Essi Varis

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ABSTRACT

This article-based doctoral dissertation explores how fictional characters unfold and function in the cognitive interactions and tensions that take place between texts and readers. The focus is on multimodal characters of graphic narratives. Accordingly, the theoretical framework combines some of the central insights of comics studies with various theoretical views on fictional characters and various premises of cognitive narrative studies. The analyzed series were picked from the corpus of DC Comics' Vertigo imprint, which publishes experimental, intertextual series for adult readers. One of them, Neil Gaiman and J. H. Williams III's miniseries *The Sandman: Overture* (2013–2015), was subjected to cognitive comics analysis, the purpose of which was to investigate how the comic's alien characters inject a sense of nonhuman otherness in the reading experience. The other target text, Mike Carey and Peter Gross' metafictional series *The Unwritten* (2009–2015) compares Frankenstein's monster to fictional characters: both are artificial creations assembled out of diverse materials, but still have a semblance of life and humanity. This analogy constitutes the backbone of the extensive theoretical fusion and speculation performed throughout the work. The Creature's journey from assorted fragments into a sentient, rebellious being is likened to the developments between structuralist, cognitive and transmedial character theories, for instance. Additionally, Frankenstein's handiwork and the wanderings of his collage-like creation steer the attention towards the ways characters and their parts are recycled from text to text and from medium to medium. These transtextual processes are shaped both by the commercial interests of the creative industries and by the communities of readers, whose cognitive engagements ultimately grant the characters a spark of life. Based on the case studies conducted in the four articles, the dissertation suggests a new enactivist theory of fictional figures. Characters are experienced as dynamic and life-like because readers enact them as such in their interactions with texts and other readers, and because these textual, social and cultural environments offer possibilities for such cognitive actions. These interpretational processes are profoundly relational, open-ended and subjective, which imbues characters with monstrous paradoxicality and instability: they are both text and cognition, both mimetic and synthetic, both incomplete and forever open to new meanings.

Keywords: comic book characters, fictional characters, comics, graphic narratives, cognitive narrative studies, enactivism, reading experiences, narrative theory, transmedial narratology, Vertigo comics, Frankenstein's creature

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä artikkeliväitöskirjassa tutkitaan, kuinka fiktiiviset hahmot toimivat ja muotoutuvat lukijoiden ja tekstien välisissä vuorovaikutusprosesseissa. Tutkimus keskittyy erityisesti kuvaa ja sanaa yhdistäviin sarjakuvahahmoihin. Niinpä myös sen teoriakehys yhdistelee sarjakuvatutkimuksen löydöksiä erilaisiin henkilöhahmoteorioihin ja kognitiivisen kertomusteorian työkaluihin. Kohdetekstit valikoituivat amerikkalaisen DC Comics -yhtiön kokeelliseen genresarjakuvaan erikoistuneesta Vertigo-julkaisusarjasta. Laajimman kognitiivisen sarjakuva-analyysin kohteeksi päätyi Neil Gaimanin käsikirjoittama ja J. H. Williams III:n kuvittama minisarja *The Sandman: Overture* (2013–2015), jonka kummalliset henkilöhahmot johdattelevat ihmislukijan havainnoimaan, missä määrin ei-inhimillisten ja kuvitteellisten olentojen kokemuksia on mahdollista ymmärtää. Mike Careyn ja Peter Grossin luoma metafiktiivinen fantasiasarja *The Unwritten* (2009–2015) puolestaan vertaa henkilöhahmoa Frankensteinin hirviöön: molemmat ovat keinotekoisia, sekalaisista ainesosista koottuja luomuksia, mutta vaikuttavat silti jossain määrin eläviltä ja inhimillisiltä. Tästä ”hirviöanalogiasta” muodostui koko tutkimuksen teoreettinen ydin, joka ohjasi erilaisten lähestymistapojen uudenlaista yhdistämistä ja niillä spekuloimista. Frankensteinin hirviön kasvua irrallisista ruumiinosista ajattelevaksi, kapinalliseksi olennoksi verrataan esimerkiksi siihen, kuinka kirjallisuudentutkimuksen henkilöhahmoteoreettiset näkemykset ovat kehittyneet strukturalistisista malleista kognitiivisiksi ja edelleen transmediaalisiksi teorioiksi. Lisäksi Frankensteinin kokoamistyö ja hirviön yksinäiset vaellukset ohjaavat huomion siihen, kuinka henkilöhahmoja ja niiden osia kierrätetään tekstistä ja viestimestä toiseen. Näitä tekstien välisiä prosesseja ohjaavat paitsi tekijöiden taustalla vaikuttavat taloudelliset intressit myös erilaiset lukijayhteisöt, sillä ilman lukijoiden kognitiivista työtä hahmot eivät heräisi henkiin lainkaan. Artikkelikohtaisten tapaustutkimusten pohjalta hahmottuu täysin uusi enaktivistinen henkilöhahmoteoria, jonka mukaan hahmot koetaan elävinä ja usein inhimillisinä, koska lukijoiden aktiivinen vuorovaikutus tekstien ja muiden lukijoiden kanssa synnyttää tällaisen dynaamisen kokemuksen. Toisaalta erilaisilla tekstuaalisilla, sosiaalisilla ja kulttuurisilla ympäristöillä on paljon eri keinoja mahdollistaa tällaisten kuvitteellisten henkilöiden muodostuminen. Koska nämä tulkintaprosessit toimivat subjektiivisesti ja tilanteisesti, suhteessa jatkuvasti muuttuviin ajattelun ympäristöihin, henkilöhahmot ovat monin tavoin epävakaita ja paradoksaalisia olioita. Ne koostuvat sekä tekstistä että kognitiivisesta toiminnasta, ne koetaan niin todenkaltaisina kuin keinotekoisina, ja ne ovat sekä ikuisesti keskeneräisiä että merkityksiltään moninaisia.

Asiasanat: sarjakuvahahmot, fiktiiviset henkilöt, sarjakuvat, kognitiivinen kirjallisuudentutkimus, kertomuksen teoria, lukukokemukset, transmedia, enaktivismi, Vertigo-sarjakuvat, Frankensteinin hirviö

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FOREWORD

When I started to assemble this monster of a project five-odd years ago, I was in the darkest place I have ever been in my short life. Thus, as I put my dissertation together, I was also, in many ways, putting myself back together. I am immensely proud and surprised to find that we both turned out as well as we did. There is no way we would have got this far without all the help, support and friendship we received along the way, however.

First and foremost, I was blessed with two wonderfully supportive advisors who, at times, have probably believed in my ability to complete this project more than I have: professors Mikko Keskinen and Sanna Karkulehto. As my head advisor, Mikko has overseen my brain freezes, unorthodox working habits and halting growth with remarkable patience, humor and faith ever since my undergraduate years. Sanna only came along in 2013 but has been the warmest, most helpful editor, co-editor and office mate anyone could ask for. I am eternally grateful for all the advise, learning opportunities and creative freedom both have granted me. Doctoral studies give one many things to be stressed and anxious about, and I feel so incredibly lucky that, for me, advisors and their comments have never, ever been among those things.

I have also been excited and honored to have my work pre-examined by two researchers whose works have been a great inspiration to me. I read several monographs and articles by Karin Kukkonen at the early stages of my research process, and learned from them what cognitive comics scholarship actually looks like. I like to think I have continued her pioneering work in some modest way. Marco Caracciolo's writings I found much later, but their clear argumentation and fascinating viewpoints truly solidified my understanding of second-generation cognitive theories and their implications. I thank Karin and Marco for being so very kind and generous to me both in and outside their pre-examination statements, and look forward to reading about their new projects!

In addition, this introductory text carries echoes of instructive conversations I had with professors Jan-Noël Thon and Merja Polvinen during the final stages of writing. Thus, I would also like to thank them for both their critical and encouraging comments. My colleagues Kaisa Kortekallio and William Hamilton also read parts of the work at the pre-examination stage, and their enthusiasm helped me to push through the final few months and weeks. Please just let me know if I can ever return the favor!

Of course, these forays into mad science would not have been possible without the financial support I received from Ellen and Artturi Nyyssönen's Foundation and the University of Jyväskylä's Faculty of Humanities. I would like to thank the former for providing me with my very first scholarship and a cool venue for my defense party. Even bigger thanks to the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies for providing me with several scholarships and travel grants, two years of employment, and a lovely office space.

LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Article 1: "Something Borrowed: Interfigural Characterization in Anglo-American Fantasy Comics" (2016) In Mikhail Peppas & Sanabelle Ebrahim (eds.) *Framescapes. Graphic Narrative Intertexts*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press. 113–122.

Article 2: "The Monster Analogy: Why Fictional Characters are Frankenstein's Monsters" (2019) *SubStance* 48:1, 63–86.

Article 3: "Alien Overtures: Speculating about Nonhuman Experiences with Comic Book Characters". Unpublished, but reviewed and approved for publication in Karkulehto, Sanna, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen & Essi Varis (eds.) *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture.* London/New York, NY: Routledge. (Forthcoming in 2019.)

Article 4: "Hyllyiltä ruutuihin ja ruuduista sydämiin: Sarjakuvahahmot muuttuvina elämystuotteina" (2016) In Lähdesmäki, Tuuli, Sanna Karkulehto & Juhana Venäläinen (eds.) *Elämykset kulttuurina ja kulttuuri elämyksinä. Kulttuurintutkimuksen näkökulmia elämystalouteen.* Nykykulttuurin tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 120. Jyväskylä: Center for Contemporary Culture Studies. 275–312.

FIGURES

CONTENTS

1   THE UNEARTHING: STARTING POINTS

It is summer in the fictional 18th century, and at a bathhouse area in Thonon, Switzerland, a bored 13-year-old boy is stranded at a nameless inn with his father and adopted sister, waiting for the weather to turn. In his ennui, the boy browses whatever books happen to be at hand, unaware that on the pages of a tattered volume on natural philosophy, "a new light", a joy of discovery – as well as an impulse to his "ruin" – awaits him. (Shelley 2012b [1818], 22.)

The boy's father glances at the title page, and says: "Ah, Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash." But of course, Victor Frankenstein does not listen: he does not only finish the book in his hands but seeks out the works of the likeminded. He reads and studies "the wild fancies of these writers with delight", and they appear to him as "treasures known to few". (Ibid.) He immerses himself in alchemy – and goes on to assemble and resurrect a mighty creature made out of dead bodies.

It is late spring in the late 20th century, and in a mid-sized town in Southern Finland, a bored 10-year-old girl is moving to a new house with her family. Everything is still boxed-up, the rooms are chilly and full of echoes. She sits on a pile of rolled-up carpets and starts reading the old *Donald Duck* magazines she found in the basement. It is also a warm autumn day, some decades earlier, and in a derelict treehouse, in the folds of a Mid-Western suburbia, a group of kids are gathering around everyday treasures: the four-colored 24-page books they bought from the corner store with their joint pool of pennies. It is also a bleak winter morning in Tokyo metropolitan area – much, much too early for anything to be quite real or tangible just yet – and sharply dressed office workers sit and stand on a train, haphazardly, like birds on a phone line. They crane their necks down to read paperbacks full of black-and-white lines and shapes and squiggles.

Somebody walks by – a parent, a friend, a co-worker, or a stranger who spilled their coffee leaving home – glances at the title, wrinkles their nose, and says: "Comics? Should you really waste your time on that? I hear it's nothing but sad trash." But of course, there are many who do not listen, and once they have finished that book or that series they are reading, they go on to explore

dozens of other series, dozens of other worlds – and, on their way, they awaken legions of very strange creatures indeed. Creatures that seem human but are quite not; creatures that the readers make themselves but whose bits and pieces were designed by someone else; creatures that were never really alive but could go on to lead a million different lives for centuries to come.

1.1   Welcome to the Laboratory

One of the most common rhetorics one finds in academic writings about fictional characters is that characters are deceptively obvious, ubiquitous and simple (see e.g. Eder et al. 2010, 3; Käkelä-Puumala 2003, 241). They appear to us, in short, as "fictional analogues of human agents" (Smith 2010, 233), imaginary people, whom we instinctively read in remarkably similar ways as we read the real people around us, based on our own human experiences and social knowledge (see e.g. Harvey 1965; Hochman 1985; Klimmt et al. 2006; Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 29–30; Smith 1995; Vermeule 2010). There hardly seems to be a trick to it – and yet, this human mask seems to hide some deep, uncomfortable void or mysticism that literary scholars and moralists have bristled at from time to time. Why should the words and lines that make up the characters be any different from the other words and lines on the page? What right do these *things* – whom do not even possess a will or a body of their own – have to manipulate our thoughts, emotions, and moral sensibilities? Comic book characters especially have a widespread reputation as readily recognizable and understandable, even overly flat and simplistic caricatures – which have, nevertheless, been feared to be powerful enough to impose delinquent ideas on young minds (Wertham 2009 [1954]).

In sum, characters are embodiments of the so-called "paradox of fiction": we know full well that they do not exist and yet we entangle them in our real thinking, emoting and experiencing (see Keen 2011b, 309). In my licentiate's dissertation, these uncanny cross-streams of fantasy and recognizability, of nothingness and significance, inspired me to remark off-handedly that "fictional characters tend to bear the same horror as all human-like yet somehow disfigured creatures, the concurrent familiarity and otherness of werewolves, harpies, Frankenstein's monster and the like" (Varis 2013, 11). Little did I know then that therein hid the loose stitch that would make my conception of character unravel into new shapes altogether, once I would pull at it a bit more briskly.

Narrative theory, like so many other domains of discourse, has utilized different Frankenstein metaphors for the past two centuries (see e.g. Casetta & Tambolo 2013). Brian McHale (2005, 67–68) has seen literary histories as grotesque, Frankensteinian constructions, cognitive theorists have been accused of assembling methodological "Frankensteins" (Caracciolo 2014b, 12), and E. M. Forster (1962, 69–70, 80) has described literary characters as an improved, "more manageable human race", whom are "galvanized" by narration, so that they "jump about and speak in a convincing way". Drawing on research on

postmodern identities, Deidre Shauna Lynch (1998, 8–9) has made an even more explicit note on how Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) could be read as an allegory of a character that spins out of its author's control in the cross-streams of interpretive and economic forces.

An Anglo-American comics series called *The Unwritten* (2009–2015) recently adopted this metafictional idea of Frankenstein's creature as the archetype of fictional characters, and ran with it. I, as an emerging researcher of both characters and graphic novels, snatched it from there, and went, perhaps, a little further still, by making this Frankenstein analogy a tool of meta-theoretical exploration.

The result of this exploration, dear reader, is the dissertation you hold in your hands. Welcome to a literary-critical lair, where multimodal fictional characters are examined and experimented on, so that we could all understand a little better why and how we fill our books, minds and lives with paradoxical, imaginary humanoids of our own making. All these Gothic theatrics and extended metaphors are meant to serve as orientation towards the most central claim of this compilation work: that *fictional characters are not, in fact, analogous to humans but to Frankenstein's monster*.

Like Frankenstein's wretched flesh pastiche, characters – particularly comic book characters – are fragmentary. Our experience of them is an amalgamation of different words and images, traits and roles, discussions and inferences, influences and incarnations. I, for instance, met Sherlock Holmes long before I met Sherlock Holmes – or to be more exact, I first met some iconic parts of him. They had simply been detached and reattached on a cartoon mouse called Basil the Great Mouse Detective, who stars in a Disney film (1986) of the same name.

Indeed, one of the most fascinating things about characters is that they, and fragments of them, can circulate in our culture in ways that seem impossible to trace, control or stop completely. Just ask Matt Furie, a cartoonist who made a desperate attempt to kill and bury one of his own comic book characters, Pepe the Frog, in May of 2017, because it had been hijacked by the so-called Alt-Right movement and made into a symbol of white supremacist ideologies (Romano 2017). Sadly, Pepe's afterlife as a pawn of internet hate cultures continues to this day, as killing a character is not as simple a task as one might think. Like Frankenstein's monster, popular characters often outlive their creators and keep drifting and transforming from story to story, from medium to medium, from genre to genre, and from decade to decade – masterless, and apparently immortal.

However, this is only possible because we readers have found some miraculous way to instill a semblance of life into these fragmentary, wandering constructions. Examples of our human urges to animate, anthropomorphize and narrativize can be found everywhere around us (see e.g. Zunshine 2008; Vermeule 2010). Japanese folk culture, for example, is famous for its ever-growing armies of pre-narrative cartoon figures: everything from regional delicacies to new electronic products must have their own anthropomorphic mascots, and sometimes they become so popular that entire animation and comics

series sprout around them (Azuma 2001, 39–53). Perhaps the most famous example of this is Hatsune Miku, who began as a marketing tool for a voicebank software and is now a transmedial pop culture icon with a global fan base. That is to say, like Victor Frankenstein, we are predisposed to craft even lifeless and nonhuman things into our own images – into something with a face, consciousness, and life history.

These parallels between the character and the Creature – and between the reader and Frankenstein – are examined more carefully in Article 2, "The Monster Analogy: Why Fictional Characters are Frankenstein's Monsters". It explores the similarities and differences between the construction, awakening and rebellion of characters and of Frankenstein's infamous creation by cross-reading Shelley's original novel, *The Unwritten* comic, and various literary character theories. The other three articles included in this compilation go on to explore other, more specific potentials and paradoxes of comic book characters – their transtextuality, their anthropomorphism, and their commercialized experientiality – from the viewpoints of literary character theories, cognitive approaches to narratives, comics studies, posthumanist sensibilities, experience economy, transmedial narratology, and fandom. Therefore, this dissertation could well be accused of being a methodological Frankenstein's monster: an unsymmetrical, nonsystematic collection of different theoretical frames, tools, cases and questions.

I would, however, ask the reader to approach this speculative series of thought experiments with an open, curious mind; to suspend their disbelief in alchemy and see what it awakens. After all, if reading comics teaches us anything, it is that juxtaposing dissimilar elements can result in the kind of sense-making that is acutely sensitive to all manners of continuities and discontinuities but still intuitive and open to different possibilities (cf. McCloud 1993; Hatfield 2005; ch. 1.4.1). By the same token, if Victor Frankenstein can teach us anything, it is that methods can be effective whether they are considered proper and scientific or not. *Frankenstein* may be speculative fiction but, ultimately, theories are hardly less speculative or less artificial than fictions. Shelley's archetypal story and characters can thus offer a playful framework for rethinking and reordering character-centric narrative theories and various related notions in ways that, I hope to show, are quite novel and revealing.

Of course, in creating an article-based dissertation, I have also inevitably created a textual Frankenstein's monster. And seeing that we relate to all texts through embodied cognition (see e.g. Kukkonen 2013b, 60–61 and 2014), it is perhaps appropriate to think of the four articles as the limbs of this dissertation. The aforementioned Article 2 as well as Article 3 ("Alien Overtures: Speculating about Nonhuman Experiences with Comic Book Characters") reach towards some of the evasive realms of thought and meaning that characters can help us to approach and imagine. In case of Article 2, the character of Frankenstein's monster facilitates the re-evaluation of character theories, and in case of article 3, fantastical comic book characters invite us to think about the alterity and unreachability of nonhuman experience. This leaves Articles 1 and 4 as the legs,

which follow the wanderings of characters and character traits across different texts, readers and platforms. Article 1 ("Something Borrowed: Interfigural Characterization of Anglo-American Comics") notes on the important role inter- and transtextual characters play in contemporary fantasy comics as well as on the important role cognitive viewpoints play in the conceptualization of inter- and transtextuality in the first place. Article 4 ("Hyllyiltä ruutuihin ja ruuduista sydämiin: Sarjakuvahahmot muuttuvina elämystuotteina"), by contrast, takes a wider perspective to the ways characters mold and become molded by the transmedializing comics industry and comics cultures. Article 4 is the only part of this dissertation I have written and published in my native language, Finnish, but I have included an English summary of it in the second chapter of this introductory treatise – or, as I like to think of it, the torso.

Indeed, the purpose of these hundred-odd pages is to seam the articles together and circulate some background information as well as some overarching inferences through them. This first chapter will go on to introduce and clarify the theoretical frameworks, research materials, methods and objectives. The second chapter summarizes the argumentative and analytical operations of each of the four articles separately, and the third chapter presents the overall result: a new cognitive theory of character that has been formed, piece by piece, based on the articles' findings. Finally, the fourth chapter offers brief parting words and self-reflection.

To quote Edward van Sloan's introduction to Universal's iconic *Frankenstein* adaptation (1931, directed by James Whale): "–– if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now is your chance to, uh... Well, we've warned you."

1.2 The Operation Theater: An Overview of the Theoretical Frames

As a whole, this monstrous body of texts lies in the intersection of three areas of academic interest that have, at least to my knowledge, never been brought together before: theories on fictional characters, cognitive narrative studies, and research on (Anglo-American) comics and graphic novels. Indeed, even though each of the compiled articles investigates very different issues with slightly different tools, they all follow these "three C's": they have Characters as their research subjects, Cognitive approaches as their primary theoretical affiliation, and Comics as their main textual context. In this chapter, I present some of the basic assumptions these starting points entail and discuss how they complement each other.

1.2.1 Characters as Research Subjects

Should I ever hit my head in just the right angle and forget absolutely everything I have ever read about fictional characters, help would never be too far

away. No matter who one asks, a scholar or a nonprofessional reader, everyone would probably define *character* in reference to two concepts: personhood and non-reality (cf. e.g. Käkelä-Puumala 2003, 241; Margolin 2005, 52; Mikkonen 2017, 175).

Most surveyees would likely offer the category of personhood as the closest analogy, and the ontological status as the main differentiating factor: characters are "just like real people, without actually existing" (Smith 2010, 234). Uri Margolin (2007, 66) approximates this view with his definition: "In the widest sense, 'character' designates any entity, individual or collective – normally human or human-like – introduced in a work of narrative fiction." Similarly, most dictionaries define 'character' – disregarding the word's copious separate but related meanings – as a "person" (represented) in a novel, drama, film or other (narrative) media.[1]

Alternatively, characters could be categorized primarily as something unreal, fictional, narrative, textual or discursive, and secondarily as something person-like. In other words, characters could be conceptualized as those parts of text or narrative that are constructed and talked about in the same way (conceptions of) real people are constructed and talked about in everyday discourse. This is how Fotis Jannidis (2013) begins his character-themed entry to *The Living Handbook of Narrative*: "Character is a text- or media-based figure in a storyworld, usually human or human-like." Similarly, in his brief essay on comic book characters, Frederick Luis Aldama (2010, 319) states that whenever an element on a comics page manifests human qualities, we identify it as a character (see also McCloud 2006, 60–61).

The fact that these simple scholarly definitions cohere so well with the folk-understanding of the term 'fictional character' admittedly makes them compelling at a first glance. Upon closer inspection, they can be contested from several angles, however. For instance: can we truly bracket characters off in entirely fictional, unreal realms when they also figure and participate in real-world discussions as "objects of discourse" and inhabit the real readers' minds as "objects of thought" (Margolin 2007, 67; cf. also Keen 2007 and 2011b; Margolin 2010)? Do characters, for that matter, always have to be bound to a narrative fiction or a storyworld, or could they also occur independently, outside of them? Moreover, the words "normally" and "usually" stick out in Margolin and Jannidis' one-sentence definitions: if human-likeness is not an absolute requirement for characters, then *what is* – and what exactly do these vague qualifiers allow including? What are nonhuman-like characters, and can they be dissected with the same terms and theories as the more common, human-like ones?

In the four articles and chapters that follow, I will seek tentative answers to these questions by delving into characters' paradoxical nature and by exploring the ways multimodal characters unfold in their readers' thoughts, discussions and cultural practices. Before that, however, it is important to understand

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[1] Dictionaries checked: *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (7th edition), *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary* and *MOT Collins English Dictionary*.

how the previous character theories have juggled these two defining features of characterness: the illusory person-likeness and the textual-fictional ontology.

The short answer is that the intersection of these two features constitutes a dilemma that has troubled literary scholars since Aristotle (see e.g. Chatman 1987, 108–110): what does it actually *mean* for a text or fiction to present, represent, introduce, contain, or evoke a person or a figure? All the theories and concepts that scholars of various disciplines have produced in answer to this question are too many and diverse to review here but, by and large, character theories of the 20th century can be divided into two camps. On the one hand, there are the "traditional", "mimetic", "realist", "phenomenological", "naturalist" or "representational" approaches, which direct most of their attention to the human-likeness of characters. On the other hand, there are the "purist", "formalist", "structuralist" or "semiotic" approaches, which are only interested in characters as parts of larger textual or narrative compositions. (Fokkema 1991, 18–41; Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 31–33; Smith 2010, 232–233; Varis 2013, 16–21.)

The traditionalist, mimetic camp has been proudly represented by such theorists as E. M. Forster and Baruch Hochman: the character-centric chapters of Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1962 [1927]) are simply titled "People I" and "People II", while Hochman (1985, 59) refers to characters as "*Homo Fictus*". It is worth noting, however, that both of their argumentations draw on realist and modernist novels – such as the works of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy and James Joyce – which not only center on human-like characters but also depict their mental lives in deft detail, through fairly "transparent" language (cf. Fokkema 1991, 18–22). That is to say, the narratives targeted by the mimetic theories usually have a way of assuring their readers that their characters reflect, derive from, or are even modeled on real people. Thereby, it only makes sense to try to understand them in the light of the same psychological, social and psychoanalytical models that have been used for analyzing the inner workings of actual humans (ibid.; cf. also Lynch 1998). Of course, this is the logic most non-professional fiction consumers also adhere to when they discuss the relationships and moral choices of the characters in their favorite book series or TV dramas – and with such resounding support of the reading public on their side, mimetic theories should not be dismissed as naive or old-fashioned (cf. Keen 2011b, 300, 309; Smith 2010, 233, 254).

The "purist" camp, for its part, has housed mostly formalists, structuralists and semioticians, including Roland Barthes, Vladimir Propp, A. J. Greimas, Seymour Chatman, Philippe Hamon and Uri Margolin. Their stern, reductive conceptions of characters as series of "predicate positions", "paradigms of traits" and "actors of the plot" were in vogue especially during the middle decades of the 20th century, when the ideals of structuralist linguistics were adopted into narrative studies. In addition, the views of these theorists were clearly influenced by postmodern novels' experimental narrative techniques, which flaunted the artificiality of characters, by dismantling them into disembodied voices and subject positions, or by flattening them into mere recurring names and pronouns. Consequently, structuralist theorists were quick to deny characters any

autonomy or special salience, and even doubted their "representational potential" – to the point that rumors about "the death of the character" quickly spread in the wake of Barthes' declarations about "the death of the author". (See e.g. Barthes 1975 & 1977; Chatman 1987, 111–116; Docherty 1983, x-xiv; Fokkema 1991, 30; Hochman 2006; Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 29–31; Varis 2013, 14–16.) To quote Barthes himself (1975, 257), most of the proponents of structuralist theories do still believe that "there is not a single narrative in the world without 'characters' or at least without 'agents'" but, in their opinion, "these numerous 'agents' cannot be either described or classified in terms of 'persons'".

These two opposing views seem to lead to a theoretical deadlock since neither of them is entirely incorrect. Demonstrably, characters are artificial constructions that can, indeed, be analyzed as predicates or as classes of plot functions. At the same time, however, such abstract observations differ drastically from the ways characters are experienced by the real readers: there is no doubt that characters are discussed in a very similar manner real people are discussed (cf. Keen 2011b; Vermeule 2010), or that – across media – most characters either have or are imagined to have a human face, a human voice, a human body, and a human mind. That is, even if naturalist approaches to character are based on a specific type of realist character, they do seem to reflect a common and central facet of our engagement with many kinds of characters (cf. also Fokkema 1991; Hochman 1985).

Thankfully, since the 1980s, several prominent character researchers have sought to bridge this chasm between characters' material make-up and phenomenological presence. They have mostly accomplished this by incorporating these two seemingly incompatible approaches into theories that view characters as multifaceted, or even somewhat paradoxical. That is to say, the more recent theories have tended, in one way or another, to describe characters' "dual" or "double" nature as *both* "words and persons" (Fokkema 1991, 30; Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 31; Schneider 2001, 607; see Article 2).

James Phelan's (1989) rhetorical account is the first and certainly the most oft quoted of these multi-edged, tension-ridden character theories. It argues that characters are "composed of three components, the mimetic, thematic, and synthetic", which can further be divided into static, attribute-like "dimensions" and dynamic, plot-bound "functions" (Phelan 1989, 3, 9). The synthetic component is the most indispensable of the three, as characters are artificial constructions by definition – but more often than not, these constructions also involve "recognizable traits" that paint them as "possible people" (ibid. 2). These human-representing traits constitute the mimetic component of character, which can be more or less developed in each case. Finally, the third, thematic component becomes visible when one asks why someone would go through the trouble of composing such possible people in the first place. That is, characters typically stand for an idea, class or category – something larger and more abstract than their mimetically defined selves – and these connotative qualities comprise their thematics (ibid. 3). In the context of Phelan's theory, then, the phenomenological naturalist approaches and the reductive structuralist approaches are

both still valid, but they have focused too narrowly on single aspects of characters, whom, in fact, are almost always more complex than that. (See also Phelan & Rabinowitz 2012 for an updated summary.)

Mere two years later, Aleid Fokkema (1991) also attempted to fuse all the previous character theories together, only in the framework of semiotics and postmodern literature – whereas Phelan (1989) mostly draws on canonical realist literature. Fokkema's solution is fairly similar to Phelan's in that she also divides characters into several dimensions: following semiotic logics, she redefines characters as "signs" whose language-driven "expression plane" is linked to the "content plane" by correlative "codes" (ibid. 44, 48–52). These codes can be divided into "the denotative code" – which comprises the names and pronouns that operate on the surface level – and to "connotative codes" – which "go beyond a primary signification and contribute to giving 'content' to the sign" (ibid. 74). Some of these connotative codes – such as the logics of description, metaphor and metonymy – mostly entail literary conventions, while others are related to the "more general conventions of representation" – such as the human-like biological, psychological and social functioning of the characters (ibid. 73–75.). In conclusion, Fokkema's theory reasserts that characters are defined and formed by the interplay of their synthetic literary and their mimetic, person-like meaning potentials. Moreover, Fokkema's (1991, 188–189) analysis of her unusual target text corpus suggests that the same – indeed – holds true for many different kinds of characters: even such postmodern works that purposefully present their characters as artificial narrative constructions seem to regularly resort to at least some assumptions of illusory personhood.

Finally, at the turn of the millennium, Ralf Schneider (2001) reiterated similar thoughts in the framework of cognitive narrative theory. According to him, different narratives' textual presentation of their agents prompts the readers to build mental models, or schemata, of human-like characters. In Fokkema's (1991, 48) theory, the correspondent term for this "mental image" is an "interpretant" – "another sign" or a "schematic representation" that forms in the reader's mind. Schneider (2001, 611–613) does not believe that the processes of building and updating an idea of character are guided by elusive semiotic "codes", however, but by the readers' everyday knowledge of literary conventions, personhood and social relationships. This active interpretation of the text can, moreover, be divided into "top-down processes" – where readers fill the gaps and make inferences about the textual information based on what they already know about people and character types – and "bottom-up processes" – where the textual data is used to construct new knowledge structures or to assimilate new information into existing structures (Schneider 2001, 617–626; cf. Klimmt et al. 2006, 296.). In this framework, the character can still be viewed as an artificial composition made out of language and other signs, but the readers' interpretive cognitions and world-knowledge "add" other aspects, such as illusory human-likeness, "on top of" this textual skeleton (cf. Varis 2013).[2]

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[2]   Alan Palmer (2004) later combined this idea of mental models with postclassical narratological models of mind-representation in order to explain how the readers' minds under-

As noted above, these three views are strikingly similar in that they recognize the paradoxical, Frankensteinian nature of characters as artificial, textual constructions that the readers, nevertheless, experience as person-like (cf. Article 2, chapter 3). At the same time, however, it is important to remember that Phelan, Fokkema and Schneider all make this claim within very different theoretical frameworks. This reflects the overall state of character theory – and along with it, the academic concept of character – as perpetually scattered and fragmented.

