, and objects together. Kathleen Woodward in *Statistical Panic* (2009) suggests considering attachment to affective work itself. Referring to a media-saturated society, Woodward claims that, “In postmodern culture the large-scale narrative has been compressed to an image fragment. Sound bites and image fragments are *affect bites*” and identifies “intensities as short-lived feelings that attach us not to *people* but rather suture us to the task—it is a form of work—of avoiding risk in our society of ever-increasing risk. Hence the affect bite that is statistical panic is countered by the psychological emotion of anger—or better, outrage—an anger that is analytical. It has a cognitive edge” (25-26). The cognitive edge of emotion here points to yet another dimension of the joint work of body and mind in navigating a networked world.

The first step in understanding how content travels through social media is gaining an understanding of the network through which it travels. In this project, the network between actors—between texts and bodies—extends to the network between previous iterations of that relationship between texts and bodies, such is the nature of remix culture. Lawrence Lessig and others have written extensively on the difference between Read Only Culture (RO), in which the culture is consumed passively: information is provided by a professional source that remains the authority over the content, and the authority over how media is consumed. In opposition to RO is Read/Write culture (RW), which posits a reciprocal relationship between the creator and consumer. There is a direct correlation between technological advancements and developments, and this RW culture in which information is shared and adapted or remixed into new sets of

information.<sup>11</sup> For example, when a “mashup” artist creates a new song from existing samples, the product is a form of artistic expression which creates new meaning through the very process of combining information from various creative, cultural, social, or political discourses that came before it. This process has been likened to the collaging or “patchwork” writing that happens in student papers, or in scholarly dialogue. From this point of view, sampling a piece of music or a video clip in a new work is similar to quoting another scholar. A remix puts multiple voices in dialogue, and the artist or writer creating it conveys a new purpose through deliberate choices in the tone, style, or phrasing of juxtaposed or layered sources in the remix. It is the social dimension of remix culture that has remained in the foreground of debates about remix and authenticity, and remix and ethics.

#### Embodiment and Society in Context

In this dissertation, which is centrally concerned with empathy and the relationship between embodiment and performance, the social network in which remix occurs is of utmost importance, and therefore an interdisciplinary approach invoking the social sciences provides foundational context. Social psychology studies of cultural memory will become integral to the later discussion of student remixes of Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred* (1979), and in the other primary texts analyzed in this project. Equally important are conceptions of what is meant by “social dimension” as it is used and deployed through the social sciences.

Bruno Latour’s 2005 *Reassembling the Social* offers a revision, a re-seeing of conceptions of the social by, “redefining sociology not as the ‘science of the social’, but as the *tracing of associations*. In this meaning of the adjective, *social* does not designate a thing among

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<sup>11</sup> See especially Lessig’s *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (2001) and *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (2008).

other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but *a type of connection* between things that are not themselves social” (5). Re-association and reassembling as active and ever-evolving processes become the meaning of social for Latour, and it is this active process that brings performance to the center of his Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Latour explains that “one way to mark this difference is to say that social aggregates are not the object of an *ostensive* definition—like mugs and cats and chairs that can be pointed at by the index finger—but only of a *performative* definition. They are made by the various ways and manners in which they are said to exist” (34). Social networks are only ever in process and must be performed continuously. By way of example, he writes:

If a dancer stops dancing, the dance is finished. No inertia will carry the show forward. This is why I needed to introduce the distinction between ostensive and performative: the object of an ostensive definition remains there, whatever happens to the index of the onlooker. But the object of a performative definition vanishes when it is no longer performed—or if it stays, then it means that *other* actors have taken over the relay. And this relay, by definition, cannot be “the social world,” since it is that very world which is in dire need of a fresh relay. (37-38)

Latour suggests we need to perform a sociology that is “best defined as the discipline where participants explicitly engage in the reassembling of the collective” (247). The relationship between performativity and actor-network theory can extend to the network of, for example, college curricula, students, teachers, and texts; and to the network between a multitude of voices implicit in remix culture. By invoking ANT here, I intend to foreground a greater focus on the re-associations and reassembling that are the occupations of the authors of the primary texts in

this study, and the relationships between the texts and interactions with those texts in specific, embodied contexts.

Katherine Hayles, in her landmark 1999 work *How We Became Posthuman*, defines embodiment as the unique context in which information is enacted. A reader's engagement with the storyworld is made meaningful through engagement with the material world in which she is reading. The goal is to "entangle abstract form and material particularity such that the reader will find it increasingly difficult to maintain the perception that they are separate and discrete entities" (Hayles 23). She makes a critical distinguish between "the body" and "embodiment": "Whereas the body can disappear into information with scarcely a murmur of protest, embodiment cannot, for it is tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person" (197). Embodiment, then, is an expression of context, an action. Hayles explains that "embodiment is akin to articulation in that it is inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational," and further claims that embodiment is "enmeshed in the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment" (196). The use of "performativity" as both Hayles and Latour incorporate it into their understandings of embodiment and actor-network theory, respectively, can be seen as rooted in definitions of performativity via Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida.<sup>12</sup> I am interested in the relationship between such a theorized performance of identity, and how it relates to the subject position of the reader or audience for the various forms of remixed artistic expression taken up in this project.

To examine this further, I will draw connections between Hayles' understanding of technology and embodied reading, Latour's revised definition of the social as the process of

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<sup>12</sup> See especially Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" and other essays in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (1990), edited by Sue-Ellen Case.

reassembling, and Emily Russell's accounting for embodied subject position predicated on culturally constructed difference, as investigated from the field of disability studies. In her important 2012 work, *Reading Embodied Citizenship: Disability, Narrative, and the Body Politic*, Russell explains that she moves from "conventional understandings of the body as the unremarkable requirement of all citizenship to exposing embodiment as an unevenly distributed characteristic only made visible by its difference" (4). She argues:

Taking on the mantle of the national body proceeds unevenly between normative subjects and citizens with marked bodies. ... "embodied citizenship" carries two meanings: first, the traditional model in which the body politic is aligned with the physical body and, second, the typically overlooked ways in which embodiment carries an added ideological weight for visibly different citizens marked by disability, race, gender, and sexuality. (7)

Russell's expresses a concept of belonging that is central to understanding the relationship between actors in a given network. Through these interactions, "the mingling of the physical, social, and textual body, then, captures a shifting and uneven terrain in which each element can become obscured and ignored. ... These poles, however, exist on a spectrum in which the material and the abstract are mutually reliant" (Russell 7-8). This dissertation as a whole, and the upcoming discussion of student writing in chapter two, takes into account the material and abstract iterations of embodiment in *both readers and texts*. Tensions for empathetic engagement emerge out of the embodied act of reading and the materiality of multiple modes. Russell asserts that, "physical difference calls upon both metaphor and materiality, but it also argues that the relation between these spheres will necessarily involve imbalance and discomfort" (7). It is this very discomfort, as it arises in the process of cutting, tearing, re-stitching, and reassembling old

texts into new forms of artistic expression, that sheds light on how the process of composition is performative and how this process is part of an ever-evolving network.<sup>13</sup>

### Memory and Society in Context

To study multimodal reading is to study multimodal readers. It is important to understand that while reading can be a solitary process, no individual reading takes place in a vacuum. This dissertation is primarily concerned with the relationship between the construction of memory in texts, and the dynamic evolution of memory and remembering in readers. Individual memories inform and are informed by their relationship to a greater cultural context. Social psychology provides the most substantial foundation for discerning the meaning and value of collective memory in my analysis because it encompasses my central focus: the psychological and emotional factors governing the human mind of the individual as it relates to and interacts with society. Foundational to social psychological studies of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs, in his work *On Collective Memory*, states, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (38). The localization of memories is important to my study because the restriction of particular conceptions of the past to specific spatial and temporal locations creates the circumstances under which multiple memories of the same event can exist; whether these memories coexist peacefully or remain in constant conflict with one another will be discussed at length.

Conjecturing on the nature of remembering as an act of reliving the past, Halbwachs further suggests,

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<sup>13</sup> See especially chapter three of this dissertation for a discussion of the role of discomfort and disorientation in multimodal reading.

If the past recurs, it seems of little importance to know whether it does so in my consciousness or in the consciousness of others...various capacities for memory aid each other and are of mutual assistance to each other. But what we call the collective framework of memory would then be only the result, or sum, or combination of individual recollections of many members of the same society. (Halbwachs 39)

It is this framework that suggests a working relationship between individuals and the formation of their own identities in relation to society. Halbwachs' use of the specific terms "result" and "sum" supports a view of collective memory that employs some sort of formal equation. These many parts suggest the inherent multiplicity of any conception of the collective framework of memory.

In a more recent work, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, James V. Wertsch distinguishes between strong and distributed notions of collective memory: The strong version of collective memory assumes that some sort of collective mind or consciousness exists above and beyond all the minds of the individuals in the collective, which he states is a difficult position to defend, and rarely manifests outside of the context of fanatical religion or science fiction. In contrast, the distributed version of collective memory assumes that a representation of the past is distributed among members of a collective. For example, a family may construct a narrative of past events by piecing together what the mother saw, what the son heard, etc. (Wertsch 21). Within the theory of distributed collective memory, there are three accepted categories. The simplest version of distributed collective memory can be termed "homogeneous," and posits that all members of a group share the same representation of the past, which Wertsch clarifies seldom exists. A second form of distributed collective memory can be termed "complementary," wherein

it is assumed that different members of a group have different perspectives and remember different things, but these exist in a coordinated system of complementary pieces (Wertsch 23).

However, a third form of distributed collective memory, according to Wertsch, involves “contested distribution.” As in the case of complementary distribution, different perspectives are inherent to this, but they do not function together in a cooperative or reciprocal fashion. Instead,

They exist in a system of opposition and contestation...similar to John Bodner’s “public memory” (1991)...Competition and conflict characterize this sort of representation of the past. Instead of involving multiple perspectives that overlap or complement one another, the focus is on how these perspectives compete with or contradict one another. Indeed, in some cases, one perspective is designed specifically to rebut another. (Wertsch 24)

Contested distribution, in this sense, focuses on conflict within the collective memory of the group: different members of the same society may adopt different versions of the same event depending upon their social, cultural, or economic position within the group. Perhaps it is prudent here to consider that collective memory—as it is understood to be an ongoing action—is distinct from history, if “history” is popularly understood as what we see recorded as factual, unchanging records of the past. Collective memory is less of a record and more of an act of rehearsing our understanding of the past. Conflict is an inherent part of that rehearsal.

Navigation between past events and present rehearsals of those events involves a degree of mediation between recollecting and interpreting. The two are inextricably linked in the *act* of interpretation: the “facts” of an event may be standardized in an official report of what happened, but the moment interpretation of those facts is relayed from two distinct voices (possibly from within the same individual), the paths diverge. Marianne Hirsch, in her article “The Generation

of Postmemory,” suggests that the term “postmemory” describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.

Hirsch reviews similar terms and their progression toward a cohesive understanding of what it means to use postmemory as the framework through which to study dynamically evolving memories, acknowledging the ideas of a “syndrome” of belatedness or “post-ness” and how it has been variously termed “absent memory” (Fine 1988), “inherited memory,” “belated memory,” “prosthetic memory” (Lury 1998, Landsberg 2004), ... “vicarious witnessing” (Zeitlin 1998), “received history” (Young 1997), and “postmemory,” (Hirsch 105). She anticipates many of the controversial assumptions about such terms:

that descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection memory and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event. At the same time—so it is assumed—this received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. Hence the insistence on “post” or “after” and the many qualifying adjectives that try to define both a specifically inter- and trans-generational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma. If this sounds like a contradiction, it is, indeed, one, and I believe it is inherent to this phenomenon. (Hirsch 106)

While the case for whether or not one generation can literally experience, or inherit, the memories of the previous generation is difficult to prove, the concept that one generation’s traumatic experiences can strongly affect the following generation is nearly universally accepted.

The younger generation may be just as conflicted when it comes to defining their identity as the older generation who actually experienced the traumatic event. Celia Lury, in *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, memory and identity*, notes the ways in which the current generation forms its identity and its “implications for contemporary understandings of agency, responsibility, the allocation of guilt, blame and virtue, the ascription of rights to the individual (and the exclusion of some people from this identity), and for recognitions of belonging, collective identification and exclusion” (2). Similarly, Dena Elisabeth Eber and Arthur G. Neal, in *Memory and Representation: Constructed Truths, and Competing Realities*, point out, “The selective and arbitrary character of memory in everyday life stands in contrast to the imprinting that occurs under conditions of crisis and trauma...The lingering consequences of trauma require that we conceptually modify our usual way of looking at memory and representation” (174). In order to establish an identity, the components that make up a self, including heritage and family history, must somehow synchronize past and present events, as well as varied understandings or interpretations of those events.

If memory, or postmemory, is to be transmitted across generations, then the medium through which it travels is necessarily representative or symbolic in some way. Eber and Neal state, “The linkage of memory with representation provides the raw material for the construction of both personal and collective identities,” and in concordance with Smith believe that “audience becomes the primary determinant of the content of what is produced” (10). Thus, multiple realities can be produced because they are perceived differently by not only different people, but also within the same individual. If postmemory functions in the ways Hirsch proposes, then it is possible that a member of the younger generation will experience internal conflict with the inherited memories and the current perception of the world.

Furthermore, because “orientations towards numerous aspects of social life are likely to vary according to historical circumstances and reflect different viewpoints according to age and generation level...generations are now foremost among the divisions within the social system and thus a primary source for the pluralization of life-worlds” (Eber and Neal 177). This pluralization encourages consideration of a collective awareness of these multiple life-worlds, or worlds in which the beliefs and understandings of different generations struggle within the individual.

A focus on “the intersections of personal biography with historical events” presents a working foundation in which the individual’s conception of his or her own history can be studied along side the collective, or official, understanding of that history as it is interpreted by the population as a whole. Eber and Neal observe:

The task of the individual is to find his or her place within the broader scheme of human affairs. A primary task of a nation is that of reworking data from the past, processing many levels of truth and reality, in order to shape a contemporary identity. The task of shaping a collective identity is embedded in the work of mass entertainment, in news journalism, in the educational system, in the creative arts, and in the work of all those specialists who are exploring the limitations and prospects of the world in which we live. These people present, or *re-present*, memories depicting many levels of truth that spar and compete with our perceptions of reality, and thus our aggregate selves. (178)

Reworking or re-presenting data from the past suggests a dynamic and deliberate action to adapt previously held interpretations of the past to fit into a new “history” that can cater to the societal needs of the present. Those needs must depend upon current social and political markers within

society. Do these markers evolve with each generation, or do they consistently fluctuate even within generations?

Memory plays an active role in the creation of both a past and, ultimately, a present understanding of shared experience. David Middleton and Steven D. Brown, in *The Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in Remembering and Forgetting*, clarify the distinction between popular conceptions of memory and how memory functions in a social psychological sense: “We place memory at the center of lived experience—not as the storehouse of that experience, but, instead, as a relational process at the intersection of different durations of living. To approach remembering and forgetting in this way is to deliberately blur the boundaries between the individual and the collective,” (1). It is precisely this blurring of boundaries between the individual and the collective that yields a demand for order, especially via artistic forms of expression.

Eber and Neal say that “the realities of the past take on several meanings through our current perceptions of them,” and further emphasize the integral role of representation, via language, in memory formation: “While our language separates time dimensions into past, present, and future, our experience tends to unify them as we reflect on the character of societal events... The past becomes a form of selective memory, since the factual details of what happened in history often are neither known nor knowable” (9). The concept of selective memory reasserts itself in both standard traumatic memory studies as well as in the unconventional exploration of “postmemory.” Memories can be selective in terms of the individual’s desire to actively block certain aspects of a traumatic event, or, as related to inherited memory, in terms of the previous generation’s desire to shield the next generation from traumatic pasts. Regarding memory formation in communities, Andrea Smith writes that,

“multiple representations of the past circulate in the same community, even within the same family, because individuals learn and process memories differently and independently and because societies are heterogeneous. One can assume that with careful attention to narrative style, content, and form, distinct memory sources or schemata and their degree of integration will be identifiable,” (Smith 263). Multiplicity in a community’s memories necessarily highlights the ways in which narrating or placing a narrative structure onto a past event will continually shape the memory, and in turn the lived experience of remembering.

Wertsch postulates the importance of considering the dynamic action of creating memories. Incorporating Bakhtin’s analysis of the “trio of characters,” in which the effects of the dramatic utterance depend equally on the speaker, the listener, and the “voice” or “voices” within the utterance, Wertsch explains the ways in which Bakhtin’s orientation “puts a strong emphasis on process, or action, hence... preference for the term ‘remembering’ rather than ‘memory.’ Instead of talking about memories that we ‘have,’ the emphasis is on remembering as something we do...” (Wertsch 17), which is consistent with Bakhtin’s understanding that voice is best understood in terms of a speaking consciousness. This emphasis on polyphony and multivocality has relevance of course for multimodal composition in which multiple modes simultaneously offer contributions to narrative.

### Multimodality Beyond the Academy

The above review of scholarly engagement with affect and theories of movement, reading and writing in the digital age, and embodiment and memory in context creates a deliberately interdisciplinary framework for considering the reading and writing of multimodal narrative today. Returning briefly to the opening example of *I’m Trying to Reach You*, I would like to

highlight a motivating question for Browning's playful, multimedia critique of academic discourse: if new media evolves faster than academic study of that media (and it always will), how does the academy remain relevant?

Cultural production tells us there is still plenty of interest in literature, and in the arts in general, but in the academy steadily decreasing enrollment in literature courses, not to mention the depressed job market for English PhDs, would suggest otherwise. Many have written about the "crisis in the humanities," including Marjorie Perloff in an essay that is now more than ten years old but that describes a scene that looks very familiar today. In "Reconfiguring Literary Study for the Twenty-First Century," Perloff suggests the state of the job market and dropping enrollment:

May well be symptoms of something else—a bad fit between an outmoded curriculum and the actual interests of potential students. The main thrust of curriculum changes in English courses over the past few decades has been the shift in attention from major writers to minority ones and hence to include many more poems and fictions by underrepresented racial and ethnic groups as well as by women. (15)

One argument literary scholars may take for granted is that the inherent value in studying these texts even when, or especially when, they are becoming more inclusive and more representative of diverse experiences, is not a value in which the general population is necessarily invested. Perloff points out, "without clear-cut notions of *why* it is worthwhile to read literary texts, whether by established or marginalized writers, in the first place, the study of 'literature' becomes no more than a chore, a way of satisfying distribution requirements" (15). More and more English departments are seen as valuable mostly for their writing courses, and in fact

entirely separate writing departments are overtaking English in many universities across the country.

A recent analysis from the American Academy of Arts & Sciences documents a trend in declining humanities undergraduate majors.<sup>14</sup> Inside Higher Ed reports on this analysis that “The number of bachelor’s degrees conferred in what the academy considers core humanities disciplines (English language and literature, history, languages other than English, linguistics, classical studies, and philosophy) declined 8.7 percent from 2012 to 2014, falling to the smallest number of degrees conferred since 2003,” and explains that “Trends in the number of majors are important to many scholars both because they value their fields and because college administrators cite low numbers of majors as reasons to shrink or eliminate programs. The latter trend is opposed by many humanities scholars, who say that type of analysis ignores their fields’ centrality to general education” (Jaschik).<sup>15</sup> In a world of ever decreasing budget cuts, in a broken system of higher education, what recourse do humanities departments, literary scholars, or English teachers have to justify their fields? Another aim of this dissertation is to highlight the relationship between embodied reading practices and new media in order to contribute to the efforts of English as a discipline to continuing evolving to best equip students with skills to read and write in the twenty-first century. We must consider *how* students read as equally important as what they read.

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<sup>14</sup> See “Bachelors Degrees in the Humanities” at *Humanities Indicators: a project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences* updated March 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See Scott Jaschik’s “The Shrinking Humanities Major” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 14, 2016.

## Chapter Overview

Prefacing the textual analysis in chapters three, four, and five is a practical application of this interdisciplinary framework via composition and literature pedagogy. How can these inquiries influence the teaching of literary texts? Perloff speculates that, “In musicology and art history such study is taken for granted: no one who cannot read a score or know the parts of the orchestra is likely to make pronouncements about a particular symphony. But in poetics we tend to assume that there is no vocabulary to master, than anyone can—and does—*read*” (16); “The first step, then, would be to teach the student that *reading*, whether of a legal brief or the newspaper or even of an Internet ad, takes training” (Perloff 17). Central to my pedagogy is an interest in and concern for how students understand their own reading processes. Equally important to the content of the texts we study is the way in which students engage with that content, and being able to articulate how they understand this engagement. The learning process itself is an embodied experience, and being able to trace, for example, specific storytelling techniques to the particular emotions they illicit in students’ own readings is valuable. For one, students must see the stakes of the material we read in order to fully engage with it. This does not mean, for example, that they have to identify with a character. Rather, they should understand *how* authors have crafted a text. Movement and embodiment play a large role in teaching literary texts because students will benefit from articulating the ways in which their reading experience is embodied. This is directly correlated to students’ experiences with remembering, and with affectively challenging memories.

Chapter two takes a writing assignment focused on Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* as a case study for exploring how the study of literature can extend beyond the classroom in order for students to make meaningful, real-world connections between fiction and their own lives and

communities. The assignment requires creative and reflective components: students must write a proposal to remix some element of Butler's narrative into another medium—for example, students have conceived of interactive sculpture exhibits; performance art at a Black Lives Matter protest; a graphic novel designed to accompany secondary education curriculum, to name a few—and a critical reflection articulating the rationale for their choices, and how they hope their adaptation would contribute to the cultural memory of slavery, and expose Butler's questions about race, gender, and class to a new, contemporary audience. Through this assignment, students gain agency in their roles as creators and an understanding of how and why Butler chose to work through the ethics of representation in particular ways; insight into how artistic expression shapes cultural memory; and, perhaps most importantly, a way to see how, as a class, students have produced a whole new set of personal memories and narrative texts that work with an established author's novel to generate discussion about empathetic connections—forceful encounters with what another is feeling—between literature and their own community.

Chapter two will conclude by addressing how a focus on genre and composition provides valuable points of access to understanding Butler's audience at the time of the novel's original publication, and how students understand *Kindred's* lasting impact and relevance for contemporary audiences. While this case study uses teaching in the first-year writing classroom as its example, the pedagogy is relevant to any course seeking to help students engage with Butler's work, and extends to make further connections to how an understanding of empathy and embodiment through remix culture offers students a meaningful way to actively participate in study in the humanities. The chapter will conclude by illuminating how embodied empathy, performance, and remix in the example student writing relates to similar questions raised in the next three chapters across *Patchwork Girl*, *Fun Home*, and *Marwencol*.

Chapter three reads Shelly Jackson's *Patchwork Girl; or, A Modern Monster* (1995), a landmark work of hypertext fiction that reassembles and rewrites Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in both text and image. Engaging with debates in the 1990s about decentering the reading process, Marie-Laure Ryan and others focused attention on immersion and interactivity in narrative. Before the affective turn, this inquiry was approached literally in terms of intensities and attachment, mapping a rhetoric of interactivity. This chapter argues that *Patchwork Girl* is not a random decentered narrative but rather a project with purpose engaged with a range of affects from uncanny repulsion, to erotic obsession, to playful meta-discourse surrounding the process of composition. Electronic literature is in a position to contemplate memory in a way traditional print literature is not because, for a work like *Patchwork Girl*, this line of inquiry also includes the memory of the text itself. When I refer to the memory of the text itself, I refer to the relationship between author and reader, or performer and audience. A nonlinear text yields unique, nonlinear reading practices in which each new reader (and each new reading) performs and interprets the text in new ways.

The immersive reading experience of a nonlinear text like *Patchwork Girl* offers a place to consider the very dynamics of multimodal reading. I argue that one of the dominant affective responses to such reading is discomfort that might be associated with the frustration or anxiety that accompanies disorientation. Much scholarship on hypertext fiction addresses the spatial awareness and lack of ability for readers to locate themselves in a fixed point in the narrative. Returning to the same questions about disorientation in multimodal reading experiences with attention to theorization about the body from the perspective of affect and dance studies allows a new, sharpened focus on the nuances of interaction between reader and text. Kinetic choreography—the sequence of motion—of the images, lexia, and hyperlinks in *Patchwork Girl*

create circumstances under which each individual reading of the text will essentially be an original performance. The text of *Patchwork Girl* in this definition includes the embodied reading performance itself because the narrative, and sequence of motion, results directly from the agency of the current reader.

This chapter will explore these claims in four parts. The first two sections look closely at what multimodal reading entails, and especially why multimodal reading is disorienting and why disorientation matters, and why multimodal reading is embodied. The next section considers how electronic environments change and shape multimodal reading and writing experiences, taking into account and building on the affective embodied dimensions previously discussed. Finally, the chapter closes with a case study of Shelley Jackson's "traversal" or reading of her own work nearly twenty years after it was first published. This last section explores the concept of performance aftermath and takes a micro focus on one author reading one work in order to extend and locate larger claims of this dissertation, namely that reading a multimodal text is an embodied performative act, and that considering the ephemeral nature of performance alongside the ephemeral nature of memory illuminates new ways of understanding both.

Chapter four reads another highly self-aware text, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006). Bechdel spent seven years writing this autobiographical graphic memoir, which tells the story, especially through the space between image and text, of her closeted father's suicide in 1980, and her own coming out. Ten years after its publication, the text is taught widely in college courses, has gained attention for attempted banning by conservative groups, and has even been adapted into an award-winning Broadway musical. One of the groundbreaking comics to ever make the *New York Times* Best Seller List, it has also now garnered a decade's worth of scholarly attention. In a 2006 interview with Hillary Chute, Bechdel comments on the intensity

of creating a narrative based on family history: “I wanted to get a purchase on the material before I had to grapple with [my mother’s] feelings about it.” She has spoken extensively about the process of creating this project as simultaneously therapeutic and traumatic. Although there have been a number of important genre, narrative, and queer theory readings of *Fun Home*, an overlooked, and equally valuable, point of access can be reached through affect studies which foreground the emotional experience—grappling with the “feelings about it”—of both the author and reader, as the object of inquiry. By focusing on the space between text and image, a reading through psychoanalytically-inflected literary trauma studies, affect theory, and dance scholars’ theorization of the body affords a way to bridge the relationship between form and content with the very real, visceral experience of and reaction to trauma in the text, and a creation of multidimensional storyworlds.

It may seem that the chasm between two art forms such as dance and graphic narrative is too great to form a basis for comparison; however, that is not the case at all. Rather, in a delicate excavation that considers the process of composition as much as the product – that is to say, *how* a graphic memoirist composed her work, and the finished work itself – there may be no greater analogue than the work done in dance studies, a field in which critics are absolutely required to build their analysis on a varied archive of materials that move far beyond the initial performance of the dance. Chapter four argues that to study how memory functions in multimodal composition is to study the persistent traces of movement that reach across modes, across spatial and temporal localities, and across experiences and multiple iterations of those experiences as they are mediated through narrative.