This enduring diversity of approaches, explanations and definitions has also been noted in the literature reviews and dictionary entries about character theory. Margolin (2005, 52–57 and 2007), for instance, distinguishes between non-mimetic, semantic, cognitive and communicative character theories, whereas a recent anthology titled *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature Film and other Media* (2010) mentions hermeneutic, psychoanalytic, structuralist-semiotic, and cognitive frameworks as the most prominent schools of current character theory (Eder et al. 2010, 5). The anthology in question was edited by Schneider and two other German scholars – Fotis Jannidis and Jens Eder – who together represent the latest wave of literary character theories. Their monographs are, regretfully, not discussed in this dissertation due to the language barrier, but I take their English-language articles on cognitive character theory (Schneider 2001), character research (Jannidis 2013), and character engagement (Eder 2006) to exemplify the current – and indeed, diverse – trends in the field.

Of course, theoretical affiliations aside, literary character theories could be grouped according to various other principles as well (cf. Varis 2013, 20). Some theories are focused on classifying characters: Forster (1962, 75–85), for instance, famously coined the dichotomy between "flat", one-attribute caricatures and "round", complex, developing characters, while W. J. Harvey (1965, 52–73) speaks of "protagonists", "background characters", and other differently functional character types. By contrast, other theories have concentrated on describing how individual characters are put together. Hochman, for instance, explores different techniques of literary character presentation – including the varying levels of stylization, coherence, and closure – whereas Chatman's trait theory is perhaps the most lasting legacy of the structuralist approaches (cf. e.g. Müller 1991 & Richardson 2010). According to Chatman (1987 126–127), characters in different media are best conceptualized as "paradigms of traits", or bundles of "relatively stable or abiding personal qualities", which "account for" the characters' actions as they intersect with the syntagmatic progression of the story.

One theory – Wolfgang G. Müller's (1991) theory of *interfigurality* – even compares and classifies the intertextual relations of characters. This is essential-

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stand the "fictional minds" narrated in novels. I would consider character theories and theories of mind-representation related but separate branches of narratological inquiry, however. This is why Palmer's or his predecessor Dorrit Cohn's (1978) works are not discussed at much length in this dissertation.

ly what Müller's (1991, 101) useful coinage 'interfigurality' means: "a network of relationships that exist between literary characters of different authors and ages". Such a network is, of course, an extremely open concept, but Müller (1991) suggests that the relations it includes could be grouped to at least five categories: *internymic relationships*, or allusive names; entirely *re-used figures*; *reading protagonists* that relate to other characters self-consciously, by reading about them; *intrafigurality*, which can occur when a work features several narrative layers placed within one another; and *combinations* or *contaminations*. The final class includes character constellations that bring together characters from several works as well as characters that incorporate traits of several preceding characters within their own structure. (See Varis 2013, 37–48, Article 1 & ch. 3.1.2. for more detailed discussion.)

Another way to discern at least some tribes and trends in the scattered field of character theories is through the concepts of *medium-specificity* and *transmediality* – which, in the context of this dissertation, simply refers to theories', narratives' and narrative elements' ability to spread coherently across various media platforms (see Articles 1 & 4 and chapters 1.2.3 & 3.1.2). Aside from Chatman, who also considers film narration, every single one of the aforementioned scholars have based their character theories exclusively on literature, which is in keeping with the overall literary bias reigning over the entire body of existing narratology (cf. Ryan 2005a & 2014). Some of the theories I utilize (e.g. Müller 1991; Schneider 2001) do make claims of transmedial applicability, and some parts of most theories are usually abstract enough to be at least somewhat helpful in the analysis of all kinds of different media texts (cf. Thon 2014, 47–48), however: Article 1, for instance, transplants the gists of Hochman and Fokkema's argumentations into the context of comics studies without much difficulty (see also Varis 2013). At the same time, it is worth noting that the literary fictional material that most character theories are founded on has undoubtedly impacted their premises and conclusions. Just as realist fiction is liable to lead to a round, naturalist conception of character and postmodern fiction to a flat, structuralist conception of character, the foregrounding of verbal material has surely produced different understanding of character than what the mobilization of more multimodal research material could have provided. Had narrative theorists consumed and analyzed more visual narratives, they would likely have placed much less emphasis on things like "direct and indirect characterization" (Eder 2013) or narrative voices and "fictional minds" (Palmer 2004), and written much more on characters' faces, bodies and their relation to the story space, for instance.

As it stands, medium-specific accounts of other-than-literary characters are still few and far in between. Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (1995), which centers on similar ideas of cognitive schemata as Schneider's (2001) theory of literary characters, remains the only extensive study on character in visual storytelling. In addition, Japanese scholarship on popular culture has recently become more and more aware of the central role visual characters play in contemporary cultural practices (see Azuma

2001; Galbraith 2014, 38–45, 126–143, 152–177). Western comics studies, meanwhile, have only managed to produce a handful of article-length accounts on character (see Aldama 2010; Groensteen 2013, 121–131; McCloud 1993, 24–59 & 2006, 58–122; Mikkonen 2017, 174–200), most of which are, moreover, largely disconnected from the theoretical tradition introduced above.

One of the very reasons the present study is situated in the unlikely carrefour of character theory, cognitive narratology and comics studies is that such lacks and disconnections should be remedied. On the one hand, I hope that my transmedial application of literary character theories to graphic narratives will lay foundations for the development of new, narratologically informed but comics-specific character theory. On the other hand, my explorations demonstrate that the medium-specific peculiarities of comic book characters – particularly their visual bodies and product-like aspects – can challenge and expand the literature-based, still-narrow conception of character in ways that bring us closer to a truly transmedial understanding of characters. In this sense, the present study knowingly participates in the emergent project of transmedial or "media-conscious" narratology, which aims, first, to find those underlying core logics of narrative that function more or less similarly across different media and, second, to uncover and straighten the medium-specific biases of current theory (Ryan 2014; Thon 2014).

Following the reasoning of Marie-Laure Ryan (2005a), such transmedial viewpoints are best supported not by literary-theoretical views based on language, but by literary-theoretical views based on cognition. To borrow Fokkema's (1991) semiotic vocabulary, this is because cognitive approaches do not concentrate on the textual, necessarily medium-specific "surface structures" of texts but, rather, speculate on their "content plane", as realized in the experiences and interpretations of the readers and viewers. To also quote Schneider's (2001) ideas, the readers and viewers are free to apply the same cognitive capabilities and schemata "top-down" to any kinds of media texts and, in reverse, to feed any kinds of "bottom-up" data – words, pictures, sound, moving images, or even bodily sensations – to the same character schemata. In conclusion, since my aim is to apply mostly literature-based character theories on comics storytelling, I must prioritize cognitive approaches to characters – or, alternatively, reinterpret the theories from a cognitive viewpoint wherever possible, as I have done in Article 1. As the next subchapter will detail, I have also simultaneously endeavored to update the schema-based character theories with more embodied, enactive and experiential views on readerly cognition.

Despite these ambitions of challenging and reinterpreting existing character theories form both transmedial and cognitive angles, the present study also follows Phelan, Fokkema and Schneider's ethos of synthesis and inclusivity. That is, I do not wish to discount the insights of any of the previous character theories simply based on their theoretical frameworks or the types of research materials they handle. Although I am more interested in the transmedial and cognitive aspects than in the medium-specific formal aspects of characters, and wish to understand the workings of individual characters, rather than analyze

the structures of bigger character constellations, my aim is to embrace, not to correct or deny, the aforementioned plurality of character theories. Characters have already proven to be shifty, duplicitous creatures, so perhaps they cannot be pinned down by a singular approach at all. I have thus assumed an exploratory attitude towards character theory, and sought constancy and stability from cognitive narrative studies instead.

1.2.2 The Cognitive Instruments

The word *cognition*, simply put, refers to all kinds of thought-driven actions that sentient creatures conduct; to mental procedures and experiences that, however, have a bodily, biological basis. Reading narrative fiction is a classic example of a cognitive activity as it requires various types of mental processing: attention, perception, comprehension of language, short-term and long-term memory, conceptualization, evaluation, inference and imagination – to only list the most obvious operations. In practice, this close intertwining of narratives and cognitions means that literary scholars cannot avoid dialogue with cognitive theorists and scientists any more than they can avoid dialogue with, for example, linguists or semioticians. To refer back to the argumentation at the end of the previous subchapter, different types of media texts may be mediated by different sign systems and technologies, but narratives of all kinds are also mediated or filtered through human minds at both ends of their "life cycle": in their conception and in their reception.

What is more, upon closer inspection, the gulf between the quintessentially humanist study of narratives and the widely interdisciplinary cognitive sciences is not nearly as wide as it might initially seem: both disciplines have strived, first and foremost, for a deeper understanding of the human mind, and have shared many other interests in the course of their individual histories as well. For instance, as David Herman (2003, 6–11) notes, literary scholars and cognitive theorists of the mid-20th century, were equally fascinated by Ferdinand de Saussure's *la langue*, or the system of codes and patterns underlying language. Just as de Saussure's ideas inspired the structuralist narratologists to study the semiotic systems giving form to narratives, it had early researchers of artificial intelligence searching for "cognitively based –– narrative rule systems" (ibid. 6, 9). Literary studies simply ignored the cognitive implications of the Saussurean system – and along with them, their close kinship with cognitive studies – for several decades.

Fortunately, this does not mean that the two disciplines would have developed into completely divergent, incompatible directions ever since then. On the contrary, in the new millennium, theoretical approaches to minds and narratives have started to converge again, perhaps more closely than ever before: at the time of writing this, cognitive narrative theory has established itself as a growing branch of postclassical narratology, and the overall "research on the mind-narrative nexus" continues to evolve in the wake of the ever-new advancements in philosophy of mind, neuroscience, (social) psychology, and AI research (cf. Herman 2013; Thompson 2010, 3). So far, this evolution of cogni-

tive narrative studies can be divided roughly into two phases, tendencies or paradigms: the first wave viewed cognitions as systems of fairly isolated operations, comparable to sign languages or computer algorithms (see Caracciolo 2014b, 16–22; Herman 2003, 9–11 & 2013; Thompson 2010, 3–15), while the "second generation" now stresses the differences between organic minds and AIs by bringing cognition back to the experiencing body (see Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014; Thompson 2010). In the following, I will discuss the main implications these two paradigms have for the theorization of characters and introduce a few other cognition-based concepts that have proven helpful in dissecting the extremely complex relationships we readers form with our fictional fellow beings.

One of the most central aims of the early cognitive literary studies was to understand how perception and knowledge are structured in the readers' minds (see e.g. Palmer 2011, 158), and to this end, Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson's (1977, 36–41, 61–66) concepts of *script* and *frame* emerged as especially influential (Herman 2013). That is to say, applying the idea of *cognitive frames* or *mental models* to the interpretation of narratives has by no means been unique to Schneider's (2001) character theory but such seminal works as Monika Fludernik's *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), Manfred Jahn's and David Herman's early proposals for cognitive narratology (Herman 2013), and Alan Palmer's (2004, 2010) accounts of "fictional minds" utilize similar ideas. To clarify, the main unifying premise behind all these theories is that readers understand narratives on the basis of organized structures of stereotypical knowledge, which they maintain in their long-term memory. These mental models, cognitive frames, or schemata[3] are gradually formed and dynamically updated by real-life experiences as well as by our encounters with narrative fiction. As a result, they contain both encyclopedic world-knowledge and specialized knowledge about narrative conventions. These models, thereby, serve as a type of mental blueprints that allow the readers to recognize the entities, spaces, and events presented in the text, to fill in their implicit and (some of their) explicit gaps as well as to make predictions about their roles in the overall story. (Fludernik 1996, e.g. 17–18; Palmer 2010, 158; Schneider 2001, 611.)

To make the operation and limitations of this framework more explicit, let us discuss in a bit more detail how these schema-based theories would outline the interpretation of characters. First, the occurrence of such textual cues as a proper name or a personal pronoun typically activates the mental model – or the "base type" (Eder et al. 2010, 13) – of a '(fictional) person' in the reader's mind (Schneider 2001, 611). In some cases, especially in visual media, where the cues tend to be richer – or at least perceived in larger chunks instantaneously – the reader might also recognize the character as a prominent cultural type, such as a superhero (cf. Schneider 2001, 619–621; cf. also Kukkonen 2013a, 16–17). Once the "base type" – with its implications of personhood – and/or the idea of

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[3] I use these three terms somewhat interchangeably as any distinctions made in psychology have not been transferred into narrative studies consistently. Scripts, however, have systematically been understood as more action- or event-oriented than frames, models or schemata, and I also comply with this demarcation.

a character type – with all the mimetic and generic conventions that entails – is activated, it guides the interpretation of all the subsequent sentences or comic panels where the same character cues are repeated. As explained in the previous chapter, this type of pre-emptive inferencing is called "top-down processing". At the same time, the progression of the plot and the further descriptive details given in the text serve to "individuate" the mental-model in a "bottom-up" manner, so that a more specific idea of a personalized character is formed, piece by piece. (Palmer 2010, 157–158; Schneider 2001.) In addition, this "fleshing-up" of an individual character model may affect – again, as the result of "bottom-up" processing – the underlying, more general schemata of a prototypical 'character' or 'person', as the reader's working memory forms a feedback-loop between the memory-based input and the perceptual-semantic input derived from the text (see e.g. Baars & Gage 2014, 348, for a generally accepted model of working memory). The hierarchical organization and the cyclical functioning of the schemata dictate, in other words, that when we are reading about a character – any character – we incrementally learn more about that individual character as well as about characters – and by analogy, people – in general.

My previous work (Varis 2013 & Article 1) also leaned heavily on this idea of characters as cognitive schemata, and discussed at length the one great strength of this paradigm: that it liberates characters from the confines of the texts that give rise to them. Curiously, both naturalist theorists (e.g. Hochman 1985) and more structuralistically oriented theorists (e.g. Müller 1991) have occasionally noticed that characters are not necessarily as inseparable parts of narrative tissues as many, particularly structuralist scholars, have assumed. Instead, characters have demonstrably, at least in some sense, always spread across or wandered from text to text, from narrative to narrative and from medium to medium: the mythical gods and heroes of the Ancient Greece were already recycled and extended according to such transmedial logics (cf. ch. 3.1.2, Article 2). To quote Hochman (1985, 30–33, 72), one of the paradoxes of characters is that they are "utterly embedded" in texts, yet "radically detachable" from them.

While this phenomenon has almost become so commonplace in the face of transmedial media cultures it barely merits mentioning (see examples of Articles 1, 2 and 4), narrative theory has not arrived at a perfectly satisfactory way of explaining it as of yet. One option is to conceptualize characters as cognitive schemata; to note that as the texts "embed" the characters in their narrative and semiotic structures, they also provide the readers with the materials to construct their own ideas of the characters. These ideas – or schemata – are, of course, materially separate – or "detachable" – from the texts that evoked them, and might, moreover, be used as impulses for new texts. In other words, it could be claimed that the "synthetic" aspect of the character is always bound by its textual form and context, but that the "mimetic", interpreted schema that this artificial semiotic structure awakens is always radically unbound – capable of leaving any descriptive or prescriptive text fragments, images, and plot functions behind (cf. Article 2, Phelan 1989).

Then again, the schema-based approaches to narratives – and hence, to characters – have recently been criticized of being overly simplistic. First of all, they are based on the computational, first-generation view of the mind, which is not only cognitive but borderline *cognitivist* (cf. Herman 2013). In other words, the language of "inputs", "outputs" and "processing" makes cognitive meaning-making appear far more linear, predictable and contextless than it actually is; it disregards how fundamentally our perceptions of narratives and characters are always impacted by and embedded in various interlinked and time-pressured mental, physical, social and cultural processes (cf. Wilson 2002). To put the same thing more concisely, the first generation of cognitive narratology severs its heuristic models of character comprehension entirely from the reading consciousness, which – as we all know – actually experiences characters much more fully, emotionally, bodily and individually (cf. Thompson 2010, 3–5).

This brings us to the second part of the problem that concerns the nature of schemata more specifically: not only has empirical research found it difficult to uncover how semantic knowledge is *actually* stored in the brain (Baars & Gage 2014, 358–359) – there is still much debate about how organized or localized it is – but our cognitions related to characters also extend far beyond the semantic, representational content described by the schemata (see Caracciolo 2014b, e.g. 29–32). In this sense, the schema theories can hardly describe character engagement with any more comprehensiveness or accuracy than the structuralist trait theories can. They may highlight the fact that the readers are actively involved in teasing out the recognizable functions and attributes of the characters, but how could a model based on just functions and attributes capture all – or even most – of the unique nuances, textures and dynamics involved in just one encounter with an elegantly drawn comic book character? How could a specific facial expression and posture, rendered in a specific visual style and specific colors, framed in a specific way, from a specific perspective, in relation to a specific fictional environment, be summed with only a few abstracted "traits" or representations – mental, semiotic, or otherwise? Not to mention that these encounters are, of course, always tinted with the readers' moods and motivational stances, with the previous experiences they may have had with the same character, and with the personally meaningful associations they might draw from this developing experiential relationship (cf. Klimmt et al. 2006).

Granted, formation of theoretical models always requires liberal amounts of generalization and simplification – and our cognition constantly resorts to heuristics in general – but the computational models of the first generation simply leave out too much. For all their efforts, they are structured in a way that fails to describe the multilayered ways in which our minds actually work, just as they fail to capture the complexity and vivacity of the impressions that characters often add to the reading experiences. As a result, they leave us with disappointing creatures that never walk, talk or have wills of their own – even though readers and writers frequently report perceiving characters exactly in such a way (see Taylor et al. 2003). "The characters arrive when evoked", Forster (1962, 74) writes, "but full of the spirit of mutiny. –– They 'run away',

they 'get out of hand': they are creations inside a creation, and –– if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces ––." Thus, even if it is by no means feasible, or even worthwhile, to catalogue and analyze all the subjective, situational, perceptual and derivative facets of each character encounter, the theoretical models should at least reserve some place for these powerful forces – for the experiential and emergent meanings and processes in which the characters participate.

Grasping for these non-propositional, phenomenological reaches of the mind has been the main concern of the so-called second generation of cognitive sciences and, by extension, of the *second generation of cognitive narrative studies*. This contemporary vein of inquiry has become more or less synonymous with the so called "e-approaches" or the *4E*, which re-conceptualize the conscious mind as Enactive and Embodied as well as situationally Embedded and Extended into the environment (Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014, 261; Thompson 2010, 10–15). Together, these concepts describe the mind not as a machine-like mechanism that collects and computes symbols, but as fundamentally action-oriented and relational – a constantly unfolding consciousness that is bodily "coupled" with its surroundings. Indeed, the core premise of the first "E", *enactivism,* is that meaning is never pre-given but, rather, something that arises from the interactions between the embodied, sentient creatures and their environments – which themselves are both molded or "enacted" through these self-same interactions as well. (See e.g. Caracciolo 2014b, 18; Thompson 2010, e.g. 10–16.) In practice, then, the newer cognitive theories shine a spotlight on the sensory and motor systems as well as on the constant flow of subjective experiencing, which the earlier theories treated only as satellite functions providing input and output for the non-conscious, purely formal "cognition proper" (Thompson 2010, 6–8; Wilson 2002, 625).

Overall, if the schema theories have the power to liberate the character from the confines of the text, the e-approaches practically liberate the mind from the confines of the brain. The impact this radical shift of perspective has had on the classic Cartesian divide between the mind and the body – and, by extension, on the divide between human sentience and non-sentient matter – is nothing short of revolutionary: if our cognitions are ultimately inseparable from our actions and the physical, intersubjective environments they take place in, the human mind is no longer the crown, the master or the sole subject of the universe, but just another integral part and result of it (cf. Herman 2011b; Thompson 2010, esp. 6).

This directly affects the way texts, narratives and characters should be regarded in literary-critical research practice. As described above, the schema theories of the first generation position texts as passive objects to be "processed", so that the meanings inherent in them could be translated into the symbolic "language" of cognition and transferred into the brain. According to e-approaches, however, conscious creatures do not observe things or environments objectively, "as they really are", but relationally, in terms of their subjective functionality and *affordances* – that is, in terms of the "action potentials"

they provide for the embodied sentient creature in question (Nagy & Neff 2015; Wilson 2002, 631). In this paradigm, then, the textual matter is not only a target of analysis but an action-enabling environment, in which the reader's cognition is extended and embedded, and where it operates based on the prospects arising from the dynamic, situational contact between the two. The common experience of characters as person-like is thus not dependent solely on specific sign constructions or on the cognitive capabilities of the human reader but is likely to emerge *between* them, as a result of their "species-typical" affordances and interactions: seeing as they are traces or extensions of their human creators' cognitions, most texts "want to" evoke experiences of human-like creatures, and the human readers are usually well-equipped and eager to make use of this meaning potential (see chapter 3 for more details).

Additionally, second-generation theories emphasize that reading is a much more bodily and multisensory process than previous approaches have recognized. That is, we relate to characters and understand their actions not only through the kind of speech-driven mind-(re)presentation Dorrit Cohn (1978), Alan Palmer (2004) and many other narratologists have investigated but also through the embodied understanding of such expressive devices as "kinesthetic language", "consciousness enactment triggers" and conceptual metaphors (see e.g. Caracciolo 2014b, 56–60, 125–129; Kukkonen 2013a, 143–150; 2013b, 24–25, 129–130 & 2014; Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014). Indeed, Karin Kukkonen (2014) argues that our conceptual and inferential thinking – including the filling-in of the informational gaps and the thematic, "cultural and social dimensions" of our interpretations – build on, and gain urgency and relevance, from the deeper, embodied experiences evoked by reading. More specifically, these embodied reading experiences consist of the "emotional appraisals" of the actions performed and the conditions endured by the only (imaginatively) embodied elements that occur in narratives: the characters (cf. ibid.).

These suggestions of embodied reading are supported by initial empirical findings of the so-called *mirror neuron systems*, which seem to fire both when a macaque monkey performs a certain action and when it observes someone else to perform the same action (Baars & Gage 2014, 451; Kukkonen 2014, 369, Vermeule 2010, 39–40). Whether these systems can be found in human brains is still somewhat controversial, but it would stand to reason that reading about an experience would activate at least some of the same cortical areas – or that a symbolic presentation of an experience would have some of the same affordances – as experiencing the same thing first-hand. Every avid reader surely has plenty of introspective evidence of such "decoupled" "off-line processing" (see e.g. Vermeule 2010, 17–20); of how the things we read about resonate not only with our propositional world-knowledge but also with the qualitative *feel* of our past experiences.

This Experiential aspect of narratives – a fifth "E" – has been studied and theorized especially closely by Marco Caracciolo (2014b), whose model also recognizes the central, mediating role characters play in evoking these "story-driven experiences". Indeed, even though characters can in some contexts be

perceived as fairly stable and "object-like" entities (ibid. 31) – particularly in their role as brands and products – we also experience them, and especially "through" them in such dynamic and subjective ways that cannot be reduced into traits or images – or equated with simulacra that could be reproduced or copyrighted (cf. the different viewpoints of Articles 3 & 4). In Caracciolo's (2014b, 116–117) terms, characters tend to "express" a consciousness – by inner monologue, a speech bubble, or a communicative gesture, for example – and so, we readers interpret them as conscious entities capable of having similar embodied, subjective experiences we ourselves do. Indeed, throughout our lives, we accumulate entire fleshly libraries of experiences – "experiential backgrounds" – (ibid. 55–60) which allow us to "enact" (aspects of) characters' experiences as the expressive devices of texts call them – or rather, "traces" of them – forth from memory (ibid. 124–127). When these two cognitive operations – the attribution of an imaginary mind to a character and the text-prompted enactment of experiential traces – coincide, the readers can imagine and understand what the character is "going through" in a more or less embodied manner (ibid. 122–124).

While the experiential side of this model is a new and characteristically "second-generation" addition to the toolkit of cognitive narrative theory[4], the idea that readers attribute minds to characters has already been studied quite extensively, under the rubric of the *theory of mind* (or *ToM*). In terms of cognitive neuroscience, the theory of mind module, first introduced in 1995 by Simon Baron-Cohen, is a complex repertoire of social cognitions that allows over 4-year-old, developmentally normal humans to infer that their fellow humans have mental states and intentions similar to – but separate from – their own (Baars & Gage 2014, 449). Similar mechanisms have also been found in some other primates and mammals, but the operative details of this evolutionary cognitive capability are still unclear (Baars & Gage 2014, 449). Thus, over the past two decades, philosophers and cognitive theorists have puzzled back and forth over whether the theory of mind is, indeed, an intuitive theory – a stance known as *theory theory* – or a form of empathetic mental simulation – a stance known as *simulation theory*. This dilemma has left many assuming that it may actually be a bit of both: perhaps we have an inkling that other creatures are sentient and hence try to imaginatively "step into their shoes"? (Smith 1995, 95–106; Vermeule 2010, 35.)

Whatever the case may be, theory of mind has already proven to be a useful concept for cognitive narrative theory: literary scholars like Lisa Zunshine (2006, 2008), Blakey Vermeule (2010) and Alan Palmer (2004, 2010) have all argued convincingly that readers are inclined to apply the same folk-psychological skills to real and fictional individuals and groups alike. In other words, at least one of the mechanisms that make characters appear person-like

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[4]   Character theorist W. J. Harvey (1965) proposed that we understand characters by drawing on "analogous patterns" in our own life-experiences years before anybody had even thought of cognitive literary studies, however, which goes to show how central characters really are for this line of inquiry (see also Hochman 1985, 38–40).

– or what makes characters characters – is that we subject them to the theory of mind and other assumptions related to human psychology (cf. Mar & Oatley 2008, 182; Zunshine 2008, 57–75). This is quite commensurate with Fokkema's (1991, 75) idea of a connotative "psychological code" introduced in the previous subchapter.

Some of the theorists have taken this intertwining of narrative and social cognition as an indication that our interest in fiction is profoundly – or even exclusively – social. Vermeule (2010, e.g. 52–75), for example, suggests that the very reason we care about fictional characters at all is that they furnish us with heuristic social knowledge (see ch. 3.2.2.). This, according to her, explains why "the most famous literary characters are the most Machiavellian": Sherlock Holmes, for instance, has become the most adapted character of all time because he practically demonstrates to the adoring audiences how skillful mind-reading works in practice (ibid.; Zunshine 2006, 138–141). In the same vein, recent empirical studies (esp. Kidd & Castano 2013) have propounded that reading fiction is like going to a "mental gym" (Zunshine 2006, 123–128) – and that the cultural value of fictional narratives and characters thus lies in their ability to improve our empathy and other social capabilities (cf. Mar & Oatley 2008).

In my view, these narrow, overly instrumentalizing perspectives on narratives and characters are best consumed with a sizable grain of salt, however (see also Mäkelä 2013). While understanding the mental and textual mechanisms that coax the reader into applying theory of mind to textual constructions seems like a promising starting point for understanding the readers' engagement with characters, this mind-reading practice can hardly be the be-all-and-end-all of these complex and idiosyncratic processes. Rather, I would maintain, in the spirit of e-approaches, that the relationships between characters and readers depend on the affordances arising from their contact. The formation of these affordances, in turn, involves such diverse variables as the synthetic, mimetic and thematic features of the character, the whims, capabilities and experiential background of the reader, and the duration and context of their contact. Furthermore, as Articles 3 and 4 aim to demonstrate, there are many things the readers can do with the characters: reading and learning are not their only affordances, but multimodal fictional figures also offer themselves for imaginative play, self-expression and speculation – speculation that can even try to reach beyond the human social domains. Thus, the question "Why do we care about literary characters?" (cf. Vermeule 2010) must have numerous possible answers, and mapping them all must require much more open-minded starting hypotheses – and highly interdisciplinary methods.

Indeed, cognitive narratology is by no means the only discipline that concentrates on investigating the reception of art, entertainment and narratives. Many of the above-mentioned theorists readily recognize the pioneering work conducted by the *reader response theorists*, particularly Wolfgang Iser, in the late 1900s (see e.g. Caracciolo 2014b; Kukkonen 2014; Palmer 2011, 157). Their legacy has been equally important to the contemporary *reception studies* and to the emergent field of *fandom studies*. These two disciplines also tend to explore the

same receptive and interpretive processes that interest cognitive literary studies, but they generally place more emphasis on multimodal and transmedial fictions as well as on the empiric study of actual fans (see Article 4). In addition, different veins of *psychology* have studied literary fiction, mass entertainment and their possible effects on human minds and relationships from numerous angles, mostly with empiric methods (see e.g. Cohen 2006; Klimmt et al. 2006; Mar & Oatley 2008 for examples). As a result, all these fields have developed whole tangles of terms and concepts to address what they unanimously deem one of the most important facets of narrative engagement across media: the reflective, simulative and emotive connections that form between the characters and audience members.

To start with the broadest of these concepts, the idea of *parasocial interactions* – which can lead to long-lasting *parasocial relationships* – was first introduced in the 1950s, when sociologist Donald Horton and psychiatrist Richard Wohl suggested that listeners might respond to chatty, friendly radio hosts in similar ways they respond to their actual friends (Giles 2010, 444–445; Klimmt et al. 2006, 291–292). The subsequent empirical and theoretical studies conducted around the concept in various different countries have since established, with reasonable certainty, that especially repeated and regular encounters with real or fictional media personas can, indeed, produce an illusion of social intimacy with them. This means that fictional figures can become, at least in a cognitive sense, part of our social networks. Moreover, this formation of parasocial relationships appears to be linked to heightened enjoyment and to more thorough cognitive processing of the media content that features the familiar character. According to some tentative studies, this type of deep processing may also result into different priming effects on the viewers' moods and attitudes. The probability of such effects occurring increases when the viewer or the reader perceives the persona as "attractive", admirable or a desirable target of affiliation in some other sense – for instance, due to perceived similarity. In conclusion, people may, at least temporarily, take on the moods and perspectives of the characters they like, and modify their media consumption habits according to their individual responses to different media figures (Giles 2010; Klimmt et al. 2006; see also Keen 2007; Mar & Oatley 2008.)

Examining parasocial interactions in any holistic, experiential sense is extremely difficult, however, because – again – the individual qualities of the viewers, the individual qualities of the media figures and the variables of the reception situation all factor in these processes in extremely subtle, intermingled and dynamic ways. Furthermore, the native psychological research on the phenomenon is still too "spotty" and too fragmented along the lines of different approaches and localities for the concept to be easily transferrable into frameworks of other disciplines. (Klimmt et al. 2006.) For the purposes of the present dissertation, the research on parasociality has also been much too focused on audiovisual entertainment: to my knowledge, no studies have examined the continued relations between readers and comic book characters as of yet, even though the seriality of some of the most traditional publishing formats enable

the same kind of regular contact as, for instance, weekly soap operas do (cf. Varis 2013, 73–74; Versaci 2007, 21–24). Overall, due to the complexity of parasocial relationships and the tentativeness of our academic understanding of them, it may be easier to approach reader-character engagements through some of the sub-mechanisms that apparently contribute to them.