Chapter five reads a documentary that explores a work of ongoing artistic expression far more literally embodied than the texts in the previous three chapters. On April 8, 2000, Mark

Hogancamp was brutally beaten outside of a bar in Kingston, New York, and nearly left for dead. With severe brain damage and no health insurance Hogancamp began helping himself. This was the genesis for the fictional WWII-era Belgium town that he created and dubbed “Marwencol.” Built to 1/6<sup>th</sup> scale in his backyard, Hogancamp designed an intricate village and populated it with dolls that became alter egos for himself and all of the people in his life. He documented reenactments of his attack and other narratives in Marwencol through photographs, which were discovered by professional photographer David Naugle. Naugle was blown away by the quality and emotion of the art, despite the fact that Hogancamp did not self-identify as a photographer or an artist. Connections in the art world led Hogancamp to his own exhibition in New York City, and a documentary, *Marwencol* (2010), was made to share his story and work with the public. It is through the carefully mediated narrative lens of Director Jeff Malmberg’s work that we come to understand who Hogancamp is and what it means to live in his world. A psychoanalytic study of attachment through the lens of affect theory, especially empathy and identification, can create a space in which to discuss the nature of human interaction and storytelling through documentary film after traumatic events. Attachment means that the subject is able to internalize an object relation as part of his psychic reality, and according to Freud, the “attachment bond” is the basis for the “binding” of affect to an image or representation. Empathy provides the point of access through which identification can blur the lines between fantasy and reality in a subject’s understanding of such a representation.

Chapter five follows two interconnected lines of inquiry: first, how does multimodal storytelling play a central role in the construction of memory? And, more specifically in the case of *Marwencol*, how do embodied storytelling practices choreograph memory in and through therapeutic art? When I refer to therapeutic art here, I am referring to a practice of art therapy

that originated in the fields of art and psychotherapy that focuses on creativity in the art-making process and the reflective analysis gained through an exchange between patient and therapist. As David Edwards explains in *Art Therapy* (2004), the psychoanalytic approach was one of the first forms in which this practice became popularized. This approach employs the transference process between the therapist and the client who makes art. The case that *Marwencol* demonstrates is unique because Hogancamp arguably inhabits both the roles of patient and therapist through the embodied performance of his art and analysis of that artistic expression in the town he builds. Chapter five argues that *Marwencol* exemplifies embodied performance of memory. In a Lacanian reading of attachment, Hogancamp's photography fulfills the role of the analyst, and that it is through empathy and identification in his storytelling that Hogancamp is able to do the work of mourning for what he lost—his sense of self or identity from before the attack—and to rehabilitate his imagination through both traumatic repetitions in *Marwencol*, and critical agency in his narration, via photography, as he documents and performs his own traumatic recovery.

In a coda I return to the relationship between personal memory and academic discourse initially discussed in the preface, and the ways in which it evolves specifically about and through embodiment and emotion. I consider the trajectory of this dissertation as it took shape over the past several years and discuss blended personal narrative academic book introductions written by Ellen Goellner, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, and Kathleen Woodward as influential examples in my own work. In a final textual analysis of personal experience in academic discourse I read Marianne Goldberg's *Homogenized Ballerinas*, an experimental piece on dance, gender, representation, and discourse on the body. It was originally presented in lecture form, next as a lecture-performance, later as a dance with lecture material inserted into it, and finally as a print

essay in the anthology *Meaning in Motion*. For its original publication, Goldberg “invented a genre [she called] the ‘performance piece for print,’ composed of text and photographed gestures” in which she conceives of “the printed page as a kind of stage, and reading as a theatrical act” (317). Meditation on form, embodiment, and bodily memory are at the heart of *Homogenized Ballerinas*. I find the work of the authors discussed in the coda particularly exciting for the possibilities they exemplify in boundary crossing, the simultaneous multivocality of fragmentation and unity, and the insertion of the self into academic discourse through embodied reading, writing, performance, and memory.

## CHAPTER TWO

Multimodality and Reflection: Remixing Octavia Butler's *Kindred* in the Classroom

Both embodied reading and embodied writing practices demand self-awareness. Academic discourse and theorization about the body might be thriving in areas like affect studies, and some of this discourse may very well be trickling down into literature and composition classrooms through analysis focused on thematic content in course texts. The link between bodily experience and how students are taught to read and how students learn to read, however, is not emphasized nearly enough in either discourses on emotion, or composition studies. In Kathleen Blake Yancey's *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, she recalls that "During the 1970s and into the 1980s, students in writing classes across the country were asked to take part in research focused on writing processes. The problem we wanted them to help us address was simple if a little disconcerting: while we in composition studies were supposed to be teaching students how to write, we didn't really know how they *learned* to write" (2). These early researchers asked students how they learned to write "in person, on tape, as they wrote, after they wrote. As students talked and as their talk was taped, *it became text*. As text, it was visible, it took on the status of text, invited the mechanisms of text—reading, interpretation, understanding, evaluation. From the very beginnings of research into composing processes, then, student writers were regarded as crucial, informed, authoritative sources, and some might say as the primary source" (Yancey 5). I would like to put forth here the direct connection between viewing students as authoritative sources and the authority of students' embodied experiences while reading and writing. Literature and composition instructors often consider the affective responses students have to course texts, but the affective responses students have to their own writing process is overlooked, and equally as consequential. In her work in this book, Yancey's purpose is to

“recover this strand of student talk, but to do so in a new setting and to use it quite differently: to ask students to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but as *agents of their own learning*, in a process that is product, that is becoming known, quite simply, as *reflection*” (5).

Nearly twenty years later, the role of metacognition in composition studies is well established.<sup>16</sup> The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011), developed collaboratively with representatives from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project, identifies eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing:

- Curiosity—the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness—the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement—a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity—the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
- Persistence—the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility—the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility—the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition—the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge.

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<sup>16</sup> See especially *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (2015), edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth A. Wardle.

Arguably, every item listed above involves a high degree of emotional engagement on the part of the student. The descriptions of each habit of mind do, in fact, acknowledge and embrace the role affective responses will influence a student's ability to achieve the particular habit. That said, these aspects still reside primarily in psychological or intellectual realms.

For the reflective principals driving this list, especially in the case of metacognition, consideration of embodiment can only further student potential for success in reading and writing in the classroom and beyond. Kristie S. Fleckenstein, in "Writing Bodies: Somatic Mind in Composition Studies" contends that:

Research in composition has yielded a rich array of philosophical perspectives on writing. However diverse their origins and their ideological and pedagogical implications, all depend on conceptual or epistemological frameworks that disregard physical bodies. ...In sacrificing bodies to some illusion of either transcendent truth or culturally constituted textuality, we cut ourselves adrift from any organic anchoring in the material reality of flesh. ...We need an embodied discourse, one that interprets body as neither a passive *tabula rasa* on which meanings are inscribed nor an inescapable animal that must be subdued before pure knowing can be achieved. The concept of *somatic mind*—mind and body as permeable, intertextual territory that is continually made and remade—offers one means of embodying our discourse and our knowledge without totalizing either. This "view from somewhere" locates an individual within concrete spatio-temporal contexts. It also recognizes the cultural, historical, and ecological systems that penetrate and reconstitute these material places. (Fleckenstein 281)

This view can be valuable for considering individual student learning practices, as well as the experiences of learning course texts as part of a classroom community. When Fleckenstein refers to a concrete spatio-temporal context, that context necessarily includes the classroom itself, as well as the current and past lived experience of each member of the classroom community. Recognizing that each student will have unique responses to and interaction with the same text, and acknowledging this fact in class, gives students a venue in which to consider the implications of their own embodied reading and what that reading may offer to those around them.

Lisa Propst and Jade Loicano discuss their attempt to craft the best conditions for students to feel the value of their own contributions to class:

Students in first-year composition classes often struggle to frame their own questions in response to the world around them. Many assume that academic success depends on sounding like someone more formal or ‘sophisticated’ than they are, and as a result, they hesitate to articulate their own avenues for analysis. To redress this problem, we designed a first-year composition course that asked students to shape part of their curriculum together. The challenge cast the students as questers...our students undertook their explorations in a contemporary digitized landscape. By having students research and communicate through media in which many already felt a sense of ownership, we hoped to help them build confidence and critical thinking ability. (Propst and Loicano 368)

The pedagogy behind this approach, while in this case referring to large-scale collaborative curriculum development, is equally productive for considering smaller-scale acts such as allowing students a variety of open-ended ways to fulfill an assignment. Furthermore, they explain that, “By enabling students to use their creativity and draw on multiple skill sets, we

hoped to ‘break down [some of] the intellectual and emotional boundaries that so often inhibit learning’ and to develop space for creative experimentation (Sword 2007: 248). We sought to increase the ability of our students to relate to the course by demonstrating that their interests and experiences could be part of the ‘canon’ of college material” (Propst and Loicano 369). They refer to Helen Sword here, in a 2007 essay in which Sword lauds and promotes creative, multimodal assignments that allow students to engage nonverbal modes to address otherwise traditional literature course objectives. Scholars and educators espousing creative assignments in academic discourse are working to incorporate student strengths and confidences into environments such as college classrooms where they may otherwise feel disoriented and incapable.

Students often come into the classroom already immersed in a variety of activities in which they encounter their favorite fictional characters in multiple venues, including their own “mashup” creations. An integral part of engaging empathetically with a text is considering and questioning genre conventions in the process of creation. I argue that students can recognize ethical dimensions of the ways in which politically charged literature changes their own worldviews when they participate in a process of co-creation in concrete ways. The empathetic connections students make while reading become fully realized when they attempt to elicit such feelings in others.

I have taught multiple sections of my literature-based composition course titled *Time Travel, Trauma, and Cultural Memory*. We read Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and Sherman Alexie’s *Flight* (2007). Each of these texts uses time travel as a primary narrative device for exploring large-scale traumas such as slavery and war, and each offers a window into the cultural memory surrounding events specific

to their time of publication. Preceding the novels, we read a scholarly article by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, “Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory,” from which the class develops an understanding of how *memory* and *cultural memory* have been defined and theorized in different disciplines. The article also provides vocabulary and a broad framework for considering how literature can act as a medium of remembrance (remembering *through* the writing); an object of remembrance (a record of memory in a particular place and time); and literature as a medium for observing the production of cultural memory (metacommentary on *how* we remember).

First and foremost, I want my students to engage actively with the course in a way that takes them beyond the text. In the broadest sense possible, I want students to feel that it was worth their time to take a college English course. So many of the undergraduates I teach at the University of Washington are science, engineering, computer science, or business majors. They end up in my classes only because the university requires every student to take introductory composition. By the time they leave, I want them to value study in the humanities as much as in their own fields and to see why something they can learn from literature, like empathy, can be helpful to them in their fields.

When asked for first impressions—immediate, gut-instinct reactions—to reading *Kindred*, students always mention genre. They don’t necessarily use the word “genre,” but they comment cautiously on what their expectations were before they started reading, and how these compare to what they find. Students can easily become wrapped up in the action and cliffhanger chapter endings. But thoughtful, sophisticated readings of the novel are harder to reach without focused consideration of how the form shapes the content. *Kindred* is likely Butler’s most frequently taught novel because of its plot-driven narrative and direct exploration of American

history and the legacy of slavery. While many approaches to teaching *Kindred*, especially in literature, history, or general humanities courses, prioritize study of historical and cultural context, these approaches can overlook or downplay the significance of the structure, style, and tone in the writing itself. This comes from a longer tradition of American college courses teaching African American women writers in which the racial and political context is favored over any consideration of aesthetic composition.

This chapter seeks to explore the affective dimensions of embodied reading and the ways in which teaching metacognitive reflection on the process of composition, genre and audience can substantially enhance students' understanding of more complex issues surrounding race, gender, and class in historical and cultural contexts. Specifically, this first-year writing class considers Butler's rhetorical moves in constructing an argument in fiction: how Butler researched and presented 19<sup>th</sup>-century Maryland from the standpoint of 1970s California; how she made decisions about what historical content should be explained to her readership, versus what information or knowledge readers presumably have; how students understand race, gender, and class dynamics at the time the novel was published; how these relate to their own understandings in the 2010s; how students define their expectations for genres such as historical fiction or science fiction; why these expectations influence their reading of the novel; how Butler makes arguments about agency and power through themes in the novel, such as education, while also providing metacommentary on writing, storytelling, and the production of cultural memory.

I will accomplish this in two sections: First, by looking at the dynamics of classroom discussion. What are the problems encountered when students cannot identify categories or classifications that look familiar to them when reading the novel? What are student reactions to these obstacles? How can instructors direct students to productive lines of inquiry that will make

them feel less alienated and more confident interpreting and analyzing how Butler works with and against genre conventions?

Second, by looking at the formal writing assignment, mentioned above, designed to give students agency as college-level thinkers. This assignment asks students to write a short creative proposal to adapt an element of *Kindred* into another medium of their choosing (film, music, drama, performance art, etc.) and then to write a critical reflection articulating the rationale behind their decisions. This portion of the chapter will include a brief overview of scaffolding for the assignment, and, more importantly, a discussion of what students have learned about their understanding of Butler's novel and what they learned about their own reading and writing processes by composing the assignment. This section will draw from student writing that metacognitively walks through the actual instances of learning that occurred as students experienced what it was like to take an aspect of the narrative—from literal scenes, to single characters, to depictions of abstract themes—and remix it with a specific audience in mind. Students visibly gain agency in their role as creator, and also in their confidence and understanding of how and why Butler composed her narrative in deliberate ways.

The example student writing discussed here comes from a bank of about 200 papers from students in nine sections of my literature-based composition course taught at the University of Washington between Autumn 2012 and Autumn 2016. These particular papers were selected to represent multiple mediums. I will incorporate some material from student reflections in discussion of each example, and present analysis specific to the theoretical framework already established. Concluding is an overview of how the example student writing highlights and frames questions related to empathy, performance, and memory in the next three chapters.

When students encounter a new fictional text, part of their reading process involves situating themselves in relation to that text. Based on their previous experience, they identify what is familiar or unfamiliar; what vocabulary they have for explicating the relationship between prior knowledge, and the storyworld in the text; and compare the rules that govern this fictional world to similar worlds. Readers in general may not acknowledge or articulate this multilayered process in a first reading, but the dynamics of self-reading assessment change dramatically when one reads in an organized group setting like a college English course. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the case study under discussion here comes from a writing assignment in my first-year composition course *Time Travel, Trauma, and Cultural Memory*. In this course I begin nearly every single class period with a five-minute freewrite prompt. The degree of specificity of the prompts varies from class to class, and the first class discussion on the beginning of a novel will almost always start with a simple, open-ended prompt: what are your first impressions of the book? This question yields responses that emphasize what stood out the most, which usually directly coincides with what made a student *feel* the most. Whether responding positively or negatively, the affective dimensions of articulating first impressions in writing stem from students' feelings about anything ranging from character, to plot, to setting, to language or style. Much of what attracts or repels readers at the outset of a novel is built on narrative empathy – feeling with fiction, as Suzanne Keen states. How exactly do we know if or when students feel with fiction in a classroom setting? Why do feelings matter at all in a literature course?

Whether we acknowledge the role of feelings in a literature course or not, they are part of the rigorous analytical work we ask students to do when they read and write about fiction. Students understand fictional worlds through their own relationship to what they can identify

from fiction in their own, lived experience. As discussed in chapter one, Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, argues that emotion works on the surface of bodies and therefore aligns those bodies inside or outside of given communities. For instance, the repetition of a word or words assigned to a particular people allows an emotional charge to emerge, one that “sticks” to bodies and accumulates further value to produce affect through reiteration (Ahmed 92). She uses the example of hate speech and argues that “hate is involved in the very negotiation of boundaries between selves and others, and between communities, where ‘others’ are brought into the sphere of my or our existence as a threat” (Ahmed 51). She states that emotions have an affective power to generate and create meaning in the world, and asks: how can the language of pain align this body with other bodies? Everyday experiences with pain, trauma, loss, or oppression manifest in rhetoric that shapes those very experiences.

One of the first conversations we have as a class in the *Time Travel, Trauma, and Cultural Memory* course regards *how* we discuss uncomfortable subject matter. Something I learned as a brand new teacher years before this course was to have a conversation about racial slurs in texts *before* I ask a student to read aloud from a particular passage. I will simply ask the class how they feel: should you read the language verbatim from the text even when it’s offensive? Why or why not? Generally, after a few brave students speak first, in my experiences most classes will decide collectively that to censor the text would do injustice to the people, subject, history, and context of the story itself; that it should be uncomfortable, and this discomfort is no excuse to ignore discussion about important topics.

In Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, the novel that begins the course, the first racial slur appears at the beginning of the story, when the protagonist, Dana, has time traveled from California in the 1970s to her ancestor’s plantation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Maryland. After Dana saved the child

Rufus (her ancestor), she tries to make sense of the way the child's mother acted. In a private conversation, Rufus explains his mother called Dana:

“Just a strange nigger. She and Daddy both knew they hadn't seen you before.”

“That was a hell of a thing for her to say right after she saw me save her son's life.”

Rufus frowned. “Why?”

I stared at him.

“What's wrong?” he asked. “Why are you mad?”

“Your mother always call black people niggers, Rufe?”

“Sure, except when she has company. Why not?”

His air of innocent questioning confused me. Either he really didn't know what he was saying, or he had a career waiting in Hollywood. Whichever it was, he wasn't going to go on saying it to me.

(Butler 25)

To return to the five-minute freewriting prompt mentioned above, this scene is frequently the starting point of students' informal writing about their first impressions of the book. Student commentary on the passage has a great variety in emotional reaction. Some students consider Rufus and his innocence, while others concentrate on Dana and her strong determination to teach this child how to respect her. A smaller handful of students have honed in on the line “sure, except when she has company” to begin asking questions about the character of Rufus' parents, and the confusing dynamic of respectability and social class implicit in this passage.

When further connecting the topics established in this introductory activity with other writing assignments, a degree of narrative empathy develops out of the ways in which students work to understand individual character's motives and actions. When Ahmed writes about the role of hate in the negotiation of boundaries between selves and others, she makes a claim for the agency of the emotion itself. Butler's fictional work offers a very real microcosm of how emotional attachments shape and are shaped by negotiating boundaries between selves and others within the storyworld, as well as beyond it.

To launch discussion on the final class period of *Kindred*, I offer the five-minute freewriting prompt: write about a line from the epilogue. The epilogue is only about two pages long, and it places the protagonist back in her own present time in the late twentieth century, in a state of what should feel like a safe distance from her previous traumas experienced on the nineteenth-century slave plantation. Butler offers both Dana's and Kevin's perspectives on coping with the past by presenting their literal attempt to locate their experiences in the physical record books and buildings that exist in Eastern Maryland at and around the site of the Weylin plantation. They asked a local farmer for any information about the former plantation owners in an attempt to find Rufus' grave, "But the farmer knew nothing—or at least, said nothing" (Butler 262). The closing passage of the epilogue is a conversation between Dana and Kevin:

"You've looked," he said. "And you've found no records. You'll probably never know."

I touched the scar Tom Weylin's boot had left on my face, touched my empty left sleeve. "I know," I repeated. "Why did I even want to come here. You'd think I would have had enough of the past."

“You probably needed to come for the same reason I did.” He shrugged.  
 “To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed. To  
 reassure yourself that you’re sane.”

I looked back at the brick building of the Historical Society, itself a  
 converted early mansion. “If we told anyone else about this, anyone at all, they  
 wouldn’t think we were so sane.”

“We are,” he said. “And now that the boy is dead, we have some chance of  
 staying that way.”

(Butler 264)

Many students choose to write about one of the lines in this closing passage, frequently to draw on themes of place, memory, truth, history, and record keeping that Butler has theorized throughout the novel. They point to the traces of the past embodied in such strong physicality – from the Historical Society building, to markers on Dana’s actual body, her missing arm and scars. Implicit in Kevin’s assessment that Dana wanted to return again to this traumatic past in order “to understand” is the concept of closure. Much of class discussion stemming from the freewriting returns to larger questions about the role of storytelling and fiction in understanding cultural memory and the legacy of slavery. Students move towards an understanding that, despite the plot-driven action on which the novel is built, a clear-cut ending suggesting a solution would not properly represent Butler’s bigger project. Rather, as Kevin states, “You’ll probably never know.” Butler’s fiction shows us that there are other things “to know” besides happy endings. The working and reworking of cultural memory through artistic expression opens discussion for new audiences.

The first formal writing assignment on *Kindred* in this course asks students to consider the relationship between Butler's deliberate choices in crafting her fiction and the context and audience for the novel in 1979:

Context:

Octavia Butler takes up many controversial issues in her novel *Kindred*. In order to discuss something as serious as the trauma of slavery, both in the past and the present, Butler has to make careful, deliberate choices about how to tell this story in fiction. What are some of these choices? How do specific style, tone, and genre conventions affect how the story is told, and how readers will interpret that story? What is the relationship between form and content? If the story were told in a different form, how would the presentation of the content change, and to what extent?

Task:

For the first component of this paper, **write a 2-page proposal to adapt *Kindred* from a novel into another medium.** Be creative! You can choose any other medium you like: film, drama, television, graphic novel, recorded music, staged musical, etc. Whichever medium you choose, keep in mind that you are writing for a specific audience: for example, the producer in charge of accepting or rejecting your proposal. You may find it easiest to focus on a single scene or character from the novel. Describe the challenges you envision in adapting from prose fiction to a new medium, what you plan to highlight in your adaptation, and

what you believe the narrative can gain from this new representation in a different medium. Carefully consider style and tone, and how these conventions relate to your specific audience.

For the second component of this paper, **write a 2-3 page critical reflection on your proposal.** What careful, deliberate choices did you make in order to pitch your ideas to a specific audience? How and why did you make these choices? Through this reflection, you will necessarily demonstrate **metacognition**—awareness and understanding of one’s own thought and writing processes—by explicitly highlighting why you think you made the choices you did in this essay. How do the tone and style of your own proposal contribute to your understanding of writing for different contexts and audiences? How might it help you think about your understanding of the way the original novel is written?

The open-ended nature of the prompt is intended to allow diversity in both the media students choose and the particular elements of Butler’s text they decide to reinterpret in their own project. Achieving new understandings of the original course text through alternate modes is a central objective of this assignment. Jerome Harste and Peggy Albers explain that:

While all communication is multimodal, “multimodality” is not what is important. Rather, what is important is what each mode contributes to the overall meaning. Too often we English language arts teachers have a disproportionate reverence for the printed word which keeps us from fully exploring the significance of other modes in which to express meaning. We include a visual text, add a musical song,

or create a short play, but more often than not, we do this in conjunction with the written word. Although adding a visual text is an important move in our teaching practices, we want to argue that multimodality is more than merely adding another mode to the written word. Multimodality helps us realize the significance that each mode affords us in expressing meaning in ways the others cannot.

...Movement across and understanding of the affordance of modalities allow us to transcend our very selves by generating new ideas and is the essence of what literacy—and the power of being literate—is all about. (Harste and Albers 4)

My rationale for requiring students to adapt some element of text on the page into another medium is that they will learn about both how the author of the original text crafted particular scenes, settings, characters, abstract emotions or moods, etc., and how, as students are now the authors of new texts, they have agency through their own deliberate decisions in crafting their adaptations.

The critical reflection accompanying the creative proposal is equally as vital to the learning objectives for this assignment. Rather than considering the reflection as a secondary or lesser component, I want students to see the relationship between reflecting and their writing process itself. Yancey explains that, “Speaking generally, reflection includes the three processes of projection, retrospection (or review), and revision. For writing, it likewise includes three processes:

1. Goal-setting, revisiting, and refining
2. Text-revising in the light of retrospection

3. The articulating of what learning has taken place, as embodied in various texts as well as in the process used by the writer. (6)

As outlined by several habits of mind in the *Frameworks*, pedagogical objectives for a document such as a reflection require that students understand and articulate the rationale behind their choices: why they did what they did. In this assignment, students explore the same question in the original text. What deliberate choices did Butler make to construct her narrative, and how does a new medium change the context for adapting and remixing this narrative?

Discussed below are two example student proposals addressing the first part of the assignment. The first example is a proposal to adapt an element of Butler's novel into a sculpture:

Dear Selection Committee,

I am making contact in order to present a submission to the Olympic Sculpture Park. Although the park already contains many exciting, dynamic pieces, the piece I would like to present today serves a unique purpose that conveys a message with special relevance to the greater Seattle community. This piece, inspired by Octavia Butler's novel, *Kindred*, embodies the cultural memories of slavery in America that continue to shape society in the modern day.

Butler's novel follows Dana, a black woman living in the 1970s with her white husband, Kevin. Dana narrates as she experiences several episodes of time travel that take her back to a slave plantation in the antebellum south, home of a distant ancestor. Kevin joins Dana in some of her travels, even getting left behind for a five-year period before Dana can return for him. Together, they embody the

ways slavery is remembered in the modern era from both a black and white perspective.

The sculpture is made from unvarnished wood and consists of life-size models of Dana and Kevin. Dana is dressed in a shirt and pants as she was in the novel, which brought her considerable attention on the plantation because she “dressed like a man.” In this way, Dana is also representative of the strides woman have made toward achieving equality with men. Her face is somber but determined as a result of the struggles she has fought to overcome. Dana’s most striking feature, however, is the absence of her left forearm. It is lost in the novel as a tragic consequence of her final journey through time. Her arm, along with her other features, reflect one of the central messages of this piece: the horrors of the past inflicted wounds that persist to this day, particularly concerning the black community.

Kevin stands beside Dana, holding her remaining hand. His face is haggard with a long beard (grown during his five-year stay in the 1800s), making his exact expression difficult to read. He is clothed in standard modern dress: button down shirt, pants, Oxford shoes. His experiences have clearly aged him, changed him, but overall he is less shocking in his appearance compared with Dana’s fierce expression and missing appendage. He is better off than his black counterpart, Dana, but he is visibly troubled by the memory of slavery, which could also be said of the modern white community.

These physical representations of Dana and Kevin further the message presented in Butler’s original work. Her work centers on the lasting memory of

slavery, and this sculpture has the added ability to develop its own memory. As it is constructed out of unfinished wood, the sculpture will weather and change through time, accumulating and displaying its own “memories” and underscoring the inevitable accumulation and lasting influence of memory.

Together, hand in hand, Dana and Kevin convey the progress of racial relations and equality, while recognizing the important impacts of past injustices. This image of unity and camaraderie serves as a particularly important inspiration to the Seattle community at this point in time. A federal investigation of the Seattle Police Department recently concluded that the SPD systematically used excessive force and called for more research concerning alleged discriminatory policing against minority groups. For this reason, Seattle could use a message of hope and progress toward racial equality that also does not excuse or erase past injustices.

This sculpture is a unique addition to the Olympic Sculpture Park in both its literal and figurative content, and it serves as a topical reminder of the importance of equality. Thank you for your kind consideration. I look forward to communicating with you further regarding this project.

In rethinking aspects of *Kindred* in a visual medium, this student has attended to central thematic and stylistic concerns of the text. When the student claims their sculpture “embodies the cultural memories of slavery” they are making connections between the fictional storyworld of Butler’s novel and the representation of real ideas, qualities, or feelings in a tangible or visible form.

While a sculpture inherently captures or freezes a single moment in time, the student comments on the dynamic nature of environmental factors, such as natural weathering of the unfinished

wood, as the “ability to develop its own memory.” It is significant that the accumulation of physical markers equate to the “lasting influence of memory” for this student’s interpretation of the novel, particularly in context of the world of their lived experience for which they have proposed their adaptation.

The student states local controversy over discriminatory policing against minority groups, an issue predicated on physical markers of otherness especially through race. Following Ahmed’s claim that emotions have affective power to generate and create meaning in the world, artistic expression of such meaning through a sculpture tangibly embodies some of the most complicated questions Butler poses through her narrative. Returning briefly to the above mention of student freewriting and class discussion on *Kindred’s* epilogue, another heavily scrutinized line is “Kevin would never know what those last moments had been like” (263). This comes after a brief exchange wherein Kevin accuses Dana of “defending” Rufus, to which she clarifies she was defending herself. The motif of roleplaying or acting flows through the entire narrative, most bluntly when Dana speculates about why it may be so much more difficult for her to take on the role of the slave than it is for her white husband to take on the role of a slave owner. In the proposal above, the student works to emphasize the difference in Dana and Kevin’s experiences. Given the visual nature of the representation, facial expression, clothing, and posture all contribute narrative details through which the story is told.

In the next student example, we return to verbal rather than visual means of communication, but the narrative is no less built on both fixed and dynamic emotional experiences:

### *Kindred* as Musical Poetry

A media adaptation is a delicate process of taking all the essence of some artwork and converting it, with a twist, to a different form. The historical fiction novel *Kindred* by Octavia Butler would benefit from an adaptation to rap music, specifically spoken word poetry against a musical beat and hook.

Several difficulties surround such a change. The new work has to capture everything that made *Kindred* unique yet it must be different enough that it will reach new audiences. If the song is to be successful, it has to carry the audience which read the book. The lyrics will be far more ear catching to them specifically rather than the general public. The song has to also focus on specific topics. There is simply no way to compress a full novel into a three to five minute song.

In order to make the song as effective as possible, it focuses primarily on Dana's character and her relationship with her new environment. This shortened the list of subjects the song could bring up. Each successive verse and chorus focuses on a different tone and theme. The song opens with the hostility of living in the antebellum south given her gender and ethnicity and the premise of her time travelling abilities. The opening line is "Dana's in for tribulation". This forms an end rhyme between the words "tribulation" and "resuscitation", referring to Dana saving Rufus's life. The next two lines establish her time travelling abilities, utilizing internal rhyme and assonance. The verse uses alliteration as well in line 7 with "A black woman in a white man's world". The verse transitions to chorus with an allusion to pop culture with "She's gotta make like Marty McFly", referring to the protagonist's quest of the 80's blockbuster to get back to the

future. The chorus analyzes the potentially dangerous relationships she has with the family who owns her, particularly Rufus. The song likens it to a “Slavery of love”, a complicated mess of emotions which many slaves felt to for their masters in *Kindred* “Strangely, they seemed to like him, hold him in contempt, and fear him all at the same time,” (Butler 229). Dana held an even tighter bond with Rufus because he was her ancestor. This tie was similar to how slaves often stayed on plantations in order to ensure the safety of their families. Dana stays for much the same reason, to ensure Rufus’ safety and her continued existence. The next verse will be about the isolation and confusion that accompanies such a drastic environmental change. The first line is actually the title of a science fiction book, *Stranger in a Stranger Land*. This perfectly describes nineteenth century America in Dana’s eyes. The largest differences lie in the moral code and her social standing while smaller ones include technology and cleanliness. All of these differences adds up to a role as a black slave which she has to inhabit. The real question posed in the book is when the acting becomes real. Spending so much time playing her character, the past becomes more real to Dana than her future. This is even further enhanced by the time dilation, similar to *Inception*. Five years in the 1820’s is just eight days in 1976. She begins to question which timeplace is home. “I was startled to catch myself saying wearily, ‘Home at last’” (Butler 127). The last verse focuses on her relationship with Rufus and her changing moral code such that she is willing to kill rather than be damned to a miserable existence. The song is performed over a pre-existing instrumental backing to save time. “Intro” by The xx is an atmospheric song with a

reverberating kick drum and a strong guitar hook. Echoey guitar lends an air of mystery, and even fear, a good fit for the setting of the book.

The book will benefit from this modernization. Old readers will be intrigued by the song and will recognize the older references. Young readers will be likely to listen to the song if they are reading the book, because of the modern style and beat of the song and since The xx is a recognizable band and “Intro” is a fairly famous track. The narrative will gain a reinterpretation of the book and a compartmentalized analysis of its themes. Even if the song fails to break even, it will regenerate interest in a thirty-year-old novel about American history and it will educate its listeners about the time. Making an investment in spreading this powerful message says far more about your record label’s commitment to education and unique music than a marginal gain for the shareholders.

*Time taken, tribulation*

*Enter hero, Dana the savior*

*Wakes up, kid drowning*

*Winding river, his life slipping by*

*Pulls him out; resuscitation*

*Who is he? And where is she?*

*Cross centuries, twenty to nineteen*

*She’s gotta make like Marty McFly*

*Mom’s crazy, dad’s racist*

*But they look like familiar faces*

*Stuck, with a sad little boy*

*Slavery of love*

*That's blazing, frozen*

*She's got much to give*

*Fight or flight*

*Learn to live*

*Stranger in a strange land*

*Dana gotta do what she gotta do*

*So she won't get stranded*

*Or stuck on a block*

*Act it out, play the part*

*But what you s'pose to do when the mind games start?*

*Eight days—five years?!?*

*Home's where the heart is*

*And yet she can't find her heart*

*Black women in a white man's world*

*Not children, invisible pearls*

*Stuck, with a sad little man*

*A slave to love*

*He's blazing, frozen*

*She's got much to give*

*Fight or flight*

*Learn to live*

*If you gotta fight, Dee*

*If you gotta hurt, Dee*

*If you gotta kill Dee*

*Seek your soul when you get back home*

*If you gotta hurt, Dee*

*If you gotta kill, Dee*

*Fight that PTS Dee*

*Find your peace when you get back home*

The assignment does not in fact require students to create the work suggested in the proposal, but in this instance the student did write lyrics for the proposed song, and they even performed them for the class to great applause. This example offers a different take on *Kindred* and adaptation from the sculpture, but it still situates the viewer in a position to interact with individual characters, particularly when the lyrics change from third to second person. The student describes the affective register created by the musical selection as invoking both mystery and fear, which echoes major themes from the novel explicitly explored in the lyrics, such as the concept of familiarity and the ways in which Dana becomes the most disoriented when she begins to feel more at home on the Weylin plantation than she does in her twentieth-century life.

The juxtaposition with the familiar and concepts of modernization resonate in the student's desire to adapt the narrative for a modern audience by drawing connections to popular culture that will give a contemporary listener points of access that may not be easily located in

the original text. Returning to earlier class discussions about genre and expectations for any novel employing time travel as a major plot device, this student's adaptation cites another famous time travel story in film, *Back to the Future* (1985), to draw audiences in. While this may seem like a passing reference, the line directly preceding the mention of home, "eight days—five years?!?" emphatically addresses the "rules" of Butler's time travel universe, which differ significantly from the example of *Back to the Future* mentioned. Class discussions of expectations for the novel to be science fiction based on the use of time travel generally conclude with students shifting to claim that the novel is actually historical fiction; that there isn't really enough *science* to qualify as science fiction, in so far as there is little discussion or explanation of how the time travel works. The choices in form, however, contribute directly to how the content is shaped and received by readers.

For each of these adaptations, the students offer further commentary in the second part of the assignment, which requires a reflection articulating their thought process in proposing some element of the narrative in a new medium. Central to the process of learning in this assignment is the process of reflection. Returning to Yancey, reflection in this context means:

1) The processes by which we know what we have accomplished and by which we articulate accomplishment and 2) the products of those processes (eg, as in, 'a reflection'). In method, reflection is dialectical, putting multiple perspectives into play with each other in order to produce insight. Procedurally, reflection entails a *looking forward* to goals we might attain, as well as a *casting backward* to see where we have been. When we reflect, we thus *project* and *review*, often putting the projections and the reviews in *dialogue* with each other, working dialectically as we seek to *discover* what we know, what we have learned, and what we might

understand. When we reflect, we call upon the cognitive, the affective, the intuitive, putting these into play with each other: to help us understand how something completed looks later, how it compares with what has come before, how it meets stated or implicit criteria, our own, those of others. Moreover, we can use those processes to theorize from and about our own practices, making knowledge and coming to understandings that will themselves be revised through reflection. (Yancey 6)

Reflection, as detailed here, involves multiple discreet tasks that work fluidly and take into account “the cognitive, the affective, the intuitive.” Reflection in this assignment involves students considering their agency as creators, as well as considering why and how they interacted with aspects of the narrative in particular ways.

Regarding genre again, the student who proposed the sculpture explains why they included brief context points that focus on characterization rather than plot: “This backstory adds interest to the sculpture as well because the sculpture does not reference flashier aspects of the novel directly (i.e. it would not be apparent by merely looking at the sculpture), particularly the use of time travel” and, “I described the sculpture as though I were describing the two actual people it depicts. Instead of saying ‘the carving of Dana,’ I would simply say ‘Dana.’ This strategy continues to present the idea that the piece is more than a physical representation of abstract concepts; it is two living breathing people that the selection committee and the public would find empathetic.” The student considers audience for both the context of the proposal (the Seattle Art Museum selection committee) and the audience of viewers who would be able to engage with the sculpture in person. It is notable that this particular adaptation veers away from the “representation of abstract concepts” that many other projects chose. The form of sculpture

itself is given concretely to embodiment in a way that allows the physicality of the human body, and as the student mentioned in the weathering process of the unfinished wood, the physicality of change over time.

In the critical reflection for the second example, the student explains, “I split the song into three different sections, each focusing on a different theme, first hostility, then home, and finally morality. This was part of setting boundaries on what the song could accomplish.” Thinking in terms of what the adaptation can “accomplish” emphasizes the student’s understanding of central purpose and objectives for both the original narrative, and the rationale behind remixing elements of it into a new form. Instead of moving chronologically through the plot, the student chose to organize the lyrics around themes. In commenting on understanding of Butler’s goals, the student writes:

I believe that the novel was made for a specific purpose in mind. Butler wants to educate modern Americans about the horrors of slavery, which has been trivialized by the passing of time. Like Dana, the modern masses have little idea what the prewar American South was like. “Like the Nazis, ante bellum whites had known quite a bit about torture— quite a bit more than I ever wanted to learn” (Butler 117). Writing the proposal opened up the idea that works of art are not necessarily created so people will like them, but rather to make people think.

Here and in other low-stakes writing assignments student discussion often returned to multiple references throughout the text wherein Dana explicitly comments on what she learned, or what she was meant to believe, about the past based on historical scholarship, literature, film and television.

The line the student quotes from the novel concludes a passage in which Dana contemplates:

I read books about slavery, fiction and nonfiction. I read everything I had in the house that was even distantly related to the subject—even *Gone With the Wind*, or part of it. But its version of happy darkies in tender loving bondage was more than I could stand.

Then, somehow, I got caught up in one of Kevin's World War II books—a book of excerpts from the recollections of concentration camp survivors. Stories of beatings, starvation, filth, disease, torture, every possible degradation. As though Germans had been trying to do in only a few years what the Americans had worked at for nearly two hundred.

The book depressed me, scared me, made me stuff Kevin's sleeping pills into my bag. Like the Nazis, ante bellum whites had known quite a bit about torture—quite a bit more than I ever wanted to learn.

(Butler 116-117)

The novel *Kindred* is full of commentary on the process of learning about history. Frequently the protagonist considers her own knowledge and how she received it; or she and Kevin comment directly on why most people don't know much history, or why representations of the past are often skewed. In some instances Dana finds no relation between depictions and reality, such as in this early scene from chapter two: "I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I was probably less prepared than the child crying

not far from me” (Butler 36). Instances such as these force readers to consider their own knowledge and experiences in relation to Dana’s and in relation to the variety of media from which they have received such knowledge. Returning to the second example student proposal, the lyrics begin in the third person, telling Dana’s story, but shift to second person in the end, speaking directly to her with urgency:

*If you gotta fight, Dee*

*If you gotta hurt, Dee*

*If you gotta kill Dee*

*Seek your soul when you get back home*

*If you gotta hurt, Dee*

*If you gotta kill, Dee*

*Fight that PTS Dee*

*Find your peace when you get back home*

This adaptation reaches its peak affective register especially through performance. The student’s tone, rhythm, and pacing over the music selected bring both the struggle and the character to life, while underscoring the value of “home” and its relationship to identity. This assignment asks students to consider the ways in which elements of particular genres inhibit and enhance narrative. In remixing various aspects of Butler’s characters, plot, themes, and style, students must take an active role in both interpreting the original text, and recreating that interpretation for a new audience. Butler’s work exemplifies a convergence of artistic expression and the production of cultural memory that both challenges and engages students.

In the past two decades there has been a shift away from a focus on identifying “sites of memory” to attention to the cultural processes by which memories are shared in the first place. “Cultural memory” developed as a useful umbrella term to describe the complex ways in which societies remember their past using a variety of media (Erll and Rigney). The assignment discussed above advances a philosophy of teaching memory studies that engages multiple genres. The example writing demonstrates the ways that students can develop their own lines of inquiry into formal and stylistic qualities of those genres. Propst and Loicano cite the results of their creative approach to curriculum: “Given the freedom to work outside the form of the traditional essay, many expressed insights that drew on their own life experiences, and in their best moments, they achieved levels of sophistication that they had not reached in earlier writing. They interrogated social values that others took for granted and, in some cases, ones that they themselves had taken for granted before the project” (374). The freedom to work outside the form of the traditional essay is one component of the creativity described here. Just as important is the critical reflection, which in form resembles a more traditional academic essay with a beginning, middle, and end, and a method of presenting evidence, and analysis.

The reflection on this process is what makes for such a visible difference in student levels of engagement. Yancey reflects, “Accordingly, reflection is a critical component of learning and of writing specifically; articulating what we have learned *for ourselves* is a key process in that learning—in both school learning and out-of-school learning (although I’m not sure the two can be—or should be—separated)” (7). This last part is key: considering “out-of-school learning” not as a separate endeavor, but as crucially and inextricably linked with what we do in the classroom is the only way to truly show students that their authority on their own work is legitimate. In thinking about the various textual and audio-visual modes through which Butler’s narrative can

be delivered, the students in the *Time Travel, Trauma, and Cultural Memory* course create a new set of texts, a new constellation of media that interprets, shapes, and reshapes an understanding of the cultural memory of slavery. The act of creation itself involves both practices of reading and engagement with an other in a variety of networks. As discussed in chapter one, social networks are only ever in process and must be performed continuously. In *Reassembling the Social* Latour suggests we need to perform a sociology that is “best defined as the discipline where participants explicitly engage in the reassembling of the collective” (247). The relationship between performativity and actor-network theory can extend to the network of, for example, college curricula, students, teachers, and texts; and to the network between a multitude of voices implicit in remix culture.

Regarding the comparative nature of this dissertation, I hope to supply an added conceptual payoff by placing this chapter on literature and composition pedagogy before the following textual analysis of different multimodal genres. I argue that multimodal composition is inherently a performative, embodied act. Likewise, the experience of reading multimodal texts is also a performative, embodied act that expands a traditional conception of the static, finite text into a dynamic, ever evolving performance. The case of critical reflective pedagogy presents an explicit breakdown of the scaffolded steps that occur in the process of reading a text, adapting and remixing that text, and reflecting on the rationale behind the composition process in the new text for a new audience. I would like to put forth the claim here that by studying how to teach students methods for understanding the roles various modes can play in communicating a narrative we gain insight into how authors compose multimodal texts, and how we as multimodal readers make meaning out of multiple modes in a single composition. In this dissertation I suggest that taking *choreography* as a critical term uniquely illuminates the connection between

writing, memory, and performance. Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* explores thematic connections between these very acts of writing, remembering, and performing. This chapter explored how we read those acts and reinterpret them in multimodal forms. In particular, this chapter showcased examples in which the physicality of bodily memory played a central role in the composition process. The primary texts discussed in the next three chapters – Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, and Mark Hogancamp's *Marwencol* – assemble and reassemble a variety of source texts in their exploration and creation of cultural memory. The act of reassembling especially exemplifies forms of embodiment and bodily memory that are necessarily performative in multimodal narrative.

## CHAPTER THREE

Performance Aftermath: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* Twenty Years Later

Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl; or, A Modern Monster* has been called hypertext fiction, new media pastiche, a hypertext poem, an electronic collage, a feminist hypertext, and "a cyborg song of communion and reunion,"<sup>17</sup> among many other creative things. However we categorize it, this work marked a turning point for technologically mediated narrative composition in the mid-1990s. Rewriting Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Patchwork Girl* reassembles the female companion that Dr. Frankenstein created at the demand of his monster, but quickly destroyed, in five different sections; each section is composed of *lexia*, boxes of text connected by multiple links. As the patchwork girl explains, "My birth takes place more than once. In the plea of a bygone monster; from a muddy hole by corpse light; under the needle; and under the pen; or it took place not at all." The five sections of the work – "Story," "Graveyard," "Crazy Quilt," "Journal," and "Broken Accents" – correspond to these separate births. Each section assembles the patchwork girl in relation to a particular technology – print narrative, reconstructive surgery, quilting, handwriting, and digital hypertext, respectively – foregrounding the organization and sensory modalities of each individual mode. While the section "Story" follows a traditional chronological narrative structure, others, such as "Crazy Quilt" stitch together quotations from the children's story *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, from Shelley's text, and from countless other texts from Derrida to popular teen magazines. Laura Shackelford notes that the five sections of *Patchwork Girl* "foreground the centrality of these different technologies to

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Joyce, author of the pioneering work of e-lit *afternoon*, wrote in a review for *Patchwork Girl* promotional material on Eastgate's website: "Hypertext's next step...*Patchwork Girl* is spectacular in every sense, from RayBan to Debordian to Cirque de Soleil... This is a work of dream and desire and defying boundaries, an electronic collage, a theatre of windows, and a cyborg song of communion and reunion."

conceptions of subjectivity, highlighting their capacity to provide and secure logics for the figurative and literal assembly of bodies. . . .The patchwork girl is literally an assemblage; her multiple, conflicting subjectivities are inextricable from the technologies that lend her specific kinds and degrees of legibility and illegibility” (76). In an interview with digital artist Mark Amerika, Jackson explained that “it is easier and more pleasing for me to think of text as a thing or things, arranged in a place, than as a story told by a storyteller or a piece of music or a journey or one of the more linear metaphors for fiction. Hypertext makes it easy to place things side by side rather than one after another, so it makes ‘thing’ and ‘place’ metaphors much easier. I guess you could say I want my fiction to be more like a world full of things that you can wander around in rather than a record or memory of those wanderings” (232-33). I argue that the composition of multimodal texts especially entails an embodied process attending to sensory details, as well as choreography: that is, to traverse a multimodal text is to engage in plotting, following, and adapting the choreography put forth by the text itself.

The immersive reading experience of a nonlinear text like *Patchwork Girl* offers a place to consider the very dynamics of multimodal reading. I argue that one of the dominant affective responses to such reading is discomfort that might be associated with the frustration or anxiety that accompanies disorientation. Much scholarship on hypertext fiction addresses the spatial awareness and lack of ability for readers to locate themselves in a fixed point in the narrative like you would be able to do in a print novel where you could see exactly how much of the text was before and after where you are currently reading. Returning to the same questions about disorientation in multimodal reading experiences with attention to theorization about the body from the perspective of affect and dance studies allows a new, sharpened focus on the nuances of interaction between reader and text. Kinetic choreography—the sequence of motion—of the

images, lexia, and hyperlinks in *Patchwork Girl* creates circumstances under which each individual reading of the text will essentially be an original performance. The text of *Patchwork Girl* in this definition includes the embodied reading performance itself because the narrative, and sequence of motion, results directly from the agency of the current reader.

This chapter will explore these claims in four parts. The first two sections look closely at what multimodal reading entails, and especially why multimodal reading is disorienting and why disorientation matters, and why multimodal reading is embodied. The next section considers how electronic environments change and shape multimodal reading and writing experiences, taking into account and building on the affective embodied dimensions previously discussed. Finally, the chapter closes with a case study of Shelley Jackson's "traversal" or reading of her own work nearly twenty years after it was first published. This last section explores the concept of performance aftermath and takes *Patchwork Girl* as representative of following trends in post-1990s multimodal literature that embrace and engage with disorientation as a productive force of encounter. Rather than presenting an exclusive analysis of *Patchwork Girl* itself, I look specifically at Jackson's reading of her own text twenty years later as an object of inquiry, which entails reflective discussion of her memory of the original composition process, in order to extend and locate larger claims of this dissertation, namely that reading a multimodal text is an embodied performative act, and that considering the ephemeral nature of performance alongside the ephemeral nature of memory illuminates new ways of understanding both.

Considering that *Patchwork Girl* is a "first-generation electronic book," to use Matthew Kirschenbaum's descriptive phrase, it stands in counterpoint to the composition process of multimodal texts discussed in the previous chapter: moving from print text to multiple modes is a

completely different process than beginning a narrative in multiple modes from the start.<sup>18</sup>

Hayles, in *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (2005) names “media translation” as a process that not only translates media from one mode to another, but is also necessarily an act of interpretation:

My claim is that they [media translations] show that our notions of textuality are shot through with assumptions specific to print, although they have not been generally recognized as such. The advent of electronic textuality presents us with an unparalleled opportunity to reformulate fundamental ideas about texts and, in the process, to see print as well as electronic texts with fresh eyes. (89-90)

Since this advent of electronic textuality, possibilities for digital fiction have exploded. David Ciccoricco, tens years later in *Refiguring Minds in Narrative Media* (2015), explains that digital fiction

Would include anything from a poem that uses Flash animation software to a novel that uses hypertext links, and it can also refer to blogs, wikis, or even email, especially when these textual forms are appropriated or subverted for literary ends. Digital fiction, more specifically, refers to both preweb and web- based narratives that often (but not always) require some kind of user input during the reading process. They often make use of multiple semiotic channels in their delivery (text, sound, image), and often feature animated (or kinetic) effects in their visual design. (6)

He establishes that “Whatever the category, form, or genre of digital fiction in question, its kinetic and cybernetic qualities are among its most distinctive as far as literary artifacts go.

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<sup>18</sup> See Matthew Kirschenbaum’s *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (2008).

Textual kinetics simply refers to the mobility of the signifiers on the screen” and that “all narrative fiction involves complex feedback loops between linguistic systems (the text on the page) and social systems (the reader and his or her interpretive milieu). Texts (and games) in programmable digital media, however, instantiate this process in their material mechanism, and the reader becomes part of an integrated circuit comprising human input and machinic output” (Ciccoricco 7-8). Exploration of the immersive nature of the multimodal reading experience itself is as much at the heart of this chapter as study of the primary text.

Most of the critical attention to *Patchwork Girl* analyzes the ways that the thematic content articulates and corresponds to the composition process itself. George Landow argues that, “Jackson is showing us the way we always stitch together narrative, notions of gender, and the identities of ourselves and others.” Engaging with debates in the 1990s about decentering the reading process, Marie-Laure Ryan focused attention on immersion and interactivity in the narrative.<sup>19</sup> Even in critical work as recent as 2011, scholars comment on how revolutionary the composition process was, but continue to eschew discussion of changing media ecologies in favor of further investigations of subjectivity and personhood supposed by the decentered nature of the text as a random collage.<sup>20</sup>

To look at *Patchwork Girl* from the standpoint of 2016, more than twenty years after it was first published, allows a reading afforded through both affect and dance theory that can account for the very process of navigating the ways in which hypertext fiction choreographs the reading experience. I argue that the work is not a random decentered narrative, but rather a project with purpose engaged with a range of affects—from uncanny repulsion, to erotic

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<sup>19</sup> See especially Marie-Laure Ryan’s *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory* (1999).

<sup>20</sup> For example, see Heather Latimer’s “Reproductive Technologies, Fetal Icons, and Genetic Freaks: Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* and the Limits and Possibilities of Donna Haraway’s Cyborg” (2011).

obsession, to playful meta-discourse surrounding the process of composition—that is choreographed through the bodies of the text, as well as the bodies of the readers even when—or perhaps especially when—technological updates alter or negate authorial intention in the original composition.

### Troubling Reading: Disorientation

One of the most basic questions at the heart of this chapter is how and why multimodal texts are troubling to read. Implicit in this question is a desire to address the popular assumption that reading pictures or images must be easier than reading traditional prose. What is the real challenge, then, in reading multimodal compositions, or any composition that unfolds in a nontraditional, and especially non-linear fashion? The affective experience of sheer “discomfort” is a major contender in discerning what is so troubling about multimodal reading. Landow writes that, “The concept of disorientation relates closely to the tendency to use spatial, geographical, and travel metaphors to describe the way users experience hypertext” (89). He contends that disorientation is often conceived of “as crippling and dis-enabling, as something, in other words, that blocks completion of a task one has set for oneself or that has been set for one by others. . . .users of hypertext do not always find the experience of disorientation to be particularly stressful, much less paralyzing” (Landow 90). Robert Coover praises the very nonlinear elements of Jackson’s work that might be most responsible for disorientation:

Perhaps the true paradigmatic work of the era, Shelley Jackson’s elegantly designed, beautifully composed *Patchwork Girl* offers the patient reader, if there are any left in the world, just such an experience of losing oneself to a text, for as one plunges deeper and deeper into one’s own personal exploration of the

relations here of creator to created and of body to text, one never fails to be rewarded and so is drawn ever deeper, until clicking the mouse is as unconscious an act as turning a page, and much less constraining, more compelling. (Coover, Eastgate *Patchwork Girl* home page)

The relations of creator to created and of body to text described here exist both thematically in the content of the narrative and formally in the composition of the work. Disorientation, then, occurs in the reading process itself, as well as for the characters within the storyworld, and, in fact, in the conflation of the two.

*Patchwork Girl* perfectly embodies disorientation in multimodal reading in two ways: through the reading process and through technological obsolescence. Jackson comments on this herself in various segments of the project. She weaves excerpts of the *Storyspace* user manual into fragmentary thoughts about how disconcerting it is to be lost at an unknown point in her narrative; in a print book, you can see exactly how close to the middle or end you may be, while in *Patchwork Girl* you have no way of knowing how much or little text is between you and another section, or even if you can read to the end of your current section without getting thrown haphazardly into some other foreign space. At the heart of this sometimes-maddening discomfort, however, is the belief that Jackson has a master plan, and if you work hard enough and endure enough discomfort (if you're one of the precious few "patient readers left in the world"), you can learn what it is. This is one meaning of Landow's concept of "pleasurable disorientation" (91).

### Troubling Reading: Obsolescence

The second, and less obvious, way that hypertext fiction troubles multimodal reading has

to do with the very fact that as new media ecologies evolve, authors like Jackson do not, in fact, retain control over the lives of their projects. It was a common misconception in the early 1990s that these technologies would offer authors unprecedented control over their readers' experiences of their work. But, unlike a print book, or even other forms of electronic literature that are not hyperlink-based, a work like *Patchwork Girl* requires a machine with particular software to read its interface properly. *Patchwork Girl* can only be read as long as enough interest is generated to update code and translate the project over and over again to update compatibility with new operating systems. As you will quickly learn if you read the original user manual published in 1995, and try to read *Patchwork Girl* now, your operating system may not support what many would consider key components of the navigation system, such as being able to access a master map that will show you where you have been, and where you can go from your current location. Much of the meaning making that occurs in *Patchwork Girl* happens most interestingly between different sections of the narrative that, on the surface, seem disconnected, but in the act of reading, acquire new significance for the very order and place in which they are hyperlinked. One example is from "Crazy Quilt" in which you can click on the text box to see where the hyperlink takes you, or you can click on the squares themselves in any order you wish; however, you have to learn to click directly on the dotted line to reveal the sources from which the text has been patched together. Of course it can and should still be read in a variety of different ways; but that discomfort with *not* knowing where you are in the narrative, or of having the knowledge that there is information embedded deep in the code that you cannot access, is all a part of how *Patchwork Girl* presents a concrete place in which to grapple with the question of how and why multimodal reading is troublesome.