These sub-mechanisms comprise, for instance, the widely studied psychological and philosophical constructs known as sympathy and empathy (see ch. 3.2.1). *Sympathy* generally means feeling for, or reacting to, another person's feelings, needs and situations from an acentral, third-person point of view (Coplan 2004). Murray Smith (1995) argues, moreover, that sympathy is the primary mode for engaging with film characters, and that it includes several discrete substructures, like the epistemological *alignment* – which is affected by the type and degree of access audience is given to characters' thoughts and actions – as well as the ethical *allegiance* – which encompasses audience members' moral evaluations of characters. *Empathy*, meanwhile, is closer akin to the imaginative simulation of experiences described by Caracciolo (2014b, 129–132): it connotes perspective-taking and a first-person emotional stance, or "central" experiences of seeing and feeling "with" the target individual (Coplan 2004; Keen 2007 and 2011a).

According to Jonathan Cohen (2006), another sub-mechanism of parasocial relationships could be constituted by the character-associated term one most often hears outside academic contexts: *identification*. In casual usage, the meaning of the word is often clear enough: when we find a character identifiable, we make a positive emotive association with it. What it actually is that we "identify" in the characters who evoke this fuzzy feeling is very unclear, however. Do these characters remind us genuinely and accurately of ourselves, of human condition in general – or does the perception of sameness perhaps involve some degree of unrealistic wish fulfillment (cf. Cohen 2006; Eder 2006; Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. 2013; White et al. 2017)? Could the reader, at least in some cases, not really identify with the character itself but with the situation it is in, or with the role, group or stereotype it embodies or represents (Keen 2007, 94–95)?

The phenomenological structure of identification is also quite vague. Does this reflection or attraction – whatever it is – necessitate or facilitate some degree of immersion, transportation into the storyworld or experiential enactment of the character's mind (cf. Caracciolo 2014b, Cohen 2006)? Some empirical film studies indicate that immersive effects may actually be stronger when the character is regarded from a sufficient "aesthetic distance" (Mar & Oatley 2008, 181), so perhaps an identifiable character must also have some foreign qualities or be placed in an unusual situation (cf. also Caracciolo 2016; Keen 2007 & 2011a; McCloud 1993, 36)? In sum, the word "identification" has been thrown around in different contexts so haphazardly it has become impossible to discern whether it is more of a self-reflective or a fannish reaction, a sympathetic or an empathetic process, or some mixture of all of these and more (Smith 1995, 1–9). Like parasocial interaction, identification seems to refer to a very complex phenomenon, but it has been researched even less – with somewhat inconclusive results

(cf. Cohen 2006). Many narrative scholars thus believe it should be discarded altogether (Coplan 2004, 147; Smith 2010, 254), or left for the consideration of psychologists (Jannidis 2013; Keen 2007, 93).

Jens Eder (2006) suggests that this hazy "globalness" of terms like "identification" could be sidestepped by studying audiences' perceived *closeness* to characters instead. This coinage suffers from similar theoretical bluntness as the models it aims to replace, however: although Eder himself draws a clear chart of what "closeness" might entail, it is ultimately an untested umbrella term, whose exact meaning is not only blurred by the casual use of the word but whose proposed contents are also subject to academic debate. In order to be comprehensive, the model could still be amended with the readers' moral evaluations of characters (cf. Smith's allegiance), and with some notion on the relationships characters have to each other both intra- and intertextually (see ch. 3.1.2), for instance. For these reasons, parasocial interaction, identification and closeness to characters are acknowledged as possible viewpoints to – or, indeed, components of – character engagement, but left mostly on the background of this study.

I have been similarly wary of the diverse terminology developed by fans. Although I am aware of, and even fascinated by coinages like *headcanon*[5] – which refers to longstanding, personal, non-canonical beliefs audience members entertain of characters and storyworlds – incorporating them properly into academic discourse would require much more theoretical groundwork than I have been able to contribute here. It is my belief, however, that understanding the workings of fictional characters, and especially our relations to them, requires more eclectic methods than any of the previous studies have employed – and bringing the viewpoints of cognitive psychology, literary studies and fandom studies together might well be a way forward. I have dabbled with such an approach in Article 4, which utilizes the findings of some fandom and reader studies (e.g. Hirsjärvi 2009; Manninen 1995; Scott 2015), albeit in an admittedly limited fashion. Although the transmedial preoccupations of fan studies would, in general, have been a better fit to my research materials than the literature-oriented cognitive narrative studies, the theoretical rigor of the latter field offered a much more solid basis for my largely theoretical, even speculative research questions and topics. Incorporating the still-scattered, mostly empirical insights of fan studies into these theoretical builds in any systematic way would have required an extra step and, possibly, interdisciplinary collaboration.

Overall, as mentioned earlier, the paradigm of cognitive narrative studies is the point of departure that I have taken most for granted; it provides the instruments for dissecting and reassembling the character theories, rather than vice versa. Thus, one of the basic presuppositions behind all articles is that the raw materials of fictional characters contain at least as much cognition as textual data – not to mention that interacting with the characters in any way always entails cognitive action. In accordance to e-approaches, I do not wish to posit characters as the static, schematic, disembodied "results" of these processes,

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[5]   https://fanlore.org/wiki/Headcanon

however. Instead, I will suggest in chapter 3 that they live and unfold *in* these processes, as indelibly open, incomplete and unstable.

To reiterate one of the points made at the end of the previous subchapter, the main reason the cognitive paradigm is given such primacy in the context of this study is that it allows seaming all the other key elements together. In my experience, there are still plenty of literary scholars who foster deep suspicions towards the cognitive paradigm. Supposedly, they fear that the long traditions of humanist narratology will eventually be completely supplanted by methods and ideals borrowed from natural sciences. For most cognitively oriented narrative scholars, the cognitive concepts and premises are merely an appendix to narrative studies, however: they only provide a new, alternative perspective from which the same human-crafted topics and theories can be re-evaluated. If classical narratology sees language as the stuff that narratives, meanings and characters are made of, cognitive approaches simply take one more step back – or, perhaps, to the side – in order to peek at the meaning-making systems behind and beyond sign systems (cf. Ryan 2005a). On this level of abstraction, transcending different material borders – such as the boundaries between different media, or the boundaries between real-life and imaginary social engagements – becomes much more plausible. On the level of cognition, in other words, it makes sense to draw analogies between real and fictional people, and to apply literary character theories to characters in comics.

In his 2013 overview of cognitive narratology, David Herman also remarks on the diversity of corpora cognitive approaches are able to grasp, and attributes this methodological flexibility to the "cross-disciplinary nature" of the field. What is more, he names both transmedial approaches and further research on fictional characters and characterization among the focal areas that cognitive narratology should target in the near future – and it seems to me, as it ever did to Frankenstein, that the future is now. The next subchapter will roughly outline the context of comics, where both character theories and cognitive approaches had to be submerged for the purposes of the articles.

1.2.3 The Vat of Graphic Narratives

If characters in literary narratives can already be considered to have a strange "dual nature" (see ch. 1.2.1), fictional existence only gets more complicated in the collage-like semiotic environments of comics, or "graphic narratives" (cf. Eisner 2008, [1996])[6]. This is because – like characters, who are both illusory persons and narrative constructs – comics are also a species of man-made hybrids: an art of unlimited juxtapositions, and a medium of margins and in-betweens (cf. Hatfield 2005; McCloud 1993).

Even the history of comics defies single, clear-cut interpretations as graphic narration is a very old – and relatively old-fashioned – yet a characteristically

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[6]   I use Will Eisner's coinages "graphic narrative" (2008, [1996]) and "sequential art" (1993, [1985]) as frequent synonyms for the more readily recognizable term "comics" throughout the work, due to their preferable connotations.

modern phenomenon. On the one hand, communicating in pictures has been practiced around the world since the prehistoric times: cave paintings and temple murals of various extinct cultures already told stories through stylized image sequences, while Egyptian hieroglyphs and (some of the) Chinese and Japanese idiograms exemplify the venerable "pictographic" form of writing (cf. Danesi 2017, 5–9; Manninen 1995, 12; McCloud 1993, 10–15). On the other hand, the comics we know and read today – popular, character-driven stories that utilize their own "medium-specific modes" of expression – are products of post-19th-century print cultures and mass media markets (Herkman 1996, 12–15; Kukkonen 2011, 43; Sabin 1996, 11–25; see also Lynch 1998).

The honorary title of the "first comic book superstar" has been claimed by the humorous workman hero Ally Sloper, who was created in England in 1867 by Charles H. Ross, and drawn by various other artists since then (Sabin 1996, 15). Fairly soon after Sloper's commercial success, professor Georges Colomb, or "Christophe", gave the French their premier comic book characters, the Cornouillet and the Fenouillard families, and the first American comic book character, the still-beloved Yellow Kid, was drawn to life by Richard F. Outcault only some years later, in 1895 (Herkman 1996 12–13; Manninen 1995, 12–21). Ally Sloper and the Yellow Kid also inspired extensive lines of fan products, thus establishing the enduring idea that successful multimodal characters must serve not only narrative and readerly but also commercial ends (cf. Article 4; Sabin 1996, 15–20).

The visual prowess that made comics so marketable in the 1800s has since been outdone many times over, however, and both audiovisual and digital media have gone mainstream in a way comics never did: television was the focal point of every bourgeois family room for decades, whereas the contemporary media landscape is dominated by the internet and its unique social affordances (cf. Manninen 1995, 56–80; Nagy & Neff 2015). This has given multimodal character franchises more pressures as well as more opportunities to spread and reinvent themselves across different platforms, although comics as a medium has remained something of a subculture – a haven for children, geeks, otakus, and other alternative and non-hegemonic groups (see e.g. Galbraith 2014; Hatfield 2005; Manninen 1995 Pustz 1999).[7]

From another perspective, comics can also be seen as a vital hub for the globalizing, transmedializing *convergence culture*: they provide a quickly evolving and quickly reacting open arena, where different streams of literary, visual and transmedial tropes, influences, characters and narratives can intersect (Jen-

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[7] *Otaku* is the Japanese counterpart to the Western *geek*: both words have for long been used pejoratively, to marginalize "socially dysfunctional men", who spend more time consuming popular culture than pursuing more acceptable social activities. As the general trends of convergence culture and transmedia have progressed, both words have started to gain more and more neutral and even positive connotations, however. This is likely because media fandoms have started to gain certain cultural capital online and want to define themselves as legitimate subcultures now. (Galbraith 2014, 3; Konzack 2006.) Manninen (1995), for his part, has explored the subversive functions comics have served in children's culture. For more information on alternative and underground comics, see e.g. Hatfield (2005) and Sabin (1996).

kins 2006, see Articles 1& 4). One of the main factors enabling this intermediary position is that comics is, for the most part, a semiotically and culturally defined medium, uncharacterized and unlimited by any technological features (Ryan 2014, 26): in essence, anything that can be expressed in two-dimensional space can be put in a comic. What is more, the creation of comics is more readily accessible to everyone than the production of most other art forms: anyone who can draw stick figures, or even add dialogue on ready-made clip-art images, can make a simple yet effective comic strip – as the massive popularity of such webcomics as Ryan North's visually repetitive *Dinosaur Comics*, Randal Munroe's minimalistic *xkcd,* or Kris Wilson and his co-creators' politically incorrect *Cyanide and Happiness* prove.

Materially speaking, comics are, of course, an offshoot of the predominantly verbal print media, which likely explains the close, two-way connections that have always existed between comics storytelling and the older, literary traditions of narration. In terms of "import", long-running series and publishing lines like *Classics Illustrated* (1941–1971), *Manga Shakespeare* (2007–2009) and DC Comics' Vertigo (1993–) have adapted, appropriated, satirized and popularized literary works and characters for more than half a century (Versaci 2007, 182–210; see chapter 1.3 and Article 1). In terms of "export", comics have increasingly found their way from corner stores to bookstores. This fairly recent development could probably be credited to at least three things: first, to the coinage of the new marketing term "graphic novel"; second, to the emergence of new genres – such as autobiographical comics, metafictional fantasy comics (see ch. 1.3), and grittier, more "grown-up" superhero stories – and third, to the increasing cross-pollination of influences, which has, in turn, been enabled by globalizing media markets and the formation of comics canons. Many of the contemporary artists stand on the shoulders of the three giants published in the late 1980s: Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* (1986–1987), and Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer-prize-winning *Maus* (1980–1991). These works finally convinced the mainstream audiences that comics are suitable for – and even highly effective at – telling long stories focused on serious subject matters. (Camus 2015; Herkman 1996, 22; Hescher 2016, 12–25; Round 2010; Sabin 1996, 160–215; Versaci 2007, 9–11, 30, 35–41.)

At the same time, comics are a "predominantly visual medium" that has not only learned from literary storytelling but also incorporates the visual conventions of media forms many decades its junior, particularly the iconographies, framings, and angles of cinematic storytelling (Manninen 1995, 14; Thon 2014, 49). The relation between comics and audiovisual media is also a two-way street, however: since publishing comics is fairly cost-effective, they serve as an important test market for the larger, slower transmedia markets. That is, if something is a hit as a comic, the same stories, characters and visual designs are relatively safe and easy to translate into more expensive film, game, or TV series productions (cf. Galbraith 2014, 55–63). The superheroes owned by the two American comics-publishers-turned-multimedia-giants, the Disney-owned Marvel Entertainment and Time Warner's DC Entertainment, have practically

become text-book examples of strategic, multibillion-dollar transmedia franchising (see Article 4 & Harvey 2015).

As for the overlaps between graphic narration and digital media, the internet has been able to introduce comics to entirely new readerships through such platforms as comics blogs and online reading services. In addition, the new digital environments and tools have created opportunities for formal, expressive and communicative experimentation: the screen functions as a scrollable, "infinite" canvas, .gif file formats can add subtle movement inside the frames, hyperlinks make divergent story paths easy to create and follow, and some online comics even feature background music (cf. McCloud 2000; 2009). At the same time, many internet-originated communication forms, such as viral picture memes and emojis, are heavily influenced by the semiotic logics established by comics storytelling (cf. Danesi 2017, 2, 125–137).

This points towards another reason that makes comics so open to cross-media exchange: their *multimodality*. Even though wordless comics also exist – and some, like Shaun Tan's *Arrival* (2006) or Mashashi Tanaka's *Gon* (1991–2002), are considered masterful – the juxtaposition and interplay of words and images has been widely regarded as one of the medium's defining characteristics (see e.g. Hatfield 2005, 36–41; Herkman 1998, 48–61; Kukkonen 2011; Saraceni 2003, 5). To put the same thing a bit more accurately, comics – even wordless comics – always mix and match several different visual logics of signification, or images of different abstraction levels. Otherwise realistically portrayed storyworlds might become warped by *speed lines*, when characters move quickly through the story space, or different *indexical effects*, such as hearts and sweat drops, may underline the characters' mental states if the drawing style is not caricaturistic enough to make them otherwise apparent (cf. Herkman 1998, 44–47, 84–87; Varis 2013, 88–102). At the very least, the visual flow of graphic storytelling is always organized and interrupted by *frames* and *gutters* – lines and blank spaces that divide the pages into *panels* (see e.g. Herkman 1998, 95–103; Saraceni 2003, 7–9).

Mixing these differently stylized and differently functional signs together allows graphic storytelling to stretch and blur the limits between verbal and pictorial logics: textual elements can gain a physical, spatial presence in comics' storyworlds, and images, by contrast, can be stylized to the point where they become symbol-like (see e.g. Danesi 2017, 12–15; Herkman 1998, 50–52: Kukkonen 2011, 37; McCloud 1993, 24–59; Saraceni 2003, 18–27; Varis 2013, 91). Will Eisner (1993 [1985], e.g. 92), one of the first "graphic novelists", was known for "setting the mood" for his stories with elaborate, evocative title designs, for instance, and such prominent works as Jeff Smith's *Bone* (1991–2004) and Dave Sim's *Cerebus* (1977–2004) have played with inserting extremely simplified, cartoony protagonists into otherwise minutely and realistically rendered storyworlds. Mismatching different styles and semiotic logics in this manner typically frustrates any easy distinctions between the physical and the abstract, the objective and the subjective, even the diegetic and the extradiegetic domains (see ch. 3.1.1 & Article 3). Interestingly, this reflects the way second-generation

cognitive approaches dismantle the Cartesian dichotomy between the fleshly, non-sentient bodies and the unseen cognitive activities: if enactivism emphasizes the intertwining of mind and matter, comics concretize this phenomenological unity by packaging everything – the intangible thoughts and voices as well as the tangible bodies and objects – onto the two-dimensional picture plane (cf. Herman 2011b; Varis 2013, 88–102; Article 3; ch. 3.1.1.). Just as a sentient being cannot step outside its own flow of consciousness, a print comic cannot communicate anything outside the visual flow of the page.

In other words, all graphic expression is ultimately based on two fundamental elements whose affordances to seeing, able-handed humans are so many and flexible they are difficult to classify, enumerate, or even describe systematically: the line and the page. Indeed, comics theorist Thierry Groensteen (2007, 3–7) has argued that breaking the pictorial narration of comics down into minimal signifying units is ultimately "useless", because the expressive, hand-drawn lines can look like anything and everything. They are not tied to predetermined sets of alphabets or grammars like verbal expression, nor do they capture the world with the ease and accuracy of photographic media (cf. McCloud 1993, 118–126). Instead, each line is a choice of stylization – an opportunity for the artist to include and foreground all the details they deem important, and exclude whatever is not necessary (Varis 2013, 30–31).

Of course, these choices of stylization also show in and have certain consequences for comic book characters, whose appearances are just as diverse and individual as the lines that form them (cf. McCloud 1993, 52–53). For literary scholars, stylization has mostly meant deviating from the norms of mimesis or resorting to types and clichés – which, of course, can only generate either unrealistic, "caricaturistic grotesques" or flat, uninteresting stock characters (Hochman 1985, 89–97). Indeed, both over-the-top personas and simple, typified figures are often described – disparagingly – as "cartoonish" across different media (cf. Lynch 1998, 2–3). It is important to note, however, that the "realism" of the characters' appearances does not necessarily correlate with the level of realism involved in the characters' narrative construction or with the level or realism experienced by the reader (Herkman 1998, 37). Numerous autobiographical comics from *Maus* to Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000) and Craig Thompson's *Blankets* (2003) have used minimalistic visual styles to recount the fates and feelings of very real individuals. What is more, many of these artists may have opted for extreme visual stylization intentionally, as it helps to create distance between the real narrating "I" and the depicted, narrated "I". In addition, overtly hand-crafted images express and foreground individual, emotional "truths" instead of the objective everyday "truths" shown in newspapers and TV news casts. (Varis 2013, 152–159; Versaci 2007, 34–104.)

Scott McCloud has even (1993, 28–54) suggested that comics' artistic inclusion and exclusion of individually chosen shapes, textures, details and moments (cf. Eisner 1993 [1985]) allows "amplification through simplification", which may even enhance "viewer-identification". His reasoning is that when the characters are simple enough, they become universal enough for the readers to pro-

ject their own feelings and personalities: the faces of extremely cartoonish characters are like masks that match to the features of any human and could thus be imaginatively worn by anybody. No empirical evidence corroborates this theory to date but there are hints of similar reasoning in the Japanese scholarship, where simplified and exaggerated facial features are considered to trigger the feeling of *moe* or *kyara-moe*, "an affectionate response to fictional characters" (Azuma 2001, 39–47; Galbraith 2014, 4–7).

Since the endless options offered by stylization makes the pictorial content inside the panels so fluid and chaotic, many theorists have preferred to approach comics' systems of signification "from on high" (Groensteen 2007, 5), by observing the macro-structures – the *compositions*, *breakdowns* or *mise-en-pages* that give rhythm and structure to the visual flow (Hatfield 2005, 41–58; Kukkonen 2011, 41). Much study has been devoted to observing how the transitions from panel to panel signal shifts in point of view, passage of time or change of scene (cf. Cohn 2007, 65–89; McCloud 1993, 60–93). This may be because the logics of time and space are also somewhat different – somewhat more hybridized – in comics than in other media. Despite the superficial resemblance, comic panels are not like filmstrips: they do not necessarily depict frozen moments from singular points of view but can just as well encompass multiple points in time, or multiple subjective and objective perspectives simultaneously (Groensteen 2013, 121–131; Hatfield 2005, 52–58; Kukkonen 2013a, 127–176; McCloud 1993, 94–117; Mikkonen 2008; Thon 2014). In addition, the panels do not only link to each other temporally, in a way that tells a story, but also spatially, in ways that form a-temporal visual and thematic structures. Thierry Groensteen (2007) has given (the study of) these different relations an aptly anatomical name: *arthrology*, or the study of joints (cf. Hatfield's "tensions" (2007), ch. 3).

Understanding this alchemy of lines, signs, empty spaces and compositions has, of course, been the main objective of comics scholarship that has slowly started to emerge – again – *between* different academic fields and *between* different comics cultures over the past few decades. Until the late 1990s, developing and promoting deeper understanding of comics had largely rested on the shoulders of historians (e.g. Sabin 1996) and educators (Hatfield 2005, 33–34). The first Finnish dissertation on comics – Pekka A. Manninen's *Vastarinnan välineistö: Sarjakuvaharrastuksen merkityksiä*[8] (1995) – was also based largely on pedagogic and sociologic interests.

The semiotic and cognitive questions, which now preoccupy most comics theorists (cf. Hescher 2016, 30–31; Kukkonen 2013b, 124–130), were actually first introduced by practitioners: comics artists Will Eisner (1993 [1985]; 2008 [1996]) and Scott McCloud (1993; 2000; 2006). Their pioneering works may read as unabashed celebrations of the possibilities of comics expression, but they also suggested tentative terms and classifications for different signs types and their functions, which quickly inspired academic semioticians (e.g. Groensteen 2007; 2013) and media researchers (Herkman 1998) to develop similar models. Apply-

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[8]   The title translates roughly as: "Tools of Resistance: The Significance of Comics as a Hobby".

ing Charles S. Peirce's triad of *iconic, indexical and symbolic signs* has been especially popular, as some of comics' elements clearly bear visual likeness to real-life referents, while others – like sound effects and emotive effects – rely either on causal or metonymic continuity, or on more conventionalized, culture-specific knowledge (cf. e.g. Cohn 2013, 18–20; Herkman 1998, 64–67; Saraceni 2003, 15).

McCloud (1993, e.g. 60–69) has been criticized for his confusing use of this classic semiotic terminology (Varis 2013, 90–91) but it could be argued that his main interests lie elsewhere: he underlines, rather, the concept of *closure,* which refers to the active interpretation and inference the reader must perform in order to make sense of the stylized images and the panel transitions. This laid the foundations for cognitive comics studies, which have since been developed empirically by Neil Cohn (2013) and theoretically by Karin Kukkonen (2013a; 2013b; see also Varis 2013). More recently, the emergence of transmedial narratology (see Kukkonen 2011; Ryan 2014) has also started to increase literary scholars' and narrative theorists' interest in comics (see e.g. Mikkonen 2017).

Although many comics scholars have learned to see this interdisciplinary diversity of the field as a strength, rather than a weakness (cf. e.g. Jenkins 2013), the multinational nature of comics cultures and comics research continues to pose practical problems: much is lost in translation between Anglophonic, Francophonic and Japanese comics studies communities. This is why the present dissertation employs primarily Anglophonic comics studies and targets, accordingly, the Anglo-American *graphic novel:* contemporary English-language graphic narratives, whose plotlines arch beyond single 24-page comic books and strive for "novel-like" formal complexity as well as "seriousness" of subject matter (cf. Hescher 2016, 32–38; Round 2010, 14–15; see ch. 1.3). There is still some academic controversy over the exact definitions of the overlapping categories of "comics", "graphic novels" and graphic narratives" (see e.g. Baetens 2001; Camus 2015; Hescher 2016; McCloud 1993, 6–9), but I use these terms more or less interchangeably. This is because my target texts fit quite unproblematically in each of these categories, and because my research focuses on a feature that all these categories share: graphic stories of all kinds present multimodal characters, almost without exception.

There are, however, some culture- and genre-specific distinctions I have strived to remain sensitive to: Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* and Japanese *manga*, for instance, are products of different industrial dynamics and modes of consumption than the English-language comics (Hescher 2016, 26–29; Manninen 1995, 14–30). Hence, they also feature unique visual conventions – such as the simplistic *ligne claire* (or *klare lijn*) style popularized by Hergé (see e.g. Hatfield 2005, 60–61) – and indigenous character types – such as the hugely lar "magical girls" (*mahou shoujo*) that save the world and sell the toys in Japan, in place of the hyper-masculine superheroes of the West (see e.g. Galbraith 2014). These or other culture-specific features are not discussed too closely in any part of the dissertation, but my knowledge of various different comics cul-

tures has surely helped to throw the typical features of the Anglo-American graphic novel into starker relief.

In terms of theoretical frameworks and affiliations, the still-embryonic cognitive lineage of comics studies offers an obvious point of contact to my other, previously introduced starting points, and my methodology builds primarily on the works of Kukkonen (see ch. 1.4.1). However, as with the character theories (see ch. 1.2.1), I believe that even the comics scholarship that is not explicitly cognitive can well be approached and utilized from the macro-frame of cognitive premises (see ch. 1.2.2 & ch. 1.4.1). Thus, I have incorporated insights from studies that examine comics from various different perspectives.

The previous subchapters have also touched on the reasons why comics are a vital part of this dissertation: their main role is to challenge – and thus to widen and deepen – the academic understanding of fictional characters as well as the scope of cognitive narrative studies. As we have now seen, equating fictional characters with literary characters is bound to leave substantial blind spots in our understanding of imaginary engagements, since different media have vastly different ways of presenting fictional minds (cf. Groensteen 2013, 121–131; Kukkonen 2013a, 127–176; Mikkonen 2008; Thon 2014), organizing narrated time and space (see e.g. Hatfield 2005; McCloud 1993), and approaching the stylization and typification of characters (see e.g. Versaci 2007).

Although I have so far highlighted the cognitive framework's ability to encompass and approach different media and their multifarious modes of presentation, this freedom of transmedial movement would mean little if it was not used for something: for comparing and colliding the theoretical and expressive tools and models of one medium with those of another medium. That is, while the cognitive approach allows transcending medium-specific surfaces and focusing instead on the deeper, more fluid audience experiences, comics research pulls this study to the opposite direction: it draws focus onto the medium-specific surfaces and practices, and their differences. This is an important push and pull as only the combination of these two "directions" can truly serve the dual goals of transmedial narratology. In other words, the similarities and the differences between different media, their features, and their theorizations only become visible when medium-specific and more comparative viewpoints are brought together (cf. Thon 2014). Comics may, moreover, be the best possible "test case" for such transmedial inquiries, due to their liminal position in the overall media landscape (Kukkonen 2011). Arguably, comics' eclectic collage-logic – their unique ability to reproduce many of the conventions and affordances of both the literary print media and the electronic visual media – also makes them the most "Frankensteinian" of all mediums, and thus a perfect fit for this particular project.

1.2.4 Additional Theoretical Scalpels and Ingredients

Article 1 demonstrates the most clearly how this fusing of literary character theories, cognitive premises and graphic storytelling material works in practice. It takes a handful of literary character theories – those of Hochman, Fokkema

and Müller (see ch. 1.2.1 & 3.1.2) – reinterprets them from a cognitive viewpoint, and uses the resulting concoction to examine how contemporary fantasy comics recycle characters. The other three articles follow the same basic formula, but they also introduce some rarer ingredients. This was important for making each article a slightly different textual creature – and thus capable of fetching slightly different information on how multimodal fictional characters function.

Article 2, for instance, introduces, motivates and validates the Frankenstein metaphors employed throughout this dissertation by taking a closer look at Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2012 [1818]) and some literary-critical studies related to it (esp. Baldick 1987 and Botting 1991). Initially, the function of this extra-ingredient was simply to deepen my critical understanding of one of the works I was analyzing, *The Unwritten*. Shelley's novel, as well as the allusive and academic works surrounding it, proved inspiring in many other ways as well, however, and ultimately, the themes and analogies suggested by the story and its protagonists started to steer my understanding of reading, transtextuality, graphic storytelling and character theory alike.

One of the recurrent themes in the literary criticism on *Frankenstein* is that Shelley's story and characters are radically unstable, and hence, open to any number of interpretations. Many have attributed this to the novel's stacked epistolary structure, to the first-person narratives placed within other first-person narratives (e.g. Botting 1991, 2–4, 36–49). However, as Barthes' (1977, 142–148) strangely Frankensteinian discourse on "the death of the author" and wandering "textual tissues" hints, this idea of "instability" does not result solely from unreliable narrative structures; it also resonates with "readerly" approaches to texts as well as with the possible relations forming between different art works. Indeed, Shelley's novel also thematizes these interpretive and intertextual instabilities by characterizing both of its protagonists as avid readers and by alluding profusely to the Prometheus myth, *Paradise Lost* (1667) and various other classic texts and tales (cf. Botting 1991 & Article 2).

Thus, *Frankenstein*'s and *Frankenstein* scholarship's main contribution to this dissertation is that they articulate and illustrate how narrative elements are based on – and can even become generative through – instabilities, tensions and liminalities, rather than neat, classical categories, continuums and grammars. As chapter 3 will demonstrate, this kind of approach meshes well with the frameworks of cognitive theory and comics studies, and can thus form a basis for a new, more dynamic way of thinking of multimodal fictional characters.

As for Article 3, it conjoins the boundary-defying logics of cognitive narrative theory, comics studies and transmedial narratology with the key questions of two reformist schools of thought: *posthumanism* and *unnatural narratology*. These movements were introduced as supplementary viewpoints for the same simple reason: they are both invested in expanding the range of phenomena – including the types of narrative agencies – that literary and other cultural studies should address.

Unnatural narratology, a branch of postclassical narratology that peaked in popularity around the year 2010, questioned the realist bias of narrative stud-

ies – much like structuralism did in the mid-1900s. Unnatural narratologists were not as focused on language and form as structuralists, however. Rather, they used diverse frameworks and approaches to call more academic attention to the fantastical, defamiliarizing or otherwise "unnatural" elements occurring in texts and fictions (see Alber 2009; Alber et al. 2013)[9] These "unnaturalities" include narratives told or focalized by nonhuman characters (Alber et al. 2013, 2; cf. Caracciolo 2016, 7), which also constitute the most important link between narrative studies and posthumanist inquiry.

In recent years, posthumanism has become such a vast, interdisciplinary and quickly evolving concept that defining it with any exhaustiveness or precision is quite difficult. In the most general terms, it is a series of philosophical, scientific, and artistic reactions to humankind's failures to manage its relationships with the biosphere in which it is embedded as well as with the technologies it has created (Lummaa & Rojola 2014). Thus, one of the core aims of posthumanism – and of posthumanist cultural studies especially – is to examine and reconfigure the complicated, imbalanced interactions, entanglements and hierarchies between humans and other creatures (see e.g. Clarke 2017). Succeeding in this task requires understanding how different nonhumans experience their own existence in our shared environments – and since narratives are humans' primary way of organizing, mediating and imagining experiences (Herman 2013), cognitive narrative studies and the concepts of 'fictional mind' and 'character' can be helpful tools in this investigation. That is to say, posthumanist perspectives are linked to my cognitive theorizing of characters through theory of mind, experientiality and the "dual" ontology of character.