## Embodied Reading: Theories of (e)motion

In the interest of using *Patchwork Girl* as a springboard to approach some of the more complicated questions raised in this project, we can begin by turning our attention to several ways affect theory can help us understand what it means to study individual readers when it comes to multimodality. As discussed in chapter one, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth declare that affect's real potential is a body's *capacity* to affect and be affected; that affect marks a body's "belonging to a world of encounters," and is synonymous with *forces of encounter* (2). When we theorize what makes a text troublesome, or how multimodal reading can cause discomfort, it is the force of an encounter with the unfamiliar that leads a reader to feel that not only the text, but the very act of reading is unfamiliar, disorienting, even chaotic.

To study multimodal reading is to study multimodal readers. An argument of this dissertation is that some of the strongest vocabulary for studying motion between bodies and texts comes from dance scholars. Susan Foster believes that "choreographing empathy" entails the "construction and cultivation of a specific physicality whose kinesthetic experience guides our perception of and connection to what another is feeling" (2). Suzanne Keen states that, "narrative empathy means feeling with fiction" (296) and that "Fictional character, however, is not a narrative technique, but a product of it. Fictional character resides somewhere between the discourse and the storyworld, a projection of fictional worldmaking and the site of readerly creative collaboration" (298).

Ann Cooper Albright, writing on dance and autobiography, explains that she is interested in "exploring the intratextual autographs of writing and dancing: in other words, I want to look at the ways in which the performing body physicalizes the autobiographical voice to produce a representation of subjectivity which is at once whole and fragmented" ("Auto-Body Stories"

182). Paul Eakin coined the phrase “the performance of the autobiographical act.”<sup>21</sup> Albright further develops this concept:

Translating reader-response theory into the performance context, one could say that not only is each dance ‘read’ and interpreted by the audience members, it is constantly ‘read’ and reinterpreted by the person performing those movements. In many ways, then, the presence of the performing body can challenge and stretch even the most recent explorations of the autobiographical self. Although the act of performing itself (or one’s self) foregrounds the fact that the self is always performed, this constructed performative self is also always reinvented by a physical body, which cannot be so easily or neatly fragmented. In the very act of performing, the dancing body splits itself to enact its own representation and simultaneously heals its own fissure in that enactment. (“Auto-Body Stories” 186)

Drawing from theorization about the dancing body in performance allows us to consider the reading body in performance, especially in the case of reading spatial hypertext that demands an embodied reading in, through, and with the text. *Patchwork Girl* is, also, in a manner of speaking, a creative autobiographical work that inserts Jackson’s own experiences, memories, and conflicts into the narrative. Such metacommentary plays out work of remembering with which we see the Monster engage, and with which the reader must engage through Jackson’s composition.

I argue that the text of Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* as mediated by its hypertext performance choreographs the way readers can empathetically engage with the experience of simultaneously feeling the forceful encounter with discomfort—pleasurable disorientation—

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<sup>21</sup> See Paul Eakin’s *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985).

while also building communion with fictional characters. The empathetic engagement I describe here is more than psychological or emotional. It necessarily registers on a physical level as well because readers are forced to acknowledge, consider, and “touch” individual parts of the Patchwork Girl’s body to navigate the collage, requiring acknowledgement of the Monster’s multiplicity. On multivocality, Landow points to Bakhtin’s work on the dialogic, polyphonic, multivocal novel: “hypertext does not permit a tyrannical, univocal voice. Rather the voice is always that distilled from the combined experience of the momentary focus, the lexia one presently reads, and the continually forming narrative of one’s reading path” (36).<sup>22</sup> This text requires more than Coover’s “patient readers.” It seeks readers who are willing to engage with the very problems of multimodal reading, particularly when it comes to assuming an active role as choreographer of their own reading performance as that performance continually unfolds.

#### Embodied Reading: Performative Discourse

When Karen Barad writes about the undeserved or unfair preference given to the written word, she draws to attention the same questions Susan Foster and other dance scholars have drawn to the ways in which the body is constantly undermined in favor of the mind:

*A performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the misconception that would equate

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<sup>22</sup> See especially Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981).

performativity with a form of linguistic monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve. (Barad “Posthumanist Performativity” 121)

Performativity entails a level of context awareness. To say that one is always already performing implies that the stakes of the performance are always already informing the performance itself. The “excessive power granted to language to determine what is real” presupposes a verbal communication in which the body is only real insofar as it can be verbalized. The primary texts taken up in this project call forth the body first, while language follows second. The composition of multimodal texts especially entails an embodied process attending to sensory details, as well as choreography: that is, to traverse a multimodal text is to engage in plotting, following, and adapting the choreography put forth by the text itself.

What happens if we favor bodily experience as equally or more powerful than verbal expression of that experience? The mind / body dichotomy does not have to exist as such; rather, a careful consideration of the ways in which one informs the other can lead to a more nuanced, deeper understanding of how the body of the text choreographs the way readers will traverse it. Anne Cooper Albright, writing about autobiography and dance, claims that, “translating reader-response theory into the performance context, one could say that not only is each dance ‘read’ and interpreted by the audience members, it is constantly ‘read’ and reinterpreted by the person performing those movements” (“Auto-Body Stories” 186). The same could be said of the body-centered texts taken up in this project. Immersive, interactive fictions in particular take into account the ways in which audiences or readers will interpret and engage with the text; and, even

more compellingly, the audience or reader can be said to adopt or inhabit a role as co-creator of the text, insofar as each individual choice made to navigate through the text produces a new, unique reading, or performance, of the text.

Electronic literature choreographs an interactive experience with each reader through the context, content, and specific technological platforms on which the text is constructed. While one may argue that the content – the words on the page – are not necessarily any more or less complex than those in a traditional print medium, the navigation, and therefore the entire reading experience, is decidedly different. Linearity is at the heart of print texts that, even when using space on the page in experimental ways, or directing readers to turn to different pages in the document, is still set in a tangible, confined space. Electronic literature has the ability to send readers to plains of the narrative that may not be visible from the start, and may not be arrived at through the same path every time.

### Nonlinear Choreography of Electronic Composition

This freedom comes with its own set of limitations, but it emphasizes, paradoxically, the embodied choreography of the text. Astrid Ensslin in *Canonizing Hypertext* explains:

hypertexts have a nonlinear compositional structure and thus categorically deviate from other digitized forms of writing, often called ‘paper under glass,’ as they are organized in a traditional, linear way and can be printed as such. Hypertext is by definition un-printable, for such an act of material linearization would disrupt its characteristic underlying macrostructure. Due to its *nonlinear* macrostructure, the hypertextual reading process is *multilinear*. In other words, there are multiple possible reading paths through a hypertext, which, due to the temporal and spatial

sequentiality of decoding language, have to be transgressed in an essentially linear way, but which defy the macrostructural monolinearity and hierarchies of the majority of print media, as the order and selection of text units varies from reader to reader and from reading to reading. (5)

To subsume structural nonlinearity and receptive multilinearity under one umbrella term, Ensslin refers to “the *antilinearity* of hypertext, which is, in actual fact, short for ‘anti-monolinearity.’”

(5). In considering the effects of hypertext’s structural principals on reading and writing, Ensslin takes up George Landow’s much-debated concept of the ‘wreader.’<sup>23</sup> She contests that “the very process of reading hypertext does not in itself liberate, or ‘empower’ the reader. On the contrary, hypertext readers are far more inclined to feel restricted, or disempowered, in their decision-making processes, a situation which more often than not results in feelings of frustration. Having said that, the concept of the ‘wreader’ can indeed be sanctioned provided that readers are actually given a chance to participate in empowering, collaborative projects in which literary hypertext is read, discussed, and created jointly rather than in isolation” (3). The relationship between form and content in a work of literary hypertext necessarily takes into account new media ecologies that arguably offer a greater degree of immersion on the part of the reader or audience.

Furthermore, the process of choosing where to navigate in a hypertext work can be conceptualized as a collaborative process between author and reader of performing the text.

When Ensslin claims that readers can, surprisingly, feel restricted rather than liberated by an abundance of agency and choice in their reading process, she calls to attention the question of reading itself.

When I suggest that a text can choreograph a reader’s experience, one may assume that

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<sup>23</sup> See George Landow’s *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1997).

this refers primarily to interactivity. There is a sense in which that is correct, but it is also too limited. The evolution of e-lit has opened our eyes to language as multimodal, emphasizing the potential of multimodal texts and on various facets of multimodality. Why now? The last twenty-five years of experience of texts in digital environments have taught us we have to think about multimodality and the way we interact with texts more richly. I propose *choreography* as another term indicating that there is more than interactivity at work in a work like Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*. There is a difference between interactivity and optionality. As Ensslin suggests, interactivity does not directly correlate to liberation. However, it is also a misreading to suggest that *Patchwork Girl* is either liberating or restricting the reader when it is, in fact, doing something else entirely. How do readers engage? How do they maneuver through texts? What does it mean to read for meaning versus to read for experience? When can one say they have read *Patchwork Girl*? When they have read every single box or lexia of text? Or when they have followed every single potential sequence of paths? Or does one simply say one continues to read? In this event, I do not mean that the text has no meaning but rather that it prioritizes movement and kinesthetic experience of an embodied reading process. Do texts ever force us to do anything? Texts orient us to navigate. Consider language as choreographed experience: what might this choreography mean for other works of e-lit? Returning to George Landow in the 1990s, we can see how assumptions that e-lit would prove poststructuralist claims about language must be adapted; rather, e-lit taught us to better understand language and multimodality.

#### Nonlinear Choreography: Writing in Electronic Environments

Interactivity is key for the employment of choreography in this context. The reader is part

of the patchwork, and the metaphors scholars use for the body of the text directly engage a subjectivity that is, at its core, intersubjective. A nuanced understanding of such a relationship between writer and reader demands discussion of the specific types of writing that take place in new media ecologies. Mark Bernstein begins the 2009 collection *Reading Hypertext* with a thorough meditation on writing in electronic environments: “What matters most in electronic writing is the link. Links are the first new punctuation mark to appear in centuries, the most important technical innovation in our literary machinery since the comma. Other aspects of electronic writing change print practice at the margins—audio or video illustrations, color imagery, print-on-demand or electronic distribution—but links change writing itself” (Bernstein 4). The change taking place described here remains centered on agency and power dynamics in the relationship between reader, writer, and text:

With links, writers cede part of their control over the sequence of the text to the reader, and readers accept the demonstrable authority they have always possessed to shape their experience of the text. ... What becomes of argumentation and narrative when we cannot predict precisely what the reader will see, or in what sequence the text will be read? Fears that the hypertext reader’s experience must be incoherent are unfounded, for readers have always been expected to assemble for themselves a coherent, causal sequence from a very different account. ... The lessons of other media reinforce our suspicion that the textual line is more tangled than nostalgia for an imaginary narrative simplicity might suggest. We enjoy polyphonic music, even though the composer cannot know whether the listener will follow the bass or treble line. The same is true of painting: the artist can guide our gaze but our perception of *The School of Athens* or *Les Romains de*

*la decadence* or *Guernica* inevitably unfolds as a sequence of impressions that the viewer chooses. Whether in text or in music or on canvas, indeed, we delight to discover relationships and patterns crafted by the artist but hidden from us until we turn our attention and intelligence to see them. (Bernstein 4-5, 6)

We think of sequencing as somehow more important to art forms conventionally and popularly conceived of as linear, such as narrative, whereas, as Bernstein suggests, visual, aural, or performing arts do not demand that one follow a single layer or trajectory. Instead one can experience the work as a whole. Shelley Jackson's work is particularly well-suited to grappling with the idea of a narrative work that demands a non-linear reading precisely because, as an author, she is especially concerned with patterns and relationships that intentionally disorient conventional reading expectations.

Jackson explained in an interview that now, more than twenty years after *Patchwork Girl* was first composed, she finds it useful to employ the term "remix" because it emphasizes the simultaneous fragmentation and unity in her work: "The work is about text as body, and in some sense is inseparable from its (technical) embodiment. A smoother, more intuitive interface wouldn't do. The work needs its discontinuities, its patches." Jackson speaking specifically to working in Storyspace recalled that she "really liked the physicality of being able to move the boxes around" because she naturally had a "very spatial understanding of text... That feeling lies behind some of the concerns of *Patchwork Girl* already, the sense that there's a physical expanse involved in text, that different pieces of text relate to each other spatially, not just conceptually." This very spatiality in composition calls for an equally engaged spatiality in reading.

## Nonlinear Choreography: Reading in Electronic Environments

In reading hypertext, Landow considers four types of information: orientation, navigation, exit / departure, and arrival / entrance (98). These types of information isolate the reading process to a bounded space *within* the text. One of the greatest potential gains of making *choreography* operational in an analysis of embodied reading is imagining the possibilities of the extension of the text itself. Shelley Jackson theorizes that, “where you draw the line around the work is very fuzzy...that you could include things that aren’t normally thought of as part of the text, like the lights that you sit under...the noises that you hear on the street” (Grigar and Moulthrop). If the line you draw around a work includes the embodied act of reading, whole new possibilities open up for understanding the work, and the reading process. Catherine C. Marshall, in “Reading Spatial Hypertext,” argues that “a focus on page-based reading isn’t enough; reading—especially reading hypertexts—is more complicated than that. At least four other factors come into play”:

1. The anticipatory gestures, partial actions, and focusing techniques we observe when we watch people read complicated paper forms like magazines;
2. The compulsive nature of simple physical actions like clicking or button-pushing;
3. The observation that human attention is difficult to manage, especially in the absence of spatial fixity and visually overwhelming situations; and
4. The growing realization that metadata often isn’t rich enough, right enough, or sufficiently trustworthy to act upon. (217-218)

Through study of these criteria, Marshall focuses on the problem of turning someone from “a user into a reader” (218), implicitly naming a distinction—and hierarchy—between the two

categories. In order to move beyond the simple position as “user,” the more complex position as “reader” demands a level of immersion in the text, i.e., the equal attention to the content and form. Embodied reading processes can and will evolve over time, just as the reception of electronic writing evolves over time.

### Performance Aftermath

The nonlinear writing and reading detailed above constitutes a variety of narrative sequences. Arguably, each reading of a text like *Patchwork Girl* creates a performance that may not be replicated exactly ever again. Certainly the performance of reading spatial hypertext cannot be perfectly replicated if we also take into consideration the extension of the text Jackson theorizes. Just as we might conceive of the text as more than the “text,” we can also understand the performance as more than the “performance.” Performance studies scholar Richard Schechner famously built his work not on drama as literature but rather on the physical act of live performance. In *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985) he broadens the idea of “performance” to include a wide range of social, ritual, and media activities. Central to this work is his concept of performance “aftermath”:

The aftermath is the long-term consequences or follow-through of a performance. Aftermath includes the changes in status or being that result from an initiatory performance; or the slow merging of performer with a role he plays for decades; or the reviews and criticism that so deeply influence some performances and performers; or theorizing and scholarship—such as this book. At the distance of reviews, criticism, theory, and scholarship careers are built not in the arts and rituals of performing but in commenting on performances. Of course, aftermath

feeds back into performing—and the theories of practitioners such as Brecht, Stanislavski, and Zeami for examples are especially instrumental. (Schechner 19)

Perhaps the most striking feature of Schechner’s performance aftermath is its implications for feeding back into performing. Choreography becomes ultimately useful in this context if we consider every embodied reading experience of spatial hypertext as part of the process that will feed back into the creation of the text itself, insofar as each reading generates a new performance of *Patchwork Girl*.

#### Case Study: *Pathfinders* “Traversal”

One of the most fascinating emergent genres in new media is the recording of interactive digital-abetted performance. A popular example of this genre can be seen in YouTube recorded sessions of gamers live streaming videogame play. Similarly, work has been done to record authors of e-lit reading their own work. The performance aftermath in this context continuously generates new performances and occasions for new audiences to witness the embodied performance of multimodal reading. One beautiful, well-documented example of such aftermath feedback exists in the recent work *Pathfinders*, created by Dene Grigar and Stuart Moulthrop.

The “About” page explains:

The best way to think about the artifact that is *Pathfinders*, in its current iteration, is as a hybrid publication: a web-book—a new form of knowledge environment that experiments with web-based multimedia for providing criticism and scholarly content to a wide audience interested in experimental writing and literature of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. But for simplicity sake and the fact that there is really no elegant name for what we have produced, we refer to it as our open-source, multimedia

*book.* (Grigar and Moulthrop)

Among other reasons, including the basic desire to preserve and archive early electronic literature, the genesis for this work was the authors' beliefs that "there is much to be said about the future of the book and what constitutes reading in rich media environments." This multimedia book marks a revived interest in pioneering electronic literature and the ways in which it has influenced several decades of innovative work, and also furthers the performance aftermath of those original works by bringing them into new, present-tense performances.

*Pathfinders* takes four primary pioneering works of hypertext fiction and films a series of "traversals" in which the authors read their own works. They offer narration of what they are doing while they are doing it, which leads to observations, commentary, and memories about the original composition process, the current reading of the text, and speculation about the different experiences of the two. Rather than focusing an analysis here on *Patchwork Girl* itself, as so much previous scholarship has done, I take Jackson's 2013 traversal as my object of inquiry. This reading of the text is broken down into four separate videos, varying in length from about seven to twelve minutes, and presented in *Pathfinders* on a single page in which each video is titled and paired with brief summary and commentary from the authors. This traversal offers invaluable insight into how a complex network of actors choreographs memory in this multimodal text. The memory under analysis here refers to both how Jackson constructed memory and the act of remember in *Patchwork Girl* in the mid-1990s, but also, now, to the mode of memory occurring in and through the aftermath of performance as we witness Jackson remembering her own performative discourse with her monster, as she witnesses her fictional Mary Shelley create her monster.

As mentioned above, Jackson commented in interviews about the importance of spatiality

in her work. In the traversal, she narrates this very issue as she reads *Patchwork Girl* in “Part 1: Unweaving the Poetic Narrative”:

I often find it easier and more interesting to navigate not by following links from something like a title page, but by actually looking at the map overview, which is in fact the way I constructed the piece. So for me this is what the piece looks like, really. And I would be happy to have the reader have exactly the same experience reading it, of moving through these movable pieces, as I did writing it. ...I want them [the five opening links] to be evenly weighted for the reader, so a reader could find herself somewhere that could potentially be pretty disorienting, which is part of my plan. (Traversal “Unweaving the Poetic Narrative”)

In the midst of this narration, the camera alternates between shots of Jackson’s face—catching her expressions, pauses, and reactions to the screen—and shots of the screen itself as she navigates from the map overview to different lexia. Beginning with the section “Birth” because she wants to take us, the viewers, to a “chunk that is like a story,” she reads some sections, but not all, because she says she “wants to hop to Mary Shelley’s own words to get my monster born.” As the video of the traversal unfolds, we witness Jackson as the reader of her own work making deliberate choices about what to represent, what to emphasize for her audience.

Additionally, she makes deliberate switches in her vocal reading patterns and tone of voice as she alternates between narration of what she is doing, to dramatic readings of the text contained within selected lexia: “Now I’m clicking through this section to reach the moment when he [Dr. Frankenstein] thinks better of his creating a female monster and destroys her. Here *my* monster interrupts Mary Shelley for the first time with a parenthetical remark: (*I told her to abort me, raise me from her book... I forge my own links*).” Jackson’s affective register of

excitement is visible and audible in the video. We see that she is reacting to one of the pivotal plot points wherein her own work supersedes Mary Shelley's, and at the same time she is performing the role of the monster.

In "Part 2: Confronting the Monster," she follows the link for "journal" to a section where fictional Mary Shelley describes her first encounter with the female monster. From this section there are two links: "written" and "sewn," which Jackson explains encapsulates her main metaphor in *Patchwork Girl*, the body as text and text itself as a fabric or weaving: "Writing becomes like stitches and stitches become like writing." Next we see her clicking through linear sections to get to the section where Mary Shelley makes love to her monster, which Jackson says she wants to show, not read. Next, she returns to the map overview to get to "Graveyard" to see how each tombstone leads to backstories of people who made up the monster. She explains that her "original idea, which you can see by clicking on the head, is to get a visual image of each body part named, which the reader can reassemble graphically on the page." Jackson leaves the Graveyard section, reading the final lines "a kind of resurrection has taken place."

In "Part 3: Stitched Remix," we see that the section "Quilt" contains passages remixed from various sources: *Frankenstein*, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, critical commentaries, works of cultural theory, and even the Storyspace user manual. The series of hyphens at the bottom of each lexia in the Quilt represent the stitches that draw the passages together; however, they don't appear in the CD-ROM version Jackson currently reads. Jackson explains she intended to take the parallel between sewing and writing in another direction with a kind of visual image in Quilt. Texts are themselves patchworked, made up of quotes from other sources: "The seams don't show unless you look under the surface." Jackson says she takes us, "into a part of the story that I wanted to explore because like the section we visited earlier where written and sewn origin

myths stand in parallel, this story section—which is in some ways the most linear—is actually composed of two parallel narratives which meet and diverge again. . . . more or less the same circumstances of one point of view resisting multiplicity, and the other celebrating it.”

In the final video, “Part 4: Parallel Patches,” Jackson explains that the Frankenstein monster has left Mary Shelley and traveled to America, where she is befriended by a young sailor named Chancy. Jackson looks at two versions of the lexia “Revelations.” In one version the Monster has sex with Chancy who turns out to be a woman, but in the other they depart in fear and distrust. Next in “An Accident” the monster is run over by a cab, leaving her left leg separated from her body. Jackson read, “Was there a right way to go to pieces?” She explains that they hold a funeral for the leg (Jackson laughs), then the monster moves on traveling west, and moves into the present day. Jackson reads, “Lacking a past all together though wasn’t safe,” and explains the monster attempts to put herself together to become whole: “The result is not good. She falls apart,” and she points out that the parallelism of the two lines is still maintained in that section. Jackson’s traversal closes as she moves on to “The Aftermath,” giving a dramatic reading of the final line: “And doubt and movement will be my life, as long as it lasts.”

#### Afterlives of Remix

The kinesthetics, emotion, and bodily expressivity of Jackson’s journey through *Patchwork Girl* constitute a material performance that both unifies and fragments subjectivity. An understanding of embodied reading in this context can be further illuminated if we turn again to the embodied performance of dance. Jane Desmond writes that, “dance, as an embodied social practice and highly visual aesthetic form, powerfully melds considerations of materiality and representation together” (2). Dancing bodies

enact a conception of self and social community mediated by the particular historical aesthetic dimensions of the dance forms and their precise conditions of reception. They engage every sense of the body, and do so in socially meaningful ways, which emphasize certain sensations over others. Such an analysis of nonverbal symbolic systems that are not only embedded in social contexts but also are formative of those contexts of lived experience can expand our understandings of ideologies and their discursive mobilization in realms that are often so overlooked as to be naturalized. (Desmond 16)

In taking up *Patchwork Girl* directly through Jackson's 2013 traversal in this project, my hope is to highlight precisely such realms—the kinesthetics, emotion, and bodily expressivity—that move to the front and center through the very spatiality of Jackson's work. Her verbal narration in the traversal offers a frame and point of access, but what becomes much more apparent, and important, is the choreography operating in affective registers that move beyond text. Sally Banes, writing on a dance composition class taught by John Cage's student, Robert Dunn, claims that, "The *writing* of dances—the 'graphy' in choreography—was crucial to the composition process Dunn outlined for his students, not necessarily in the sense of permanently recording what the dance was, but in order to objectify the composition process, both by creating nonintuitive choices and by viewing the total range of possibilities for the dance" (7).<sup>24</sup> The issues raised here regarding desires to simultaneously permanently preserve an ephemeral performance, and conceive of the multiplicity inherent in any single performance are at the heart of Shelley Jackson's embodied reading, and the performance aftermath of *Patchwork Girl*.

"There isn't an essential 'self' in *Patchwork Girl*" Jackson said in her post-traversal

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<sup>24</sup> See Sally Banes' *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (1993).

*Pathfinders* interview, emphasizing again the multiplicity of this text, and the broader questions that she believes drive all of her work. She says that *My Body*, her semi-autobiographical Web piece, and the story collection *Melancholy of Anatomy* are both “in a way versions of *Patchwork Girl*, too” as is her novel *Half Life*, which is about monstrosity and conjoined twins; the link between textual body and physical body is central throughout. Another experimental project, *Skin*, in which Jackson created a narrative via distributing individual words to thousands of participants who tattooed their word on their own bodies is “what happened to *Patchwork Girl* after she fell apart. She turned into this story on individual bodies wandering around remixing the story.” When explains the relationship between the writing of dances and the performance of those dances that follows, she illuminates a way to consider the relationship between composition, performance, and audience reception. Jackson, by conceiving of a patchworked through-line in her body of work as a whole, embraces the concept of remix that necessarily involves and always evolving understanding of what constitutes the text.

Disorientation, discussed previously, relates strongly to reading experimental, nonlinear text and performances of text, but it also holds relevance for performance aftermath. Authors and readers, or audiences, alike certainly experience disorientation when it comes to preservation and recording some sort of concrete representation of an ephemeral performance. In response to a question about scholars’ attempts to preserve individual, specific readings of *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson says, “The desire to hold [things] together is doomed and unhealthy. . . . Literature is a way to learn to let go of ourselves.” In a sense, this attitude further upholds a belief in the active participation on the part of a reader, or audience, to simultaneously embrace unity and multiplicity. In other words, the act of letting go is another performance act, one choreographed by the text itself.

## Obsolescence Remixed

This chapter began by establishing two categories through which to consider troubling reading: disorientation and obsolescence. Earlier, I discussed obsolescence in terms of technology and context specific to *Patchwork Girl*. Now I will move to a more nuanced theoretical examination of obsolescence, and its implications for the relationship between text/performance and reader/audience, as well as how multimodal texts have the capacity to comment on what might be remembered and what might be erased, lost, or forgotten. Randy Martin, in “Dance Ethnography and the Limits of Representation,” writes that:

The dancers constitute themselves in anticipation of performance. This anticipation bears the anxiety of uncertainty, of something that can be completed only through its communication. The performance is the execution of an idea by dancers whose work proceeds in expectation of an audience that is itself only constituted through performance. The audience has no identity as audience prior to and apart from the performative agency that has occasioned it. As such, the audience is intrinsically ‘unstable,’ both in terms of its own presence and in its ability to occasion and then disrupt the very anxiety of performance. At the same time, it is the work that the audience does, the participation that it lends to performance to make the latter possible, that is irrecuperable to representation. It is, like the dance activity itself, an untranslatable object. But unlike dancing, forms of representation rarely make an effort to recognize audience participation, which springs from this disruptive potential, itself an indeterminacy of representation internal to the performance. So if writing and documentation cannot recuperate the traces of participation found in performance, minimally

they can recognize the disruptive effects of the work of participation lost to representation. (Martin 321)

Recuperation occupies a central stage of concern for Martin here. Regaining or recovering that which was lost, or the seemingly impossibility of doing so, relates back to precisely what makes spatial readings of text difficult, troubling, or disorienting. The concept of linearity goes hand in hand with the concepts of documentation and preservation simply because they are all grounded in *locatability*. If you find yourself feeling disoriented as a reader or an audience member, you are likely unable to locate where you are *in* the performance; that is, in relation to the parts coming before and after your current location.

Theorization from dance and performance studies scholars like Martin offer a magnified look at embodied motion between choreography, performance, and reception that generates invaluable insight into motion in nonlinear electronic literature. The “traces of participation” are key to my understanding of how multimodal texts choreography memory and the act of remembering. Martin writes that, “The shift in perspective to participation rather than representation as suggested by the conceptual challenges posed by dance, here understood as the particularization of the performer-audience relation, has an import beyond dance writing. This perspective simulates a relation of performer and audience where the activity of performers (the artistic object of performance) puts into operation the notion of ‘agency,’ and where the audience suggests a mobilized critical presence such as that implicit in radical notions of ‘history,’” (322). Electronic literature is in a position to contemplate memory in a way traditional print literature is not because, for a work like *Patchwork Girl*, this line of inquiry also includes the memory of the text itself. When I refer to the memory of the text itself, I refer to the very performer-audience relation of Martin’s mobilized critical presence. As discussed earlier, “not only is each dance

‘read’ and interpreted by the audience members, it is constantly ‘read’ and reinterpreted by the person performing those movements” (Albright “Auto-Body Stories” 186). In an example like the *Pathfinders* traversal, we see Jackson reading and interpreting her own work as an audience member for the duration of one specific, unique embodied performance of the text.

### The Audience

Intriguingly, performance studies offers precedent for considering the audience in much the same ephemeral terms as the performance, which is key to understanding embodied reading practices in the face of the inability to recuperate any specific reading experience once it has past. Herbert Blau, in *The Audience*, contends that the audience “is not so much a mere congregation of people as a body of thought and desire. It does not exist before the play but is *initiated* or *precipitated* by it; it is not an entity to begin with but a consciousness constructed” (25). My comments above regarding disorientation as an audience member located discomfort in the lack of ability to identify a current locale. Blau’s concept of the audience suggests that the audience always already can only locate itself in relation to the performance, insofar as what we think of as “audience” simply does not exist outside of the performance. Considering this understanding alongside Jackson’s musings about where to draw the boundaries around a text, I would argue that we have much to gain from considering the audience itself as *part of the text*. This definition of text demands choreography as an organizing principal because it through choreography that we can see the total range of possibilities for the text, and the performance aftermath of that text. Questions about documentation and preservation in some respects seem contrary to the nature of such a text because they emphasize only the past, only a singular conception of an original text that exists independently from the traces of participation that

ultimately made the text what it is and could be. Blau believes that, “The very obsession with *what happened*...may accumulate so many variable versions of the past that they virtually cancel each other. Or, held in unnegotiable balance, breed indifference to history” (16). Rather than risk indifference to the past by focusing all energies on recovery, future readings of electronic literature might explore not static memories of the work but instead the ongoing performance of memory.

### Composition and Bodily Experience

The ongoing performance of memory explored in this chapter points to fundamental concerns about the relationship between disorientation and control in the reading process. I refer there to disorientation and control in multimodal reading specifically, and in the ordering of narrative that takes place in the act of remembering more broadly. In a text like *Patchwork Girl* the joint work of visual and textual modes affects the way in which a reader can or cannot control their own reading experience. Ciccoricco describes what he calls a paradox relating to empathy in digital environments:

Whereas graphical realism in a visual register can enhance empathetic effects, temporal factors counteract them, an observation that has particularly profound implications for interactive and participatory digital environments. Our engagement with something as familiar and mainstream as film can change when we assume a measure of control through simple operations such as zooming or replaying, which effectively allow us to reexperience or reinforce empathy. More significantly, the same observation has the potential to challenge commonplace laments concerning the intellectual and emotional shallowness of digital

environments: the more control we have, the more opportunity we have to (re)stage empathy. In short, we need to factor in issues of control, temporality, and, indeed, medium in considering the complex matter of shaping mental simulations. (Ciccoricco 239)

Ciccoricco's observations regarding the effects of control in a mainstream medium such as film highlight such effects in a medium like hypertext fiction that, as Jackson claimed, will never be mainstream precisely because of the challenging nature of reading it. This chapter has argued that the affective experience of disorientation directly informs such challenging natures of reading multimodal narrative. If more control equates to more opportunity to (re)stage empathy, as Ciccoricco suggests, than I would argue that this process of restaging must be considered a fundamental part of what we conceive of as the text itself. The performance aftermath of a text like *Patchwork Girl* makes clear the role of audience engagement through control of choreography: an embodied performance of multimodal reading only exists through the sequence of motion enacted by the current reader.

Rather than presenting an exclusive analysis of *Patchwork Girl* itself, this chapter looked specifically at Jackson's reading of her own text twenty years after it was published as an object of inquiry, which entailed reflective discussion of her memory of the original composition process, in order to extend and locate larger claims of this dissertation, namely that reading a multimodal text is an embodied performative act, and that considering the ephemeral nature of performance alongside the ephemeral nature of memory illuminates new ways of understanding both. The conceptual payoff of placing this chapter on hypertext fiction in between discussions of critical reflective literature and composition pedagogy in chapter two and graphic memoir in chapter four is the necessarily comparative trajectory of studying multimodality.

More specifically, the sequence of these chapters builds momentum through continued emphasis on the role of the author's bodily experience of composing the text. Student's adaptations of Octavia Butler's *Kindred* placed the students themselves in the position of their proposed audiences in order to rationalize compositional decisions in their adaptations. Shelley Jackson placed herself directly into the narrative of *Patchwork Girl* to make distinctions between various levels of authorship and creation for herself, her monster, Mary Shelley, and the reader navigating her text. The next chapter takes authorial insertion into the text to another level. Alison Bechdel not only writes a memoir in graphic form that centers her physical body in the text, but she also extends dialogues similar to what we saw in Jackson's traversal regarding various levels of authorship and creation between Bechdel the author and Alison the character. These distinctions allow for explicit commentary on the process of multimodal composition and the role of embodied memory in multimodal reading.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Dancing with Memory in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

Analysis of performance and embodiment in multimodal texts highlights the role of emotions in memory and the ways that memory is just as much about the body as about the mind.

Representations of the body and of bodily memory in the previous chapter focused on digital environments in which the reader arguably has more control over the narrative than in a print text, even a print text engaging multiple modes. In this regard, hypertext fiction and graphic memoir, the genre taken up in this chapter, are quite different. My intention in juxtaposing these genres is twofold: first, I want to draw attention to how *choreography* operates in genres with varying degrees of boundaries or “boundedness.” Second, despite the drastically different forms hypertext fiction and graphic memoir take, I want to supply insight as to how representations of the physical body in both contribute to a greater understanding of what I argue is the performative, embodied act of multimodal reading and writing.

When I refer to boundaries or boundedness here I mean the literal confines of the “literary object,” to use Katherine Hayles’ term. Hayles claims that, “the physical form of the literary artifact always affects what the words (and other semiotic components) mean” and that we only come to “a full-bodied understanding of literature” as a unified literary object (Hayles *Writing Machines* 25-26). The unified literary object for hypertext fiction, as discussed in the last chapter, is largely unbounded in its sequential order, whereas the unified literary object in the case of a graphic memoir, while it contains textual and visual modes, is a single print object that you can hold in your hands. Even if you read a digital edition of a graphic memoir, there are still sequentially numbered pages that indicate a clear beginning, middle, and end of the overall narrative. Graphic memoir provides a fascinating example because while the

overall narrative may unfold linearly, individual pages and panels choreograph motion in a manner more similar to the nonlinear narrative we see in hypertext fiction. In this way graphic memoir offers a visual representation of the relationship between movement and the construction of memory.

Considering attempts to analyze movement as a metaphor for attempts to analyze memory allows a space in which both the physicality of an experience and the emotional or psychological understanding of that experience can be articulated together. By framing an analysis of memory in multimodal texts through analysis of movement, one of the central objectives of this chapter is to highlight that previously held widespread conceptions of the mind / body divide are not sufficient for understanding the relationship between memory and artistic expression. What does it mean to draw on a body of philosophical and theoretical reflection about movement and embodiment to discuss a multimodal text? To embody is to be an expression of or give a tangible or visible form to an idea, quality, or feeling. Embodiment is a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling; the representation or expression of something in a tangible or visible form. Movement itself, unlike text printed on a page, can only be analyzed in terms of the myriad ways in which it is recorded and reinterpreted after it has happened.

So much work in memory studies theorizes what happens when we remember, and considers the ways in which mediating memory, especially through writing and other modes of visual or aural expression, can alter the original memory. Implicit in this line of inquiry is some idea of an “original” memory, and the question of whether a single perspective on a moment or an event can ever be pure and authentic. Of course the working and reworking that occurs in the act of remembering can enhance and alter perceptions, and this is one way that narrative forms.

Speculating about the “presence of the body,” scholar of performance studies Andre Lepecki writes:

As issues of memory, history, and visibility are brought to the fore, the notion of mnemonic trace emerges as a concept in crisis—a concept brought to crisis by the means of dance. This is a crisis of the visible, of how to approach the visible body as its dancing presence plunges it into the past, into history, into a representational field that is perhaps too excessive to be regimented, contained, tamed. This is the epistemological crisis of writing in motion, writing as a body moving in the interstices of visibility, which is to say, writing in between the threads of the mnemonic/technological matrix. Such is the next challenge for thinking the presence of the body in performance and in dance. (Lepecki 4-5)

I would argue that the “crisis of the visible” of which Lepecki writes in regards to the dancing body is just as applicable to the crisis of the visible in the performativity of memory in narrative form. The presence of the body in multimodal storytelling both imprints static images in the performance space of the page, screen, or panel, while also drawing attention to that image’s simultaneous existence in the present and as a reference to the past, and, more importantly, as a marker of the movement between temporalities. Performance studies scholars in particular have developed useful trajectories for approaching writing about memory like traces of movement that occur in attempts to reassemble the past. Lepecki continues, “But there is also an inscription of the dance onto the mnemonic mechanisms of technology, either through photography, film, the writing of the critic, or movement notation. Between one kind of memory and the other, the question of the presence of the dancing body becomes a matter of delicate excavation, as dancing body releases layers of memory-affects, photographic contact, digital depth, and

choreo/graphing” (4). The concept of excavation is also prevalent in memory studies, and to describe it as “delicate” suggests the complicated, multivalent strands from which scholars presume themselves to be digging up multiple pieces of some imagined whole that existed before sinking to such unreadable, unattainable, or unknowable depths in the past.

Another influential performance studies scholar, Peggy Phelan writes about the problematic nature of writing about the past in terms of sensory haunting which outlives experience:

To be haunted by the dead means to be beset with sound, smell, taste, image, memory, after the material body is gone. To attempt to write about dance after the performance is over is to submit to a similar haunting, but one that promises the possibility of a more orderly re-membering. There are documents to consult: reviews, photographs, scores, notes, sometimes even video. If one could place these artifacts delicately and precisely enough on an operating table one might reconstruct, if not completely resuscitate, the moving body. (Phelan 15-16)

Phelan also describes this process of reconstructing the past as “delicate.” Does this language indicate fear of breaking something perceived to be so fragile; or respect and humble admiration for the work of studying the past; or some other affective relationship to the work of cultural criticism that might include fear, admiration, and an appreciation for the difficulty of analyzing a “text” like the body in motion that will be mediated through multiple documents?

At this point, it may seem that the chasm between two art forms such as dance and graphic narrative is too great to form a basis for comparison; however, that is not the case at all. Rather, in a delicate excavation that considers the process of composition as much as the product – that is to say, *how* a graphic memoirist composed her work, and the finished work itself – there

may be no greater analogue than the work done in dance studies, a field in which critics are absolutely required to build their analysis on a varied archive of materials that move far beyond the initial performance of the dance. This chapter argues that to study how memory functions in multimodal composition is to study the persistent traces of movement that reach across modes, across spatial and temporal localities, and across experiences and multiple iterations of those experiences as they are mediated through narrative.

Alison Bechdel spent seven years writing her autobiographical graphic memoir *Fun Home*, which tells the story, especially through the space between image and text, of her closeted father's suicide in 1980, and her own coming out. Ten years after its publication, the text is taught widely in college courses, has gained attention for attempted banning by conservative groups, and has even been adapted into an award-winning Broadway musical. One of the groundbreaking "comics" to ever make the *New York Times* Best Seller List, *Fun Home* has also now garnered a decade's worth of scholarly attention. Ann Cvetkovich writes about *Fun Home* as an emblematic text offering queer perspectives on trauma that challenge the relation between the catastrophic and the everyday. Robyn Warhol approaches *Fun Home* through post-classical narrative theory and "autography," to emphasize that a level of awareness in self-consciously creating narrative is central to any reading of this text. In a 2006 interview with Hillary Chute, Bechdel comments on the intensity of creating a narrative based on family history: "I wanted to get a purchase on the material before I had to grapple with [my mother's] feelings about it." She has spoken extensively about the process of creating this project as simultaneously therapeutic and traumatic.

This chapter argues that, in the wake of so many important genre, narrative, and queer theory readings of *Fun Home*, an overlooked, and equally valuable, point of access can be

reached through affect studies which foreground the emotional experience—grappling with the “feelings about it”—of both the author and reader, as the object of inquiry. The kinds of passionate attachments that characterize the most important literature have been recognized as related to the compassionate ties that connect us to other things we love in the cultural world, as in Sara Ahmed’s concept of “sticky affect.”<sup>25</sup> The transitory form of this affectively challenging narrative contributes directly to readerly empathy. By focusing on the space between text and image, a reading informed by affect theory foregrounds embodied memory, and affords a way to bridge the relationship between form and content with the very real, visceral experience of and reaction to trauma in the text, and a metacognitive creation of multidimensional storyworlds.

Heike Bauer explores the “vital lines drawn from books” in her analysis of *Fun Home*, foregrounding the role of literature and reading in character development. Bauer points to Hillary Chute’s emphasis on the embodied experience of creating a graphic text in order to steer away from a “body-centric analysis”:

Yet while such creative embodiment clearly plays an important role in Bechdel’s memoir making, a body-centric analysis alone cannot fully account for the relationship between the drawing process and the prominent role of the written word in the memoirs. The interplay between words and image as much as the space/time logic of sequential art are what allows comics formally to draw out the gaps, contradictions, and uncertainties that mark the realms of feelings and the processes by which they are experienced and remembered (see Heer and Worcester, 2009). We might say that the formal characteristics of comics constitute the “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and

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<sup>25</sup> See discussion of Sara Ahmed’s “Happy Objects” in chapter one.

resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” that characterizes, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s famous formulation, the affective pull of queer reading and cultural representation, and which, in the case of comics, also are an overt feature of the medium itself (Sedgwick, 1993: 8). (Bauer 269)

To speak of a “body-centric analysis alone” is to embrace the popular, and misled, notion that a clear mind/body divide exists. Kinesthesia is the awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body by means of sensory organs in the muscles and joints, from the Greek *kinein* ‘to move’ and *aithesis* ‘sensation’, it points to a bodily experience that is both physical and understood in terms of psychological or emotional awareness. Deirdre Sklar names her own technique for observing the actions of others a practice of “kinesthetic empathy,” and Susan Foster points out that, “The fact that the experience of empathy needs to be qualified with the adjective ‘kinesthetic’ belies the pervasive assumption that emotional and physical experiences are separate” (Foster 10). Previous *Fun Home* scholarship that has focused on the materiality or architecture of the text is notable for moving beyond earlier work that focused on analysis of Bechdel’s complex archive of literary intertexts.<sup>26</sup> While Bauer has made substantial leaps in understanding many facets of *Fun Home*, there is still much to be done in an analysis of the relationship between the body in the text and the bodies of the creator and readers.

Central to this dissertation is Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth declaration that affect’s real potential is a body’s *capacity* to affect and be affected; that affect marks a body’s “belonging to a world of encounters,” and is synonymous with *forces of encounter* (2). Bechdel’s graphic memoir choreographs forceful encounters visually between text and image, demanding the interaction of readers’ specific subject positions in the process of navigating narrative. Many

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<sup>26</sup> See Aaron Kashtan, Catherine Labio, and Robin Lydenberg.

scholars have explored and theorized new media and multimodal storytelling as sites for rethinking subjectivities and modes of intersubjectivity, including Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, and Laura Shackelford, as discussed in chapter three. My work, through an interdisciplinary discourse combining affect and theories of movement developed in dance studies, seeks to expand this conversation to include both the process of composition and the reading or viewing experience as legitimate objects of inquiry. It explores works created by and through a variety of new media that consistently put forth bodies as the central focus and medium through which to compose, navigate, rewrite, and experience narrative. Specifically, it takes “choreography” as a critical term that has productive applications for understanding the movement of bodies through texts, and readers’ empathetic connections to those bodies through the text.

Susan Foster proposes that choreography can productively be conceptualized as a theorization of identity - corporeal, individual, and social. She believes that “each moment of watching a dance can be read as the product of choices, inherited, invented, or selected, about what kinds of bodies and subjects are being put forth” (4). Thus, “choreographing empathy” entails the “construction and cultivation of a specific physicality whose kinesthetic experience guides our perception of and connection to what another is feeling.” A graphic memoir like *Fun Home* is uniquely situated to position bodies in the text that simultaneously tell a story, and the author’s experience of remembering and reordering that story.

The striking paradox in the project of self-representation is the expectation to be at once uniquely subjective and factually accurate while maintaining the value of the work, conventionally evaluated through its veracity. This is an argument that Leigh Gilmore makes, which she extends to a focus on the ways in which traumatic experience intervenes in what

constitutes truthful representation of experience. Gilmore contends that autobiographical conventions “appear to constrain self-representation through its almost legalistic definition of truth telling, its anxiety about invention, and its preference for the literal and verifiable... As a genre, autobiography is characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts...in order to achieve as proximate a relation as possible to what constitutes truth in that discourse” (3). The relevance of this rhetorical setting cannot be understated; however, I would argue that, in the last two decades especially, the formal elements characterizing contemporary American memoir have shifted enormously, such that the incorporation of mixed media in the project to tell one’s life experience has created new ways of discovering and interpreting exactly what we mean by “experience.” Bechdel’s archive is even more complex because she draws on materials ranging from her personal journals from her childhood onwards, to actual family photographs that she painstakingly recreates through layered drawing and digital mediation in her graphic memoir. Each of her panels has photographic qualities, and many of these panels also contain reproductions of actual photographs.

Susan Sontag theorizes, “To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture. ...Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us” (89). It is important to consider that the dichotomy presented between image and text is one in which the photograph is popularly assumed to be a “factual” representation of reality, a carbon copy. However, every photograph, and likewise every drawing, is still shaped by perspective, tone, focus, and subject. Graphic memoirs are an instance in which images contribute hugely to the “task to understand.” They put

into place a narrative structure in ways that words alone cannot. Is it possible they have an even greater impact, a greater capacity to “haunt us” through what is happening in the space between text and image?

The term “graphic novel” became popularized in 1978.<sup>27</sup> The distinction from “comics” was necessary not just because of the greater length and novelistic quality of the content structure, but also to lend credibility and value to a genre that had not previously been taken seriously in the academy. These substantial genres developed the need for naming and categorization almost two decades after the popularly recognized start of the non-fiction novel genre, and just before the memoir boom at the start of the 1980s. The desire for freedom in artistic expression yielding a “subjective truth” in memoir or autobiography relates to the shift into narrative agency and first-person representation across the latter half of the twentieth century. The experience represented through such narrative agency, then, speaks to a level of belated self-awareness. Marianne Hirsch’s theories about postmemory—memories literally inherited from previous generations—whether one believes in the literality of these memories, present a pivotal key through which to interpret experience. Graphic memoirs offer an embodied example through which to *show* readers the *experience of processing experience*.

Before looking at some of Bechdel’s most powerful passages, I find it useful to recall an apt description Azar Nafisi wrote in her own memoir about how we remember. She describes a scenario where you are walking a scenic path around dusk when, “suddenly, you feel a large drop on your right arm. . . . You look up. The sky is still deceptively sunny: only a handful of clouds linger here and there. Seconds later, another drop. Then, with the sun still perched in the sky, you are drenched in a shower of rain. This is how memories invade me, abruptly and

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<sup>27</sup> See especially Will Eisner’s *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (1996) and Stephen Weiner’s *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel* (2012).

unexpectedly: drenched, I am suddenly left alone again on the sunny path, with a memory of rain” (59). So much of the work of autobiography is aimed at collecting and organizing the scattered, uncontrollable memories that hit in torrents. This description, in words, portrays the multilayered chaos of memory, but it does so through analogy. Multiple images on a single page have the ability to “invade, abruptly and unexpectedly” yet they can appear in the spaces which the writer designates: multimodal forms of storytelling push boundaries to create new models for understanding experience precisely because they allow for representation of *controlled chaos*.

The comics form can show others a story by allowing readers to do the work of connecting image and text, even if that work happens without actively thinking about the process that led to meaning making because attention is focused on the conclusion drawn. Bechdel’s *Fun Home* masterfully makes use of the ways in which images can convey meaning, both by larger narrative arcs of her life story, and by distilled, minute sensory details that call up and show specific experience. Near the beginning of “Chapter Two: A Happy Death,” Bechdel recalls that in Camus’ first novel “about a consumptive hero who does not die a particularly happy death,” her father had highlighted the line “He discovered the cruel paradox by which we always deceive ourselves twice about the people we love – first to their advantage, then to their disadvantage,” and overlays on this text her own comment: “A fitting epitaph for my parents’ marriage” (*Fun Home* 28). The page on which this passage appears collects details from the narrative Bechdel has ordered about learning her father had died. The images include a retroactive look at her father’s textual warning signs prior to the accident (“But dad was always reading something. Should we have been suspicious when he started plowing through Proust the year before? Was that a sign of desperation? It’s said, after all, that people reach middle age the day they realize they’re never going to read *Remembrance of Things Past*”); an image of the event itself, her

father crossing the road in front of the oncoming truck; and, perhaps most grippingly, a close up of the note she received at school informing her that something was wrong, framed by her own hands. This single page offers a simultaneous look into both the longer trajectory of the narrative Bechdel has created over time about this catastrophic event, while also honing in on the immediate feelings of shock and anxiety Bechdel would have felt in the first moments of hearing about the news, and she does this by juxtaposing the image of her father's body with parts of her own body. The text and images together offer a way to experience the initial trauma, the repetition of that trauma, and the process of mourning that occurs through such therapeutic acts as storytelling over time.

Bechdel also playfully incorporates dark humor in joking about her father "plowing through Proust" in anticipation of his death, yet she draws quite serious parallels to Proust in thematic content and organizational structure throughout her entire memoir. Proust viewed involuntary memory as memory imbued with the "essence of the past" that was triggered wholly by bodily actions, for example, food and scent, or the motion of bending over to tie shoes.<sup>28</sup> The torrent of embodied memory cued by physical sensations is a concept Bechdel puts forth in the kinesthetics of the pages throughout her memoir and especially in the "young women in flower" passages previously discussed, directly engaging imagery and thematic content from Proust's second volume as she centers bathing suits, bodies, and youth in the middle of her text.

In the closing pages of *Fun Home*, we see Bechdel controlling the chaos of her memories of her father before his death, of his coming out, of her own coming out, of the intertextuality of their lives and experiences shared through literature and art: in short, an incredible amount of information, made even more overwhelming by the trauma of remembering, of recreating the

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<sup>28</sup> Proust is the obvious template for how memory and memory reconstruction are working. For work on Proustian memory and especially the concept of involuntary memory see Elizabeth Jackson, Maya Slater, and Inge Crossman Wimmers.

narrative visually. She begins speculating about the lesbian couple that had helped James Joyce along the way to publishing *Ulysses* and comments, in a small box of text in the top left corner, “‘Erotic truth’ is a rather sweeping concept. I shouldn’t pretend to know what my father’s was,” and in a block of text above a picture, “Perhaps my eagerness to claim him as ‘gay’ in the way I am ‘gay,’ as opposed to bisexual or some other category, is just a way of keeping him to myself—a sort of inverted Oedipal complex” (*Fun Home* 230). The large pictures at the top and bottom of the page show a childhood memory she had recalled much earlier in the book, a day at the pool with her father, where she is grabbing his shoulders while he teaches her to paddle. Her mother is visible in the background of the top panel image; the bottom panel image is cut closer to her and her father’s faces. In the middle of these pictures are two images of letters that highlight particular passages: one is a letter where her father “does and doesn’t come out” to her, with the words “I am not a hero” highlighted. The other is a passage from *Ulysses* with the highlighted words of Stephen Dedalus, “I’m not a hero” (*Fun Home* 230).

The reader has had access to the narrative developed through her and her father’s shared affinity for literature at this point, and so in the same way that Bechdel is able to literally show the scattered rain drops of memory invading at once—the memory of the pool, her father’s letter, reading Joyce together—the reader is able to understand the meaning created within the context of this narrative. This passage shares the same awareness and metacommentary of others in the memoir, concerning the distance from the experience needed to articulate it, in addition to using the relationship between image and text to generate further understanding of what we do when we create narrative, as in Bechdel’s line of inquiry into whether she is searching for and creating her father’s “truth” or her own.

She makes a final allusion to Icarus hurtling into the sea, in the last page of the memoir which shows a top panel close-up of the truck that killed her father, and a larger bottom panel of her, as a child, jumping off the diving board into her father's waiting arms, with the text: "But in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt." This text, read or experienced simultaneously with the drastically contrasting images delivers an affectively fraught punch in the stomach that potentially has the power to literally make your heart race. When Sara Ahmed discusses the emotionality of texts, she observes that, "naming emotions often involves differentiating between the subject and the object of feeling" and claims that emotions are not "in" texts, but rather are "effects of the very naming of emotions, which often works through attributions of causality" (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 13). In this complex relationship between subject and object of feeling on one hand, and self-representation through the text on the other, I would argue that the controlled chaos made visible through image and text is precisely how experience can be simultaneously represented as unique and collective.

We can consider the same panels in terms of what Scott McCloud, in his seminal work *Understanding Comics*, calls closure: "Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (67). In other words, the medium itself requires a degree of active engagement from the reader to connect the dots in the space between panels when every single action or thought is not illustrated. This of course speaks to the way memory works, and especially the way in which the act of remembering is often portrayed in graphic memoir. For Bechdel to close *Fun Home* with such a stark juxtaposition of images – a close up of the truck that killed her father, and the image she remembers fondly from

her childhood in which her father is there to catch her in the pool—is both to ask her readers to witness her own closure as readers find that closure for themselves.

A particularly striking comparison to draw here in terms of process can be found in comments that Peggy Phelan makes as she reacts to a dance piece by Trisha Brown called *Accumulation With Talking* (1973), of which Brown said: “While I was making the dance my father died somewhere between these two movements.” Phelan writes:

...I was amazed by the phrase “my father died somewhere.” Death is an event of both temporal and spatial location. It occurs “somewhere” outside linguistic and kinesthetic reckoning. It can obliterate memory; it can spur memory. It often divides mourners’ lives into *before* and *after*. The schism fuels the desire to map that “somewhere,” for only rarely do events in the external biological world coincide with events in the internal psychic world. One day Brown’s father died biologically; some other day she arrived at the fact and force of his death; on yet another day she announced it in her piece. In this sense, it might be more accurate to say: “my father died and he is going to die again in the ongoing recollection and accumulation that registers the work of mourning.” The yawning space between these various temporalities is the “somewhere” that pulsates between the time death occurs and the time it takes (a) place—the time required for it to be experienced, witnessed, interpreted. (Phelan 17)

This passage is remarkable for its articulation of several halting observations. Phelan outlines the process of shock, grief, and mourning experienced at losing a loved one, while also pointing to what may seem at first glance like a disconnect between language and reality. That is to say that Brown’s phrase “somewhere between these two movements” does not of course indicate that she

does not know the exact date or time of her father's death. Rather, the "somewhere" in question is a specific temporality: that temporality exists in relation to her artistic expression, rather than a calendar date. When Phelan writes of the time required for death to be "experienced, witnessed, interpreted" she highlights the active engagement taken in narrative formation. Attempting to read a formula into the grieving process, Phelan suggests, "*Accumulation With Talking* might be seen as an attempt to calculate the mathematics of loss in both the physical body and the linguistic utterance. Adding together that which is lost requires double motion: one calculates the way in which subtraction, paradoxically, accumulates. 'My father died somewhere in between these two movements' indicates the physical, pedagogical, and conceptual space that distinguishes one movement phrase from the other" (17). If we consider the very same laden phrase "my father died somewhere between these two movements" as superimposed on the final panels of *Fun Home* we can arrive at a more fully embodied understanding of what is at stake when Bechdel juxtaposes the images from her memory that symbolize her father's death and her father's most vital signs of life in relation to Alison the character as a child. In only two panels on a single page, Bechdel offers the space to experience, witness, and interpret not only her narrative arc, but also *how* that narrative arc arrives through multimodal composition when readers can view recreations of her memories.