Finally, Article 4 aims to observe multimodal characters in the "natural" social environments of comics industry and consumption – but without resorting blindly to any empirical methods just yet (see ch. 1.4.2). Instead, my article takes a tentative theoretical step towards a more practical and applied approach to multimodal characters by introducing some core ideas of experience economy, convergence culture and fan studies into the base mixture of cognitive comic book character theory.

In their 1999 bestseller *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, business consultants B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore (2011 [1999]) claim that all products and services become commodified over time, and that the best way to fight the resulting loss of value is to repackage the products and services as holistic, multimodal, customized, truly memorable experiences. In the context of cultural studies, these premises pose certain problems, however (cf. Karkulehto & Venäläinen 2016).

First, as the current cognitive studies underline (ch. 1.2.2), the flow of experiences cannot truly be bottled, injected or controlled. Experiences only form in subjective consciousness and are thus more dependent on the consumer than on the producer. In other words, the agency of the readership has to be taken more fully into account, and to this end, the article examines how the subcul-

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[9]   Jan Alber actually approaches unnatural narrative elements from an overtly cognitive angle, which is why I have utilized his ideas specifically.

tural practices of comic book fandoms counteract and intermingle with the strategies of the Western comics industry. In practice, this required borrowing findings of fan studies (see ch. 1.2.2) and referring to my own experiences within the globalized Anglo-American comics fandom.

A second notable problem is that comics industry, like all narrative industries, have never not been in the business of selling experiences. So, how would the "law" of commodification apply to them? I have tried to answer this question by interpreting Pine and Gilmore's categories of 'commodity' and 'experience' quite loosely. One option is to observe the changing relations between comics' materiality and their experiential contents; to realize that the medial form is the commodifying package, while the characters constitute the actual value-bearing products. Another option is to examine how comics industry, too, has developed towards offering more and more customized characters and, more and more immersive experiences. Indeed, comic book characters' development from one-size-fits-all comedic heroes of throw-away newspaper attachments into diverse transmedia franchises follows many of the value-increasing strategies identified by Pine and Gilmore (2011; see also ch. 1.2.3 & 2.4). Moreover, the premises of experience economy have striking parallels with Hiroki Azuma's (2001) theory of *database consumption*, which sees characters as carriers of interchangeable attractive traits, and Henry Jenkins' (2006) concept of *convergence culture*, which describes an interactive media culture where all different media platforms "do what they do best" in order to enhance immersion and other storytelling potentials.

Although these supplementary ingredients and instruments were originally picked up in order find interesting research problems and to answer them in specific articles, something has always spilled over and affected the overall conception of character presented in this dissertation. The extended Frankenstein metaphors originating in Article 2 are the most obvious example, of course, but the posthumanist thinking practiced in Article 3 has also sensitized the entire inquiry to the excessive and limiting anthropocentrism inherent in character theory and in (cognitive) narrative studies in general. Similarly, the issues raised in Article 4 have served as a constant reminder that characters are rarely just signs on paper; they exist in the world, entangled in social and material practices.

1.3 The Textual Corpus: Dissecting Vertigo Comics

When Vertigo imprint of the American DC Comics was first established in 1993, its slogan promised "The Shock of the New". In practice, this meant that, under the supervision of its long-time editor-in-chief Karen Berger, the publishing line started to gather and foster innovative fantasy, horror and crime fiction titles aimed at "mature readers" – including, rather ambitiously, mainstream audiences that either were not accustomed to comics or had not taken them seriously before (Daniels 2003, 224; Elder 2007, 56; Round 2010, 23).

In many ways, this was publishing giant DC Comics' reaction to the so-called "first hype of the graphic novel", which had been ignited in the United States at the end of the 1980s, by the critical and commercial success of *Watchmen, Maus,* and *The Dark Knight Returns* (Camus 2015; Hescher 2016, 12–19; see ch. 1.2.3). Many anticipated a growing interest in adult-oriented, experimental graphic narratives that would compete with or build on the artistic achievements of these still-revered works, and Vertigo was intended as an incubator for such ambitions. This meant, first and foremost, giving scriptwriters more power and priority than had been customary in the industry (Round 2010, 21; Sabin 1996, 168).

In the end, the market for graphic novels did not turn out to be quite as wide and lucrative as had been expected (Hescher 2016, 19–23). As Roger Sabin (1996, 171) points out, DC's biggest competitor Marvel Comics never even deemed it worthwhile to launch a comparable imprint. Yet, due to its exceptional aims, procedures, and artistic talents, Vertigo soon developed its own "literary", "self-reflective", highly "postmodern" house poetics, which has remained both original and impactful in the contemporary comics scene (see e.g. Camus 2015; Dony 2014; Round 2010).

1.3.1 Vertigo's Resurrective Poetics

On the one hand, Vertigo's promises of novelty were not just marketing talk but based on very concrete importation of new voices: since the imprint's leading editor Berger was also the British liaison of DC Comics (Daniels 2003, 224), she recruited multiple talents from overseas. As a result, many of Vertigo's founding titles were scripted by Englishmen for a long time: *Hellblazer* (1988–2013), *Shade: The Changing Man* (1990–1996) and *Enigma* (1993) by Peter Milligan; *Swamp Thing* (2nd run, 1982–1996) by Alan Moore; *The Animal Man* (1st run, 1988–1995) and *Doom Patrol* (2nd run, 1987–1995) by Grant Morrison; and *The Sandman* (1989–1996) by Neil Gaiman. Vertigo thus contributed significantly to the larger trend that has later become known as the "British Invasion" to the American comics markets (see e.g. Round 2010; Sabin 1996, 171).

On the other hand, many of the early Vertigo titles were not quite as "new" as the line's slogan implied, but vaguely intertextual revisions and re-assemblages of ideas that had not been very sustainable or successful in their previous forms (cf. Dony 2014). This concerns the characters in particular, as many of the series resurrected and reinvented forgotten, long-out-of-print heroes from DC comics' portfolio. Most likely, this approach was inspired by one of the canonized classics that induced the graphic novel hype in the first place: the provocative protagonists of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* were, likewise, reimagined – more layered and cynical – versions of characters created for Charlton Comics, which sold most of its superhero franchises to DC before going defunct in early 1980s (see Cooke 2000; Varis 2013, 148–149).

To give an example, Gaiman – a friend and disciple of Moore's (Bender 1999, 17–20) – based the protagonist of his *The Sandman* series on two previous DC characters who wielded control over people's dreams: a pulp-fiction-style

detective Wesley Dodds, created by Gardner Fox and Bert Christman in 1939, and superhero Hector Hall, created by Roy Thomas and Jerry Ordway in 1983. Hall's 'Sandman' moniker derived from his place of residence, "The Dream Stream", which allowed him to view other people's dreams, whereas Dodds defeated his enemies with a gun that emitted sleeping gas. (See Daniels 2003, 206.) Hence, he also donned a gasmask – a very recognizable and loaded visual trait for a character that was first introduced in the early years of World War II. In a truly Frankensteinian fashion, Gaiman expands and twists these ideas in his work, making his Sandman not only a resident of dreams but a god-like personification of dreaming, and dresses him in a gasmask-type helmet, which is fashioned out of an ancient beast's skull and spine – the biological seat of dreams. *The Animal Man*, *Doom Patrol, Swamp Thing* and *Shade: The Changing Man* boast similar genealogies: their names and basic concepts can also be traced back to decades-older DC franchises. What is more, these intertextual ties do not only run backwards, to earlier series, but also sideways, as the success of reinvented Vertigo characters have occasionally dragged their DC ancestors from their graves. The revived *Sandman* was such a cult hit that the original pulp-Sandman Dodds was given his own parallel series, *The Sandman Mystery Theater* (1993–1999), whereas superhero-Sandman Hall makes a substantial cameo in *The Doll's House* arc (1989–1990) of Gaiman' series.

All these resurrections have prompted Christophe Dony (2014) to argue that Vertigo imprint has since its conception implemented an "archival" strategy that differs drastically from the allusive practices of other major comics genres consumed in the United States. Instead of establishing narrative continuities like the transmedialized superhero universes, or paying homage to the artists and genres of high prestige like many alternative comics, Vertigo series tend to remix eclectic source materials in a way that does not so much attach itself to the Time-Honored Old as pulls it apart and creates something new out of its remains. More often than not, this remixing also involves bringing darker, Gothic aesthetics, more timely elements of popular fiction as well as timeless allusions to literary fiction into the mix. (cf. ibid.) Bill Willingham's extremely long-running *Fables* series (2002–2015), for instance, relocates classic fairytale characters in today's New York, and in doing so, combines the genre conventions of fairytale with the tropes of various more contemporary genres, such as film noir, political satire and horror (Kukkonen 2010, 137–147). *The Sandman*, likewise, thematizes storytelling itself, and consequently borrows characters and motifs from almost anywhere: from mythologies, history, fantasy and Gothic literature as well as from pulp horror, superhero comics and rock music (see e.g. Bender 1999; Elder 2007). That is to say, Vertigo's self-aware revisionism does not only target the characters but plays with the overall genre dynamics.

Dony is certainly right in noting that Vertigo series have been overtly, and perhaps exceptionally, open to diverse generic and transmedial influences. Many scholars have considered the imprint's titles highly "literary" (Camus 2015; Round 2010, 21–23), and as I argue in Article 1, comics series employing

this type of pastiche poetics effectively position their characters in shared transmedial universes with classic literary characters. This, in turn, can be seen to lend them certain prestige and thematic depth. However, Vertigo characters cross over to each other's series often enough to also create a sense of a "Vertigo universe", which may present the reader with rather vague timelines but is otherwise quite comparable to DC's and Marvel's superhero universes. For instance, the realms of Faerie are remarkably similar in *The Sandman* and *The Books of Magic* (1994–2000), another Vertigo series initiated by Gaiman. In the same vein, occult detective John Constantine, the protagonist of Milligan's *Hellblazer,* begun as a minor character in Moore's *Swamp Thing* (Daniels 2003, 224; Sabin 1996, 168), and has since made cameos in numerous other series – including both *The Sandman* and *The Books of Magic.*

In addition, popular minor characters – such as *Jack of Fables* (2006–2011) from Willingham's *Fables,* and *Death* (1993, 1996) and *Lucifer* (2000–2006) from Gaiman's *Sandman* – have received their own spin-off series. More recently, Vertigo's postmodern, multimodal revamps of old literary and mythical figures have increasingly continued their journeys towards electronic media as well: the Vertigo version of the Biblical and Miltonian arch nemesis Lucifer has now become the protagonist of his own TV series (Fox, 2016–), and *Wolf Among Us* (2013–2014), an episode-based digital narrative by Telltale Games, is essentially a transmedial extension of Willingham's *Fables.* This highlights the fact that, for all its encouragement of writer-driven experimentation, Vertigo's intertextual structures are also driven by commercial interests that, apart from the scale, hardly differ from the logics of transmedial superhero franchising (cf. Article 4).

What is more, during quarter of a century of active publication, Vertigo's revisionist poetics have ironically become so systematic and expected that Dony (2014) wonders if the imprint has not "commodified strategies of rewriting and self-canonization" – turned from omnivorous to cannibalistic, and built a new tradition out of the subversion of tradition (cf. Kukkonen 2010). In other words, the genre-defying Vertigo titles have almost come to constitute a genre of their own (see Article 1) – and indeed, in his introduction to the first album of *The Unwritten* (Carey & Gross 2010), Willingham suggests that a new genre is "pushing above the soil in our comics garden". He names this genre "the LAF Triumvirate", and explains that its three pillars – L, A, and F – are abbreviations for "Literature-based fantasy; Animal fantasy; and Fairytale fantasy". He goes on to describe it as "a bizarre pancommunity of fallen princesses and acerbic talking ravens, itinerant storybook heroes and exiled Fables, of mice and men, battling for life, love and virtue, among the leaves of cursed books or enchanted woods" (ibid.) – in other words, a virtual, self-aware cornucopia of not only genres and genre tropes but also of characters and character tropes of all kinds.

All this should explain why I have determined Vertigo publications to be the ideal source material for theoretical exploration of multimodal and transmedial characters. The very fact that Willingham can only describe the imprint's offerings with a rather arbitrary abbreviation testifies to the monstrous diversity of ingredients that go into these series and their narrative agents. Most

importantly, pillars A and F announce the presence of various kinds of nonhuman characters, from talking animals to monsters and aliens, while pillars L and F ensure that all kinds of intertextual and transmedial characters also make frequent appearances. Moreover, Vertigo's remixing of genres means that characters established within certain contexts are frequently transplanted into new generic environments. This requires them to react and adapt to their new surroundings and plot structures, making them appear in a new light. To put this in another way, juxtaposing characters and genre conventions in novel ways invites the readers to compare the similarities and differences between different instances of the said characters and genre conventions, which – one might surmise – is likely to trigger some reconsideration, even defamiliarization.[10] This might make the structures, features and dynamics of the specific characters easier to see, which in turn should make the structures, features and dynamics of all fictional characters slightly clearer (see Article 2). In sum, Vertigo comics operate like an imaginative character laboratory, and I have largely mirrored their eclectic, inclusive poetics in building this dissertation's theoretical framework: Frankensteinian characters appearing in Frankensteinian texts should be a good fit for Frankensteinian methods – and vice versa.

At the same time, this generic, intertextual and transmedial eclecticism of Vertigo series is counterbalanced by fairly uniform generic, historical, social, and economic frames that bring the idiosyncratic experimental and intertextual qualities of the individual texts and characters to shaper focus. On the one hand, Vertigo's self-declared aim to remain approachable for comics readers and non-comics-readers alike has prevented it from drifting to the same dead end as Piranha Press, another DC imprint that specialized in even more niche and experimental titles, starting from 1989. It quickly alienated most of the potential readers with its series' "impenetrability", and was discontinued only a year after Vertigo was launched, in 1994. (Daniels 2003, 238). On the other hand, Vertigo also avoids the other, superhero-fueled extreme of the global comics markets. While the main lines of the big American publishing houses have forfeited their statuses as comics strongholds and opted for fully transmedial character-based franchising strategies (see Article 4), smaller lines and houses like Vertigo and its contemporary rival Image Comics have largely remained dedicated to the graphic novel as a storytelling format (Round 16, 21, 25). This makes them ideal places to look for medium-specific experimentation, innovation and excellence, especially in the current Anglo-American context. Indeed, Willingham declares "LAF" the genre of the "new millennium", which has come to replace superheroes in the epicenter of comics storytelling (Carey & Gross 2010, "Introduction").

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[10]   Colin B. Harvey (2015, e.g. 70–74, 130–131) notes that this kind of tension between familiarity and strangeness is one the operative pleasure-inducing features of transmedia consumption in general (see ch. 3.1.2). In the same vein, Caracciolo (2016) argues that the concurrent familiarity and strangeness of nonhuman characters cause defamiliarization, which can make the reader more aware of his or her interpretive strategies (see Article 3). As chapter 3 will discuss, different kinds of tensions and comparisons – and the cognitive jolts they cause – seem to be central to our engagements with characters.

In sum, Vertigo's ambivalent position between literature-inspired experimentality and mainstream transmediality allows a nice compromise between diversity of source material and generalizability of the results. Berger, the founding editor-in-chief of the imprint, credits this perfectly balanced formula of artistic ambition and marketability to Alan Moore, the author of the momentous *Watchmen* and Vertigo's *Swamp Thing:* "––he really showed that you could do comics that were literary, but modern and popular, but could really stand next to a great work of fiction, of prose fiction, and that really changed everything" (Round 2010, 21).

Overall, Vertigo's first 25 years mark a very particular moment in Anglo-American graphic novel scene. The series' dark, Gothic tones and literary ambitions have consistently echoed the vibe of the more "adult" comics that served as an impetus to the very term "graphic novel". At the same time, its revisionist poetics and inclusive marketing strategies have helped to define what the term means today. (Camus 2015.) This project has, however, now run its course, as the entire publishing line was officially relaunched on its 25th anniversary, in August of 2018, with a new line-up of talents, new series, and – of course – new revivals of old characters (Melrose 2017). The poetics that will emerge from this rebirth remains to be seen but, on the surface at least, this turning point sections off a fairly well-defined and cohesive corpus of "original" Vertigo comics.

The works targeted in this dissertation have thus officially become things of the past – and things that have expired are much easier to canonize and dissect than things that are still squirming and looking for new directions. Then again, in the context of Vertigo poetics, as well as according to the Frankensteinian narratology developed in this work, no end is final: at least some of the characters, conventions, and practices cultivated within the original Vertigo are likely to continue influencing artistic genre comics and their cult readerships for decades to come. Thus, they are still as worthy of academic attention as ever.

1.3.2 The Alien and Metafictional Specimen

Awareness of these house poetics informed the analyses performed in Articles 2 and 3, which – sadly – are the only components of this compilation that provided the space and the cause to delve more deeply into the corpus. Still, the chosen titles, *The Unwritten* (2009–2015) and *The Sandman: Overture* (2013–2015), encapsulate the development and the trends of Vertigo – particularly the "L" pillar of Willingham's "triumvirate" – fairly well. The latter is the latest installment, and thus something of a culmination, of one of the imprint's first and most popular series, while the former puts the intertextuality and metafictionality inherent in the entire Vertigo project front and center, making them not only features of its narrative but the main topic.

Indeed, English author Mike Carey and American illustrator Peter Gross's *The Unwritten* was an obvious choice for a target text from the beginning because it overtly discusses and thematizes the problems and paradoxes fictional characters entail. The plot centers on Tom Taylor, a son of a famous fantasy author, who accidentally discovers that he may, in fact, be one of his father's char-

acters, rather than his biological offspring. Once Tom sets out on a quest to discover the truth of his ontology, he starts gaining more and more metafictional powers and intertextual friends, and soon finds himself at odds with a shadowy organization that steers the fate of the world by controlling which stories people read and believe. The story thus plunges the characters – and along with them, the readers – from Western classics of literature and philosophy to the worlds of *Harry Potter, Winnie the Pooh*, Golden Age superheroes, and back again.

All this takes place over 66 issues, which have been collected in 11 trade paperbacks – one of which is a crossover with the aforementioned *Fables* series, and co-authored with its main creators, Bill Willingham and Mark Buckingham. *The Unwritten* ran as a monthly series from May 2009 to October 2013, and was restarted again in January 2014 with a much shorter "Apocalypse" arc, which ran, also monthly, until January 2015. Since then, the series has been on hiatus, and Carey and Gross say they are unlikely to continue the story anymore, even though some individual themes and characters in the series might still have more to explore (Renaud 2015).

As it happens, before *The Unwritten*, Carey and Gross had collaborated extensively on the aforementioned *Lucifer* series, which begun as a spin-off of *The Sandman*, the other series I decided to concentrate on, since it has been so foundational for Vertigo's house style (Camus 2015). The original *Sandman* series, written by British author Neil Gaiman and illustrated by dozens of different artists, was also an exceptional financial and critical success. It won eight Eisner Awards, three Harvey Awards, and enjoyed a diverse and dedicated readership that stuck with the series even through the great market crash of 1990s, which dropped the sales of most popular superhero titles dramatically; at a certain point, *The Sandman* outsold even *Batman* and *Superman* (Bender 1999, 258–260; Round 2010, 19). Since then, the patchwork-like tale of Morpheus, the moody personification of dreaming, and his six equally eternal and anthropomorphized siblings – Destiny, Death, Destruction, Desire, Despair and Delirium – has become something of cult classic among comics fans, Gaiman fans and the Goth movement alike (Bender 1999, 10–11).

During the seven years that the series ran, its abundance of collaborators, story arcs and fantastical elements also produced a large, mind-bending cast of characters, which made use of both the verbal and pictorial affordances of graphic storytelling in innovative ways. Many of these character concepts and characterization techniques are stretched to their farthest limits in the latest surprise addition to the series, a six-issue prequel Gaiman scripted nearly 20 years after the conclusion of the original saga. This mini-series, titled *The Sandman: Overture*, ran from October 2013 to September 2015, and was immediately reprinted as a hardcover collection (Gaiman et al. 2015). All the six issues are illustrated by only two artists, penciller J. H. Williams III and colorist Dave Stewart, but they still incorporate numerous distinct art styles and strikingly experimental page layouts. This enhances the markedly fantastical, nonhuman feel of the alien characters and the nonlinear, apocalyptic structure of the high-concept plot.

In the first issue of this prequel, Morpheus learns that an old mistake of his has caused a domino effect that threatens to drive the entire existence to madness and chaos. True to his responsible nature, he sets out on an intergalactic and -dimensional quest to undo the cataclysm. He succeeds, after a fashion, but is so exhausted by the end of the ordeal that a mere amateur magician is able to imprison him, as seen in the first issue of the original *Sandman* series. *Overture*'s events, in other words, take place directly before the beginning of the original series' main story arc.

In conclusion, characterization in both series centers on a feature that is salient within the context of Vertigo but highly unusual in the larger context of Anglo-American graphic novels. For *The Unwritten,* it is metafictionality, and for *The Sandman: Overture*, it is nonhumanness – both viable embryos of research questions. However, the conciseness of the article format required zooming a little closer still. Thus, Article 2 had to focus on studying how *The Unwritten* treats a specific character, Frankenstein's monster, as a metafictional device, while Article 3 approaches the strange characters of *Overture* mainly from the viewpoint of experience and its radical subjectivity.

1.4 The Autopsy Report: Notes on Methodology

Now that we have taken a full tour of the laboratory, it is only proper to explain what exactly I have done with all these ingredients, instruments and specimen. This chapter starts explicating the research process by describing the methods. The first subchapter portrays the empirical component of the project, by detailing how the implications of second-generation cognitive theories and the multimodality of comics factor into the processes of (academic) reading and interpretation. The second subchapter then relates these interpretive practices to present work's prevalent theoretical speculation and explains why it has been so necessary to prioritize theoretical discussion over collection of data.

1.4.1 Darning Meaning with Cognitive Comics Analysis

As noted in chapter 1.2.3., one of the defining characteristics of graphic storytelling is that it comprises several types of signs that stand in various relations to each other. From the cognitive viewpoint, the next obvious premise is that all these elements, as well as the particular ways in which they are juxtaposed, can always be read to communicate or mean something (Kukkonen 2013a, 18–25). So efficient can these multimodal compositions be in their communication that it can sometimes border on "overcoding". This has undoubtedly earned comics their stereotypical label as "easy reading": for decades, classic literary works have been adapted into comics with the belief that the multiple semiotic channels make the stories, themes and characters quicker and easier to grasp (Herkman 1998, 55–58; Saraceni 2003, 27–28; Versaci 2007, 182–184). However, as I also noted above, it is often extremely difficult to place an analytical finger

on the impressions just one specific color choice, or a single line that curves in a certain way, makes on the reader (cf. McCloud 1993, 118–137). Similarly, as simplified and caricature-like as the characters can appear in some comics, even the slightest change in the shape or the placement of their eyebrows might alter the way their emotional state is likely to be interpreted. The often intuitive "feel" of comics thus only serves to mask the formal complexity that gives rise to it; if the main point of the page is perfectly clear to the reader in seconds, it is only because the dozens of different elements on that page – as well as the surrounding pages – have been successfully designed to work in meaningful harmony.

This apparent simplicity and hidden complexity of comics have been approached very differently by different comics researchers. Some strive to uncover the "closed morphologies", patterns and architectures that guide the construction of these communicative designs. From this viewpoint, comics are seen to combat the vagueness of their visual expression by such strategies as double-coding – using words to shoot down any alternative interpretations the picture content might suggest – or by developing various kinds or conventionalized signs for expressing the most common actions and emotions. (cf. Cohn 2013, 23–49.)

Analyzing such individual signs can only take one so far, however, because – as Karin Kukkonen (2013a, 22) notes – readers do not "decode sign by sign" but construct meaning in a more holistc context-sensitive process that also involves plenty of world-knowledge as well as conscious and pre-conscious inference (cf. ch. 1.2.2). Even if it was possible to sort all signs into functional categories, they are thus coupled with readerly responses that are much more difficult to predict or classify. Indeed, if the basic unit for semiotic approaches has been the sign, cognitive approaches couple the sign with the "effects" it has in its unique contexts: textual features are treated as "clues" or "cues" that give rise to hypotheses, mental models, experiential traces, affects, and other cognitive actions, which influence the reading of subsequent textual cues in an open-ended fashion (Kukkonen 2013a, 21).

This approach, then, turns the alleged chaos of comics' visual storytelling into something that should be embraced; it highlights the artistry that goes into both the production and the interpretation of multimodal wholes. As Kukkonen (2013a, 38) puts it, "[m]ultiple meaning potentials and cognitive complexity are part and parcel of our cognitive engagement with the text". Likewise, Hatfield (2005, 66) notes that comics are ultimately "complex enough to frustrate any attempt at an airtight analytical scheme". Indeed, the cognitive comics analysis outlined by Kukkonen (2013a), which I have used as my methodological starting point, is not so much an idealized model as it is a flexible "pragmatic" approach, which fuses together the insights allowed by the semiotic classifications, the main premises of rhetorics and reader-response theories as well as the ever-accumulating findings of cognitive sciences and theories.

In practice, this means that whenever a cognitive theorist talks about the inferences drawn by "the reader" they are always, on some level, talking about themselves and their inferences. This is not necessarily a threat to reliability,

however, as long as this personal involvement is recognized, the analysis remains sensitive to the "multiple meaning potentials", and one does not position oneself as an ideal or a prototypical reader. Instead, the researcher is merely an *exemplary reader* – who is, nevertheless, highly likely to draw at least some of the primary, most salient inferences cued by the texts. This is another way of saying that although textual cues and their readerly effects are not straightforward chains of stimuli and responses, the patterns and sign categories investigated by semioticians do guide the individual reading experiences in crucial and somewhat predictable ways.

From this also follows that all academic analyses should be taken as loose heuristic descriptions of how texts might be experienced by some readers, rather than as exhaustive or absolute truths. Inexorably, every academic text analysis has been written by a professional reader who has brought not only their expertise but also their experiential background and their reading body to the specific situation where they have encountered the text (cf. ch. 1.2.2). If anything, cognitive approaches can make this inescapably experiential and personal starting point of all scholarship more visible, which might, in the end, help to make the analyses more reliable, grounded and nuanced (cf. Kukkonen 2014; see Article 3).

These aspirations drove my analysis of *The Sandman: Overture* in particular. I had already read the graphic novel twice – first, as a fan reading the latest installment of a series I knew and loved, and second time as a scholar, with a more critical eye and attention to detail. Still, I finished the book both times with only a very vague sense of what made the aliens and gods seem so foreign and distant, yet so readable and recognizable. I surmised that in order to analyze how the comic not only represents nonhumans but *evokes the sense of* nonhumanity, I would have to analyze not only what is on the pages but how I read the pages: where I stop or misread, where my eye is instinctively drawn, or where I feel the book "knows" that somebody is there, reading it. Going through the album again while simultaneously taking copious associative notes of each spread – first of the overall impression, then of each individual panel – seemed like the most obvious, albeit admittedly crude and imperfect way of getting some rudimentary hold of these experiences. Although I subsequently had to group these observations and sublimate them into more general, concise and distanced interpretations to be presented in Article 3, I felt that being systematically mindful of the raw and "unacademic", yet very actual and unavoidable personal encounter with the text benefited the analysis in many ways. In particular, it made the interpretive "tension" between the page as a narrative sequence and the page as a static composition more obvious (Hatfield 2005, 48–52, see ch. 3.1.1).

The basic cognitive presuppositions also motivated the analysis of *The Unwritten* in Article 2, although the actual re-reading process was more scattered and distanced. When I first read the entire series – over several years, as it was still being published on a monthly basis – I identified the *Frankenstein* subtext as the device that delivers the most potent and explicit metatextual com-

mentary on the ontological problems related to fictional characters. The next step, then, was to re-read the first six albums, where the subtext mainly figures and bookmark all the scenes where the Creature appears or is mentioned. Finally, these marked scenes were subjected to a fairly traditional close-reading process, whose main purpose was to identify conscious and incidental allusions to the original *Frankenstein* novel or to literary character theories. These connections proved fairly unsystematic, however, so I ultimately found it easier to map the character theories and *The Unwritten*'s metafictional remarks on the basic plot points of the original novel, as summarized by literary scholars (Baldick 1987, 3; Holquist 2002, 92–98, see Article 2).

It is thus important to note here, too, that even though *The Unwritten* parallels Frankenstein and his monster quite explicitly with an author and his character – and even though some literary theorists have employed conspicuously Frankensteinian language (see ch. 1.1 & Article 2) – these connections still had to be found and recognized, actively interpreted and tacked together by me, an academic reader. Overall, this longwinded process of comparing a comic, a novel, and a mass of narratological theories highlighted how much cognitive effort is required for connecting various semiotic dots intertextually, and how open such processes are to serendipity and constant revision – the article went through more than five drafts. Crucially, this halting cross-reading process also forced me to be more aware of the oft-ignored fact that the reading and employment of theory is hardly less interpretive, personal or experiential than the reading and analysis of fictional narratives.

In sum, the most important point implied by these methodological choices is that meaning, or even intertextual connections, do not simply "exist" in the texts as stable things, ready to be classified, but only emerge in the encounters between the reader and the text. What is more, these encounters are never impersonal, truly objective, or entirely predictable. On the contrary, reading, especially skillful interpretive reading, extends well beyond straightforward semiotics, and it does not settle for any complete or singular "closure" (McCloud 1993). Literary and comics studies could be even richer and more reliable if – instead of striving for science-like objectivity, preciseness and decisiveness – they showcased this type of creative reading and got more systematically and explicitly in touch with the situatedness and subjectivity of the text–reader encounters. The theories on enactivism and the experientiality of narratives seem to suggest such methodologies – such new ways of academic reading – but, as of yet, the practices of enactive text analysis are still waiting to be developed.

1.4.2 Why This Monster is (Still) Speculative

Since only two of my four articles involve close-reading of any comics at all, it is safe to say that while cognitive comics analysis is an important tool it is not the main method of the present dissertation. Instead, the bulk of the study, including this introductory treatise, consists of theoretical discussion, theoretical synthesis or – some might say – theoretical speculation.

Before anyone else rushes to say it: yes, theory without empirical evidence is groundless. I would counter, however, that there are several ways of anchoring theory to actuality, and the approach taken in this study is phenomenon-based, rather than data- or measurement-based. This means that the research problems of each article derive from real, current texts and trends:

- Article 1 takes as its starting point the startling number of inter- or transtextual characters featured in contemporary Anglo-American fantasy comics in general, and in Vertigo comics in particular (see ch. 1.3.1).
- Article 2 re-evaluates academically *The Unwritten*'s speculative analogy between fictional characters and Frankenstein's monster.
- Article 3 investigates primarily my own encounters with the imaginary, nonhuman aliens depicted in *The Sandman: Overture* (see previous sub-chapter for details).
- Finally, Article 4 explores what kinds of roles characters have been given in the marketing and fan cultures of comics.