There are countless panels in *Fun Home* that highlight the act of viewing, and these point to Bechdel re-viewing her own emotions in the memory itself, as well as the affective response she intends to produce in her reader through the very instance of seeing the frame. One such instance is a panel where we as the reader watch her father watching her looking at a magazine (*Fun Home* 99). The lines of eyesight from father to daughter to magazine image structure the composition of the panel and also highlight the frame of the panel itself as it appears to readers

viewing the individual gazes taking place, while also seeing the panel as a whole cohesive image.

The belief that narrative experience has the power to represent lived experience has been iterated through various scholarly dialogues surrounding graphic memoir, especially in the cases of Bechdel, Art Spiegelman, and Marjane Satrapi, among others. Experience is “practical contact with and observation of facts or events,” or “an event or occurrence that leaves an impression on someone.” A graphic memoir like *Fun Home* shows that the genre has shifted and expanded to suggest that experience is both the event and the impression; the narrative and the articulation of what it meant to create an affectively challenging narrative. Memory is ephemeral and fleeting. Narrative reorders discreet memories into an arc out of which meaning can be made.

In Nabokov’s autobiography, *Invitation of a Memory*, one of countless intertexts Bechdel references in *Fun Home*, Nabokov muses, “Whenever I start thinking of my love for a person, I am in the habit of immediately drawing radii from my love—from my heart, from the tender nucleus of a personal matter—to monstrously remote points of the universe. . . . I have to have all space and time participate in my emotion, in my mortal love, so that the edge of its mortality is taken off, thus helping me to fight the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence” (296-297). Widely accepted as one of the greatest chroniclers of experience of our time, Nabokov points to the very limits and boundaries between individual and hyperbolic collective of “all space and time.” The “experience” of infinite sensation indicated here shares affinities with the comparably small, specific, and no less infinite experience indicated in, for example, Bechdel’s memory of her father catching her when she leapt off the diving board. Genre expansions in the realm of self-representation have undeniably created tangible circumstances under which such experience can

be realized, ordered into narrative, and shared with others in efforts to make meaning of the past in the present.

Throughout *Fun Home*, Bechdel works to unravel the intertwining narratives of her and her father, and she explicitly comments on her awareness of conflating the two stories for her own purposes. In the final panel of “Chapter Four: In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower,” Bechdel literally juxtaposes the positions, stance, and attitude of her and her father in photographs, while still framing them for the reader with her own hands holding the images, with text overlaid:

What’s lost in translation is the complexity of loss itself.

...In another picture, he’s sunbathing on the tarpaper roof of his frat house just after he turned twenty-two. Was the boy who took it his lover?

As the girl who took this Polaroid of me on a fire escape on my twenty-first birthday was mine?

The exterior setting, the pained grin, the flexible wrists, even the angle of shadow falling across our faces—it’s about as close as a translation can get. (120)

Bechdel’s deliberate placement of text and image on the page choreograph a reader’s empathetic response to the narrative especially by directing attention to the bodies that move in both memory and the process of remembering.

Marjorie Allison, in her exploration of the role of the labyrinthine in *Fun Home*, looks especially at passages which feature maps of Bechdel’s hometown (*Fun Home* 146-147) and claims, “There is simply no way to read or process the images and ideas in a linear manner. Bechdel forces the reader to come up with his or her own method of making it through the labyrinth of images, metaphors, and plotline. There are no longer any clear ‘white space’ or

margins dividing material into separate components. The graphic material and themes of her narrative bleed into one another to underscore the complex world in which we all live” (Allison 75). The passage she analyzes here depicts a realistic looking map, along with the cartoonish overlay of her own commentary, which offers perspective on both her own opinion of several landmarks, and also her memory of her father’s perspective on places in relation to his family. For Allison and others to claim that Bechdel forces the reader to actively engage in the creation of their own reading trajectory suggests that a degree of chaos, albeit ordered chaos, exists in the graphic form that relies on various forms of non-verbal communication such as facial expression, mood conveyed through contrasting lightness and darkness, etc.<sup>29</sup>

This claim merits further consideration, particularly in regards to movement, as the metaphor for reading process adopts a linear or nonlinear binary. Is this scholarship making claims for a lack of choreography, or the opposite: highly choreographed chaos? Foster explains that “Choreography can stipulate both the kinds of actions performed and their sequence of progression” and writes that, “Sometimes designating minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, sketching out the broad contours of action within which variation might occur, choreography constitutes a plan or score according to which movement unfolds. Buildings choreograph space and people’s movement through them; cameras choreograph cinematic action; birds perform intricate choreographies; and combat is choreographed. Multiprotein complexes choreograph DNA repair” (2). The examples she suggests here are both illustrative and helpful in considering a number of reference points in Bechdel’s work, from viewership, to architectural space, to biological actors which become points of obsession in several instances throughout *Fun Home*.

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<sup>29</sup> See K.W. Eveleth and Jenna Goldsmith.

If we take choreography to apply critical pressure on the relationship between embodiment in the text and processes of embodied reading, then we can draw parallels between claims that suggest Bechdel forces her readers to choreograph their own reading process; however, is this not also a claim for the intensely controlled nature of Bechdel's composition process? She has spoken extensively about her creative process, including posing for pictures in which she tries to recreate positions she remembers her father and other family members standing in. This is a kind of performance of memory that is at once embodied and narrative. Foster argues that rather than a natural or spontaneous connection, a dancer's performance draws upon and engages with prevailing senses of the body and of subjectivity in a given historical moment (4). A reader might not call what Bechdel does "dancing," but certainly the highly choreographed nature of the way in which her own physical body moves through this narrative text dances with memory. Subsequently, Foster argues for:

...further expansion of choreography to encompass a consideration of all manner of human movement including the operations of gender in constructing masculine and feminine roles and the guidelines according to which protestors have conducted nonviolent direct action. Proposing a dialectical tension between choreography and performance, [she] emphasize[s] the ways that choreography presents a structuring of deep and enduring cultural values that replicates similar sets of values elaborated in other cultural practices whereas performance emphasizes the idiosyncratic interpretation of those values. (7)

In this instance, the distinction between choreography and performance is an important one, particularly as we move between performance studies scholars' analysis of, for example, concert

dance in live performance, and the performance of memory in graphic memoir. When Bechdel places photographs of her and her father—photographs she has reproduced in her own digital illustrations—side by side in order for the reader to draw comparisons between them as she does, she relies on a “structuring of deep and enduring cultural values” that plan out or dictate a particular trajectory of realizations about each character, and their relationships to their respective lovers who presumably took the original photographs. To return to the claims about linear versus nonlinear readings, I would argue that Bechdel’s work does not have to inhabit either one or the other. Taking Foster’s use of choreography as a critical term in fact offers a third, completely separate model for considering embodied reading: rather than confining a reading to a particular order, it highlights what *happens* in any reading. That is to say, when we think of choreography as more than a set of steps or directions for proceeding forward, we can see the ways in which a complex set of actors that are culturally rooted in values and assumptions about the relationship between those actors allows for artistic expression of memory as an *experience*, and that experience may not have a clear beginning, middle, or end.

Before delving further into the implications of choreography in *Fun Home*, let us return to Foster on empathy to glean a more coherent meaning of how empathetic viewing might relate to embodied reading:

Early twentieth century dance theorist John Martin argued for a vital rapport between dancer and viewer and an equally basic connection between movement and emotion. He explained dance conveys meaning because viewers, even though sitting in their seats, feel the movements and consequently the emotions of the dancers. Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century neurophysiologists are claiming an intrinsic connectivity between dancer and viewer based on the

discovery of mirror neurons—synaptic connections in the cortex that fire both when one sees an action and when one does that action. These claims both argue for a fundamental physical connection between dancer and viewer, but they differ markedly in their underlying presumptions about the nature of subjecthood and the way that perception takes place. (2)

In other words, Martin believes an autonomous inner self witnesses the dance and responds with a unique interpretation of the dance's expression, while neuroscientists propose that selfhood is continually reforming as part of the ongoing process of perceiving the dance.<sup>30</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty's landmark work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) staked a claim for the very ability to reflect as a direct result of embodiment; embodiment as a condition of perceiving what the senses and mind notice, and understanding and interpreting those observations centrally through one's body. The body and what the body perceives cannot be broken into a clear mind / body division. Reading Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body as our "point of view in the world" along with findings of neuroscience half a century later puts further pressure on a contemporary readership to consider what it means to witness another: reading and viewing another's memories necessarily activates psychological and physical responses that alter one's self. This is embodied reading.

The text of Bechdel's *Fun Home* is itself an embodiment of the act of remembering. One striking element of *Fun Home* that usually appears as an afterthought, if at all, in most scholarship is the importance of the chapter title panels, which are as follows:

1. Old Father, Old Artificer (1) [close up of Bruce]
2. A Happy Death (26) [grave monument]

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<sup>30</sup> See John Martin's *Introduction to the Dance* (1939).

3. That Old Catastrophe (55) [portrait of parents]
4. In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower (87) [photo of young Bruce sunbathing]
5. The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death (121) [landscape]
6. The Ideal Husband (151) [close up of mother in dressing room mirror]
7. The Antihero's Journey (187) [child Alison & Bruce at pool]

Each chapter begins with a single page that includes one illustrated panel above the text of the title. Bechdel has used digital technologies to sketch these images, but they are realistic copies of photographs, rather than the cartoonish style of other narrative panels within the chapters. By contrast, the title panels appear as static photographs from the past, while the narrative panels within the chapters appear as dynamic action happening in present time. Additionally, the reproductions of the title page photos have tabs drawn at each of the corners to look like they have been secured in a traditional photo album or scrapbook. As a reader opening the book, whether reading in a printed copy or on an electronic reader, the experience of holding and paging through a personal family album immediately follows from the first page as a result of Bechdel's deliberately crafted introduction.

The panel for "Chapter 1: Old Father, Old Artificer," is a photo of Bechdel's father, Bruce, from the waist up. He is shirtless, his body facing sideways, elbow out with hand on hip, while his face looks straight into the camera. He is perfectly centered in front of the house, a few steps in front of the porch. Is this Alison's story, or Bruce's? Arguably, Alison and Bruce are the joint protagonists in Bechdel's story. The reader constantly shares Bechdel's gaze, and wrapped up in that gaze is the physicality of handling a material archive. To dance with memory in *Fun Home* is to move, to follow a sequence, and ultimately to perform. Choreographing memory entails a very performative aspect of remembering, which Bechdel executes with such

painstaking detail, which makes any instance of memoir a performance of some kind. The panel for the first chapter signals key structural elements of this story: that the choreography of this narrative moves with and through artifacts, such as family photos, that capture and document subjects in specific moments in time; and that the narrative will follow a trajectory of movement that proceeds from such artifacts.

Bechdel draws attention to the process over the product immediately in her chapter title, “Old Father, Old Artificer.” The relationship between the artifacts on which the narrative is built and the artificer she sees in her father is playful, yet ominous. From the Latin *arte* ‘by or using art’ and *factum* ‘something made,’ the artifact that is the opening photograph is a simulacrum made by Bechdel, and it is no coincidence that the photograph chosen makes the house nearly as central as Bruce himself as a focal point. Bechdel narrates:

His greatest achievement, arguably, was his monomaniacal restoration of our old house. (4)

It was his passion. And I mean that in every sense of the word. Libidinal. Manic. Martyred. (7)

He used his skillful artifice not to make things, but to make things appear to be what they were not. (16)

He appeared to be an ideal husband and father, for example. But would an ideal husband and father have sex with teenage boys?

It’s tempting to suggest, in retrospect, that our family was a sham. That our house was not a real home at all but the simulacrum of one, a museum.

Yet we really were a family, and we really did live in those period rooms. (17)

The entanglement of artifact and artifice in the beginning of *Fun Home* demonstrates Bechdel dancing between the dichotomy she believes the house symbolizes to her, in retrospect: simulacra or the real thing? The title panel spotlights Bruce as the creator of this “museum,” but the chapter panels turn starkly to highlight Bechdel as the creator, the artificer, the maker of her own narrative. As readers we are primed to follow the choreography set in place by the relationship between the reproduced family photographs and the cartoonish action of the children running wild in previously pristine period rooms of the old house. The cartoonish form takes on the more authentic role in the narrative: the story suggests that Bechdel’s drawings of chaos (really living in those period rooms) represent reality, while the staged family photographs on holidays are inauthentic, further artifice perpetuated by Bruce to conform to what society expected of a “proper family.”

The title panel for the final chapter of *Fun Home*, “The Antihero’s Journey” (187) is Bechdel’s reproduction of a photograph at the pool in which child Alison is jumping into her father’s open arms in the water. In this image, only the back of Bruce’s head and arms are visible, head and arms tilted up out of the water toward Alison. Alison is in mid air, legs tucked under her, arms and head tilted down toward her father. The significance of this memory in the pool and its relationship to the final passage of the text was discussed earlier in this chapter, but the role of the title panel deserves further analysis. The reproduced photographs do more than recall a specific memory from which to launch into the next chapter: they perform a choreographed sequence which, taken as a whole, directs back to the crucial role the body and embodiment play in this text. The first and last chapters take Bruce as their object, but shift the focus of Bechdel’s gaze from Bruce to herself. Chapters two and five focus on things and places, rather than people: the grave monument, and landscape, respectively. Chapters three and six highlight Bechdel’s

mother, first in the staged portrait in the hose with her husband, last alone in a close up that shows her preparing for a theater production. Right in the middle (one almost wonders if Bechdel planned an uneven number of chapters for this very purpose), is chapter four, which begins with a title panel image of young Bruce sunbathing.

Unlike the reproduced photos for every other chapter, this middle chapter takes as its central image a photo that seems to be smaller, more worn, and not slotted into an album. There are very faint imprints and evidence of folding, showing that this photograph was hidden away, not on display in any family album. It is the same photograph that appears on the final page of this chapter, except in the latter instance it is clearly in Alison's hands. Earlier in this chapter there was discussion of the "translation" Bechdel sees between herself and Bruce in these photos, which she speculates were taken by their respective lovers. But here, I will shift the focus back to the earlier photographs actual subject matter. In the penultimate panel of this chapter, Bechdel narrates:

What's lost in translation is the complexity of loss itself. In the same box where I found the photo of Roy, there's another one of dad at about the same age. He's wearing a women's bathing suit. A fraternity prank? But the pose he strikes is not mincing or silly at all.

He's lissome, elegant. (120)

The choreography of this panel simultaneously centers embodied reading and embodied performing. As readers, we see Alison the character's hands on the photo, drawing the eye to the frame and the kinesthetics of the page. We also see a conscious performance on the part of the photograph's subject: Bechdel's narration hazards a flimsy explanation ("a fraternity prank?"),

which she immediately discounts as “not silly at all” but “lissome, elegant.” This line makes explicit in written language what was already implicit in the visual performance.

The grace in this photograph is entirely projected through Bruce’s body: rather than laughing or dismissing the photo as a prank, Alison has a deeply thoughtful and affective response. Let us remember again that Foster proposes choreography can productively be conceptualized as a theorization of identity - corporeal, individual, and social. That:

Each moment of watching a dance can be read as the product of choices, inherited, invented, or selected, about what kinds of bodies and subjects are being put forth. These decisions, made collectively or individually, spontaneously or in advance of dancing, constitute a kind of record of action that is durable and makes possible both the repetition of a dance and analysis of it. (4)

My earlier claim that memoir is a performance dovetails with the use of dance as a metaphor for memory itself. The record of action that Foster calls “durable” is comprised of a combination of action, perception, reception, and reflection. Bechdel choreographs action through a deliberate structure that foregrounds image over text in the chapter titles, and the pivotal middle chapter places the one secret photograph as a powerful key at the center. The key in this instance is not meant to unlock, or solve a puzzle, but rather to illuminate a deeply embedded connection between Alison and her father that runs throughout the memoir. “In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower” is filled with memories and anecdotes in which Bruce is obsessed with Alison presenting femininity, while Alison becomes more and more obsessed with men’s fashion. The performance of gender in style, tone, and attitude is a complex choreography, and the image of a body in a bathing suit embodies it wholly.

The above mentioned title panel for the final chapter returns again to bodies in bathing suits, but the image of Bruce posing elegantly in the picture presumably taken by his lover as a young man contrasts greatly with the image of a little girl gleefully jumping into her father's arms in the pool. As with the entire memoir, the final moments of *Fun Home* are carefully crafted simulacra of events from Bechdel's life, reinterpreted, reordered, and reproduced in narrative form. It is impossible to know whether the structure grew out of the experience she had finding the hidden bathing suit photograph, or if finding that photograph gave the memory of playing at the pool new significance. It is more likely the final product is a result of some cyclical combination.

To think of choreography as a theorization of identity allows for a conception of movement in which bodies are more than the object of theory; bodies become the active subject, the Merleau-Pontian point of view in the world in which they move. Bechdel choreographs memory structurally through the complex relationship between chapter title panels and the chapter contents. Another way in which *Fun Home* embodies the act of remembering is through the myriad interactions Bechdel the creator has with Alison the character in the text. Multimodal narrative makes this type of interaction visible to the reader in several ways. In "Chapter Five: The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death," Bechdel narrates:

Then there's my own compulsive propensity to autobiography.

At some point during my obsessive-compulsive spell, I began a diary. Dad gave me a wall calendar from one of his vendors to write in, a curious memento mori.

And appropriately enough, my first entry was made on that moveable feast of morality, Ash Wednesday.

Actually, the first three words are in my father's handwriting, as if he were giving me a jump start.

“Just write down what's happening.” (140)

The panels interspersed with this text oscillate between images of young Alison and her father looking at and writing in the date book, and close up images of the book itself, in which handwriting and hands become the central focus. The tone of these panels offers Bechdel's characteristic dry humor, while also presenting thoughtful self-aware commentary. Readers are able simultaneously to see young Alison documenting mundane details from her day, and Bechdel narrating in retrospect. This retrospective narrative follows the wider thematic arc of autobiography and what record keeping means to Bechdel in the present, while also highlighting minute details that seem unimportant to the wider arc, such as an arrow pointing to a tail tied around Alison's waist with the text “Halloween costume remnant,” but that nonetheless bring specific scenes and memories to life. Bechdel's illustrative retelling of her autobiographical origin stories embodies the complex choreography that sets a path for writer and reader to experience the act of remembering together.

What happens next is perhaps the most striking and telling instance of Bechdel's relationship with her writing, documentation, and storytelling. Overlaid with panels of close ups of her childish handwriting, she explains:

But in April, the minutely-lettered phrase *I think* begins to crop up between my comments.

It was a sort of epistemological crisis. How did I know that the things I was writing were absolutely, objectively true?

My simple, declarative sentences began to strike me as hubristic at best, utter lies at worst.

All I could speak for was my own perceptions, and perhaps not even those. (141)

Bechdel's epistemological crisis reaches even further extremities when she relates that, "To save time I created a shorthand version of *I think*, a curvy circumflex. ... Then I realized I could draw the symbol over an entire entry" (142-143). This escalation from the self-doubting words "I think" to a single symbol ^ have the effect of both confusing and empowering young Alison.

The negating symbol is a way to exert some degree of control over her own record keeping, but in retrospect, Bechdel shows the startling contrast between events that had great emotional impact, and their subsequent erasure from her diary:

Considering the profound psychic impact of that adventure, my notes on it are surprisingly cursory. No mention of the pin-up girl, the strip mine, or Bill's .22. Just the snake—and even that with an extreme economy of style.

Again, the troubling gap between word and meaning. My feeble language skills could not bear the weight of such a laden experience. (143)

The panels in this passage add a third dimension beyond what we see in the previous section in which Alison receives the journal from her dad for the first time. Here, we see close ups of the writing, Bechdel's commentary, and now images of the actual events she describes – or rather, obscures – in her written record.

The curvy circumflex that symbolizes Alison's self doubt is the embodiment of her continued need to write and not-write; the symbol, while an erasure of language used to describe events, is still a presence. It is a figure that takes up space on the page, and it has visual

characteristics of its own that evolve over time. When the symbol is first used, it is small and faintly drawn, appearing over specific words. Later, it balloons to cover entire entries that are “almost completely obscured” (148), and these symbols are large, dark, and written multiple times over. The panels with these larger symbols show the intensity with which they were drawn, pressed into the paper over and over again. Throughout this chapter, Bechdel contrasts the obscured journal entries with increasingly significant life events related to sex, death, and growing up. The text of *Fun Home* does the work of retracing, rather than uncovering, the narrative obscured by the circumflex. In this way, Bechdel is dancing with memory in a more literal way: taking steps back, following a sequence of movement her material archive has preserved, and taking steps forward along the same trajectory as she continues developing that same archive with, through, and in her memoir.

Bechdel describes her epistemological crisis with truth and memory in similar terms as performance studies scholar Andre Lepecki theorizing dance, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and worth reiterating here:

This is a crisis of the visible, of how to approach the visible body as its dancing presence plunges it into the past, into history, into a representational field that is perhaps too excessive to be regimented, contained, tamed. This is the epistemological crisis of writing in motion, writing as a body moving in the interstices of visibility, which is to say, writing in between the threads of the mnemonic/technological matrix. (4-5)

In both instances, Lepecki and Bechdel are responding to the desire to reconcile a moving body, and the point of view attained through that body, after the present moment is gone. The intense difficulty of knowing what has happened when any record or documentation may be, in fact,

unknowable, is embodied in the dancing body, and the body of memory put forth especially in the form of graphic memoir. *Fun Home* centers bodies: bodies in motion, bodies in static preservation, bodies in confluence and conflict with a present body of the text. For Bechdel and Lepecki to identify this struggle as a crisis is to further emphasize the degree to which the body contains within it experience and information that may not be translatable in a verbal or written communication, but which is nonetheless present, active, and relevant to an ongoing process of choreographing memory.

Dancing with memory in *Fun Home* means traversing narrative lines where much of the meaningful dialogue between past and present becomes visible only through the relationship between text and image. Multimodal narrative allows for creators and audiences alike to witness more explicitly the implicit affective responses to the very act of remembering through storytelling. Some of the most potent instances of embodied reading in *Fun Home* are those in which we see Bechdel the creator in dialogue with Alison the character. Excavating past selves to follow the trajectory of past movement is part of the work of autobiography, of artistic expression of memory. The textual and visual choreography operates on multiple temporal levels, and through multiple modes of communication.

The next chapter considers the relationship between Mark Hogancamp the creator and Hogie the character in *Marwencol*, another multimodal body-centric work in which a complex set of actors choreographs memory. The conceptual payoff of the sequence of genres discussed in the latter three chapters of *Choreographing Memory*—hypertext fiction, graphic memoir, and photography and documentary film in the storyworld of therapeutic art—is the foundation built for a major tenet of my argument: that the experience of reading multimodal texts is a performative, embodied act that expands a traditional conception of the static, finite text into a

dynamic, ever evolving performance. In each of the artistic endeavors put forth in *Patchwork Girl*, *Fun Home*, and *Marwencol*, the artists employ active performance to recall, shape, mediate, and choreograph memory.

A sharpened sense of the difference between these artistic endeavors, however, develops through consideration for the life of the text in each case. At the beginning of this chapter I referred to the boundedness of the text as informed by Hayles' concept of the unified literary object. Now I refer to the life of the text to extend the unified literary object to include the performance—the life—of the reader. For Shelley Jackson, the nonlinear disorientation experienced in an embodied, performative reading of *Patchwork Girl* is central to her project. The sequence of motion in *Patchwork Girl* may be infinite, but the number of lexia and links are still finite. In Bechdel's case, *Fun Home* is a story with a finite beginning, middle, and end. While the narrative may live on in multiple other venues, *Fun Home* is a contained project. *Marwencol* as an ongoing art project provides a strong contrast because it is essentially boundless. The documentary Malmberg created presents a small fraction of the narrative Hogancamp continues to build and rebuild in his daily life. I argue that taking *choreography* as a critical term uniquely illuminates the connection between writing, memory, and performance. These three chapters offer insight into how motion and emotion play central roles in that connection.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Therapeutic Art Embodied in Mark Hogancamp's *Marwencol*

This dissertation began with the example of a multimodal novel, Barbara Browning's *I'm Trying to Reach You*, which directed readers on a course of motion between the comparatively static pages of the print book, and the dynamic web pages of Internet browsers where the novel's narrative continued in dance videos, among other things. The next example moved from the pages of Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* to the first-year writing classroom and back out into the world of a variety of student selected venues and audiences. Following was movement into exclusively digital environments where Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* showed us that a technically bounded text can, in fact, have boundless iterations of reading performances. Most recently, we moved back to the print pages of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* to see the ways in which art primarily inspired by individual photographs and created in a digital platform moves on the page. This final chapter takes a truly unique narrative as its primary object of analysis. While Mark Hogancamp's *Marwencol* reached the public through the form of documentary film, the unified literary object, returning to Hayles' term, is in this case an ongoing art project, an essentially boundless embodied performative act. I choose to close with *Marwencol* because it reifies the theorized relationship between movement and memory from previous chapters as literally embodied performances of memory. In this dissertation I argue that the experience of reading multimodal texts is a performative, embodied act that expands a traditional conception of the static, finite text into a dynamic, ever evolving performance. *Marwencol* is a literal ever-evolving performance.

On April 8, 2000, Mark Hogancamp was brutally beaten outside of a bar in Kingston, New York, and nearly left for dead. When he came out of a nine-day coma, Hogancamp had lost virtually all of his memory and had to relearn how to talk, walk, and feed himself. With severe brain damage and mental, physical, and emotional trauma, Hogancamp had no health insurance or means of obtaining professional rehabilitation therapy. Having no memory of who he was or why he was attacked and no way to get help, Hogancamp began helping himself. This was the genesis for the fictional WWII-era Belgium town that Hogancamp created and dubbed “Marwencol.” Built to 1/6<sup>th</sup> scale in his backyard, Hogancamp designed an intricate village and populated it with dolls that became alter egos for himself and all of the people in his life. Hogancamp documented the story he narrated daily in Marwencol through photographs. In 2005, a professional photographer, David Naugle, noticed what Hogancamp was doing, and he was blown away by the quality and emotion of the art despite the fact that Hogancamp did not self-identify as a photographer or an artist. Connections in the art world led Hogancamp to his own exhibition in New York City, and to a documentary, *Marwencol* (2010), which was made to share his story and work with the public. It is through the carefully mediated narrative lens of Director Jeff Malmberg’s work that we come to understand who Hogancamp is and what it means to live in his world.