I was able to identify these still-uninvestigated phenomena, first and foremost, due to my long-time personal involvement with the Anglo-American comics scene, but setting the focus on a limited pool of target texts – Vertigo publications – proved helpful as well (see ch. 1.3). Based on my previous research, I already had pre-established interest in the readers' viewpoint, which unavoidably guided me towards the cognitive framework, but otherwise it was these real-life phenomena – these existing texts and the problems suggested by them – that dictated which theories and concepts were included. Guided by a Frankensteinian ethos of near-pathological curiosity, I was happy to utilize any theoretical tools necessary to dig up at least some answers – to understand these things I had seen in comics and comics culture just a little bit better. The target phenomena and the theories thus formed a natural hermeneutic circle, where the chosen comics and topics would drive me towards certain theoretical frames and premises, which in turn would prompt me to investigate these comics and topics from new angles.

In this sense, this dissertation is not about pure theory-juggling but, first, about investigating existing phenomena speculatively, and second, about testing and developing the theories by applying them to such actual texts and contexts that the theory-makers likely never considered. These experimental matchings between phenomena and theories may have produced only partial answers at best, and sometimes they have led to more questions than they have answered. Article 1, for instance, talks about characters that recur in different texts but does not resolve when, why and in what sense two similar characters in two different texts can be considered to share the same overarching character identity. Similarly, Article 3 ends with a question about whether the concept of character could or should be decoupled from anthropomorphism and anthropocentric concerns in some contexts or to some degree. These unanswered questions can, however, be considered part of this work's results as they point

towards gaps and biases in our current understanding of fictional characters and, thus, provide starting points for further research.

These holes and imperfections in the theories is also one of the reasons why this study includes no empirical measuring or data collecting beyond the two comics analyses described above. In the past few decades, psychologists have already conducted various empirical studies related to character identification and parasocial interactions: extensive questionnaires and controlled reading situations have been set up to explore, for instance, what kind of characters different demographics prefer, whether engagement with fictional entities can compensate for lack of social interaction with real humans, and whether the readers identify more with the narrated situation or with the positions of the salient characters in those situations (see e.g. Cohen 2006; Coplan 2004; Klimmt et al. 2006; Mar & Oatley 2008). As Jonathan Cohen (2006, 193) notes, these empirical studies have mostly yielded "conflicted" or inconclusive results, and I am liable to agree with him that one plausible reason for these discrepancies is the lack of "conceptual clarity". In other words, the conductors of the different experiments may have had different, and possibly insufficient, conceptions of what a fictional character actually is. Advancing the theoretical understanding of characters and reader-character relationships should therefore take priority over further empirical experiments; only a sharper view of characters' ontology, structures and affordances will help the psychologists to ask better questions and to interpret the results of past and future tests and surveys in a more nuanced and contextualized manner.

The same argument applies to the option of "hard" neuroscientific approaches, but brain-imaging studies pose other considerable limitations as well. First, none of the current imaging methods can provide a comprehensive view of all the neural activity taking place in the brain at any given moment. Secondly, and even more crucially, observations of neural activity are not directly translatable into better understanding of cognitive functions. This is partly due to the complexity of brains' "mechanics": the scientific understanding of how different lobes, nuclei and connections function and interact is still very incomplete to date, and the plasticity of brains means that each test subject would arrive to the experiment situation with a slightly different cortical wiring. In practice, this means that experimental neuroscience can only prove or disprove very limited hypotheses in highly controlled test environments. (cf. Baars & Gage 2014, 555–588.) As it stands, these methods could hardly grasp the full spectrum of experiences that engaging with a fictional character produces in the span of a short story, let alone a novel, a comic series, or a prolonged transmedial interaction.

What is more, even the best data could never equal the phenomenal qualities of character-oriented cognitions and interactions, because the so-called "hard problem of consciousness" is still unsolved: neuroscientists and philosophers of mind still have no idea how or why neural activity produces subjective experiential textures, or qualia (see e.g. Caracciolo 2014b, 14–15; Nagel 1974; Thompson 2010, 7). Therefore, neural experiments – or any kind of

quantitative data – cannot provide much insight into how characters are interpreted by individual readers. Instead, if the terminology serves as any indication, subjective qualia could be reached at least somewhat better with qualitative methods – to which close-reading is also included.

All this considered, I would like to turn a full circle and note that if theory without empirical evidence is groundless, empirical experimentation without theory-building is aimless. Theoretical approaches should therefore not be regarded as trifling or even supplementary, but the only way of providing the "big picture" of such complex experiential phenomena as character engagement (cf. Caracciolo 2014b, 12). As such, speculative research like the present work "pave[s] the road for empirical work" (ibid.), while also implementing and developing more fine-tuned ways of talking about our relationships with fictional beings.

In academic contexts, the word 'speculation' is often used disparagingly[11], to refer to unproven theories and fancies, but as I argue in Article 3, imagining and hypothesizing is ultimately the only way to make the possible visible – to gain any hold of things that cannot be empirically tested (as of yet). Essentially, our narrative theories are almost as speculative as the texts they target, but rather than a being a weakness, this is their very function, the very feature that makes them useful and valuable.

1.5   The Hubris: Research Problems and Objectives

To sum and reiterate, the aim of this dissertation is to challenge literary character theories, cognitive narrative theories and comics studies with each other, and thus to extend them towards each other. More specifically, this means developing cognitive narratology and theoretical understanding of fictional characters to a more transmedial direction; orienting cognitive narratology and comics studies more towards the concept of character; as well as updating the cognitive branches of existing character theory and comics research with new viewpoints and connections. Put together, all this should result in new understanding of what multimodal fictional characters are and how we as readers engage with them.

Thus, this work neither starts with nor aims for a cohesive, universal model of fictional characters but, instead, seeks to uncover at least some of the complex dialectic relations between the textual existence of characters and the cognitive actions of their readers. As explained in this chapter, I believe these perspectives to be mutually revealing and explanatory, so that the ontological, structural, medial and textual peculiarities of characters are likely to evoke certain heuristic types of responses, while the readers engage these artificial hu-

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[11]   There are some exceptions to this, of course, such as the loose group of non-anthropocentric philosophers who have recently opted to gather under an umbrella term of "speculative realism" (Phetteplace 2017).

man analogues – and make them what they are – by utilizing their human, and human-centric, cognitive capabilities and knowledge structures (see ch. 1.2.2). The main objective, in other words, has been to map the many affordances and interfaces of fictional characters: the mental, social and material functions they invite and the many unstable meanings that can be assigned to them, both in and outside of narrative contexts.

This quest was divided into article-sized chunks, which each had to follow their own logics and concentrate on quite specific texts, theories, and problems. However, as the previous subchapters have endeavored to qualify, all these texts, theories and problems were carefully chosen to have logical connections with each other, to be representative of the overall fields, and to also bring something entirely new into the ongoing discussions. In addition, the publication contexts shaped some of the article-specific research questions to some degree, so that they ultimately took the following shapes:

- Article 1: How do the different types of interfigurality identified by Wolfgang G. Müller manifest in recent Anglo-American fantasy comics, and what implications do these manifestations have for the theory of interfigurality?
- Article 2: What aspects of fictional characters become revealed or foregrounded if one parallels theoretical accounts of character with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), as *The Unwritten* comic (2009–2015) suggests?
- Article 3: How do comics in general, and *The Sandman: Overture* (2015) in particular, construct characters that can be interpreted as nonhuman and, in doing so, evoke the illusion of mediating nonhuman experience?
- Article 4: How are the main principles of B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore's experience economy reflected in the ways comic book characters are marketed and consumed, especially in the Anglo-American context?

Taken together, these case studies provide tentative answers to such larger questions as:

- How do comic book characters take form and evolve between various texts, authors and readers?
- How do characters affect the interaction between readers and narrative texts? In other words, what kind of tools for thinking and narrating fictional characters are?
- What kinds of meanings and subjectivities can comic book characters convey or (re)present, and how?

The next chapter will summarize in more detail the argumentation and results of each article, whereas the final chapter will return to these larger questions and piece together an overall vision of fictional characters, as suggested by the articles' findings.

2 THE OPERATIONS: SUMMARIES AND RESULTS OF THE ARTICLES

The four article limbs attached to this dissertation have been constructed, one by one, between 2013 and 2017. Article 1 was the first crude attempt to bring the main ingredients of my project together, and it draws heavily on my licentiate's dissertation, *A Frame of You: Construction of Characters in Graphic Novels* (2013). It is thus included mainly to mark the starting points – to display the cluster of undergraduate stem cells from which the three other much longer, more substantial texts were able to grow and evolve.

The rest of the articles are not presented in the chronological order of writing or publication. Instead, they progress from the most abstract and meta-theoretical towards the more applied and concrete research problems – from ontological and analogical speculations to analyses of comics' expressive means and, finally, to explorations of the marketplace where comic book characters are ultimately formed and experienced. I have chosen this order because it seems sensible to stack the shakier, more gap-ridden components on top of the more solid ones: the theoretical end already has some weight behind it – and this dissertation has added some more – but the practical end is still wide open to further interdisciplinary inquiry.

2.1 Article 1: Sorting the Wandering Figures of Fantasy Comics

The main aim of Article 1, "Something Borrowed: Interfigural Characterization in Anglo-American Fantasy Comics" is to yoke Wolfgang G. Müller's (1991) concept of interfigurality to the intertextual poetics of contemporary speculative graphic novels. Since the early 1990s, the writers and artists of Vertigo imprint, as well as some individual comics creators like Alan Moore and Mike Mignola, have produced a growing number of successful comics series based on well-known literary and mythological figures. Article 1 notes that these works already constitute an unidentified (sub)genre and, moreover, that they exemplify

each and every type of interfigurality named by Müller (see ch. 1.2.1). So central is interfigurality to this young genre of comics, in fact, that it might even point towards such new categories of intertextual character relations that Müller (1991) failed to identify based on his exclusively literary corpus. For instance, generic character conventions – such as tropes related to most superpowered or vampiric characters – could be regarded as a distinct interfigural phenomenon as well.

In addition to these category explorations, Article 1 seeks to explain why the contemporary English-language graphic novel has proved so fertile a breeding ground for reinvented and borrowed characters and character tropes. The trends and practices of the Anglo-American comics industry are one likely factor: the more recent series have probably been inspired by the artistic and commercial success of pioneering titles like *The Sandman* (1989–1996), and the conventions of cross-over universes had already been established by mid-century by superhero comics and their highly centralized publication rights (cf. ch. 1.3.1). Moreover, one could speculate that comics' medium-specific affordances invite intertextual experimentations: perhaps the collage-like quality of the formal composition makes analogous mixing and matching of content elements, like characters and genre tropes, especially easy or intuitive (cf. ch. 1.2.3). One could also liken re-used figures to the gaps Scott McCloud (1993) and his followers discuss: just as the reader must cognitively tack his or her way from one panel or issue to the next, so does he or she also have to observe, remember and compare in order to close the seams between the re-used figure and its previous version(s). Otherwise, parts of the character may remain hollow or unintelligible – as good as blank space.

Article 1 thus concludes that Müller's theory of interfigurality is, indeed, applicable across media, and especially useful when analyzing the intertextual branch of fantasy comics that has been incubating in the Anglo-American graphic novel scene during the past few decades. However, the concept of interfigurality would be more sustainable in a cognitive framework (e.g. Hochman 1985 and Fokkema 1991) than in the context of Müller's own structuralist affiliations. This is because repeated names, traits and signs mean little in themselves. Rather, the reader must engage in considerable amount of cognitive work in order to gauge the degree of difference or sameness between the two versions of the character and to interpret the implications of the resulting intertextual link (cf. ch. 1.4.1 & 3.1.2).

Article 1 was published in early 2016 as a part of Inter-Disciplinary Press' digital anthology *Framescapes: Graphic Narrative Intertexts*, edited by Mikhail Peppas and Sanabelle Ebrahim. In essence, it is a slightly amended version of my first-ever conference paper, presented at Inter-Disciplinary Network's 2nd global *Graphic Novel* conference in the University of Oxford on September 23, 2013. Although its tentative use of terminology is not entirely consistent with the rest of this dissertation, its main arguments already lean towards the transmedial, dissonance-embracing and reader-prioritizing stances developed in the later articles.

2.2 Article 2: Discovering the Monstrosity of Fictional Characters

The theoretical forays of Article 2, "The Monster Analogy: Why Fictional Characters Are Frankenstein's Monsters", are directly based on a metanarrative analogy presented in Mike Carey and Peter Gross' *The Unwritten* (2009–2015). As the comic's protagonist, Tom Taylor grows more and more unsure about his ontological status, he starts feeling special kinship with Frankenstein's monster, one of the many re-used literary figures he encounters in the course of the series. Their conversations suggest, sometimes quite explicitly, that the troubles of fictional characters are very similar to the troubles of Frankenstein's conflicted creature: both have been purposefully crafted, yet demonstrate full agency and many other human qualities. According to Lisa Zunshine (2008, 51–131), this makes them "counterontological" creatures, beings that do not fit comfortably to the fundamental cognitive categories that distinguish between person and artefact. After establishing this parallel, the article goes on to evaluate and elaborate this "monster analogy" by comparing the stages through which Frankenstein's Creature develops in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to the evolution that literary character theories have undergone in the past century.

Firstly, the functionalist language of structuralists' and formalists' character categorizations and trait theories correspond to Victor Frankenstein's scavenging of graveyards and abattoirs, as both stages or approaches concentrate on the artefactual side of creation. In other words, these early character theories were mostly interested in the formal components one needs to build a character (e.g. Chatman 1978), and in the functions they should predictably perform in the framework of the narrative (e.g. Barthes 1975). By contrast, they dedicated little consideration to the individuality and agency of characters, despite expressing some passing bafflement over characters' illusory humanity: it is difficult to ignore the fact that especially nonacademic readers tend to regard these textual androids as if they had minds of their own or led entire extratextual lives. James Phelan's (1989) rhetorical and Aleid Fokkema's (1991) semiotic theory were the first approaches to explicitly admit that both of these aspects – the synthetic and the mimetic – are equally essential to the definition of character – as "counterontological" as that might feel (cf. ch. 1.2.1 & 3.1.1).

The more recent, cognitively oriented theories of character parallel what Michael Holquist (2002, 96) names "the second creation" of Frankenstein's Creature, because both involve transforming a patchwork-like construction into a coherent, minded being through the act of reading. The Creature's identity only forms as it reads the novels and lab notes it finds, and characters only appear to have inner lives because the readers apply the theory of mind to them; the Creature identifies as a person through fictional characters, and the readers, in turn, identify him as a character because he invites the attribution of person-like consciousness (cf. ch. 1.2.2 & 3.3.2; Vermeule 2010; Zunshine 2008). At the same time, the cognitive efforts of the readers could also be likened to Frankenstein's stitching work, as it is the cognitive frames and encyclopedic knowledge

of the readers that ultimately allow them to connect and complement the scattered textual cues into an idea of a complete human-like entity (Eder et al. 2010; Schneider 2001). Because all readers perform this assembly against a different experiential background, their views of any given character necessarily differ, however (Caracciolo 2014b). This bestows the characters with the same kind of instability and virtuality many literary critics have attributed to Frankenstein's Creature (Botting 1991; Sherwin 1981).

Finally, the Creature rebels and outlives its creator – and most fictional characters have the potential to do the same. This is because the authors only have control over a limited set of textual cues – those they personally arranged on paper – whereas many characters partake in complicated interfigural genealogies: they consist of readerly interpretations of potentially unlimited sets of textual cues. Indeed, as *The Unwritten* hints and as Roland Barthes also argues in his seminal essay, "Death of the Author" (1977), a text gains its power not from the author but from its connections to the multitudes of readers and other texts. Victor Frankenstein may die in the end but, at the same time, the cycle of reading and recreating has made him, his Creature – and myriads other characters – virtually immortal. This transtextual nature of character is also addressed in Articles 1 and 4, and it might become a focal issue for character theories in the future, as literary scholars are increasingly required to address the transmedial and interactive dimensions of contemporary storytelling.

In conclusion, theorists should embrace the Frankensteinian paradoxicality of fictional characters; the fact that they are textual machines as much as they are imaginary persons. Admittedly, this is a cognitively uncomfortable and methodologically difficult notion to grasp, which might explain why so many theories have concentrated on only one of these aspects.

Among all the textual body parts of this dissertation, Article 2 has by far the richest and longest version history: I presented the first conference paper on the topic in the fall of 2014, and submitted the present manuscript in the fall of 2017. *SubStance: A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism* accepted the manuscript with no revisions and included it in the first issue of 2019 (vol. 48).

2.3   Article 3: Experiencing (with) Alien Characters

The third article, "Alien Overtures: Speculating about Nonhuman Experiences with Comic Book Characters" delves into the utility and validity of imaginary aliens. In other words, it focuses on manifestly nonhuman comic book characters – but refrains from asking how they could provide insights into real nonhumans' experiences. There are three distinct reasons for this restraint.

First, as Article 2 already established, no character is ever truly human or nonhuman but somewhere in between. As textual constructions, characters could deviate from normative humanness in any number of ways, but narrative conventions and human readers' cognitive propensities ensure that the interpretation of characters is constantly connected to the readers' ideas of person-

hood in some ways (see ch. 3.2.2). In this sense, the ontology of characters always already destabilizes the human–nonhuman dichotomy presupposed by the hypothetical research question, "what nonhuman characters can teach us about real nonhumans' experience?"

Second, as Thomas Nagel argues in his seminal essay "What It's Like to Be a Bat?" (1974), the nature of experience is such that all acts of abstraction, objectification and translation diminish or obscure it: experiencing batness as a bat is quite different from engaging with any description or depiction of batness as a human. Our experiential understanding of being a bat will always be necessarily limited by the fact that we occupy human minds, bodies and societies, whereas bats do not. Asking any work of fiction to accurately provide such understanding would therefore be quite unfair.

Third, fictions do not necessarily convey facts, as it is not what they are designed to do. Storytelling tends to be less about knowing and more about imagining. Thus, inquiring a fictional entity how an actual entity actually feels would surely be misguided.

What fictional characters can do, however, is to help the readers to speculate on the experiences of bats, or any other creatures, whether human or nonhuman. After all, if batness truly is unknowable to humans, we can only relate to it in two ways: by ignoring it altogether, or by imagining it. Consequently, the question that Article 3 really seeks to answer is *how*: how can comic book characters coax the reader into imagining experiential domains that deviate from their everyday human life and perception?

The first thing to consider is the experiential nature of narratives. Monika Flurdernik's (1996) natural narratology in particular equates narrativity with anthropomorphic experientiality, and it is undeniable that narratives of all genres place much more focus on the subjective, situational and emotional textures of life than sciences do (cf. Caracciolo 2014b; Herman 2013).

More recently, some cognitively oriented theorists and unnatural narratologists have amended this view by noting that narratives do not only have to reflect and repeat our everyday experientiality but they can also remix it. That is, experimental and "unnatural" narrative elements can defy human reality, perception or logic, and thus generate imaginary experiences that challenge and stretch the cognitive frames we use to make sense of them (e.g. Alber 2009; Caracciolo 2014b). In other words, when the formal elements of narratives are used in a way that present characters as strange or nonhuman, they are likely to elicit a defamiliarizing effect – a jolt of strangeness that encourages the reader to reflect on his or her worldview and thought patterns (Caracciolo 2016).

Experimental and speculative literature have specialized in producing such estranging story-driven experiences for a long time, but graphic storytelling has repeatedly shown to have both the interest and the means to step outside realism as well (Fehrle 2011). One of these means is provided by the collage-like quality of the comics medium that was already identified in Article 1 (and chapter 1.2.3): comics' multimodal modularity allows juxtaposing all kinds of information in any number of dissonant ways. Consequently, comic book

characters can, for instance, hybridize human and nonhuman traits in different degrees, and elements of character-focalization can mesh ambiguously with the objective, physical reality of the storyworld (Groensteen 2013, 121–131; Herman 2011b; Keen 2011a; Thon 2014). In addition, characters in comics are always visually embodied and situated, which allows the reader to observe their "minds in action" (Kukkonen 2013a, 127–176) and attribute states of mind to them from an enactivist viewpoint that need not be strictly verbal and anthropocentric.

Finally, all these ideas and devices are tested and made more concrete through a cognitive analysis of Neil Gaiman and J. H. Williams III's graphic novel *The Sandman: Overture* (2015). This practice in experientially oriented close-reading demonstrates, for instance, how comics can employ multimodal hybridization of different ontological categories (Zunshine 2008) in order to construct characters that are simultaneously strange and relatable (cf. Bernaerts et al. 2014). Through its use of experimental page designs and mirror motifs, *Overture* also explicitly marks changes and continuums between subjective and objective perspectives, hinting that it always remains mindful of the humanity of its creators and readers. Together, these effects give the impression that the readers' knowledge and imagination as well as the techniques of storytelling and graphic expression have their limits – and that numerous alien domains will always reside just outside those limits.

As a whole, "Alien Overtures" is the most recent of the compiled articles. Its first draft was produced in the summer of 2016, and the present version in the course of 2017. It was tailor-made to represent comics studies in an interdisciplinary anthology titled *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*, which I have edited together with my advisor Sanna Karkulehto and my colleague Aino-Kaisa Koistinen. Routledge has agreed to publish the volume in 2019, in their series "Perspectives on the Nonhuman in Literature and Culture".

2.4   Article 4: Consuming Multimodal Heroes in Transmedial Cultures

The title of Article 4 could be roughly translated as "From Shelves to Selves: Comic Book Characters as Modifiable Experience Products". In this Finnish-language appendix to the present dissertation, comic book characters are, in other words, portrayed as beings that take form in the material and social exchanges between producers and audiences. The main aim of the article is thus to explore, first, what roles characters play in the marketing and fan cultures of comics, and second, how they themselves become molded by these processes and interactions of comics industry and collective narrative consumption. As mentioned in chapter 1.2.4, one of the central starting points for this exploration is Pine and Gilmore's ([1999] 2011) notion of experience economy, which insists

that the best way to combat the commodification of goods, products and services is to repackage them as memorable, custom-made experiences.

At the dawn of contemporary graphic storytelling, in the late 19th and early 20th century, comic books were seemingly at the bottom of Pine and Gilmore's (2011) value hierarchy. They were viewed as disposable commodities that were cheap to print and quick to read (Sabin 1996, 12–20) – and soon enough, big publishing houses started to produce them like any other consumer product, in workshops organized like industrial assembly lines. In order to maximize the shelf-appeal as efficiently as possible, the task of creating a single comic was thus divided to a writer, a penciller, an inker, a letterer, a colorist, and so on. (see e.g. McCloud 2000.) These Fordian practices are still in use, particularly in the publishing cultures of North America and Japan, but somehow comics continue to avoid the dreaded loss of value. On the contrary, they are slowly but steadily gaining legitimacy as an art form and finding their way to book stores, canons and reprint lists.

This is likely due to the experientiality that comics have fostered all along: even when they were just black-and-white attachments between newspapers, their function was to boost the sales by appealing to the readers' hunger for visual spectacle and fictional experiences (Sabin 1996 12–20). This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that comic books whose original values were diminutive in the 1930s and 1940s now fetch millions of dollars in international auctions, as the fans want to experience and honor the narrative and material origins of their favorite superheroes (Rogers 2011).

Based on this, one could claim that, rather than staging experiences around non-experiential products, comics industry actually develops goods and services around experiential and narrative products, such as characters and storyworlds. This is only becoming clearer as the increasing convergence of media production transforms comics franchises into transmedial, transnational story universes that extend across all imaginable platforms (cf. Jenkins 2006; Harvey 2015). Indeed, the two biggest comics publishers in the United States – Marvel Comics and DC Comics – have gone through so many corporate mergers during the past few decades that their original identities have been lost in transmedialization: Marvel Entertainment and DC Entertainment now describe themselves simply as "character-based" entertainment companies (see company websites for up-to-date formulations).

As this peculiar mission-statement suggests, in experience economy, characters function much like brands; they are the lynchpins that attach lasting experiential value to the material products. Indeed, many superheroes, with their logo-like emblems and value-declaring mottoes, are constructed much like all the other commercial brand items. What is more, many comics genres have become so conventionalized they provide the audience with rather uniform and repetitive narrative experiences: all superhero stories, for instance, are founded on the same premise of an exceptional, often traumatized individual fighting for what he or she believes in, against overwhelming odds (Coogan 2009). Consequently, characters and their individual traits – the character brands – have

become one of the main factors that differentiate these stories and draw the consumer from one product to the next.

This is at least what Japanese media scholar Hiroki Azuma (2001) suggests with his theory of database consumption. According to Azuma, consumers of postmodern popular culture have lost their faith in the grand narratives of modernism, and thus tend to attach themselves mostly to whatever discrete character traits attract or endear them. All the media industry needs to do is to recombine these traits into ever-new characters and ever-new products in ever-new ways, and the audiences will keep buying the "memorabilia" (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 85–88) that evoke this feeling of kyara-moe. Indeed, the likenesses of popular characters have been used to sell every imaginable kind of good and commodity ever since Ally Sloper (Sabin 1996, 15).

Azuma's theory also overlaps with Pine and Gilmore's (2011, 112–113) concept of "mass-customization", a process of modular modification that is meant to enhance the experience of the individual customer. In comics industry, this is realized by tweaking some of the meaning- and identity-carrying traits of the base character product – for instance, the generic template of a superhero – so that it would better reflect the perceived desires of specific target demographics. Both Marvel and DC Comics have recently introduced prominent Muslim and homosexual characters to their superhero line-ups, for instance, perhaps because the transmedialization of their core franchises has expanded and diversified their audiences significantly.

What Pine and Gilmore's (2011) theory does not recognize, however, is that since experience products can only form and produce value in the interactions between the commercial offering and the individual consumer, the audiences have some power over the customization of the products as well. When a consumer buys a regular product, he or she also buys certain public affinity with the product's brand and its values. The same could also be said of the character brands – but at the same time, their narrative and experiential affordances also allow the fans to remake or ventriloquize them to fit and express their own core values (cf. e.g. Brown 2011). This is apparent in the ways the fans of various media products mold and "poach" characters in their creative and social practices (cf. Jenkins 1992).

In fan fiction, fan art, cosplay and other forms of fan production, as well as in the playful space of comics conventions, the favored characters are constantly reproduced by the fans. In this process of reproduction, they may easily be transplanted into new contexts – new plots, storyworlds, genres or character configurations – or be modified to fit the fans' personal or collective whims, needs and values. Since these recombinations are motivated by the fans' individual, non-commercial interests, they may either comply with the official industry-produced versions of the characters or clash with them in ways that often reveal and resist the assumptions and values inherent in the canon. (cf. Hirsjärvi 2009; Jenkins 1992; Manninen 1995). One prominent example of this is "The Hawkeye Initiative", an internet movement that encourages fans to re-

draw overly sexualized and unrealistic female heroes as equally distorted male characters – often for a humorous effect (Scott 2015).

In conclusion, characters can be viewed as social and material nexuses where the salient values and identities of cultures and subcultures are expressed and renegotiated in nonlinear, interactive manner. In a somewhat ironic sense, this reflects the next stage of value progression that Pine and Gilmore (2011, 241–245) are expecting to emerge in the near future: the transformation economy. In this up-and-coming paradigm, "the customer becomes the product" and marketers of experiences must aim to produce lasting changes in them (ibid.). As the practices of fan cultures highlight, the exchanges between the industry, its products and its consumers are already transformative in many ways, however. On the surface, the processes of mass-customization and fan production may seem to target only fictional figures, but these figures are ultimately inseparable from the people and cultures that use them to communicate things about each other and themselves to each other and themselves.

Article 4 was produced and published in the framework of a Finnish anthology that applies the models of experience economy critically to various cultural and artistic fields and phenomena. This volume, whose title translates roughly as "Experience as Culture and Culture as Experience: Approaching Experience Economy via Cultural Studies", was published in 2016 by the Jyväskylä Center of Contemporary Culture Studies. It was edited by Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Juhana Venäläinen and Sanna Karkulehto, one of my advisors.

3   THE ANATOMY: A COGNITIVE THEORY OF CHARACTERS ACROSS MEDIA

Even as they have focused on their own case-study-like stitchings and dissections, these four articles have also unearthed crucial pieces of a more tacit, overarching understanding of what characters actually are. As I have already noted, the foundations of this tentative anatomy were laid out in my licentiate's dissertation, which hypothesized, perhaps unoriginally, that readers construct the characters between their own ideas of humanity and diverse textual data, which can comprise both words and images that can, moreover, originate in several works by several authors (Varis 2013). Such a reader-centric view of characters has both sustained and survived this dissertation project as well. If anything, the results and complications of the four articles have only made it more obvious that characters must be conceived as inherently conflicting, liminal and process-like if we are to retain any hope of explaining all the ways they wander and function in contemporary multimodal media cultures. Fortunately, current cognitive approaches provide a framework where characters can be described in exactly such a way – as unbound amalgamations of textual cues that gain a sense of coherence and a flicker of humanity in the reception process, in the interactions between the signs and the minds.

Many of the keywords of this dissertation, from Frankenstein to speculation and from experience to liminality, underline the complex and situational nature of characters' mode of existence and of readers' engagements with them. One of the purposes of this approach has been to openly defy the explanatory power of single static schematic models. Then again, conjuring up artificial, contradictory constructions does not seem too foreign to the Frankensteinian spirit of this treatise either. Hence, for the sake of conclusion and in hopes that it would make the findings of these articles easier to reconcile, apply and develop, I will next attempt to piece together a tentative list of tensions that appear central to the ontology and functioning of characters.

Tension seems an especially appropriate choice of word here since it has already been given prominence in character theory by Wolfgang G. Müller (1991, 109) – who examines the "tension between similarity and dissimilarity"

that different interfigural phenomena evoke (see ch. 3.1.2.) – in comics studies by Charles Hatfield (2005) – who calls comics "an art of tensions" (see ch. 3.1.1.) – and in cognitive literary theory by Marco Caracciolo (2014b, 49) – who describes the enactment of characters' consciousness as the tension between "being oneself" and "being other" (see ch. 3.2.1). As with these three theories, the notion of tension is here used to inject some dynamism into the otherwise simplified model as, to quote Caracciolo (ibid.), "this term designates a relationship that develops over time, giving rise to unstable and always reversible configurations instead of creating 'end products'". Furthermore, in the context of physics, tension generally refers to creation and storage of potential energy, and electric tension (or electric potential difference) is more commonly known as voltage. If Frankenstein's Creature was brought to life by manipulating the electric tensions in his tissues – as many believe, though Shelley's novel makes no direct references to galvanism[12] (see e.g. Goodall, 2008; Knellwolf & Goodall 2008) – it seems only appropriate that his textual analogues would operate on the cognitive and semiotic tensions generated in the reading process.

Theorizing characters in terms of tensions, in other words, is intended to capture their inherent potentialities or affordances, the ways in which they can be evoked or enacted in opportune circumstances. That is to say, my model is not to be taken as a definition of what characters are but as an incomplete, yet somewhat systematic speculation of how they can become, take form and make meaning.