The documentary was met with critical acclaim and won awards from SXSW and Comic Con, among others, and dozens of magazines and newspapers ran publicity articles.<sup>31</sup> While this journalistic coverage touches on themes such as trauma recovery, reality and fantasy, and art as therapy, the only semi in-depth analysis has focused on broader social issues of access to health

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<sup>31</sup> See Pete Brook, Barry Caine, Steve Dollar, Ethan Gilsdorf, Penelope Green, Jeremiah Horrigan, Lisa Kennedy, Tania Ketenjian, Ashley Moreno, Mark Olsen, J. Osicki, Nick Ravich, and Travis Wagner.

care and how mental illness is treated in the United States.<sup>32</sup> No scholarly work has been published yet on this documentary. Malmberg strikingly said in an interview that he “didn’t want to make a documentary about a social issue that only traveled towards character” but rather wanted to “start with character,” then move to subject, and then social issue, because the “social issue construct is played out, not helping the people who could really use the message. We have to question preconceived ideas about that issue.”<sup>33</sup> The intention behind this narrative structure points to several questions raised by the documentary: what is the function of art—in this case both Hogancamp’s photography and Malmberg’s documentary—and how does the blurring of fantasy and reality influence different readings of these respective stories? How does art operate in the face of PTSD, amnesia, and melancholia?

This chapter follows two interconnected lines of inquiry: first, how does multimodal storytelling play a central role in the construction of memory? And second, more specifically in the case of *Marwencol*, how do embodied storytelling practices choreograph memory in and through therapeutic art? When I refer to therapeutic art here, I am referring to a practice of art therapy that originated in the fields of art and psychotherapy that focuses on creativity in the art-making process and the reflective analysis gained through an exchange between patient and therapist. As David Edwards explains in *Art Therapy* (2004), the psychoanalytic approach was one of the first forms in which this practice became popularized. This approach employs the transference process between the therapist and the client who makes art. The case that *Marwencol* demonstrates is unique because Hogancamp arguably inhabits both the roles of patient and therapist through the embodied performance of his art and analysis of that artistic expression in the town he builds.

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<sup>32</sup> See Jonathan Kim’s “Marwencol: When Therapy Becomes Art” (2010).

<sup>33</sup> See Elvis Mitchell’s “The Treatment: An Interview with Jeff Malmberg on *Marwencol*” (2010).

A psychoanalytic study of attachment through the lens of affect theory, especially empathy and identification through art, can create a space in which to discuss and raise further questions about the nature of human interaction and storytelling after traumatic events. Attachment means that the subject is able to internalize an object relation as part of his psychic reality, and, according to Freud, the “attachment bond” is the basis for the “binding” of affect to an image or representation (Rauch 115). Empathy provides the point of access through which identification can blur the lines between fantasy and reality in a subject’s understanding of such a representation. I argue that, in a Lacanian reading of attachment, Hogancamp’s art fulfills the role of the analyst and that it is through empathy and identification in his storytelling that Hogancamp is able to do the work of mourning for what he lost—his sense of self or identity from before the attack—and to rehabilitate his imagination both through traumatic repetitions in *Marwencol* and via critical agency in his narration, via photography, as he documents his own traumatic recovery.

Following Freud’s model of belatedness, Lacan declares in *The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis* that the original facts of a traumatic event are less important than the resubjectifications of the event that repeat within the patient’s mind long afterwards. In her study of post-traumatic hermeneutics, Angelika Rauch concludes that, “this resubjectification, as past history and ongoing process, can be accessed only by means of an interactive relation between analyst and analysand” and that “in therapeutic dialogue, the encounter with a trauma requires that analyst and analysand take the trauma out of quarantine and put it back into play” (113-114). Rauch further explains:

Given that in a psychoanalytic dialogue the “assumption of the subject’s history” is only possible by the assumption of an other’s signifiers, therapy requires that

the analysand incorporate an other's subjectivity through which emotions can be mediated and hence experienced. It is therefore important that the analyst not be merely a surface for projection but also function as an other who provides ego support by "lending" his or her own experience and imagination to the analysand. The patient has to undergo defamiliarization: he or she must be able to experience himself or herself as other than what he or she has been before in a previously "prejudicial" or fixed factual state. (115)

Trauma studies accepts the notion of "play" Rauch describes insofar as the trauma itself will always be realized belatedly, and that, in order to begin working through trauma, the originating event or circumstances will be remembered and repeated in any number of iterations, especially as connected with physical places and individual people. What I would like to contest here is the necessity of an analyst who acts as more than a "surface for projection" and who must lend "experience and imagination to the analysand." *Marwencol* offers a story in which the object of attachment for a trauma victim is not found in an analyst because there is no professional therapy available. This documentary certainly speaks to the significant issue of health care access, but the details of character development are just as striking than the broader social concerns suggested.

Malmberg states that he "chose to make a story about an *emotional reality*, with an emotional through line rather than a narrative through line" (Mitchell). Some critics have pointed out what they viewed as fault or neglect in the narrative for not tying up loose ends, for example with regard to the fate of the attackers (some of whom served jail time but are now free). Malmberg explained that "it never felt right emotionally to bring up the attackers," because "Mark doesn't feel justice was served," and Malmberg referred to Mark's feelings as his "magnetic north" throughout the whole process (Mitchell). An emotional through line, then,

points to Hogancamp's emotional reality, which evolves from his active engagement not with an analyst or an actual person who can be his sounding board but rather through the fictional storyworld he maps out in his art. In the documentary, Hogancamp says, "I figured all right, what's the first thing I got to work on? And that's my imagination," and he says of his town, "I created my own therapies, and this is one of them. I can act out my revenge and anger and rage in photographs." He also says, "This place, just looking at it soothes me," indicating the solace and comfort he receives simply by being able to act out the aggression (Malmberg). As Cathy Caruth points out, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). In the absence of an analyst, Hogancamp's art makes possible the *play* of traumatic repetition.

Perhaps the most productive way to understand how art operates in this capacity as therapist is to consider the implications of empathy and identification in character development. Suzanne Keen observes that a fictional character "is not a narrative technique, but a product of it. Fictional character resides somewhere between the discourse and the storyworld, a projection of fictional worldmaking and the site of readerly creative collaboration" (298). When looking at *Marwencol*, we have the opportunity to discuss how Hogancamp both creates and empathizes with the fictional characters in his town and how we as readers of this world empathize with Mark Hogancamp and the other actors in the narrative.

Hogancamp reflects that, "Every time I see Marwencol the town, it brings me right back to when I started the town and how close and dear it was to me, and how much I wanted people to know about my town and be part of my town, that's why I started putting people that I know in it, is because I feel so alone here" (Malmberg). Speaking to his creation process when he

begins to craft a new character, Hogancamp explains “first thing I look at is their face, and then I think who does it remind me of that I know that I want to portray with an alter-ego in my town” (Malmberg). Mel Chen theorizes the importance of the face in “Masked States and the ‘Screen’ Between Security and Disability”:

In his *Totality and Infinity*, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes of the ethical first importance of the face, in particular the primacy of the face-to-face encounter (1969, 194-219). The face itself, to Levinas, is phenomenologically distinct and, indeed, is likened to a *force*, the capacity to affect; it affects even before being judged. The naked face presents a vulnerable other, inviting compassion in the ethical encounter. But taking this phenomenological abstraction to its limit, what becomes of the ethical encounter when—in the case of a mask—an altered face, a covered face, or a non-face, presents itself? (Chen 87-88)

Chen concludes, “We might therefore say that the mask-screen can operate negatively, precisely when what is at stake is the loss of *face* as the necessary translating mechanism for what is inside” (Chen 90). When brain damage disables the very ability to effect feeling through facial expression in previously familiar registers, the struggle against the loss of control itself becomes empathetically embodied instead. Hogancamp builds his characters first through facial recognition emphasizing how the characters operate as multidimensional, dynamic, evolving beings in the universe of Marwencol. He expresses an inability to make intimate connections with people in the real world, but he manufactures this kind of intimate relationship with characters in his storyworld.

Fictional characters, then, are a product of narrative technique, as Keen suggests, precisely because Hogancamp's characters emerge out of his desire to tell the story that wants to be told in a post-traumatic reimagining of reality. The line between fantasy and reality is blurred here such that the therapeutic act of creating an alternate reality has healing effects in Hogancamp as the creator. Bert Budd, Hogancamp's best friend shares that, "When Mark creates a character for you, that's really a way Mark honors you. I felt very honored when Mark made me a part of his town" (Malmberg). Hogancamp believes that, "Everybody at one time or another wishes they had a double that could do things that they could never do. So what I do...with alter-egos is I tell my friends you can be anybody you want, you can do anything you want in my town" (Malmberg).

Commenting on the authenticity and intentionality of Hogancamp's art, Tod Lippy, the editor of the magazine that first published Hogancamp's photography, observes:

There's one major difference I found immediately between Mark's work and other contemporary art that I like. Generally if you're photographing dolls, you see a strong sense of irony in the work, there's a distance, trying to be funny, subversive, clever. The thing that struck me immediately about Mark's work is that there's no irony in it, as far as I can tell. He's a very clever guy, very smart, but he's in the work, he's not using the work as a tool to do something else, the work *is* him. It's a very authentic feeling to me, which is a wonderful thing and you don't see it that often. (Malmberg)

Much of the authenticity cited here lies in Hogancamp's extreme identification with his alter ego and his emotional investment in the town. The most direct example of this may be Hogancamp's remarks on the March 26 wedding of his alter ego and his most beloved character, Anna: "I don't

remember when I got married in real life. I remember that it was '84, but I don't recollect that wedding as much as I recollect the one that my alter ego got married to here. It's weird that I say 'my wife.' I remember that I said that back when I was married, but it just doesn't hold any... I don't know" and he trails off as the documentary cuts to Hogancamp watching video footage of his real wedding (Malmberg). Post-traumatic memory loss and brain damage have literally left Hogancamp to create his own reality where the old one was erased.

The art, then, becomes Hogancamp's testimony to his trauma. In order for the testimony to have any transformative power, it is necessary for an interaction to take place between the patient and their testimony. The interaction referred to in conventional therapy assumes that exchange between analyst and analysand is necessary for the analysand to realize agency. The inner witness is a mechanism that develops in response to traumatic events. Three types of testimonial narrative are differentiated in terms of the presence of the inner witness in their syntax. The first mode is one in which the inner witness is accessible, enabling the imaginary shift between the voice of the victim and the voice of the witness. The second mode, which remains a 'first-person' mode of report, preserves and enacts the traumatic memories and the traumatic features. The third, psychotic mode attacks both the first and the third person, separating the subject from both his memories and his sense of selfhood.<sup>34</sup> Kelly Oliver explains that:

The inner witness is produced and sustained by dialogic interaction with other people. Dialogue with others makes dialogue with oneself possible. In order to think, talk, and act as an agent, the inner witness must be in place. Address and response are possible because the interpersonal dialogue is interiorized. ...The

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<sup>34</sup> See Dana Amir's "The Inner Witness" (2012).

inner witness, then, is the structure of subjectivity as address-ability itself, the structure of witnessing. (87)

In Hogancamp's case, the inner witness is established through his dialogue within the Marwencol narrative. The characters, while alter egos of actual people from his life, take on a meaning that equals, or even surpasses, that exhibited in interactions he has with real people. Two of the most important characters in his town, Wendy and Colleen, are named the other co-owners (as he explains in a note shown in the documentary: Mark, Wendy, Colleen = MAR WEN COL) and help him to create the name. Hogancamp engages in the emotionally intense "dialogic interaction" Oliver describes, but his interaction is with his characters, rather than other people.

In the documentary, both Mark and Colleen narrate the story of their characters and how they were getting married in the fictional town. Colleen, Mark's neighbor, who is married with three children, said of the experience, "It was like he was telling me about it like it was somebody else, like it was two other people, and then he told me it was like us. I was like, what? Hello? You're talking to a real person, and it's dolls. You have to know when to stop" (Malmberg). At this point, the film cuts to Hogancamp telling the story of another character he named Dejah Thorus the Belgian Witch of Marwencol, and explains that, "Dejah wants to poof Colleen out of Marwencol forever." Hogancamp finds solace in being able to control what happens in the town in a way that he cannot in real life. He exercises the same agency via his most beloved character, Anna, and says, "my favorite female doll, I wish she would come alive. I won a photo contest and with the money I bought Anna. When I first got the doll I fell in love with her face," and he rationalizes that, "If I'm going to be alone in life, at least my alter ego can have a girlfriend. Every night she's next to my bed I stare at her and I wish and I wish that I

could find a girl that looks just like her” (Malmberg). The extreme empathy for and identification with his alter ego in the town creates relationships between him and his characters. These relationships become testimonies to his process of recovery in their own right.

Dori Laub, in his book with Shoshana Felman, contends that testimony is “the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal ‘thou,’ and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself” (85). Hogancamp’s town embodies his own inner witness. Oliver calls the performance of witnessing “transformative because it reestablishes the dialogue through which representation and thereby meaning are possible” because “this representation allows the victim to reassert his own subjective agency and humanity into an experience in which it was annihilated or reduced to guilt and self-abuse” (93). Recalling the very beginnings of Marwencol, Hogancamp says, “The more I built, the more I played around and made figures, the more the story just came alive in my head” (Malmberg). What Hogancamp does in Marwencol is performative in several ways: he dictates the performance that the characters give throughout the narrative, he performs on another level through the photography of that narrative, and he is also replacing his initial trauma throughout the entire process with this new, present-tense performance.

The testimony to that trauma becomes a performance, and a transformative one, because Hogancamp identifies internally with the external narrative he creates. The documentary cross cuts back to Hogancamp narrating: “Meanwhile back in Marwencol...the town Germans and I came up with a plan to infiltrate the SS. The SS took me, tied me up, sent the town Germans away, anger, I want a drink, started cutting me. On my alter ego I put a scar down the right side of the face because this is the side that was damaged in real life on me” (Malmberg). He identifies so strongly with his alter ego in the town that the physical markings of his trauma

manifest in his physical self in the fictional town as well. In the same way that his own alter ego does the work of coping with the past, so do the other characters in the town take on the role of therapist in saving him. Hogancamp tells the story of the women's rescue operation to save him from the SS: "The girls went into the church and eliminated the SS. They only wounded the worst SS guy because they had plans for him, they wanted to save him for later. Anna came and got me down and held me until the others came to take us back to the bar... Her coming and saving me from the SS proved to me that she loved me and proved to me that she felt the same way I felt about her." Hogancamp has invested all of himself in the fictitious relationship with his characters, especially Anna, because he does not have actual relationships in his life beyond Marwencol to work through his trauma. The documentary plays the song "We did it before and we can do it again" set to a montage of the girls taking out the SS as Hogancamp says: "Still smiling, the women of Marwencol have gotten their revenge. This is no town that you can push over and take over. This is what happens to people who mess with us" (Malmberg). He has formed an alliance with the characters that he considers more valuable than any relationship that he has in his life outside of Marwencol, and his characters' revenge is his own. Bearing witness to his trauma through his alter ego's SS attack allows Hogancamp to regain a sense of agency.

Oliver explains that there are three ways in which bearing witness to your own oppression is paradoxical:

- 1) the performance of witnessing, which reinscribes subjectivity, is in tension with the constative description of becoming an object;
- 2) the process of witnessing, which restores subjectivity, also recalls the shame and pain of becoming an object;

3) in an important sense, the experience of becoming an object cannot be described, since it is the experience of becoming inarticulate. (99)

It is through the performance in Marwencol that Hogancamp is able to articulate the experience of becoming an object: he may not be able to describe it in terms of his life before the attack, but through his attachment to his alter ego, he can find ways to show his trauma.

In a section later in the documentary called “The Big City Jitters,” Malmberg cross cuts between the narrative of Hogancamp’s actual beating and another narrative reenactment in Marwencol. Over images of the figures in the town, Hogancamp narrates for his alter ego: “I figured I’d go out and see what was going on in town. While I’m focused in on what’s going on in my town, this SS asshole snuck up behind me, and I don’t hear him. Brings me back to town where all of his buddies are, and five of them figured they’d have a little fun with me.”

Malmberg then moves to footage of Hogancamp returning to the physical Attack Spot, where Hogancamp says, “It all comes back to me. The attack, those five scum bags, how bad I want to kill them” (Malmberg). At the prospect of ever meeting his attackers again, Hogancamp thinks, “I don’t know if I’ll start ripping them apart, I don’t know if I’m gonna want to kill them, I don’t know if it’s gonna take like eight police officers to shoot me. There’s no fair fighting the person that’s been jumped on from behind and every memory kicked out of his head. There’s no etiquette to fighting after that. I get all angry and stuff thinking about it” (Malmberg). The transition between the actual physical space where he was attacked and the physical space of the fictional town is striking because of the weight projected onto the reenactment in Marwencol. Hogancamp’s photographs display perspective such that the intensity of emotion is felt in the plastic dolls, and it is suggested that Hogancamp very much reverts in his mind to the actual attack, as connected with physical space, through the performative staging of space in his art.

Ulster County D.A. Emmanuel Nneji, Hogancamp's attorney says, "I hope Mark is not always haunted by this experience, but unfortunately, this kind of thing doesn't leave you just because the case is over" (Malmberg). Even as the process of witnessing through art restores Hogancamp's subjectivity, the shame and pain of becoming an object continues to have damaging effects.

Caruth believes that, "It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience" (58). Part of understanding Hogancamp's trauma involves looking at how he understands himself before and after the attack. Despite the fact that he does not self-identify as an artist for what he creates in Marwencol, he does speak to being an artist and about his creation of drawings before the trauma. He explains, "I used to be able to draw anything that came to mind before the attack. But now, since the attack, I can't because my hand shakes too much," and graphic drawings of people fighting are displayed as he points out the "evidence" sticker.

Hogancamp's attorney states, "His drawings were there to show to the jury what this individual was capable of doing. Brain damage you can't see with your own eyes, but you can see the manifestations from what people have been able to do before to what they can do now" (Malmberg). Hogancamp articulates his thought process in trying to recover his identity before the trauma:

I started to ask questions because I didn't know who I was. I had to ask other people. What was I like, was I a bad guy, was I mean? They would tell me, 'no you weren't mean, you were just drunk. You didn't hurt anyone, you just hurt yourself.' Then I started finding my drunk journals and reading those because I

wanted to find out who I was. For real. Because the only one who would know would be the one who was writing it, who was me. I may not be in the right frame of mind, but it was me. It's all messed up like this because I was hammered...I'm gonna die tonight. Last entry Jan. 19, 1993. I was like my god, it was like reading something Stephen King wrote or something, it was bad. I never want to see this guy again. (Malmberg)

Hogancamp's testimony to his own trauma manifests in his understanding of his pre-trauma self as another being, a guy he never wants to see again. Despite the terror he experiences in getting to know his former self as an alcoholic, Hogancamp still desires a more complete picture of that self. He says, "When the teenagers kicked my head to pieces, they wiped everything, I mean all memory of everything" (Malmberg), and so he must rely on the "evidence" he left behind. He explains, "the memories that I do get come back in stills, just a single shot, but no context. Alls I have is a photo to remind me that I was married. To a good lookin girl, too. She was Russian Polish. Anastasia" (Malmberg). The specific language he uses to describe his sparse memories is interesting in light of the photography he does now. Hogancamp has created a context for all of the single shots where the original narrative had been erased.

The questions raised by discussing Hogancamp's trauma recovery in terms of empathy and identification with his fictional characters are further complicated when that private therapy is made public by way of his art exhibition in New York City. Tod Lippy expresses his concern when he says that, "I did feel a very strong responsibility and a concern about, you know, will the show be too much? What if this leads to attention and it's bad for him in some way, will the photographs look okay, will he like the space, will he be comfortable here, will he make it to the city?" (Malmberg). These are all concerns about interacting in public that would be challenging

enough to deal with on their own, but the dynamic and private nature of Hogancamp's art and storytelling compound the potential negative consequences. Hogancamp says, "I'm happy about the whole thing except the talk of me taking something so sentimental to me and having it on display 100 miles away. It's a very big decision for me to make." He further speculates that, "I built Marwencol for me. For my therapy. And now it's like everybody's. Now everybody wants to play in it or be part of it, and I don't want all that. It's like this is the one last thing that I don't ever want taken from me. And it seems like it is, but theoretically it's not, it's still mine. It's still mine," which he says over shots of him disassembling the town (Malmberg). This process of moving his private world into the public eye mirrors the process by which he must move his very identity, which is directly influenced and shaped by his art, into a vulnerable public place.

Malmberg deliberately places the "Who am I?" section at the beginning, and waits until most of the narrative has been told before moving to the "Who I am" section near the end. Here, the documentary reveals another layer of Hogancamp's traumatic experience with regard to the motivation behind his attack. Mark's former roommate explains, "The first night we went home to his apartment when he got out of the hospital, we see this whole closet full of shoes. He asks 'what's with all the shoes?' And I said, well, Mark, they're your shoes. You buy them, you collect them, and you wear them" (Malmberg). Hogancamp had apparently mentioned to the people in the bar that night that he was liked to wear women's clothes, and that was the reason he was beaten. The story of Hogancamp's alter ego in the town is not only the story of reenacting the trauma of being physically wounded but also that of being emotionally and psychologically wounded through other's reactions to how he wants to present himself. The town is a place where Hogancamp can test out fantasies that he would like to become part of his life beyond Marwencol. Over images of the girl dolls in the town dressing up his alter-ego, Hogancamp says,

“Two or three times I put tights under his pants just to see how that felt, but I was like I didn’t want to come out of the closet in my town yet. But my girls, they know me better than I know me” (Malmberg). In a sense, Hogancamp’s performative reenactment has now come full circle: in addition to acting out past lived experience in his fictional town, he is now acting out the way he would like to behave beyond the storyworld of Marwencol.

Hogancamp begins to articulate a new world view that he has formed as a result of being able to conflate fantasy and reality in his performative testament to his trauma within his art. Malmberg reflects that, “Mark’s openness is a constant source of surprise; he’s a real believer in therapy, which made it so hard when his therapy was cut off. The film isn’t all just poetic; there’s a lot of reality about how he gets through his life on a daily basis. He learned in therapy in his first life to never tell a lie. He wanted to live in his truth in his second life” (Mitchell).

Hogancamp states that he believes this sense of honesty is central to the behavior that he is developing after the trauma:

If I tell people what I am and what I’m about I’m true to myself, that means I’m not lying to myself. What they do with it is on them. I’m not accountable for their feelings or how they perceive it, make faces and stuff. That’s when I close in and discover who I am, and that’s all part of the finding out who I am part of this new life, second life, I was given. (Malmberg)

Part of this second life necessarily involves realizing and accepting behavior that he previously tried to ignore or cover up. Hogancamp’s therapeutic art has taken the place of an analyst because it allows him a space in which to explore his anxiety and fear about living in a society that reacts with such hostility to anything perceived as a challenge to conventional gender norms.

If we are to read the narrative of Marwencol as a hopeful one, Malmberg certainly aids this reading near the end of the documentary when Hogancamp's attempts to come out in the town start to become a reality. The process is not an easy one, and Hogancamp speaks to both the difficulty he has in expressing his own identity, as well as the challenge of interacting with people at the exhibition: "I don't know what to say, I don't know how to speak to people. They're big collectors, they're big important people. Should I write things down, should I photograph them? I don't know what to say, so I told one lady I liked her shoes. She looked at me like I was strange" (Malmberg). The concerns expressed here are particularly interesting because they point to ways in which Hogancamp attempts to interact with the world beyond Marwencol in the same, familiar way he has come to interact with his storyworld—especially by photographing what happens around him in order to document his own story. He conveys his creative thought process to people at the exhibit who are interested in his attire: "When I'm stuck with where the story is going, I slip on a pair of heels, and the characters tell me where the story is going next," further pointing to how inextricably his creative process is linked to how he creatively expresses himself through clothing. Although he arrived at his exhibition in men's clothing, Hogancamp said, "But I wanted to do it with my heels on. And I was like man, I chickened out," to which a woman responds, "It's not too late. If you want to put them on..." (Malmberg). The documentary transitions to a shot of Hogancamp with high heels and seamed stockings in the gallery, albeit among the sparse crowd of people left at the end of the night. The initial attempts to behave how he wanted to in the fictional town of Marwencol made Hogancamp's ability to behave how we wanted beyond the storyworld possible.

Malmberg is careful not to craft a story that suggests a conclusive happy ending. The reality of Hogancamp's situation is always front and center in the documentary, even (or

perhaps, especially in) the fictional reality of the town. The trauma is not, and will not, be erased, but rather continues to be worked through within the narrative. Hogancamp speaks to his fear about doing the art exhibition because he will have to leave the comfort zone of his fictional world:

I'm really, really attempting to have a positive outlook on everything, but it's that subconscious, the fear that I still have about being hurt again. I don't want to get hurt. That's the biggest fear. I don't want to get hurt, mentally, physically, or emotionally ever again. So that's why, thank god, there's that other voice in my head that still didn't get broke in that attack, that tells the other side that's so worried, come on don't think about that stuff. Do the show like you do Marwencol the story. (Malmberg)

It is evident from these comments that Hogancamp still conceptualizes himself in fragmented parts. As a trauma survivor, and especially as a survivor who has sought therapy through extreme identification with an alter ego, it is significant that Hogancamp would conceptualize any part of his identity as preserved from before the attack. He places a great deal of value on the part that "didn't get broke in the attack" because it is the portion that contains the critical agency through which the rest of himself can identify and act upon in order to begin to function after the trauma.

It may be useful here to recall the ways in which Freud distinguishes mourning from melancholia, because Hogancamp's process of post-traumatic identity formation speaks to these differences. In melancholia, unlike mourning, when the object-relationship is shattered, the free libido is not displaced onto another object but rather it is withdrawn into the ego. Object-loss is transformed into ego-loss. The conflict is no longer between you and the loss of a loved one or object of desire, but it is rather an internal conflict between you and who you are now as a result

of internalizing this loss. The ego is thus fundamentally altered by identification (Freud 249). If we look at Hogancamp and how his alter ego in Marwencol operates, we begin to see the ways in which his own performative testimony acts as therapist where there is no external source of professional therapy available, ultimately resulting in an extreme internalization of the narrative he enacts in the town.

While Malmberg's documentary does convey a great deal of hope, he does not suggest that Hogancamp has achieved any desired end goal or successful method of mourning the loss of his pre-event self. Malmberg believes that his "responsibility as director is to tell the greater truth, the emotional truth; I wasn't going to tell flat, static truth, but rather bring the camera in to ask questions, to keep a sense of complication" (Mitchell). This complication is certainly portrayed in Hogancamp's own articulation of how his therapy is working for him in daily life. Hogancamp says, "My mind can't decide what world to go for. Realistic world, but there's dangers out there. People out there are so...real. And I don't understand all that. I feel safe when I get in my town and it just takes everything away" (Malmberg). The soothing nature of his town lies in the degree of control he can experience in telling the narrative and in the way daily life in Marwencol is just as "real" and meaningful to him as life beyond the storyworld.

Hogancamp says, "I know what it's like to build things in miniature, and want to have a society outside of society, smaller society" (Malmberg). He explains, "There was one rule in my town: be friends, friendly with each other, behave. So they did, they were. The Americans, the Germans, the British. They all drink together, they all smoke cigarettes together, everybody be friends with each other...Everybody got along, nobody was against anybody else, didn't matter what clothing they wore" (Malmberg). His vision for peace in the town clearly speaks out against his attackers and any person who would discriminate based upon difference. He specifically

alludes to how important his gender is in the comment about what clothes people should be accepted to wear in the town. If he can articulate this message within the town, he can govern the ways that the people abide by his rules. The number one rule is that people respect one another. We see Hogancamp working to align his developing identity through his own terms and vision of reality.