While the word 'character' may in many contexts be used in its narrow sense, to denote signs on a page, my intuition is that most "character discourse" (cf. Skalin 2012, 120) treats fictional beings as something we readers experience. That is, even though the conventionalized language we use to discuss characters might seem to refer to stable, humanlike entities, speaking of "living" characters actually requires referring to interpretive and communicative processes. This is because characters as we experience them do not and cannot exist outside or independent of these processes of experiencing. It is important to note, however, that both of these senses of the word – character as a string of signs and character as an open-ended interpretation of a "potential person" – continue to haunt especially the academic discussions of character, and they are often collapsed together with each other as well as with various other tensions, which I aim to disentangle in this chapter.

These conceptions of character "on the slab" and "off the slab" (cf. Article 2) also point towards the most central tension of them all: the "potential difference" between the text and the reader. As cognitive and reader response theories have reiterated to the point of truism, it is this highly unstable encounter where textual cues result in both predictable and unpredictable cognitive effects, where meanings are negotiated and narratives unfolded (cf. e.g. Kukkonen

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[12]   Galvanism refers to muscle contractions caused by external electrical stimuli. The phenomenon is named after Luigi Galvani's (1737–1798) pioneering experiments, which reportedly fascinated both Percy and Mary Shelley. (Goodall 2008; Knellwolf & Goodall 2008.)

2013a, 38; ch. 1.4.1). This point of contact is, in other words, where the reader extends his or her cognitions towards the text, and a "spark of being" (Shelley 2012b, 35), a potential, oscillating energy, is bestowed on the textual creation. This all-important interaction is also foregrounded by Caracciolo (2014b, 49), who defines narrative experientiality as "the tension between the textual design and the recipient's experiential background", and by Hatfield (2005, 58), who names "text as experience vs. text as object" one of the tensions that make comic art so complex and open to different interpretations (cf. ch. 1.4.1).[13]

These unstable encounters always take place between two entities that are already full of tensions and ambiguities of their own, however. The texts are unavoidably polysemous and full of gaps (see ch. 3.1.1.), while the readers' experiences lie in the intersections of different cognitive processes that are unlikely to ever produce simple, harmonious representations of the world around them (see ch. 3.2.1.). Moreover, the majority of characters are suspended between multitudes of different texts (see ch. 3.1.2.) and/or readers (3.2.2.), meaning that the processes that constitute characters also tend to be transtextual and socially shared. And just as there is always an electric potential difference between two different materials, there is also bound to be a tension – a qualitative dissimilarity – between any two readers or reading experiences as well as between any two texts or narratives. In physics, this "gap" between two phases, or two different materials, happens to be known as the Galvani potential, which – again – seems frighteningly fitting, seeing that these intertextual and inter-reader gaps form the "grids" that can grant the characters something resembling Frankensteinian immortality (cf. Article 2; Carey & Gross 2012b; Varis 2018).

On top of all this, I would argue that characters themselves are marked by tensions that are more or less peculiar to them as nonexistent agents. As Chapter 1 and Article 2 both elaborate, readers tend to be strangely mindful of both the mimetic and synthetic qualities of characters simultaneously (see ch. 3.3.1.) – which is related but not equal to the fact that characters are always anthropomorphized to some degree, despite being artificial creations by definition (see ch. 3.3.2.). Due to this artificiality, fictional characters are, moreover, subject to virtuality: they can be evoked, rendered or incarnated in any number of dissonant ways without ever realizing or exhausting their full meaning potential (see ch. 3.3.3).

Indeed, if Baruch Hochman (2006, 97) is to be believed, characters are aberrations, monstrous and disobedient oddities that "mar the ever-so-satisfying symmetries of narrative theory"; "[t]he semantic and semiotic tools which [are] so effective in dealing with other aspects of narrative do not work for character"

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[13] I find the way that Hatfield (2005, 63) equates "narrative content" with "the experience of reading" problematic, however, as experience is clearly something more personal, more situational and more difficult to describe than what the abstract notion of "narrative content" connotes. Furthermore, the proper counterpoint to the experientiality of reading comics would not be the "materiality", the physical medial form of comics but the entire "textual design" (cf. Caracciolo, 2014b, 49): the textual cues and their relations *as well as* their material incarnations.

– or at least they cannot describe what is unique about them. This is why the following display of theoretical alchemy borrows its potency mostly from character theories, although I will adhere to my Frankensteinian modus operandi and incorporate a handful of other useful viewpoints as well (see ch. 1).

All the aforementioned tensions are grouped into a rough skeletal model in Figure 1, and the following chapters aim to slap some meat on it, but only briefly. This is because the main merit of this dissertation has been to identify these tensions and their relations. Discussing and understanding them in more detail clearly requires further research.
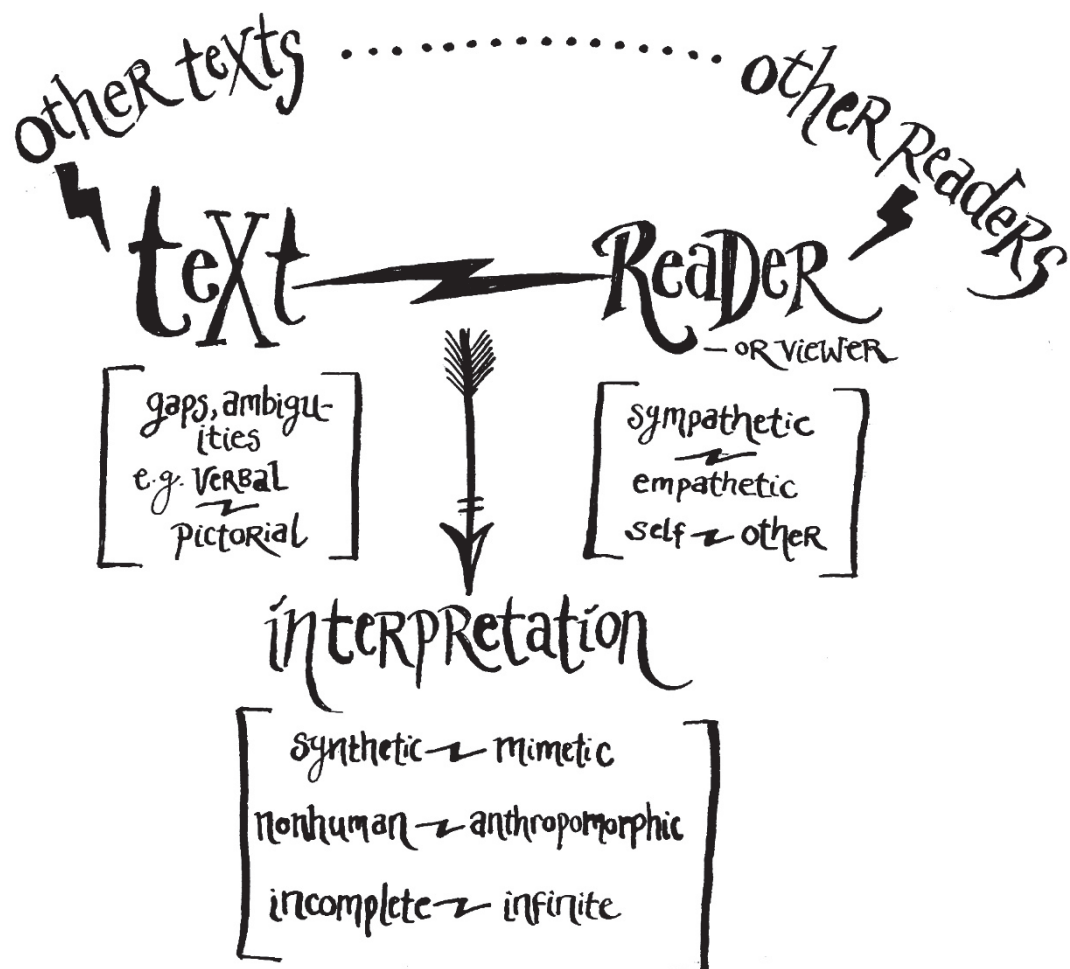
FIGURE 1: Network of Tensions (drawn by the author)

3.1   Tensions Within and Between Texts

All of the tensions discussed in this chapter seem to be so essential to the entire species of fictional characters that they should occur in slightly different forms across all media. In spite of this, I will not abandon comics as my main source of examples. On the contrary, in the very first subchapter, I will take Hatfield's (2005) cue and use "the art of tensions" to illustrate what kind of *intratextual tensions* the polysemous tissues of (multimodal) narratives generate. Indeed, comics may not contain any more information gaps than other forms of story-telling but they certainly make some of them very apparent, as the gutter-crossed pages bear a striking visual semblance to the scar-riddled body of Frankenstein's Creature.

The second subchapter then wanders off to explore the *intertextual tensions* forming within and between characters occurring in different media texts. Müller's (1991) article on interfigurality (see Articles 1 & 2, ch. 1.2.1) and Brian Richardson's article on "transtextual characters" (see Article 1) offer fairly formalist and literary starting coordinates for the discussion, but our cognitive and transmedial instruments should allow us to navigate some ways further into the wilderness between works.

3.1.1   Intratextual Tensions: Comics' Frankensteinian Bodies

In addition to the primary tension between the text and the reader, Hatfield's (2005, 66) theory of comics storytelling names three types of tensions that, according to him, mark comics expression with profound "plurality" and "instability". First, there is the much-researched tension between "different codes of signification" – or the interplay between pictorial, more or less mimetic "symbols that show", and the conventionalized, less transparent "symbols that tell" (ibid. 41). Second, there is the tension between discrete units, such as panels, and the larger sequences they form (ibid. 41–45). Third, there is the tension between "linear" and "tabular" structures or reading strategies. That is to say, each Frankensteinian page can always be considered a spatial composition as well as a representation of different moments or events, which follow each other according to some temporal logic (Hatfield 2005, 48). As these tensions are intrinsic to the way comics tell their stories and communicate their meanings, they also intertwine with the tensions of the characters. Therefore, it is helpful to consider each of them in a little more detail.

The first type of tensions – the contrastive and collaborative relations between various verbal and pictorial elements – tempts simplistic parallels with Cartesian dualism (see ch. 1.2.2). In other words, it would be easy to assume that the pictorial track is mostly reserved for depicting characters' exteriority and that the verbal track is the only means of unfolding their interiority (cf. Mikkonen 2017, 176; Varis 2013, 50–62). This myth has, for a long time, been nourished by general declarations about different media's individual strengths:

even academics hold widespread beliefs that verbal literature has an exceptional ability to provide "direct" access to characters' and narrators' minds (cf. e.g. Caracciolo 2014a; Cohn 1978; Herman 2011a) while images, especially photographic media, are best at capturing the visually perceptible reality. This "Laocoon argument" (cf. Kukkonen 2013a, 14–15) can lead to the harmful assumption that different media can reach abstract depths and subjective experiences only to the extent in which they are endowed with the powers of verbal narration. Similarly, one might be led to believe that visual media must focus, almost exclusively, on external qualities and actions, physical bodies and environments, or movement and spectacle. The first-ever character theory also seems to buy into this paradigm, as Aristotle was willing to direct consideration to the subjectivities of characters only insofar as they unfold as action (see e.g. Hochman 1985, 29; Hogan 2010). This may be because classic drama – Aristotle's target corpus – has seemingly little means of providing "direct", unspoken access to the characters' minds, whereas the actors' moving, talking bodies were constantly in the audiences' view (Varis 2013, 14).

The same could, of course, be said about comics. The bodies of comic book characters are also repeated almost superfluously from panel to panel and, what is more, they are often caricaturistic and exaggerated – cute and simplified or superhuman and over-sexualized. At a quick glance, this seems to suggest that physical action and visual pleasures are, indeed, foregrounded over subjective depths in comics storytelling. At the same time, the textual fragments that do verbalize characters' and narrators' thoughts and speech are neatly bracketed into bubbles and text boxes. The thought bubbles especially serve as almost invasively direct probes to characters' moment-to-moment cognitions, seemingly confirming the tight bond between verbal language and mind-reading.

As hinted in chapter 1.2.3, all this brings graphic narration to an interesting dialogue with second-generation cognitive theories. For even if we were to accept that mental action is, indeed, best represented by verbal and physical action by visual narration, comics and e-approaches observe such high traffic between the poles of this double dichotomy as to almost dismantle them altogether. What I mean by this is that the minds of comic book characters are always visually embodied and situated: even if the characters are not given speech or thought bubbles, they provide the reader with gazes, expressions, gestures, postures and positions. Given that such silent characters are interpreted as sentient and intentional beings, rather than as object-like mannequins or pin-ups, second-generation cognitive theories propose that these cues give the reader a very different, although not necessarily less sophisticated kind of mind-access than, for instance, free indirect speech would offer. Upon closer inspection, the same is, of course, true for Aristotle's dramatis personae: theater may not be able to produce a similar illusion of intimate first-person mind-reading as literature[14], but it is also extremely adept at showing "minds in ac-

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14   Unless, of course, one wants to make a case that dramatic monologues and narrated or internal monologues have not only the same function but exactly the same effect on the audience. I would argue against this, however, because the bodily mediation of the actor

tion" (Kukkonen 2013b, 127–176) – at suggesting unfolding subjectivities not only through verbal dialogue but also through bodily action that relates directly to the characters' physical and social environments.[15] Indeed, if the base assumption of cognitive literary theory is that the readers apply to fictional beings the same folk-psychological skills that they use to interpret real fellow beings, one could argue that these bodily cues replicated in visual media should actually be given primacy over the exceptionally direct, and thus unrealistic, literary mind-access.

The ways in which comics differ from real life are no less important, however, as many of their peculiarities facilitate this embodied kind of mind-reading even further. For one, the constantly shifting, chaotic mind cues of real life are replaced by sequences of frozen faces and postures in graphic storytelling. As the artists often strive to make each panel as expressive and "pregnant" as possible (cf. Eisner 1993, 105–111; Kukkonen 2013a, 14–16), the embodied minds of comic book characters are likely easier to interpret than the evanescent mind cues of real people, especially if they are emphasized with indexical effects. If reading fiction can be considered a socio-psychological "workout" (see ch. 1.2.2), comics can thus be seen to be able to provide some boosts or aids for this type of mind-reading training.

Second, just as theater can employ audience-directed monologues, comics can use thought bubbles to insert verbal, first-person mind-information – somewhat awkwardly – amidst the embodied, third-person mind-information. These verbal cues can, of course, support the pictorial cues, but they may just as well contradict them, which adds another layer to the mind-reading by creating an overt tension between the verbal and the pictorial tracks. Even more importantly, however, the very possibility of such contradictions effectively demonstrates that the cognitions we attribute to comic book characters are not locked on singular semiotic tracks but spread across the pages in extremely complex ways.

This observation is complicated even further by the fact that, along linguistic elements, speech and thought bubbles can also contain pictograms (Groensteen 2013, 124), symbolic images standing for the ideas thought or expressed by the characters – even as their "actual", exact expressions remain unknown. That is, if we see a character emitting a speech bubble that only contains a heart, it does not necessarily mean that the character says "heart" in some language. Instead, he or she can be understood to express warm or even amorous feelings – but whether this is the character's own intention or other characters' perception of his or her intentions remains unclear, as does the exact phrasing.

Similar ambiguity is typical of the more complicated pictorial devices for communicating characters' thoughts, feelings, worldviews and mental states as

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forces a reception situation that is, in many ways, much closer akin to a social situation than reading is.

15   In addition, the Greek actors sometimes wore masks, whose exaggerated facial expressions rival those of the most caricaturistic comic book characters. The British Museum, for example, has (had) some on display.

well. As discussed in Article 3, comics can sometimes express character focalization by altering the colors or the line work of certain panels or sequences, or by "superimposing" metaphoric or expressionistic imagery over the standard depiction of the storyworld (see Groensteen 2013, 123–124; Mikkonen 2008; Thon 2014; Varis 2013, 101–102). Since these subjective views can be shown to the reader "with the same force of conviction" as the "real" storyworld and characters (Groensteen 2013, 131) and since the transitions between these registers are often quite ambiguous, comics' visual narration can truly blur the boundaries between minds and physical environments. In other words, comics that use this kind of pictorial character focalization – such as *The Sandman* series or Bill Watterson's beloved strip comic *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985–1995) (Groensteen 2013, 129; Varis 2013, 120; see Article 3) – illustrate what enactive meaning-making looks or feels like in practice. Cats who see Death as feline and Calvin who sees his teachers as space monsters show us in a very concrete way that the world is never ready-made or absolute but emerges between the stimuli offered by the characters' surroundings and whatever they want, need or are able to perceive. These enacted, subjective views of storyworlds also cohere with the e-approaches in that their textures are often grasped in a fairly embodied manner: twisted shapes, swirly lines and sickly colors can feel literally nauseating, for instance, and thus help the reader to empathize with the focalizing characters' nauseous state (McCloud 1993, 118–137).

In sum, it could be claimed that instead of paralleling the Cartesian dichotomy by maintaining a similar dichotomy between verbal and pictorial narration – or symbolic and iconic signs – comics' creative use of all visual means of expression has actually always been more reminiscent of e-approaches' deconstruction of the Cartesian dichotomy (cf. Article 3). In other words, the close, jumbled interplay of text and images in comics reflects the close, jumbled interplay of mind and body that e-approaches describe. Graphic narration's tendency to question the distinction between verbal and pictorial elements' traditional functionalities (cf. Hatfield 2005, 37) thus allows them to effectively depict characters' minds not only as unseen and verbalized but also as visually embodied, enactive and enmeshed in the storyworlds. Just as there are no hard lines between a conventionalized sign and a representative sign or between realistic and expressive art styles, there are no solid boundaries between characters' bodily and mental expressions or between different characters' and narrators' realities. Thus, the tension between words and pictures should not be equated with the tensions between characters' minds and their physical surroundings; rather, it is a feature of visual expression that is highly illustrative and conductive of enactive cognition for both the characters and the readers.

The visual bodies of characters also factor in the second type of tensions discussed by Hatfield – the tensions between singular units and sequences. For Hatfield (2015, 41–48), these tensions seem to mostly comprise the relations between single panels and panel-to-panel transitions, but comics are, in fact, fragmented analogously on several scales, like fractals. Each panel is a part of a page; each page is a part of a single issue or album; the story arcs of separate

issues tend to form larger overarching narratives or themes; and the complete comics series might belong to multi-platform transmedial storytelling franchises (see Article 4; Varis 2013). Following McCloud (1993), the gaps between all of these units invite the reader to perform "closure", and according to Kukkonen (2013b, 38) as well as Hatfield (2015, 41–44) himself, this can always be done in multiple ways. That is to say, all of these gaps are capable of catalyzing multiple interpretations, and for characters, this means that their development and coherence are constantly in question.

When two similar-looking figures appear in two adjacent panels, they are often quite automatically recognized as the same character, especially if the transition is scaffolded by ongoing dialogue or supported by gestalt rules, such the rule of continuous movement (cf. McCloud 1993, 63; Kukkonen 2013a, 18–19). At the same time, however, each panel usually adds some new character information – portrays the character from a new angle, perhaps, or shows them doing or saying something they have not done or said before. To refer back to Schneider's cognitive character theory (2001), this slight tension between a familiar figure and new information allows the reader to amend or correct their idea of the character in a dynamic process (see also Harvey 2015). These basic sequentialities of "restricted arthrology" (Groensteen 2007, 22) – or, more specifically, the "moment to moment" and "action to action" transitions between panels (McCloud 1993, 70) – are thus crucial to characterization. They usually create just enough tension to keep the reader moving and learning but rarely pull the character apart.

Other types of transitions – especially the more swooping panel-to-panel connections of "general arthrology" (Groensteen 2007, 22) and the leaps between different albums or story arcs – can generate more strained tensions and, hence, very different effects. If the transition between panels or works is coupled with a dramatic shift in scene and space-time coordinates, for instance, the character may suddenly look very different, which leaves the reader gauging and wondering about the character development that has taken place between the scenes. Alternatively, if the character has not changed at all, even when everything around it has, the reader might question its humanity or realism (cf. Richardson 2010, 536–538, Versaci 2007, 21–23). In addition, the character may suddenly be rendered in a different style, as the main characters of the original *Sandman* series are in almost every issue. This induces the kinds of ambiguities discussed earlier: the reader might wonder if this shift signals character focalization, whether the entire storyworld has somehow shifted, or whether this is a stylistic choice that should simply be attributed to extratextual variables, such as the change of artist.

The most important thing to observe here is that the visual bodies of comic book characters can help them to "survive" these more dramatic transitions from unit to unit (cf. Varis 2013, 65–66). To show what I mean by this, it is perhaps useful to seek instructive contrast from literary characters – or "fictional minds" (Palmer 2004) – whom are only held together by tenuous strings of pronouns, and who live and die by their names. Indeed, at least since Barthes, liter-

ary character theorists have been quite focused on names (Margolin 2007, 66): Fokkema (1991; 74, see ch. 1.2.1) calls names and pronouns the denotative code, on which the connotative human-like traits can cling, and Müller (1991, 103) describes characters as "coherent bundle[s] of qualities" identified by "onomastic labels". Yet, names are hardly particular enough to be an entirely reliable means of cohesion either intra- or intertextually. As a discrete unit, it does not hold very much character information, and two characters can well share the same name without having much else in common (cf. ibid.). Indeed, if the minimal requirements for a character are, first, some degree of agency and, second, some degree of individuality (Margolin 2005, 53), a name alone cannot constitute a character. It has to be coupled with at least one verb or attribute; otherwise, it does not portray a potential narrative agent that is distinguishable from other narrative agents.

A single panel depicting a comic book character can, by contrast, accomplish at least as much. Simply by looking at one picture of even a stoic character whose face is turned away, the reader can usually – again, using folk-psychological skills and everyday knowledge – assign some traits to the character. One should at the very least be able to observe whether they are humanoid or not, whether they are big or small in relation to their environment, and what kind of lines and colors are used in their rendition. This is likely why depicting the hero on the covers of all comic books is such a deep-ingrained convention: the one cover image can already characterize the protagonist, the most central experiential content of the book, to some degree (cf. Article 4; Bender 1999, 24). Moreover, while it is entirely possible to draw several characters that look identical – like Donald Duck's nephews, for instance – constructing the character's body into an entirely unique sign is just as possible. This is usually what the creators aim for, which can be confirmed by comparing the characters in the same work: they are often designed as schematically antithetical – as the heroes of *The Fantastic Four* or Batman and the Joker, for instance. Even if all the characters in a work conform to the same base design, they usually carry some metonymic, individualizing markers or "pointers", as exemplified by the Smurfs and the Moomins. (cf. Herkman 1998, 126; McCloud 2006, 72; Varis 2013, 120–122; Varis 2018.) The visual bodies, in other words, can identify characters unmistakably as themselves – with such high reliability that the likenesses of characters are often copyrighted.

In conclusion, when characters are reproduced consistently from narrative unit to narrative unit they can significantly reduce the tensions generated by the gaps between the units. Correspondingly, inconsistent visual bodies may heighten these tensions – or even disrupt the continuity of the character altogether. By contrast, a unique, recognizable and stable visual likeness should allow the character to endure considerable contextual tensions with its identity intact. Once again, these observations carry interesting echoes of Frankenstein's Creature, who has no name to identify him, but whose grotesque fleshly traits have lent him quite exceptional durability and recognizability (cf. Baldick 1987, 5).

Finally, the third type of tensions itemized by Hatfield (2015, 48–50) result from the fact that comics panels serve simultaneously as units of time and space. Arranging the panels back to back implies that they form narrative continuums but, at the same time, the pages of comics also constitute spatial compositions comparable to collage works (cf. Articles 1 & 3). The characters in comics can, accordingly, be viewed in both ways: not only as functions or actors of the plot, as structuralist theorists have suggested (see ch. 1.2.1, Article 2), but also as parts of visual layouts. This visual-compositional function of comic book characters could, perhaps, be considered one aspect of their synthetic component (cf. Phelan 1989; see ch. 1.2.1) – an aspect that is purely aesthetic and sensory, and thus, also realized through the visual bodies.

In this a-temporal interpretation, the visual bodies of characters gain a very object-like presence, which provides an interesting counterpoint to the oft-quoted Henry-Jamesian idea that characters are so deeply enmeshed in the plot and other narrative structures that they cannot be examined as separate entities at all: "what is character but the determination of incident; what is incident but an illustration of character?" (Hochman 1985, 21.) If characters can be cut up and duplicated by the panel and page compositions, why could they not also be cut *out* of the page and made into reproducible simulacra – that is, into products and adaptations that bear the characters' unique likenesses or recognizable parts of them (cf. Article 4; Azuma 2001; Galbraith 2014). The tension between the tabularity and sequentiality of comics storytelling thus highlights the fact that multimodal characters have both narrative and material affordances, which stand in interdependent relations to each other. These affordances are utilized creatively by fans, as described in Article 4: whatever material form a familiar character is reproduced in, the fans are quick to connect the item to the narrative content they associate with the character; but new material incarnations also provide opportunities for the formation of new narrative content. Thus, a figurine of a familiar character serves as an enactive link between the official stories told by the franchise holders and the new narrative scenarios that fans might play out with the figurine.

To conclude, these tensions, gaps, and ambiguities inherent in comics storytelling induce various dynamic effects that are central to the presentation, evocation and elaboration of characters. They allow, for instance, different effects of character focalization, character development and transmedial expansion – but can also produce different experimental and defamiliarizing disruptions in characters' cohesion and identity if they are stretched too far. Other media are bound to generate comparable tensions through different means: in theater and film, for instance, there is always some tension between the actual actors and the fictional characters they portray, and in literature, the tensions between each mention of a character are likely to be quite similar to the tensions arising from panel-to-panel transitions in comics (cf. Schneider 2001). The bottom line is that no narrative in any medium is entirely devoid of gaps or polysemy, places where these intratextual tensions ensue. Consequently, no narrative in any medium can deliver the character to the reader in an instant, definite,

complete package. Some assembly is always required, and the pieces fit together in more ways than one (cf. Article 2).

3.1.2   Intertextual Tensions: Potentials for Transtextual Existence

If characters' textual construction is necessarily so fragmented that there is always some tension between two narrative units – panels, sentences, scenes or chapters – that evoke the "same" character, does it even matter if the two units occur between the covers of the same book or between the covers of two different books (cf. Richardson 2010, 527)? According to the current understanding of transtextual characters, it does matter – but mostly because these transitions between narrative artefacts typically coincide with other significant discontinuities. On the level of narrative content, the spatio-temporal coordinates may shift or reset, the plots of the two works might function more or less independently of each other, and one narrative may be produced in a different style, genre or medium than the other. These ruptures could also be coupled with extratextual alternations, such as a change of author, or changes in target audiences, budgets, publication platforms and other contextual variables.

Following this logic, both Wolfgang G. Müller (1991) and Brian Richardson (2010) link the trans- and intertextual continuity of characters to the consistency of textual features on the one hand, and to the extratextual function of authorship on the other hand. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I concur that dramatic work-to-work transitions as well as changes in extratextual factors like authorship are likely to result in more strained tensions than anything that occurs intratextually, but there are other than text- and author-based ways of approaching this issue as well. After all, one's understanding of characters' cross-textual journeys depends directly on one's definition of character itself, and neither Müller nor Richardson even hints towards cognitive views with their explanations (cf. Article 1).

On the contrary, Müller (1991, 101–102) considers the very term 'character' "ideologically – – suspicious" and opts for the structuralist concept of 'figure' (or German "Figur") instead. He goes on to define this "figure" as a "strictly textual and functional element", whereby transferring it from one context to another becomes "comparable to quotation" (ibid. 101–103). Yet, almost in the same breath, Müller (ibid. 103, 107, 109) adds that since these "quoted names" are always threaded amidst other words, "complete sameness" between two occurrences becomes "ultimately unattainable". Furthermore, he recognizes that these differing textual contexts are "bound to create tension or conflict" between the two mentions of the same "figure", as the seemingly stable meanings linked to the character name by previous mentions clash with the new implications of subsequent textual surroundings (ibid.).

Richardson (2010), by contrast, is less direct about his affiliations: he quotes the possible world theories of Margolin, structuralist ideas of Genette and the rhetorical character theory of Phelan (see ch. 1.2.1) at different turns of his argumentation. One thing he is consistent about, however, is that he seems to define characters as "recognizable cluster[s] of attributes" (ibid., 540; cf.

Chatman 1978). Indeed, one of the conditions Richardson (2010, 536) sets for transtextual continuity of characters is that their "essential" traits must remain consistent from text to text. One might counter this proposition by questioning what actually constitutes a "trait" in the first place, or by wondering how one could possibly distinguish between the "essential" and "nonessential" traits in each case.

Let us, however, concentrate on the one virtue of this approach: it recognizes the fragmentary complexity of characters, the fact that they are not undividable, ready-made entities (cf. previous chapter) – which is exactly what makes the interfigural relations so diverse. Not all allusive characters have pretensions of being exact replicas of the originals, but sometimes only tain "traits" or aspects, such as functional tropes or names, are repeated from text to text, in order to invite comparisons between the characters – no matter how similar of different they might be overall. In other words, not only characters but also character traits can drift and be shared between several texts.

As already mentioned, Richardson's (2010, 533–536) second criterion for transtextually continuous character identities is more straightforward: in addition to the consistent traits, he insists on continuous or legitimate authorship, meaning that only the original author, and those authorized by him or her, can truly duplicate any given character. Other works by other authors that try to stake claim on the characters' identities should therefore be deemed merely "illusory variants" or "versions", Richardson (ibid.) argues. Müller (1991, 107–109) makes a very similar distinction between "autographic" and "allographic" sequels as well, perhaps because the authors' names are a significant part of the (para)textual contexts that create the tension between the repeated figures – or perhaps because he recognizes the complete, "legitimate" sameness Richardson is after as one category within his own network of interfigurality (cf. "re-used figures").

Despite these overlaps, it is important to note that Müller and Richardson actually talk about two very different things: the former theorist explores the different kinds of tensions induced by various interfigural relations, while the latter is on a quest for character duplicates that have as little tension between them as possible. Not only the definition of character but also the kind and degree of the intertextual continuity one seeks thus suggest very different criteria and results.

In terms of both of these starting points, the cognitive framework offers a third, alternative approach – an approach that stems from the prioritization of the reader. From cognitive point of view, in other words, characters' transtextual continuity does not rest in the hands of the author, nor in the textual signs and structures – but in the mind of the interpreter. Seeing that, in this framework, a character is constituted by the readers' cognitive enactments, recognizing and connecting the interfigural clues across various texts and fitting them together into one coherent character – or several more or less interlinked characters – must be seen as a part of this readerly cognitive work (cf. Article 1; ch. 1.4.1). Indeed, if there are any allusions that the reader does not notice or recog-

nize, the interfigural or transtextual potentials of these textual elements remain inactivated, and the authors' possible allusive intentions unrealized (cf. Varis 2013, 37–38; Article 1). To put this in another way, all intertextual tensions must ultimately derive from the primary tension between the diverse textual environments and the reader's action-oriented cognitions.

Granted, the readerly interpretations are likely guided by the textual and paratextual cues investigated by Müller and Richardson, but the audience members also have considerable freedoms beyond these parameters. They can move freely between different media, between different canonical and non-canonical texts, and even produce their own versions of the characters. If they feel all the while that they are engaging with one continuous fictional person, identifying the textual cues that stay present in all of these activities is merely an afterthought; it does not provide much explanation. In the same vein, telling a fan fiction author that they cannot "really" reproduce their favorite character due to issues of "legitimacy" would likely have quite little sway on that individual reader-author's (en)active engagement with the character in question. After all, the very concept of fan production is based on the premise that not only authorized creators but also the fans themselves can replicate the characters "accurately" enough to tap into their own established affective connections to these familiar figures (cf. Article 4; Jenkins 1992). Textual cues and canonical considerations can thus only provide clues to what the readers and reader-authors engaging with interfigural or transtextual characters might perceive, experience and create; they can hardly set absolute boundaries for these activities.

As it happens, recent research on "convergence culture" (Jenkins 2006) and "transmedial storytelling" (see e.g. Harvey 2015) have taken a fairly similar approach to cross-textual characters, perhaps because they also depart from the older intertextuality- and adaptation-based explanations in two important ways. First, like the cognitive view, theories of transmedial storytelling also do not concentrate on single, unilateral transpositions of narrative elements from one medium or text to another. Rather, they encompass unlimited amounts of mediums, platforms and relations, thus adopting a similar, free-flowing global view to different texts as the audiences have. (cf. Harvey 2015.) Second, this global view has prompted these theories to take entire storyworlds – rather than relatively small textual elements like "quoted names" – as their starting point. To date, most research on transmedial storytelling has focused on investigating how the audience members can revisit established (or at least ready-sketched) storyworlds through different narrative products. These narrative revisitations often involve "expanding" these worlds with new narratives and encyclopedic details (see Jenkins 2006, 114; Harvey 2015, 23), much like the tensions between discrete narrative units invite the reader to revise their character schemata (Schneider 2001; cf. ch. 3.1.1).

This similarity of characters and storyworlds was already recognized by the inventor of trait-based character theories, Seymour Chatman (1978), who considered characters and story-space paradigmatically expandable "existents",

as opposed to syntagmatically unfolding "events". Indeed, many later character theorists, such as Fotis Jannidis (2013) and Uri Margolin (2007, 66), have also defined characters as "storyworld participants", while writings on fictional world-building have conversely regarded characters as sign-post-like components that make the different storyworlds recognizable and distinctive (see e.g. Wolf 2012, 66–67).

Thus, if transmedia theorists have concluded that most intertextual tensions that form between different works depicting the same storyworld result in expansion of that storyworld, the same could be said about characters as well. In other words, the readers can actually resolve many intertextual tensions in very much the same way they resolve most intratextual tensions: by conjoining the cross-text comparisons induced by allusive textual elements into their overall experiences of the character – or characters – in question. The goal of this type of approach is thus not to preside over the legitimacy or completeness of different character incarnations á la Richardson (2010). Rather, in this cognitive-transmedial framework, the continuous character identity is replaced by *transtextual character potential*, which can be activated between any opportune textual or material cues and any readers who are previously familiar with a character corresponding to these cues (cf. Varis 2018). In practice, this leads to different kinds of consonant and dissonant inter-character relations that could well be classified in the same way Müller (1991) classifies different types of interfigurality.

At the same time, these chaotic intertextual character enactments may also be guided and structured by the traits and canonical concerns that Richardson (2010) discusses. As Hiroki Azuma's (2001) database theory suggests, in some cases at least, the readers may actually be more attached to a specific trait or feature of the character than to its coherent human-like whole (cf. Article 4). In these cases, the transtextual consistency of the entire character configuration is bound to be less important to the reader than whether or not the different intertexts manifest that specific attractive trait. Richardson (2010, 534–535) seems to think along similar lines himself, since he hypothesizes that flat, cartoonish characters originating in "low" media forms with "weaker mimetic pretentions" – such as comics – must be easier to transpose from text to text, as they tend to consist of only one or two essential traits. If this dissertation accomplishes nothing else, I hope to have shown at least that such demeaning blanket statements about comic book characters are nothing short of silly – but Richardson still has a point in claiming that some fans might like some popular characters for single salient traits, rather than for the complexity and realism of their characterization. This may also explain why fan artists and fan fiction writers can sometimes change such essential-seeming traits as characters' age or gender: as long as they maintain the traits that define the character to themselves and their (supposed) audience, violations of the traits' overall configurations may be overlooked, especially if these reconfigurations serve a discernible function, such as parody (cf. Scott 2015; Article 4). In sum, the activation of transtextual character

potential is likely to follow certain salient traits, at least within certain reception communities.

Similarly, canons and authorships also affect the encounters between texts and readers by steering the readers' expectations and by creating hierarchies between the different texts and character versions. This can help the readers to "curate" their own character experiences, helping them to expand their ideas of certain characters to certain directions on the one hand, and to avoid less welcome, disruptive intertextual tensions on the other hand. Recognizing the diffuse potentiality of "Batmanness", in other words, does not stop us from distinguishing between Frank Miller's Batman, Adam West's Batman and Lego Batman, for instance (cf. Varis 2018). Instead, it helps us to see the individual engagements that are realized in the tensions between these different versions and canons.

To conclude, it seems futile to set formal or authorial limits for characters, when the readers can always give them monstrous powers to wander, echo and expand across any and all texts and media. Ultimately, all characters offer themselves for easy comparison with each other simply by the virtue of occupying the same ontological and interpretational category of characterness (Varis 2013, 38). Thus, whether an interfigural link consists of only a shared name, a familiar-looking visual body, a common character trope, a reference to previously recounted life event or "legitimate" authorship, the intertextual tensions these links generate are ultimately created by the reader, who compares the two textual cues and characters to each other. The responsibility of reconciling these tensions, whether to a consonant or a dissonant effect, must thereby also rest with the reader. In different contexts – for the sake of copyright laws or for the sake of theoretical discussion, for instance – it might be useful to invent some rules and categories for this reconciliation, but the intertextual comparison itself remains as chaotic and open-ended as any other forms of readerly cognition – a kind of interpretive alchemy.

3.2   Tensions Within and Between Readers

Indeed, according to Suzanne Keen (2011b, 295), the readers remain "the black box" of narrative studies: there is still much to know about the nature and structure of readerly meaning-making, and many of the unanswered questions are likely to stay mysteries for decades to come, until new empirical methods are innovated and implemented. In spite of this incomplete and scattered state of reader research, this subchapter aims to discuss in a bit more detail some of the phenomena that seem to be central to our cognitive experiences of and social discourses on fictional characters.

Many theoretical and empirical studies have repeatedly implied that our engagements with characters hinge on the tension between sympathetic and empathetic cognitions. How we readers share these experiences with other readers, by contrast, has been investigated very little. The only thing that can be

stated with confidence is that my monster looks a little different from everybody else's monsters.

3.2.1 Cognitive Tensions: Self in Other and Other in Self

If put on the spot, nearly anyone could provide plenty of anecdotal evidence for how engaging with fictional characters can evoke real bodily feelings or prompt reflections on human nature and behavior. My mother, for example, is frightened of snakes and makes a point of lifting her feet off the floor whenever there are snakes on the screen she is watching or in the book she is reading. Time and again, I have witnessed my friends leaning their bodies or moving their controllers towards the direction they want their player character to go in a video game. The internet, of course, is awash with tests revealing which character from this or that fiction franchise the respondent is most like, as well as fans who spontaneously declare especially familiar-seeming characters as their "spirit animals". Personally, I have used fictional figures to learn about myself and others since first grade, when Pippi Longstocking taught me how to ward off bullies: the trick is to not get upset or cry, but to smile or laugh – both with and at them.

Indeed, the intuition that characters, despite their fictionality, can make their readers feel, think or even act in certain ways is extremely common – so common, in fact, that it is even reflected in Müller's theory of interfigurality (1991, 116–117) in the form of "reading protagonists". As Müller (ibid.) notes, these metafictional commentaries on character engagement rarely depict the act of reading itself, but concentrate more on unravelling or parodying the reading characters' fairly extreme "imitations" or "emulations" of the idolized characters (cf. Margolin 2010). Don Quixote's delusional knight adventures and Emma Bovary's romance-filtered worldview are perhaps the most famous examples of this, and they are not without real-world counterparts. From the *Young Werther* copycat suicides in the 18th century (Margolin 2010, 413) to people who confess to dressing in the style of their favorite characters (Keen 2007, 67), it seems undeniable that fictional figures do not only serve as "major entry point[s]" (Smith 2010, 234) to storyworlds and narratives, but they can influence the readers beyond them – reach out into the real world and leave lasting marks. This has always caused some concern in the public sphere, from Plato, who wanted all the reading material in his Republic to cultivate virtue (Margolin 2010, 413), to psychologist Frederic Wertham (2009 [1954]), whose infamous treatise led to a moral panic around comics in the 1950s United States.

In the past few decades, literary theorists have, likewise, started to consider the psychosocial effects of character engagement, but from less prescriptive perspectives. Suzanne Keen (2007 and 2011a), for instance, has explored narrative fictions' possibilities of evoking and enhancing empathy as well as comics' means of promoting empathy towards foreign or stigmatized groups (cf. Hakemulder 2000, 13). Although she has some reservations concerning the rate at which readerly empathy actually leads to prosocial action, it seems safe to say that reading socially complex fiction can heighten an avid reader's aware-

ness of the feelings and motives of self and others as well as promote wider and more nuanced vocabularies for describing such mind-reading activities (e.g. Keen 2007, 6). Another theorist, Jèmeljan Hakemulder (2000, 29–58) adds that reading-induced processes of social learning could also open readers' values and self-concepts to new directions.[16] Blakey Vermeule (2010) is more pessimistic: she underlines that our interest in fictional characters may have more Machiavellian motives and warns that the social lessons learned from them could also be used for manipulative ends (see also Keen 2007, 15, 92).

These anecdotal, cultural and theoretical observations of characters' formational power have also been corroborated by an increasing number of empirical findings. On the most basic level, many studies show that readers of different ages truly "align" themselves with the spatio-temporal, epistemological and emotional perspectives of the main characters (cf. Eder 2006; Smith 1995, 83). In practice, this means that we are quicker at processing and better at remembering story content that is consistent with the focalizing characters' position and point of view (Coplan 2004, 142). In addition, there is some indication that readers' emotional orientation towards texts is dictated more by the characters' emotional charges than by the narrative situations, as readers' affective responses are similar whether or not they know more about scenes' outcomes than the characters do (ibid. 143). This means that re-reading or re-watching should hinge on character engagement about as much as the first encounters with narratives do. Even more poignantly, other empirical studies suggest that when readers perceive characters as similar to their actual or ideal selves they can experience greater psychological closeness with these fictional figures than with their real-life acquaintances, and, moreover, such characters can indeed serve as tools for positive "self-expansion" (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. 2014, cf. Eder 2006; Hakemulder 2000). The latter finding is supported by a very recent study, which found that taking on the role of a specific fictional hero, such as Batman or Rapunzel, can help toddlers to persevere longer at tedious tasks – a phenomenon the researches termed "the Batman effect" (White et al. 2017).

While all these theoretically and empirically observed phenomena may seem somewhat suffuse and random, they all have something in common: they involve strange tensions between the readers' and the characters' perspectives or identities. My mother surely knows that the snakes she fears are at the feet of the character – and yet she reacts with her own feet. Similarly, Don Quixote's escapades are made comical by the fact that he is decidedly not a young, strong and romantic hero but still insists on acting like one. The empirical studies, likewise, highlight the back-and-forth between simultaneous resemblances and obvious differences: it seems that we feel cognitively closest to characters that are the most similar to our actual selves, but characters can only serve as resources for self-expansion when they are closer to our ideal, as-of-yet-unrealized selves, for instance (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. 2014, 558). How we

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16   Author Samantha Ellis would surely concur, as she has written an entire book, *How to Be a Heroine: Or What I've Learned from Reading Too Much* (2014), about literary heroines' impact on her self-image.

typically relate to characters is thus best described with the interlocking circles of a Venn's diagram (cf. ibid.; Caracciolo 2014b, 123). On the one hand – if we have not entirely succumbed to Quixotism – we see characters and ourselves as clearly separate and different entities, whereby the fascination with characters could be best described as parasocial. On the other hand, there is usually a small area where this distinction becomes blurred – where we invest ourselves into imagining what it is like to be the target character and "identify" something of ourselves in them. (Cf. ch. 1.2.2.) Arguably, this tension – and partial confusion – between self and other is exactly what grants characters power over our cognitions, and thus, it is worth taking a closer look at the mechanisms behind it.

Many literary and media scholars have previously discussed whether we experience characters more "from the inside" or more "from the outside", and how these approaches intertwine. Smith (1995, 78–81 and 2010, 252) talks about "central" and "acentral imagining", and Caracciolo (2014a and 2014b) about "first-person" and "third-person stances" towards characters, for instance, but most of these discussions ultimately draw from, and return to, the distinction between sympathy and empathy (see ch. 1.2.2).

The exact definitions of these psychological mechanisms vary slightly from theorist to theorist, however. On the one hand, Amy Coplan and, following her, Caracciolo (2014, 38) and Margolin (2010, 411) understand empathy as a fairly general form of perspective-taking or a "mental simulation" of an experience, which – as experiences generally do – can entail various epistemological as well as affective aspects. On the other hand, Patrick Colm Hogan (2010, 144) declares that mental simulation is "distinct from empathy" and, rather, its "necessary component", because he understands empathy in a more limited sense, as "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" (cf. Keen 2007, 4). Keen (2007, 27), too, is mainly interested in the affective side of empathy, although she recognizes that the segregation of emotion from other types of cognition is ultimately untenable (see also Smith 1995, 59–65). In any event, all of these theorists either regard empathy as a key component of character engagement or character as the main catalyst of narrative empathy, and the close relation between empathy and the theory of mind – particularly simulation theory's version of it – certainly makes this approach seem plausible (see ch. 1.2.2).

Yet, other theorists have argued that our reception of narrative fictions must rely more heavily on sympathy. Noël Carroll (1990, 88–96) and, following him, Smith (1995 and 2010) propose that engagement with characters must happen mostly in a third-person mode, as this allows better recognition of – the often quite notable – gaps between the characters' and audiences' desires, epistemological resources and emotional states. Thus, Smith (2010, 252) believes that empathy, in its wider meaning of mental simulation, is merely a "primitive" mental function that the viewers use "intermittently" to build the more sophisticated "structure of sympathy", which, in turn, truly allows them to align themselves with the characters. Eder's (2006) conception of "closeness" also seems to imply a similar, fairly distanced and structured viewpoint.

It is worth noting that the assumptions these sympathy-favoring theorists hold of empathy are partially flawed, however. As Coplan (2004, 147) notes, empathizing also preserves the distinction between self and other. That is, one can hold on to their own perspectives, opinions and desires *even as* one imaginatively simulates those of another (cf. Cohen 2006, 184–185; Smith 1995, 80–81). Rather, the main difference between the two mechanisms is that the affect experienced by the empathizer and the target individual is "qualitatively the same", whereas "sympathetic emotions are typically triggered by and related to [the] target individual's emotions" or situations, but the experiences of the engaged character and the engaging audience member are of different emotional nature and valence (Coplan 2004, 143–145).

Overall, empathy and sympathy may not be quite as diagrammatically opposed or mutually exclusive as theorists like Carroll seem to suggest. Smith's idea that empathy precedes and enables sympathy is, in fact, quite well in line with the theoretical developments of many of the more empathy-oriented theorists. Keen (2007), for instance, considers narrative empathy the "first step" that could contribute to altruistic or prosocial behaviors – which she associates more closely with sympathy. Similarly, Caracciolo's (2014b, 123) model of characters' enacted consciousness (see ch. 1.2.2; Article 2) regards first- and third-person stances as two sides of the same coin: empathetic simulation of characters' narrated experiences is not enough to constitute a full character engagement, but these simulations must also be attributed to a more third-person conception of the character.

In conclusion, it seems that we have encountered another double dichotomy that cannot be upheld (cf. ch. 3.1.1.). Characters are not simply parts of us, nor entirely separate from us. Neither are they subjects of just sympathy or only empathy – but somewhere between all of these nodes.

If characters are understood as enacted entities or experiences – as I propose that they should be – they cannot exist without the readers, nor without the textual environments with which the readers interact. From this enactive viewpoint, it is only logical that they would overlap with the readers' self-concepts while also incorporating various foreign elements; just as Frankenstein's monster, they are not born of their reader-creators, nor of the various materials they have collected, but from the mysterious interactions between the two.

These interactions, in turn, present different affordances for sympathetically and empathetically oriented engagement in different situations. In the "Batman effect" experiment, for example, the researchers were aiming to promote empathetic role-taking. Thus, they provided the child subjects with props associated with the target characters and asked them to refer to themselves by the names of those characters (White et al. 2017). In spite of this, even the 4-year-old subjects must have maintained some third-person notions of the target characters because – as noted earlier – characters provide resources for self-expansion only insofar as we perceive them as superior to our actual selves. Similarly, it may not be a coincidence that sympathetic engagement strategies

have been prioritized by Carroll and Smith, a film philosopher and a film researcher, when third-person storytelling is perhaps more prevalent in cinema than in any other medium or art form. Yet, this does not mean that one could not also take an empathetic stance towards an outwardly depicted film character, especially if one consciously chooses to do so.

The fact that characters are enacted but not fully embodied by us readers thus allows us to engage with them through "central" and "acentral" imagination alike, and this contributes to our "paradoxical" experiences of them (cf. Caracciolo 2014b, 38; Smith 1995, 78–81). Although many of the details of these mechanisms are either highly situational or still unknown or debatable, there is enough evidence to state that characters do steer our cognitions and, hence, our actions in various ways. They serve as important "user-interfaces" to narratives and fictional worlds, and they orient our emotional responses towards different texts. Moreover, they seem to orient us differently towards our very selves, by offering points of comparison and aspiration as well as distance and alternative perspectives. As in the case of Frankenstein, it likely depends on each reader whether they use these foils for betterment or exploitation, and whether it brings them joy or sorrow.

3.2.2 Social Tensions: The Leviathan of Readership

So far, all the conclusions in this "Anatomy" chapter have built on the cognitions of "the reader": it is the reader who seams the fragments of the character together, it is the reader who reads it into life; it is the reader who interprets, engages and remembers, so that the tensions spark and the character awakens. The obvious trouble with all of these theoretical tales is, however, that there is no such fabled figure as The Reader (cf. ch. 1.4.1.). Victor Frankenstein may have worked alone and created just one monster, but to correspond each character, there is often a vast multitude of readers, each of whom perform their readings individually and situationally, in different circumstances, for different durations, with different expectations and for different reasons. This amounts to a problem that threatens to maim both the theory and practice of character: what do we actually talk about when we talk about a character? After all, everyday experience reminds us that, regardless of the necessarily unique, fleeting and personal nature of character engagements themselves, characters are also shared and discussed socially – often, everywhere, and with conviction.

This paradox that characters can be perceived simultaneously as subjective experiences and as objects of public discussion has proven especially unavoidable in my discussions with other researchers who have also attempted to decode the strange DNAs of fictional entities. These discussions typically derail long before the problem gets solved, however, possibly due to insufficient terminology: not only is there confusion over what we talk about when we talk about a specific character but also what we talk about when we talk about characters in general. Character as a purely textual construction is, at least on the surface, much easier to share and refer to than character as a transtextual construction, or character as a cognitive construction, or character as a holistic, dy-

namic experience. In other words, different choices of theoretical frames and definitions are – again – bound to lead to different solutions.

From my perspective, the crux of the issue is, once more, that characters are not built on anything solid and unequivocal, but on tensions – particularly on the tension between the stable-seeming, yet always polysemous textual data and its individual interpretations. From this follows that when one talks about a character, one can, more or less intentionally or accurately, refer to any point – or various shifting points – between these two poles. Sometimes, the context gives some clues as to which sense of the character is being targeted. For instance, when analyzing a text, for academic purposes or otherwise, the weight of the attention is usually distributed heavily towards the semiotic cues evoking the character in that specific text. In more casual contexts, the intended nature of the referent is often much more difficult to determine, however.

Furthermore, if the character in question has a strong transtextual presence, this continuum of possible points of reference fans out into a vast, ever-changing grid of heterogeneous signs and impressions. If I were to discuss, say, Victor Frankenstein with a colleague, it would be more than likely that he or she would draw on different source materials than I do. His or her transtextual conception of the troubled scientist would probably contain fewer Frankenstein-themed comics than mine, for one. Additionally or alternatively, he or she might have watched dozens of Frankenstein-themed films, which would have had – either unconsciously or due to conscious reflection – some effect on the way he or she experiences that character. Indeed, even if we were to limit our discussion explicitly to a specific edition of Shelley's original novel, these transtextual experiences would still subtly color our interpretations of it. On top of all this, one or both of us could have only read the novel once, years ago, which might – possibly in tandem with the intervening transtextual information – cause us to forget or misremember crucial details. Overall, engagements with characters can be so complex and long-winded processes that I may not even be able to pinpoint what I talk about when I talk about Frankenstein myself, and my current sympathy for him might well seem strange to me several years from now.[17]

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[17]   I should add that these observations are based on actual experiences, as I have often been quite shocked by the open animosity many of my colleagues have expressed towards poor Victor, and suspected that their unfavorable views of him may have been informed by other intertexts than the ones I have been consuming. In the context of the novel, one can make a case that – besides his admittedly transgressive curiosity – Frankenstein acts out of trauma, fear and – ultimately – responsibility, rather than out of greed, malice or delusional sense of superiority. If one's impressions of the character are based heavily on film adaptations, which rarely mention the untimely death of Frankenstein's mother and usually feature much more maniacal laughter than the novel, for example, it is a given that such memory traces might steer one's sympathies away from the transtextual whole of Victor Frankenstein. Then again, the interpretation that I am advocating here is based on a desire to perceive him as an extremely human, psychologically complex and traumatized figure. If my motives and interpretational framework were more theory- or allegory-oriented, it would surely be easier to regard him as a grotesque, immoral embodiment of Enlightenment's failed ideals. In sum, I do not wish to point towards "right" or "wrong" interpretations here but merely highlight that different variables can result into

These problems of hazy reference and shifting meaning are closely related to the special, subjective nature of experience explored in Article 3. According to one of the central truisms of philosophy of mind, experience can only ever be fully accessible to the experiencing subject (Caracciolo 2014b, 14–15; Nagel 1974). Therefore, there truly is no way of knowing *exactly* what someone else means when they talk about a character *if* what they mean by 'character' mainly entails their personal experience of that character, rather than specific, material signs on paper or screen.

The main conclusion to be drawn from all this is not that we cannot talk about characters in any meaningful sense at all, however. As argued in Article 2, the ultimate unknowability of other minds is not limited to character engagement, but it is at least as pertinent to real social contexts. Yet, the fact that we also know real people in different ways and roles, from different angles and contexts, does not stop us from sharing views and speculating – in a word, gossiping – about them. According to some studies, two thirds of casual conversation actually concerns "social topics", especially other individuals' reputations and morals (Vermeule 2010, 154–155). It could well be claimed, then, that it is exactly the mysteriousness of every person's – and, by analogy, every character's – nature and motivations, and the resulting partiality of our social knowledge, which makes these discussions compelling and worthwhile (ibid. 160).

Of course, these parallel spheres of gossip do not mean or presuppose that real people and fictional people are exactly the same ontologically or epistemologically: real people really do have subjectivities that are fully knowable (only) to themselves, whereas characters do not have independently existing subjectivities at all. What I have been attempting to formulate here, rather, is that half of characters' unknowability is borrowed from the real readers' differing interpretations, which form on the basis of their actually unknowable subjectivities. Thus, by gossiping about characters, we cannot expect to arrive to a conclusion about what the characters are "really" like; we only learn what other readers think of them – which is an interesting point of parasocial tension in itself (see below). The other half of the unknowability of characters' imaginary subjectivities, again, comes from the texts, which – as I have mentioned several times – are always full of gaps and ambiguities. This means that, unlike some aspects of real people, some aspects of characters may not only be unknowable, but uncreated – an issue that I will discuss further in chapter 3.3.3.

From another angle, however, even the gappiest of texts tend to exist in some objectively observable, material form, which also lends the characters certain substance and stability. Even if the full vividness of another readers' character engagement experience escapes me, I still have, at least theoretically, firsthand access to the text – or to the group of texts – that catalyzed that experience. As an added benefit, this textual character data is usually much more organized and contained than the chaotic stimuli on which we base our impressions of

considerably different responses between different readers and reading contexts – even among professional readers in academic contexts.

real people (Hochman 1985, 60–61). The material, semiotic "pole" of each character thus acts as a center of gravity that loosely gathers all the subjective, dissimilar interpretations of character together, bringing them in gossipy dialogue and revealing the live tensions between them.

As also described in Article 2, *The Unwritten* (#23, [17–19]) likens this cluster of interlinked but individual character readings to Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan: just like the Hobbesian state is envisioned as an artificial but functional body consisting of all its private citizens, the social power and meaning of a character is ultimately the sum of all the individual experiences of that character. As the protagonist of *The Unwritten* (ibid.) interprets it, the Leviathan is a "symbol" that stands for "the power of the masses", "a billion living things making up one huge entity". The Frankensteinian undertones of such a symbol are, of course, quite glaring, even though Hobbes' metaphor predates Shelley's novel by nearly two hundred years (Baldick 1987, 15).

In the context of *The Unwritten* – as for the discussion at hand – the symbolism of the Leviathan means, then, that the socially shared character is a disharmonious, ever-evolving super-monster, which consists of all the individual, already tension-ridden Frankenstein's monsters each reader builds for themselves. Whether such an enormous creature can even be contemplated outside speculative fiction or philosophy – let alone addressed in any practical manner – may be dubious, but it is essentially where different discussions about fictional characters are situated and what they contribute to: myth-like, million-layered fictional beasts that are no longer under anyone's full control.

As it happens, Frankenstein's monster, a widely known and transtextualized character, is a perfect example of this. A single author, scholar or work of art – even Shelley's original novel – has an increasingly limited sway over the way the Creature is viewed in popular discourse, and yet, these views are constantly evolving, as if on their own accord. The early reception and adaptation cycle of *Frankenstein* was shaped by conservative Christian values, and thus, showed the story and its characters in a morally abhorrent light. Since then, the revered series of 1930s Universal films has inspired waves upon waves of interpretations that play upon the more sympathetic aspects of Shelley's character while simultaneously dumbing it down, into a more animalistic or zombie-like monster. (cf. Baldick 1987, 2–5; 56–60.) These layers have by now assumed a retro vibe, which can color the Creature either cool or campy, depending on the context. The cultural "meaning" of the Creature has thus become as fragmented, monstrous and multiple as its physical form – and the same could be said about various other characters. The Creature's Gothic colleague Dracula, for instance, has similarly come to mean both everything and nothing, from fear of death to hope of immortality, and from alienation to forbidden carnal desires.

This is not to say that one could not discern some tensions within these cultural Leviathans as well – one of the most central being characters' Frankensteinian double duty as symbols and human analogues (see ch. 3.3.1). One of the layers in Frankenstein's monster's cultural meaning is that the epicenter of its moral evaluation has recently shifted from religious to scientific domains,

which is evidenced by such multiplying coinages as "Frankenfood", "Franken-storm" and "Frankencity" (Casetta & Tambolo 2013). Metaphoric expressions like this can actually help to keep characters alive across different historical and cultural interpretation communities (cf. Article 2), as they flatten and generalize them into metaphors, stereotypes and heuristics, whose meanings are slightly more fixed and crystallized than the motives of the more anthropomorphically understood versions of the characters (Vermeule 2010, 52). Yet, fictional figures are often regarded as an extremely useful type of cognitive shorthands because they can "personalize and anthropomorphize" information by embodying and implicating entire narratives and social structures (ibid. 9). In other words, describing something as "Franken-something" – or as Quixotic or Macbethian, for example – can offer the readers rough, ready-made moral and emotional positions in relation the described issues – although these allusive heuristics are already quite far removed from the more immediate and nuanced experiential and parasocial engagements with the characters in question.

Accordingly, characters are not only discussed in this manner, as highly abstracted chess-pieces in social and moral strategy games, but also – very much and often – as if they were real, or at least possible, people. What is more, this kind of real gossip about imaginary matters is also an effective way of sharing and learning social information. This exact claim appears to be the best answer evolutionary psychology can give to the question set by the title of Vermeule's monograph, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* (2010): fiction and its inhabitants orient us towards the complexities of the human social world in an experiential way, allowing us to safely simulate and form probabilistic conceptions about who is to be trusted and how to act in different social situations.

These gossipy functions of narratives generate yet more troublesome tensions, however: a tension between social and parasocial knowledge and ethics. On the one hand, narratives teach us social information by showing how different kinds of characters think and talk about or with each other; epistolary novels like *Frankenstein* consist exclusively of characters' subjective reports on the activities of other characters (ibid. 151). On the other hand, narratives allow readers to extract and implement social information by providing them with opportunities to think and talk about both narrating and narrated characters, sometimes from deliciously omniscient positions (ibid. 129–130). The latter type of activities have found unprecedentedly mainstream arenas during this very decade, in the wake of popular TV serials that are now broadcast simultaneously in various countries, episode by episode and season by season. Everything from YouTube channels to regular columns in national newspapers are now dedicated to analyzing what happened in the previous episode of HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–), or speculating what might happen in the next season of BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–) or the next installation of *Star Wars* films. And of course, these discussions typically revolve around the mainstays of gossip: successes, failures, tragedies, and sex (Vermeule 2010, 154).

As Vermeule (2010, 150–156) points out, both individuals' and societies' attitudes towards gossip are deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, knowing somebody else's secret is pleasurable, builds unity among those in on the secret, and ensures fairness and trust – which is why everyone does it. On the other hand, gossip may not always be accurate, but regardless, it has the power to destroy lives and reputations – which is why no one wants to be the target of it. (ibid.) One of the unique affordances of characters is that gossiping about them comes with many of the same pleasures as gossiping about real people, but hardly any of the moral package: whether our speculations about *Game of Thrones* are accurate or not, the characters cannot truly suffer from them. However, there is still some social risk for us gossipers, as we are likely to expose our own social attitudes and moral fibers to our friends as we discuss different characters with them.

In other words, gossip around narratives not only gives us social information about its fictional objects but also about its real subjects. This may be one of the reasons why talking about emotive engagement with fictional characters is often viewed as shameful (Keen 2007, 67, 73–78) or, at the very least, "unmanly" (Smith 1995, 56). Erasing the moral consequences of gossiping does not necessarily erase its cultural stigma as something that "[m]atronly middle-aged women" and "chatty maids" do (Vermeule 2010, 150), and on a yet more profound level, caring about nonexistent entities can seem absurd and pointless. Still on top of all this, one always runs the risk of being ridiculed for sympathizing with an unpopular, cartoonish or morally suspect character (cf. Keen 2007, 74–75). This vague air of suspiciousness and awkwardness, which has lingered around these topics at least since the heyday of New Criticism (cf. Vermeule 2010, x), is truly a loss for the study of character, as auto-ethnographic studies of parasocial relationships would likely yield some very interesting information about the personal impact and social functions of fictional beings. As things stand, performing such a study in full sincerity and accuracy would likely mean putting one's academic reputation as well as one's social reputation on the line, however.

Fortunately for future research, things are very different online, where screen names enable anonymity and it is not uncommon for even the most controversial of fictional characters to have their own fan clubs. Indeed, as Article 4 discusses, fans and fandoms can sometimes use characters for illustrating their own moral stances and personas, and while internet provides plenty of socially safe opportunities for such practices, they are typical of other subcultural contexts, such as fan conventions and like-minded friend groups, as well.