Hogancamp essentially witnessed the death of any conceptualization he had of an identity before the attack, which he articulates again and again through the idea of his memories being kicked out of his head. Cathy Caruth notes that in

exploring consciousness as figured by the survivor whose life is inextricably linked to the death he witnesses, Lacan resituates the psyche's relation to the real not as a simple matter of seeing or of knowing the nature of empirical events, not as what can be known or what cannot be known about reality, but as the story of an urgent responsibility, or what Lacan defines, in this conjunction, as an *ethical* relation to the real. (102)

This ethical relation to the real is crucial in any understanding of the delineations between fantasy and reality in Hogancamp's post-traumatic world. At the art exhibition in New York City, Hogancamp's best friend Burt observed, "I was listening to people's opinions about his stuff, and I felt myself getting mad or defensive, like 'let's go look at pictures of real war.' You know, this *is* Mark's real war!" (Malmberg). Hogancamp's real war is the struggle, not to learn the exact facts of the traumatic event, but rather to understand the belated nature of his traumatic repetitions and how those repetitions within Marwencol continue to shape who he is becoming.

In an interview, Hogancamp said of the characters he creates in his fictional narrative, "To me they're not dolls, they're not toys, they're actual living, breathing actors and actresses"

(Olsen). His extreme empathy for the characters again leads to his own understanding of himself, and that ethical relation to reality—a reality in which Hogancamp actively displays critical agency in a venue in which he was previously robbed of it. Keen explains:

Yet if character is hard to disentangle from plot, the narrated domain, and the intricacies of narrative situation, it is equally hard to confine to the textual realm, for character notoriously escapes the boundaries of the text itself, and not only through sequels and other transfictional reanimations. Ordinary readers do things to and with character that evade description by narrative theory when they respond to characters as persons. (299)

While Keen speaks to narrative empathy in textual, written form, it is certainly applicable to Hogancamp's narrative of the town as it is documented in photographs. Hogancamp's characters have absolutely escaped the boundaries of the fictional narrative. In one scene in the documentary, Hogancamp tucks the girl dolls in next to his bed and says, "if they're happy it means I'll sleep better. They're the last things I see before I go to bed." He whispers, "I love you" to them, and explains, "That's just how I say it. Out loud. So I can hear it. That's how often I get out." His extreme identification with his fictional narrative leads him to be more concerned with the internal process by which he works through his trauma rather than by any actual account of the trauma itself. These characters have grown and evolved alongside Hogancamp as his art rehabilitates him.

Despite the agency Hogancamp has clearly exerted to create Marwencol, the comparison between how he interacts with his fictional town and how he does or does not interact with the outside world can return us to the concept of melancholia and how it may be operating in Hogancamp's life. Rauch offers: "According to Walter Benjamin's model of experience (a

model based on Freud), every experience affects the subject's mind in a way that resembles the belated (*nachträglich*) effects of trauma or shock; yet the contingency of trauma and experience is an unconscious and unknowable event in a person's life" (117).<sup>35</sup> Rauch looks to Walter Benjamin's *Erfahrung*, which

implies an uncompleted process that awaits belated completion before it can be incorporated into the self. Before such a completion of experience in the present, that is, before the affect can finally be bound in a belated image, the subject vis-à-vis her desire remains fixated on the past. This desire may be turned into a compulsion to repeat for the sake of bringing about the satisfaction of a merger between affect and signifying image. However, in the absence of this synthesis, the subject remains in a melancholic state, not able to detach from what is lost and experienced as traumatic, and hence not able to interpret the past constructively. (118)

The compulsion to repeat, to reenact his trauma over and over again, is played out daily in Marwencol through Hogancamp's narrative. He articulates how he continues to be inhibited in his interactions with the outside world: "People don't know that I'm disabled, they don't know that I don't think correctly. They don't know that I have psychological problems. That I'm always on guard, always looking over my shoulder, always worried about being attacked again. They just see me on the outside. Outside I'm trying to act like a normal human so I don't get attacked again by the stronger ones." In an interview, Malmberg observes, "His use of what I think somebody referred to as 'personal space' between the dolls is brilliant... Mark talks about how he cuts his own hair still—he doesn't like people touching the back of his neck, because he

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<sup>35</sup> See the essay "Experience" in Walter Benjamin's *Early Writings: 1910-1917* translated by Howard Eiland (2011).

was beat up from behind. I think personal space for Mark is very important because it's an indication of power" (Slutsky). He is definitely still confined to the fears instilled in him by the attack, but does this mean that he is unable to interpret the past constructively, that he is unable to detach from what he lost? How might we even begin to go about determining what progress in this severe case would look like?

To speak of trauma as unconscious and unknowable in the ways in which it will affect the subject is to suggest that the subject will never be able to comprehend or move outside of the trauma. Despite this, Hogancamp attempts to move outside of his trauma by reenacting it in his fictional world. Caruth believes that such repetition "is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's own survival*. If history is to be understood as the history of trauma, it is a history that is experienced as the endless attempt to assume one's survival as one's own" (64). The closing of the documentary introduces something of a plot twist with regard to Hogancamp's progress, or lack thereof, beyond the initial trauma.

Hogancamp explains that, "My character in the story had to create something for himself to deal with the trauma that he still had from being attacked by five SS and beaten and kicked almost to death. So there's a lot of wear and tear on his mind, so he found comfort in building his own little world, his own little town, peopled with little 1/6<sup>th</sup> scale dolls and figures, each with a personality" (Malmberg). In this mind-blowing surprise ending, we learn that Hogancamp has retreated so far into his fictional narrative and invested so much of himself into his alter ego that the performative testimony to his trauma has taken on another dimension. Speaking to the nature of Hogancamp's art, Malmberg said, "I thought, and I know Tod thought, maybe he'll get another show and that will lead to an artist's rep...it took us all a little while to realize that truly

wasn't what he wanted out of this. It was his therapy. As much as that seems like an obvious thing, human nature wants, in a narrative sense, Mark to be better from this. ... In the years since the art show, he's probably retreated further into Marwencol" (Moreno). Hogancamp could be said to have assumed the position of analyst for his alter ego, such that his therapeutic art has brought him full circle, even at the cost of retreating further into his therapy and away from the world beyond Marwencol.

After the documentary was made, Hogancamp said in an interview, "I'd like to show other disabled people who have been left out of the regular world that even at the point where they might want to give up, there is a way to create something, if only they can find what it is" (Horrigan). In this direct message to others with similar experiences, Hogancamp actively articulates the usefulness of his creative process in the ways in which he has begun to reconstruct his identity after the traumatic event. Petar Ramadanovic believes that, "trauma does not concern a past event but rather a becoming form, not something that has finished but a certain kind of futurity. The subject of/in trauma is not a fragmented subject but a subject which is not whole because it is yet to come" (6). Hogancamp's narrative creation works to regain his subjectivity and sense of self. Recalling his attackers, Hogancamp says, "I'm glad I have the ability to escape into a fantasy world, I'm real glad, because I thought those guys took it away. I thought they took away my imagination and everything else. And like I've been fighting to get balance and everything else back, I fought for my imagination to get that back, and that's when Marwencol started. ... I prefer to live in my world. I want to live here, in Marwencol" (Malmberg). This is the epitome of empathy for characters in a fictional world: the process is heightened by the fact that Hogancamp is both the creator and the reader of his own story of traumatic recovery. A Lacanian reading of attachment theory provides a productive framework through which to

understand the transformative effects of Hogancamp's art when we view the act of creation itself as fulfilling the role of the analyst. The strongest testament to Hogancamp's therapy may be the acute sense of self-awareness and growth that he is now able to articulate about his trauma as a direct result of artistic storytelling.

### Locating the Self in Narrative

After the previously discussed examples in e-lit and graphic memoir, *Marwencol* offers a very different but valuable occasion for thinking about affect, trauma, and choreography wherein performance can simultaneously display and work through traumatic memory. Performativity enables forms of witnessing previously disabled by past traumas. The photography and documentation of Marwencol center specifically on an individual who has been disabled by violence especially through the physicality of bodies marked and coded before the narrative even begins. A hallmark of trauma theory's application to the arts is the belief that reconstructing narrative about a traumatic event can both retraumatize the victim while also implicating new victims—new witnesses—in the event.

Shoshana Felman, writing about literature, narrative, and law, writes that, "It is because the body of the witness is the ultimate site of memory of individual and collective trauma—because trauma makes the body matter, and because the body testifying to the trauma *matters in the courtroom* in new ways—that these trials have become not only memorable discursive scenes, but dramatically physical theaters of justice" (Felman 9). In a less literal sense, such "theaters of justice" exist in the convergence of artistic expression and activism. While trauma studies grew out of theorization of specific traumatic events, especially in relation to large-scale oppression, disability studies and the disability rights community have done much to spotlight

different kinds of trauma, such as the experience of living daily life with severe brain damage. A wholly different affective register arises when the trauma is not inflicted from an outside source via a catastrophic event but rather arises from within one's own body over a painstakingly gradual amount of time, as in degenerative diseases and other chronic conditions. Another point of pressure disability studies has brought to bear arrives through the very question of what counts as disability and how we label, categorize, and understand the difference between a person disabled from birth and a person who becomes disabled later in life. Hogancamp must work through the challenges of becoming disabled later in life when he will never fully recover his previous conception of self before the event.

The way in which a storyteller's body is situated in the world dictates specific embodiment in the story. The therapeutic artistic practices addressed in this chapter involve an awareness of the self in relation to narrative, and to other bodies in the narrative. In her essay "Orientations Matter," Sara Ahmed explains:

Orientations thus "matter" in both senses of the word "matter." First, orientations matter in the simple sense that orientations are significant and important. To be oriented in a certain way is how certain things come to be significant, come to be objects *for me*. Such orientations are not only personal. Spaces too are oriented in the sense that certain bodies are 'in place' in this place or that place. ... To say spaces are oriented around certain bodies is to show how some bodies will be more 'in place' than others.

Orientations also matter in the second sense of being about physical or corporeal substance. Orientations shape the corporeal substance of bodies and whatever occupies space. Orientations affect how subjects and objects materialize or come

to take shape in the way that they do. The writer writes, and the labor of writing shapes the surface of the writer's body. The objects used for writing are shaped by the intention to write; they are assembled around the support they give.

Orientations are about how matter surfaces by being directed in one way or another. (Ahmed, "Orientations Matter" 235)

Considering cultural, historical, spatial, and temporal relationships between bodies, and objects around which those bodies position orientation calls into the foreground the very mechanism by which one body could be more "in place" than another. Such sense of orientation shapes physical or corporeal substance. Individual bodies in performance are also always oriented towards an implicit audience for that performance.

In taking photography and documentary film as venues in which an audience can come to know a trauma they have not experienced themselves, the act of witnessing must be embodied by both the artist –photographer or documentarian—and the viewer. In order to fully understand what this means, this project turns to a combination of literary and dance theory that traces empathy as a central point of access: namely, Suzanne Keen's approach to narrative empathy and Susan Leigh Foster's concept of choreographing empathy.

Senses of the body and embodiment in *Marwencol* are layered in multiple ways. To consider "choreography" as a critical term in this project must take into account the movement of affect between Hogancamp's figures and his memory; between the figures and the photographs; and the even more nuanced internal movement within the individual storylines themselves as they navigate Hogancamp's life with brain damage, and how he understands this life through the fictional characters in the narrative played out and altered on a daily basis. Keen states "narrative empathy means feeling with fiction" (296). Her approach to narrative empathy "draws upon

work in several areas beyond narrative theory. Developmental and social psychology, including the juncture of affect and social cognition, prove major resources” (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* xi). She defines *temperament* as “the interior qualities of a person’s mind and affective style (or feeling or tone), not necessarily their performative or public personality” (298), and she argues that the way we cocreate fictional characters in reading also depends on inner qualities of temperament, defined as “constitutionally based individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation, in the domains of affect, activity, and attention.” Constitutional differences involve a combination of heredity, individual development, and experience. These contribute, in the form of temperament, an affective, attentional, and activational core to personality, which itself includes “much more than temperament, particularly the content of thought, skills, habits, values, defenses, morals, beliefs, and social cognition” (296). Ahmed believes, “naming emotions often involves differentiating between the subject and the object of feeling” and claims that emotions are not “in” texts, but rather are “effects of the very naming of emotions, which often works through attributions of causality.” The documentary *Marwencol* creates a unique space in which both narrative and choreography generate empathy. Keen claims we must not overlook “bodily responses, immediate feelings and long-term moods, memories that distort dimensions and traits of narratives, and gap-filling imagining that goes further than the textual evidence supports” (Keen 300). The force of encounter is more than sympathetic for a viewer who is able to read all of the emotion behind a blank face; the connection to what another is feeling arises through mediation of memory and storytelling wherein fictional characters are only a starting point for the very real, lived experience of the embodied memories themselves.

To be oriented toward writing, as Ahmed suggests, would mean that writing is something that matters, as well as something one does. For Mark Hogancamp to be oriented toward

storytelling and documentation means that narrative matters, and that performance of that narrative is something he does. As discussed in chapter one, in *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age*, Margot Lovejoy uses a definition of representation that refers to “a system of iconography containing both the perceptual and the aesthetic when related to art and having conventions of both tool and medium inscribed in it. ... Images or objects that artists construct are not just simple responses to individual experience. They are always ordered, coded, and styled according to conventions which develop out of the practice of each medium with its tools and process” (4). What does it mean to read for experience, rather than to read for meaning? A performance that embodies memory is one in which metacommentary on the process of composition is implicitly involved.

When Lovejoy points to artistic production as more than responses to individual experience, she highlights the bodily marks left on the performance by the medium. In Hogancamp’s artistic production, each level of narrative engages directly with mode in concrete ways: the dolls are oriented towards reconstruction of past memories; the photographs present orientation towards a current reordering of those memories; and the documentary film about this narrative orients Hogancamp in a larger arena wherein a much broader audience has access to his embodied performance. The medium shapes the narrative, and vice versa. For example, in Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, the images and objects are created both for and from an archive that physically marks the memoir, whether they are coded through “realistic” photography or “cartoonish” comics illustrations. The images themselves are all reproductions created in this new venue for the purpose of conveying a complex narrative. Memory functions in multimodal composition by way of a vast network of actors, each mediated by the specific modes through which they are presented.

The town of Marwencol and the characters crafted, developed, and physically choreographed throughout infinite storylines offer one of the most explicit examples of embodied performance imaginable. As Alison Bechdel developed an embodied relationship with her character through graphic memoir, so too does Hogancamp develop and continuously foster a relationship with Hogie the character through the physical figure of the doll and the photography that captures such detailed perspective. In each of these artistic endeavors, the artists employ active performance to recall, shape, mediate, and choreograph memory. A sharpened sense of the difference between these two artistic endeavors, however, develops through consideration for the life of the text in each case. When I refer to the life of the text, in Bechdel's case *Fun Home* is a story with a finite beginning, middle, and end. While the narrative may live on in multiple other venues, *Fun Home* is a contained project. *Marwencol* as an ongoing art project provides such a strong contrast because it is essentially boundless. The documentary Malmberg created presents a small fraction of the narrative Hogancamp continues to build and rebuild in his daily life.

Returning to the discussion in chapter three regarding boundless iterations of reading *Patchwork Girl*, I claimed that the choreography in each individual reading operates in affective registers that move beyond text. I find it valuable to highlight again that Sally Banes, writing on a dance composition class taught by John Cage's student, Robert Dunn, claims that "The *writing* of dances—the 'graphy' in choreography—was crucial to the composition process Dunn outlined for his students, not necessarily in the sense of permanently recording what the dance was, but in order to objectify the composition process, both by creating nonintuitive choices and by viewing the total range of possibilities for the dance" (7). I would like to put forth the claim that Hogancamp's photography constitutes the "graphy," the writing of narrative in his fictional town. Just as choreography allows for viewing the range of possibilities for a dance, the

individual photographs of Marwencol simultaneously offer a static object of memory and a point of access to the ongoing possibility of storytelling in his embodied performance. Next I turn to a coda that explores the relationship between performance, personal memory and academic discourse. I will explore this dynamic relationship in creative scholarly work for the possibilities it offers in boundary crossing, the simultaneous multivocality of fragmentation and unity, and the insertion of the self into academic discourse on and through embodied reading, writing, performance, and memory.

## CODA

## “All the possibilities of the dance”: Personal Memory and Academic Discourse

I begin and end this project on memory and emotion by inserting myself into the text in the same way the authors I have discussed place their own lived experience and memories into their texts. The preface to this dissertation took us back to October 3, 2013, when that fateful AXIS Dance Company performance lit the spark in me that ignited the whole project. Now, in closing, I take us back to October 4, 2013, which is according to my Zotero library the first time I typed “dance” and “literature” into the MLA research database. I had no idea what I would find. As soon as the hits popped up I felt my heart racing. Of course academic dance studies existed. I was stunned I had never looked for it before. I had been a life-long dancer. My mother was my first dance teacher. She teaches dance still. For as long as I could remember I had an unbridled love and enthusiasm for music and motion. But to this point in my academic career, it had bizarrely never occurred to me that this part of my life could intersect with my scholarly interests. My previous academic work focused on memory and trauma studies. Questions about the body and embodiment were already central to my work. Why not dance? My research on memory has given me much insight into how we construct memory and the process through which we take a series of events from the past and order them into a cohesive narrative, and all the physical, psychological, emotional, and cultural factors that influence this process.

In retrospect, I can take the events of that first week in October 2013 and order them into part of a much larger narrative about trauma, memory, and dance in my life. In October of 2003,

during a dance class I was taking my freshman year of college, I received a phone call notifying me that I needed to get to the hospital to see my father. The doctors had done everything they could and were waiting for family to arrive before they turned off the life support machines. I remember collapsing on the floor in my leotard and tights outside the studio. I didn't take another dance class until 2013.

It was not until much later that I consciously realized I had shut dance out of my life for exactly ten years. When I walked past a ballet studio on The Ave in Seattle's University District, I was stressed from studying for my Ph.D. comprehensive exams in American literature, memoir, and trauma studies. When I took that first ballet class after all those years I felt elated. I was filled with a sense of familiarity and home, an enthusiasm and joy I hadn't felt in a very long time. Even then I had no idea the effects returning to dance would have on my academic work and on my life. I've been at the dance studio every week since then. It is now, as I write the coda to my dissertation three years later, that I see a cohesive narrative arc in these events.

That day in October when I first began researching dance studies and literature one of the first texts I found was *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (1995), edited by Ellen Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy. The creative personal narrative that opened their preface profoundly struck me when I read it three years ago, and it resonates even stronger now at the end of my own dissertation journey:

This book grew out of a question we asked each other one hot afternoon, several summers ago, lying on our backs doing hip circles in a dance studio *Ellen leading, right leg up, open side, around* after five hours teaching in an intensive writing program. We were both writing dissertations for Ph.D.'s in literature and wondered, why is it *switch legs, left leg up, around, and reach* that no one in

English departments ever talks about dance? We'd each encountered resistance—or at best bewilderment—from advisers, professors, and colleagues about taking dance seriously, making our dance interests scholarly, thinking about dance with the literary critical-skills we had developed. We didn't get it *Jacqueline takes over, leg to the side, open out, and down* especially with all the discussion of gender, bodies, fluidity, performance, sexuality, popular culture, and multiculturalism animating literary studies *and the other leg up, out, down*. There was so much that dance seemed able to bring to literary studies *how about standing now, leg swings forward* and so much literary studies could bring to studies of dance *other leg, and side*. We wondered *add the torso, lift, and circle backward* are we crazy? Is our interest *now, shifting, to the left* in dance *spinning out and breathing fully* unintellectual?

We have become convinced, in the years since we first asked each other these questions, that a direct consideration of dance *can* focus and enrich many of the structural and theoretical discussions taking place in literary studies. We have become equally convinced that learning to read dance as literary critics read texts—especially given dance's unstable meanings, its dense net of reference to other movements, and its complexity of structured reiterations and variations—can open new areas for dance scholars and writers. (ix Goellner and Murphy)

This text puts forth choreography, a sequence of movement, through the interweaving of italicized descriptions of motion taking place simultaneously with the narrative description

recounting the origin story, as it were, of the collection it prefaces. The creative nature of this personal narrative locates the reader in the present tense of this memory as the authors are literally in a dance studio, before transitioning directly to the present tense of the preface itself. I bring us to Goellner and Murphy's text now not only for the playful pieces of scholarly creative memoir it inserts into the text, but also of course for the thematic content on dance and academia. More than twenty years have passed since this collection was published, and while dance studies is far more established now, the valuable work of dance scholars is often overlooked by other disciplines theorizing the body and motion. My hope is that this dissertation demonstrates the inherent interdisciplinarity of studying memory and the body, and that dance studies offers unique ways of thinking about the relationship between the body, memory, performance, and (e)motion.

Another influential example of blending personal memory with academic discourse is the introduction to Kathleen Woodward's *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions* (2009). Woodward opens recounting how she read Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) in one sitting. Didion's memoir of grief and mourning in the year following her husband's unexpected death offered direct correlations to Woodward's own life, which she writes about in her academic introduction:

As I read *The Year of Magical Thinking* I thought of my own experience years earlier. I too had lost my partner to an altogether unexpected death. It was as if my own life—half my body—had been ripped from me. ...I too turned to reading and research about grief, and it seemed to me too that virtually nothing clarified my extreme confusion.

But isn't loss a common experience? Why was there no department at my university devoted to the study of emotions? ...How could such an important dimension of life receive so little consideration from the academy? I didn't understand then what now seems so self-evident that it doesn't even require elaboration: that reason and emotion have long been constructed as antimonies in western culture, with reason exalted as the preferred term, figured as masculine, and emotion denigrated as feminine. I consider myself a reader by profession as well as by temperament, and I don't remember anything I read being especially enlightening or consoling. But then it's also true that I remember very little from that year. So I wasn't surprised to see that Didion, remarking on the large gaps in her memory, devotes much of her book to simply trying to *remember* what happened in the year after her husband died.

Thus the genesis of this book—a collection of essays on the emotions written over the course of several years—can be found in my desire to comprehend the turmoil I felt as well as my bewilderment at the reactions of some people (they were my friends) to my state of grief. ...Why was my experience considered *inadmissible* in what seemed a social court of emotion law? Later I found myself studying the emotions—academically. (2-3)

Woodward's narrative description supplies a long arc to the years that transpired between her partner's death, her experience with grief, her academic research, and the current volume we are now reading. Affective responses to each of these stages appear in the story she shares, and the

role of the reading experience itself centers prominently in the meaning making that has happened only in retrospect. I am personally surprised that at first I found it a remarkable coincidence that both Goellner and Murphy in their preface and Woodward in her introduction went through a period of much doubt and confusion before developing these book projects. They both go as far as to list a series of questions about why dance and emotions, respectively, had not received the intellectual treatment that they seemed to so obviously deserve.

I would argue that it is works like these that have helped to establish the legitimacy not only of academic study of emotions and the body, but, even more importantly, to establish the legitimate place of a scholar's emotions and experiences in academic discourse. Woodward writes "one of my major points is this: we all have experience of the emotions and shouldn't hesitate to draw on it—reflecting on it, turning it over in our minds, watching when a certain emotion subsides and is replaced by another, and placing it in perspective in the arc of our own personal lives and in the context of social constraints, commands, and controls as well as larger historical change" (8-9). I fully advocate this belief and have mirrored these models by offering a personal origin story in my dissertation preface and closing with that memory's relationship to the present moment of this scholarly work here in the coda. In the same way that I invite students to reflect metacognitively on their embodied writing and reading processes, so too do I believe in the vital role of personal reflection in scholarly writing, especially scholarly writing on memory and emotion.

### Creative Scholarly Multimodality

Finally, I return more explicitly to the question of academic discourse and the ways in which it evolves specifically about and through embodiment and multimodality. My final

example is Marianne Goldberg's *Homogenized Ballerinas*, an experimental piece on dance, gender, representation, and discourse on the body. It was originally presented in lecture form, next as a lecture-performance, later as a dance with lecture material inserted into it, and finally as a print essay in the anthology *Meaning in Motion*. For its original publication, Goldberg "invented a genre [she called] the 'performance piece for print,' composed of text and photographed gestures" in which she conceives of "the printed page as a kind of stage, and reading as a theatrical act" (317). Meditation on form, embodiment, and bodily memory are at the heart of *Homogenized Ballerinas*. I find the work of Goldberg particularly exciting for the possibilities it offers in boundary crossing, the simultaneous multivocality of fragmentation and unity, and the insertion of the self into academic discourse on and through multimodal narrative and embodied reading, writing, performance, and memory.

In a piece that alternates between academic prose, photographic images of the author and other professional dancers in various stages of motion, and creative writing, Goldberg laments that "so much feminist writing points to the theoretical or metaphorical reclaiming of the body without considering the material, experienced body" (311). In a creative interlude she writes:

*I place myself at the middle of meaning—at the point of contradiction where meanings are formed in the body. I am not a sculptured landscape, a surface for projected meanings. At the middle point: intense changes of perception redefining my body, strands of information, desire for motion. My body is: a vessel of psychological memory or emotional elation or trauma / an imprint of verbal language or visual image / an antenna to outside surroundings or internal physiological needs. Are there any purely kinetic experiences? Are meanings grafted onto physical sensations or are they intermeshed in the body's tissues? If I*

*find my way to a conventional ballet arabesque, I may not perceive it as an arabesque but as something other. My new perception might collide with the usual meaning of the movement: arabesque: and lend it an alternative meaning, layer a new meaning onto the old.* (Goldberg 313)

Goldberg considers how meanings are formed in the body and embeds in her writing her affective experience of locating meaning in the body. Her use of punctuation throughout this passage choreographs movement between topics, and movement between abstract theorization and concrete locations for that theorization in and through the body. The various photographic images woven throughout this text capture active physical movement of the body while also highlighting the intellectual movement of the text as she continues to raise questions about kinetic, emotional, and psychological experience. I discussed the concept of the unified literary object and the different degrees of boundedness this object might take in different genres including hypertext fiction, graphic memoir, and therapeutic art, photography, and documentary film. The unified literary object of Goldberg's text as it exists published in the anthology *Meaning and Motion* has finite boundaries. In an afterword to the essay, Goldberg explains that her intention in publishing this essay in a scholarly anthology is to "work referentially within scholarly discourse and to point—through jarring juxtapositions of modes of address or of experiential and theoretical language—to frames unconsciously placed around explorations of dance" (318). In this dissertation I have drawn attention to the frames unconsciously placed around explorations of dance and of multimodality through a comparative approach of juxtaposing analysis of multiple genres, and ultimately by making transparent the frame of personal lived experience, memory, and emotion that informs the texts of the authors I study, and of my own personal relationship to this work.

I will return once more to Sally Banes' claim that "the *writing* of dances—the 'graphy' in choreography—was crucial to the composition process...not necessarily in the sense of permanently recording what the dance was, but in order to objectify the composition process, both by creating nonintuitive choices and by viewing the total range of possibilities for the dance" (7). The total range of possibilities suggested here is central to my argument that the experience of reading multimodal texts is a performative, embodied act that expands a traditional conception of the static, finite text into a dynamic, ever evolving performance. The range of possibilities is as infinite as the nature of memory and performance are ephemeral. *Choreographing Memory* is a scholarly effort to value personal memory in academic discourse and to write down the intellectual movement of witnessing the body in motion through multimodal narrative.

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