On the one hand, this fannish identity work often entails simple consumption choices: especially young people like to buy merchandise that refer to the characters they relate to or idolize (Brown 2011). This likely makes them feel closer to the character in some animistic sense, but displaying fan products is also a way of letting the other fans know where one's preferences and loyalties lie (cf. Keen 2007, 66–67). This, again, makes it very clear that character discourse is typically motivated by parasocial engagement with a character that is

perceived as human-like, but expressing the meaning of this highly subjective engagement involves cropping the same character into an easily repeatable, symbol-like shorthand, which can, nevertheless, still carry moral implications and social meanings.

On the other hand, a continued interest in a character can also translate into very complex fan practices that may aim at molding the entire illusory personality or imagined history of the target character. Indeed, as Article 4 also argues, fans do not always accept the social stereotypes and implications creators and license owners attach to the transmedial characters of popular culture. In fact, they may actively fight against the canon by creating and sustaining alternative, even subversive versions of the characters through fan fiction, fan art and fan gossip. Not only are these clashes between official versions and fan creations very tangible proof of the fact that when we talk about a certain character we do not necessarily all talk about the same thing, but they also highlight the importance of interpretational communities. Even if the "character-Leviathans" are too vast to be steered by single works or interpretations, they do not evolve entirely on their own accord either, but in the dialectics between influential interpretations shared by loosely organized groups of people. The enactive character engagement processes between texts and minds are thus enmeshed in larger social conceptions of character that unfold analogously between canons and fanons.

In sum, when we talk about fictional characters, we actually talk about quite a few different things. Depending on the context, we may refer to fairly specific textual cues or cultural shorthands, or we may attempt to convey a more personal interpretation of something more human-like and transtextually distributed. Whatever the case may be, discussing parasocial relationships in different situations can have both cognitive and social consequences. The character-Leviathans are thus tangled in complex webs of various enactive tensions.

3.3   Tensions Inherent in the Characters

As a result of all these ambiguities ingrained in their textual existence and reception, characters themselves can be nothing but conflicted, paradoxical beings. As Article 2 notes, it is extremely tempting to simply summarize the nature of all fictional creatures with the same evocative words Paul Sherwin uses to describe Frankenstein's Creature (1981, 889–891): they are "wandering signifier[s]" and "geniuse[s] of liminality" whose "principal virtue is virtuality". However, if complementing these poetic notions with a rather more technical dissection of this "monster analogy" was ever in order, it is here, at the end of my tentative exploration of characters' enactive anatomy. Thus, even at the risk of demystifying or over-interpreting this kinship between authors' creations and Frankenstein's creation, I will lastly discuss three tensions or paradoxes that manifest in our conception and/or experiencing of characters themselves: their simultane-

ous lifelikeness and artificiality, their amalgamation of human and nonhuman features, and the generativeness of the gaps they necessarily entail.

3.3.1 Aspectual Tensions: Manufacturing a Semblance of Life

Let us start again from the beginning – that is, from the very first claim made in the introduction to this dissertation: characters are not analogous to persons but to Frankenstein's monster, because no matter how convincingly they walk and talk, we know their humanity is artificial and their agency illusory. This immersive, yet transparent marionette act can be – and has already been – approached with various theoretical tools, via various disciplines.

Philosophy of language, for instance, has for long labored over sentences like A.) "Viktor Frankenstein constructed his monster near Inglostad, Germany" and B.) "Mary Shelley constructed Viktor Frankenstein and his monster as foils or mirrors to each other". The odds are that a common listener would intuitively brand both of these claims as true or accurate, and yet, upon closer inspection, the ontological status of the seemingly identical referents – Frankenstein and his monster – is different in each sentence. Proposition A represents the so-called "internal" view to fiction. As such, it makes complete sense only as a make-believe, pretended statement, as if it was implicitly framed by such disclaimer as "in Shelley's book", or "let us imagine". Proposition B, by contrast, takes an "external" view to fiction, referencing Frankenstein and his monster as actual but abstract artefacts – as intangible creations of an actual, though late, individual called Mary Shelley. (See Skalin 2012; Tyynelä 2014.) Considering the radical differences between these two views and the ontological claims they make of their referents, it is fascinating to note that readers are accustomed to confusing them, to using the exact same words – such as characters' names – in both meanings alternately, without even blinking an eye. This, of course, results in certain tensions in our social discourses on fictional matters, as the previous chapter already demonstrated.

Experts on visual arts and aesthetics might try to explain this problem away by applying philosopher Richard Wollheim's (2003) concept of "twofold-ness". Wollheim (ibid.) suggests that representational images invite a specific mode of "seeing-in", where the viewer simultaneously recognizes what is being depicted – the subject of the picture – and the "marked surface" – the materiality and design of the picture. In other words, in most situations, canny appreciators of a typical work of representational art are not fully "taken in" by the mimetic illusion it conjures, but they always maintain some meta-awareness of its artistic, artificial qualities as well. Furthermore, the appreciation of these surface features does not necessarily diminish the mimetic experience; rather these two stances are inseparable aspects of the same, indivisible aesthetic experience (ibid.).

Murray Smith (2011, 283) has later added that this experiential double-edge might not only be essential to representational visual arts but to all kinds of representations, regardless of medium. If we accept this to be the case, then fictional characters, too, could be thought of as "twofold" beings – a view that

would actually correspond extremely well to much of the everyday character talk. Even the most fannish and memetic declarations circulating in the internet – such as "I don't care if he's fictional, I still want to marry him" or "If I got a dollar every time I felt more emotion towards a fictional character than a real person, I could pay for the psychiatric care I obviously need" – actually betray a very self-aware interplay between "emotional engagement" and "meta-fictional reflection" (cf. Smith 2011, 291).

This idea of twofoldness also echoes one of the most widely used and accepted literary character theories: that of James Phelan's (1989). As already explained in chapter 1.2.1, Phelan (ibid. 2) considers all characters to be "multi-chromatic", in the sense that they consist of three interwoven components: a mimetic, a thematic and a synthetic one. The mimetic dimensions and functions of character could also be called "representational", as they portray the character as a "possible person" or – in Smith's terms (2011, 280) – a "virtual person". The synthetic aspect, meanwhile, is based on the artificiality, the surface and the constructedness of the character (Phelan 1989, 2).

On the one hand, Phelan and Rabinowitz (2012) observe that these two components are "often –– on a seesaw", meaning that whenever one of them is foregrounded, the other tends to seem less pressing or interesting. On the other hand, they do not see this as an absolute rule, and foregrounding one component does not imply that the other component "evaporates" completely (cf. Smith 2011, 281). In addition, the third, thematic component straddles the other two components, as finding it presupposes the recognition that the author wants to communicate something through the characters he or she has created, but this message typically becomes intelligible only through the characters' agential, mimetic functioning (Phelan 1989, e.g. 3; Phelan & Rabinowitz 2012). In conclusion, although it adds a third, intermittent component, Phelan's view on fictional characters is extremely amicable to Wollheim and Smith's claim that the experience of mimetic representativeness and the perception of artificiality can be fully simultaneous. Indeed, both Phelan (1989, 4) and Smith (2011, 289–290) note that the trickiest critical disputes about character could be avoided or solved by accepting this duality, rather than by cramming the character into narrow categories of strict structuralism or naïve naturalism (see ch. 1.2.1 and Article 2).

Although Phelan (1989, 10) is a rhetorician and states that he is more interested in how characters are constructed than in how they are read, his theory is compatible with cognitive approaches as well. On the frontiers of cognitive narratology, Merja Polvinen (2012 and 2018) has repeatedly argued that experiencing a narrative's representational aspects – buying into the diegetic illusion, undergoing imaginary transportation into the storyworld or engaging in emphatic simulation of characters' experiences – does by no means preclude simultaneous awareness of the narrative's artifice. Drawing from the Aristotelian theory of mimesis and cognitive literary studies alike, she explicitly argues that "[e]ven acute awareness of the fictionality of fiction does not constitute an anomalous rational action that works against an emotional immersion"; on the contrary, it

is "necessary for the immersion to happen in the first place" (Polvinen 2012, 108–109). Keen already surmised something similar in her book on narrative empathy (2007, e.g. 4, 87–88): she suggests that the overt fictionality of characters actually encourages the readers to feel empathy towards them, as identifying with a fictional person is made both safe and possible by the very imaginariness and inconsequentiality of parasocial encounters. That is to say, we may not feel for or with characters *despite* their fictionality but *because* of it – because the sum of their synthetic and mimetic affordances make them available as objects of such cognitive actions.

Overall, the notion of twofoldness connects directly to second-generation cognitive theories' central premise that sentient beings construct their own world of meaning – or "Umwelt" – in constant interaction between their own activities and their environments (see ch. 1.2.2.; Herman 2011b). We do not necessarily ever see characters as people any more than we see bananas as phones, but in certain situations, where making make-believe phone calls becomes desirable for some reason, we might come to consider bananas as possible prop horns (cf. Polvinen 2018, 74). Similarly, the literary conventions and expressions often meet our own needs and cognitive habits in a way that makes us see possibilities of anthropomorphic meanings or opportunities for pseudo-social interactions in fictional figures. Inspired by this type of enactivist meaning-making and Ricourean conception of metaphors, Polvinen (2018, 75–76) raises the stakes even higher by suggesting that this "double vision" of what things are and what symbolic actions they allow is ultimately what "makes human-like consciousness possible": living as we are in a world full of representations, metaphors and other possibilities for sense-making, we can never afford to lose sight of the "tension" between different domains' contrasts and similarities. Seeing characters simultaneously as components of fictional works and as possible persons is thus only one example of a very fundamental cognitive capability of superimposing something metaphorical or imaginary on something materially real.

On all accounts, then, it seems not only possible but quite probable that we perceive fictional characters very much like we perceive Frankenstein's creature – as artificial human analogues – and this affects the ways they are used, experienced and discussed. Indeed, cognitive theorists have also suggested that we are predisposed to treat and react to different entities according to their perceived ontological categories (Zunshine 2008, 8–13, 63). These categories are not so much "real", essential laws of the universe as fairly rigid and coarse-grained cognitive heuristics that allow us to quickly differentiate between substances, objects, plants, animals and persons (ibid.). As noted in Article 2, the idea of "twofoldness" clashes dramatically with these categories as it places the character in two incommensurate categories: the category of agential, conscious persons, and the category of purposefully crafted artefacts.

Lisa Zunshine (2008, 51–131) has discussed at length how figures like Frankenstein's Creature, advanced AIs and androids are guilty of such "counterontological" condition. Moreover, she proposes that the "cognitive ambigui-

ty" generated by this type of two-category characters makes them endlessly fascinating to us:

> "– – events and entities that violate our intuitive ontological expectations are *never* fully assimilated by any one ontological category. As such, they retain our interest, and stay in our memory, and remain perennially open to new interpretations (as do supernatural agents and magical artifacts in religions across the world)." (ibid. 66).

What Zunshine fails to notice, however, is that all fictional characters follow a similar counterontological logic and, accordingly, this type of cognitive dissonance must also be much more common and wide-spread in fiction than she assumes. This indicates two alternative possibilities. Perhaps this type of hybrid ontology constitutes its own, fairly stable category, which is not quite as defamiliarizing as Zunshine believes. After all, as discussed above, we may have surprising cognitive propensity for accommodating dual purposes and ontologies. Or perhaps this is exactly why characters of all kinds fascinate us: because their inner tensions do not settle into one absolute meaning, but remain in process, in oscillation, "perennially open to new interpretations".

So as not to leave this chapter too open for interpretations, however, one detail still requires clarification: the reason why I propose aspectual tensions to be their own distinct factor in character engagement. It may be tempting to conflate this ontological ambiguity of the character with the primary tension between the text and the reader. After all, the synthetic aspects of characters arise quite directly from their textual construction, while much of the characters' human-likeness derives from the readers – as I will elaborate in the next subchapter. On the same note, Smith (2011, 289–291) believes that recognizing characters as "twofold" could help in bridging the gap between overly technical academic character theories and the kind of layman-discourse that is overly invested in the characters' illusory humanness. Phelan (1989, 3–4), too, considers his aspect theory to have similar potential for uniting the analytic accuracy of semiotic and structuralist views of character with the interpretive richness of the more naturalist views.

I contend, however, that all these ideas concern the interactions between the reader and the textual environment, whereas twofoldness is part of the experience that emerges from these interactions. In other words, not only are characters born out of the tension between a textual artefact and a human mind, but this tension produces a dual vision where the character is also *interpreted* as both artificial and human-like. The uncanniness of the character is thus two-fold, material and experiential: they are purposefully crafted people, and we can never truly look away from their constructional scars. The concept of twofoldness thus serves to reconcile the differences between structuralist and naturalist theories only insofar as structuralism is not considered a stance on characters' ontology but, rather, a reading strategy that privileges the artificial aspects of the character experience (cf. Margolin 2010, 401–403).

3.3.2 Chimerical Tensions: Anthropomorphizing Artefacts and Narrating Nonhumans

Characters' dual ontological categories also constitute a good starting point for determining the dynamics of their human and nonhuman qualities. Materially, there is, of course, little question about characters' nonhumanity: we all know that they are crafted by mortal men and women, and not out of flesh and blood, but out of signs, experiences, meanings and affordances, which take form through paper, screen or – sometimes – the bodies of human actors. Moreover, individual characters can be crafted in a way that deliberately lays bare their categorical artefact nature: some dissipate into narrative voices and pronouns that refuse to form any coherent figure, others metaleptically comment on their own fictionality, and still others remain too flat or minimalistic to assume any mimetic traits at all (see e.g. Fokkema 1991). This type of anti-illusory characters were celebrated in both theory and practice for most of the 20th century (Docherty 1983, x–xvi; Fokkema 1991, 56–71; Hochman 2006), and the craftedness of characters is no less apparent in comics, where grids of gutters serve as overt markers of narrative structures and the lines as indices of the artist's hand movements.

These "unnatural" origins of the character – the fact that they have been constructed for a purpose that is not their own but that of their mortal creators' – constitute a stark antithesis to one of the most crucial traits we associate with sentient and especially with anthropomorphic beings: agency, or a will and ability to affect one's own actions, traits and motivations (cf. Eder et al. 2010, 10; Vermeule 2010, 22; Zunshine 2008, 63, 77–89; Article 2). In practice, this tension between categories is hardly insurmountable, as the origins and the life of an entity can simply exist in conflict: Frankenstein's monster demonstrates its agency by rebelling against its manufacturer, for instance. Zunshine (2008, 100–116) underlines, however, that we humans harbor a strong cognitive bias towards such essentializing thought patterns as the ontological categories: if we know that a machine was originally made a machine, we are likely to resist the urge to categorize it as 'a person', no matter how impressively human-like its AI and artificial body might seem. Similarly, more than anyone else, Frankenstein struggles to see the monster he created as a human, probably because the juxtaposition between his bloody handiwork and the deep, eloquently expressed feelings of the abandoned Creature must be cognitively dissonant to the extreme.

In spite of this, many would argue that Shelley's novel does ultimately succeed in humanizing the Creature – at least in the readers' eyes and at least to some degree. The same applies to many postmodern and experimental characters whose ontological artificiality is unveiled by their creators: the protagonists of *The Unwritten,* for instance, look and act quite human – they bleed, they speak and they have been integrated into the human society – even though their actions are motivated by their awareness of their own fictionality (cf. Fokkema 1991). None of this should be surprising in the light of the previous subchapter, which already established that readers' experiences of characters do encompass

both their artifice and their representational qualities. What still remains to be discussed, however, is where the latter traits come from – or what kind of enactive processes make these fictional constructs so human-like.

Article 3 provides some answers to this question, as it finds characters at the heart of various nested anthropocentric practices. First, most acts of communication in nearly all media involve spoken or written language – a central symbol of humans' cultural dominance over other species. Second, one of the most common uses for language is the mediation of narratives, which, in turn, could be defined as mediation of anthropomorphic experience (Fludernik 1996). Indeed, storytelling is often considered a "human universal" (Vermeule 2010, 161): narrativizing is a central strategy for human sense-making, and so, narratives always concern the kind of spatial and temporal spans, topics and themes that are relevant and understandable to human minds. Third, the experiential cores of these narratives are constituted by none other than *Homo Fictus*, imaginary constructions, whose descriptions and expressions, nevertheless, invite the reader to apply theory of mind to them (see ch. 2.2.1). This, in and of itself, is a strong indicator of the essential category of personhood (Zunshine 2008, e.g. 63), and furthermore, all conscious experiences we, as human readers, can attribute to anything at all have to be modeled after as well as enacted by our own human minds (cf. Caracciolo 2014b). In sum, reading something as a character wraps the textual-artificial target in the human-centric logics of language, narrative and folk-psychology, all of which are enmeshed with our perception of ourselves as persons and human beings.

Cognitive theorists that subscribe to evolutionary psychology believe that this tendency to anthropomorphize is further supported by even more primitive cognitive patterns, such as animism, the tendency to think of inanimate objects and events in terms of animate organisms. Indeed, some studies show that most people are ready to perceive agency and intention even in abstract shapes if they so much as move (Vermeule 2010 21–23). This echoes the repeated theoretical assumptions that even the smallest cues of personhood may be enough to evoke a sense of character (Keen 2007, 68–69; Margolin 2007, 72; Smith 1995, 20–31) or what Eder has named the "base type" – a prototypical core of "anthropological givens", such as coherence, sociality and consciousness (Eder et al. 2010, 13; cf. Fokkema's connotative codes). Depending on the medium, the minimal cues evoking these assumptions might include a proper name (e.g. Keen 2007, 68), the distinctive, bipedal human shape (Smith 1995, 25) or an ability to speak: as Kai Mikkonen (2017, 185) notes, attaching a speech or a thought bubble to anything at all is enough to convey sentience, and thus, characterness. In addition, comics make regular use of pareidolia, or the deep-ingrained human tendency to see a human face in the simplest of patterns: two dots and a mouth-like shape underneath them is enough to make something potentially interesting to our social instincts (McCloud 1993, 32–37; McCloud 2006, 58–61).

It has been suggested that this over-attribution of sentience is likely favored by adaptive evolution, as it is always safer to presume that sudden

movements and threatening shapes in the distance are alive, and thus, possible predators (Vermeule 2010, 21–23). Similar but more anthropocentric reasoning has led Vermeule (2010, 30–31) to advocate the "Machiavellian intelligence hypothesis" as the main reason we read fiction: the modern world puts us in such close physical and mental proximity with other people that social complications have become the most immediate threat, and they can only be avoided by acquiring social information – a need that fiction can cater to in several different ways (see ch. 3.2.2). Indeed, empirical evidence that humans are especially good at processing and remembering human-centric, social and narrativized information has already been accumulating for years (see e.g. Coplan 2006; Mar & Oatley 2008; Vermeule 2010 of summaries of several such studies). In conclusion, both theoretical and empirical research seem to suggest that human readers are not only predisposed towards anthropomorphizing but also hard-wired to be interested in anthropocentric stories that offer opportunities for mind-reading.

All this provides some insight into scenarios where we might find ourselves sympathizing or empathizing with such fictional people as Victor Frankenstein – and they likely account for at least some of the humanity we can find in the Creature as well. At the same time, however, they both obscure and clash with those traits of the Creature that are representationally nonhuman (cf. Article 2).

Overall, as Article 3 also discusses, there are some considerable limitations to portraying literary characters that do not reside on the threshold of actual artefactuality and illusory humanity but strive to evoke other ontological categories – be it animals and insects or monsters and aliens. Not only are the experiential depths of differently embodied minds even more difficult to grasp than those of the other humans (cf. ch. 3.2.2.; Nagel 1974) but the aforementioned narrative conventions and cognitive tendencies often steer the attention away from this alterity and gloss it over with allegorical or analogical anthropocentrism (see Article 3). The very category of characterness is so closely modeled on human figures and subjectivities that it automatically invites the activation of human-centric interpretational frames (Smith 1995, 20–24) – such as the base type or theory of mind – and these misreadings are typically encouraged by subtle narrative and expressive means. Comics, for instance, are liable to superimpose recognizable, human-like facial expressions on animal figures or give the gift of speech to critters that would not actually know how to talk or grasp the conceptual ideas of humans (see e.g. Herman 2011b; Keen 2011a). Thus, applying the theory of mind to characters like Frankenstein's monster might initially seem like a boon, since it lays the foundation for sympathetic and empathetic engagement (see ch. 3.2.1), but at the same time, it involves cramming the Creature into a category to which it knows it does not truly belong. The irony here is that while comparing fictional characters to Frankenstein's monster may bring us better understanding of characters in general, viewing the Creature through the anthropomorphizing lens of characterness may not help us to understand its uniquely nonhuman troubles very well at all.

The question that must be asked next, then, is whether there is any way around this interpretational violence: whether and how could diverse nonhumans be included in narratives across media? And again, the enactive framework sketched in this chapter should provide some ways forward, as it does not operate on categories – ontological or otherwise – but on tensions, continuums, and possibilities for different unfoldings and interactions. That is to say, even if human minds are inescapably human, different nonhuman beings and different artistic depictions of nonhuman beings can engage our cognitive actions in ways that enable discerning both the commonalities and the unbridgeable differences between humans and nonhumans.

Indeed, even if human minds are drawn to intuitive essentializing, it is ultimately nothing more than a cognitive fallacy (cf. Zunshine 2008, 6–13); more logical consideration as well as situations where we interact with actual nonhuman animals remind us that humans also have many features in common with all the other inhabitants of the biosphere. Our embodiments may be different, but underneath their species-specific traits, all fauna share at least the same base experience of being a fleshly and mortal creature on planet Earth. Moreover, if we assume consciousness to be a fundamentally embodied and embedded phenomenon, there is reason to believe that the embodied experiences of all human individuals and sentient critters bear some rudimentary structural similarities (cf. Caracciolo 2014b, 13; Herman 2011b). Some of the cognitive capabilities mentioned above also seem to occur in comparable forms across different species: cats that run after toys or moving specks of light seem every bit as prone to animism, or over-attribution of sentience as humans (cf. Vermeule 2010, 21) – and why would they not be, if this cognitive habit truly increases the odds of self-preservation?

Similarly, technological nonhumans, such as AIs, should not be considered polar opposites of humans either, because they are – after all – man-made. On the surface, this is exactly what enforces the cognitive categorizing to subjects and objects but, as both narrative theory and *Frankenstein* remind us, humans generally like to create things in their own image: if narratives always bear traces of humans' species-specific ways of thinking, why would codes and algorithms escape this bias altogether?

Arguably, since these continuities are experientially available to us as human readers and storytellers, narratives can display, address and explore them in ways that do not lead (only) to over-anthropomorphization but (also) to ethical re-evaluations. Many would agree that this is one of the effects *Frankenstein* accomplishes, and similarly structured android- and AI-narratives, such as Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), have subsequently broadened the same moral discussions to encompass various technological others (Broglio 2017, Zunshine 2008, 68–131).

The other strategy that all kinds of narratives can employ – and that is of at least equal ethical importance – is refusing as much anthropomorphizing as possible and alerting the readers to the nonhumanity of nonhuman characters instead. This does not mean that the human creators would have to know how

to depict nonhuman experience accurately; on the contrary, experimental and posthumanist narratives tend to underline nonhuman minds' unreadability and unreachability. This is exactly what *The Sandman: Overture* does as it depicts imaginary aliens with numerous defamiliarizing techniques (Article 3; cf. Caracciolo 2014a and 2016): following fantastical hybrid creatures through warped and confusing panels forces the reader to recognize that there are entire worlds that they will never fully understand – but that still matter and are in some ways available to enactivist and/or imaginary interactions. Less fantastical narratives, by contrast, can make use of the notion of embodied cognition by exploring the affordances that are available to different animal bodies in different environments (see e.g. Caracciolo 2016, 140–177; Herman 2011b and 2018 for examples). If such narrative explorations are done in a way that is sensitive to the target animals' species-specific behavior, there is no reason why they could not connect with the readers' real-world knowledge of animals – or "folk-ethology" – in the same way that human-centric narration plays on folk-psychology (cf. Zunshine 2008, 63). Visual media are, of course, especially effective at this as they can forgo any language that the depicted animals do not master and show, instead, the nuances of their bodily movements as they interact with their immediate physical and social surroundings (cf. Herman 2018; ch. 3.1.1).

Obviously, none of these strategies allow replicating nonhumanness perfectly – and characters can never be impeccable imitations of humans either. There is no reason why they should be. As irrevocably artificial and nonhuman, yet anthropomorphic and man-made things, they are, instead, in a unique position to reflect and remix different aspects of humans and nonhumans in ways that present the readers with innumerable ways of perceiving the relationships – and tensions – between the two. In other words, all of the aforementioned phenomena – overt artificiality, cognitive and narrative anthropomorphizing, depictions of cross-species unity or defamiliarization – rarely occur in their pure form but reside in different characters in different, shifting mixing ratios (cf. Bernaerts et al. 2014; Herman 2011b, 166). Once again, it is difficult to think of a more poignant example of this than Frankenstein's creature, a fully sentient and agential artefact whom is made of both animal and human flesh, and treated alternately as a project, a person and an inhumane monster (cf. Broglio 2017; Article 2).

Clearly, this is another reason why reconceptualizing characters as analogous to Frankenstein's monster is vital. Many of the most influential definitions and theoretical discourses on fictional characters have been overtly human-centric (see e.g. Forster 1962; Harvey 1965; Hochman 1985; Phelan 1989; Vermeule 2010), which is, of course, commensurate with the ways characters are typically used and interpreted: there is no escaping the fact that most characters offer themselves for humanizing readings, or that most human authors and audiences are highly invested in communication over human matters. However, this has made the concept of character too narrow for the chimeric interplays of artifice, representation and defamiliarization, which some fictional figures can

induce. The current posthumanist climate calls for an understanding of fictional characters that is not only open to the tensions between characters' material nonhumanity and representational humanity but also to tensions between representational humanity and representational nonhumanity. Alternatively, if the concept of character proves to be too closely coupled with the idea of human personhood, including nonhuman narrators and narratees in the theoretical discussion might require constructing new terms and measures – a new species – altogether.

3.3.3 Possible Tensions: From Incompleteness to Immortality

As Baruch Hochman (1985, 60) muses, another feature that separates characters from humans is that they do not possess the kind of experiential unity "people in life ordinarily have"; they cannot boast complete life histories, because they never truly lived. As previous chapters have discussed, locally, within certain narratives, characters do commonly adhere to some logical, biological, psychological and social conventions (cf. Fokkema 1991) that can result into mimetic illusions of a human-like life. If we widen our view to concern all the layered tensions discussed heretofore, however, it becomes clear that no character can have so solid a body or so stable a consciousness that they would definitively and permanently bind the character to any specific spatio-temporal coordinates. It is only because we are so used to thinking of characters in terms of human analogies, and so conditioned to respect the integrity of commercial canons, that we tend to forget how all fictional "existents" (cf. Chatman 1978) teem with narrative and interpretive potentials, which, due to their hypothetical nature, could even directly contradict each other without annulling each other.

Because characters are speculative – not real nor necessarily realizable – they can be any kinds of things and, what is more, *many* kinds of things at the same time; "they can be factual, counterfactual, hypothetical, conditional, or purely subjective" (Eder et al. 2010, 10). As with Frankenstein's monster – an unpredictable, unprecedented, hybrid tabula rasa, whose mind and meanings are formed according to enactivist logics, in dynamic interaction with its incidental environments (cf. Sherwin 1981) – the meanings and forms of all characters are always malleable. They can, in other words, escape the textual designs their authors enslaved them with and live many times forever, by exploiting, on the one hand, their own "ontological incompleteness" and, on the other hand, the tensions between texts and readers (Eder et al. 2010, 11; Hochman 1985, 59–85; Suits 1994). The purpose of this chapter is to explain in more detail (than I could in Article 2) what this Frankensteinian quality of virtuality (cf. Ryan 2005b) entails.

Let us first return to consider the incompleteness, or the degrees of stylization, inherent in all fictional things (cf. Hochman 1985, 89–97). As philosophers proclaim, with real people and in real life, the existence or the lack of any imaginable trait, as well as the occurrence or the non-occurrence of any imaginable event, can "in principle" be verified, whereas characters are always bound to have some properties or moments in their imaginary lives that have simply

been left uncreated (Suits 1994). That is, according to character theorists drawing from ontological philosophy, we cannot "know" whether Sherlock Holmes – or Victor Frankenstein for that matter – had a mole on his back, because mentioning or even implying the existence or non-existence of such a trait was never relevant in any of their (canonical) narratives (cf. Eder et al. 2010, 11–13; Hochman 1985, 60–65; Suits 1994). As mentioned in chapter 1.2.3, this lack of impertinent detail is concretized on the picture plane of comics storytelling: the panels and the cartoonish, hand-drawn images therein tend to render visible only the moments, forms and details that are meaningful in the overall design of the work (McCloud 1993, 36–45; Mikkonen 2017, 195). We can, of course, still assume or imagine, either consciously or unconsciously, that there are textures, moments or, indeed, blemishes between the lines, but we cannot point to them on paper and say that they are definitely "there" in the text, or in anyone else's interpretation of it.

To state the obvious, all characters in all media are full of these Frankensteinian seams. Texts do not explicitly mention or depict everything we need to know to make mimetic, coherent sense of characters: their legs may never be mentioned or shown, and they still move from place to place; their voices may not be heard or described and they still somehow communicate. As discussed in Article 2, cognitive character theories are unanimous that these gaps are stitched closed by the reader rather automatically, according to the principle of minimal departure, the person schema and various generic conventions (Eder et al. 2010, 13–15; Schneider 2001; Smith 1995). Thus, the readers usually infer that characters that move and communicate have functioning legs and can speak the same language. However, some contexts, especially in felicitous genres, might also allow the alternative assumptions that the characters levitate, are in wheelchairs, or have four hooves like centaurs; that they use sign language, communicate telepathically, or have cybernetic brain implants that allow them to directly read each other's brain waves.

However, such creative uses of the loose joints between conventions and cognitive frames are often viewed as "incorrect" or unauthorized, even by some cognitive theorists. Eder, Schneider and Jannidis (2010, 12), for instance, grant that any reader *can* imagine Lady Macbeth to have as many children as he or she pleases, "but on the level of the fictional universe the text creates, the information will remain unavailable". To me, this view resembles Frankenstein's deluded dream of total control over his creation – the old-fashioned, one-dimensional claim that "if [the author] is the creator of his characters, then he must perforce be the creator of truths about them" (Suits 1994, 105). In the monstrous web of tensions I have knit in this dissertation – in a paradigm where characters are processual and enacted rather than object-like and stable – this dream is shattered on no less than three accounts.

First, in this framework, the "fictional universe[s]" where characters reside are never "created" singlehandedly by the authorial texts but, again, enacted or interpreted in the primary tension or interaction between the texts and the readers. Relegating the authority over this interaction to the text rather than to

the reader should not be taken as a given but as a methodological choice, which is likely often motivated by the fact that – as discussed in the previous chapters – "the reader" is something of a fictional, prototypical, character-like construction as well. Appreciating the greater stability of the text over the greater agency of the reader is bound to lead to fairly stable and text-bound conceptions of character, which are more manageable in theoretical discourse. However, as I have demonstrated, this does not necessarily explain or correspond to the ways characters are experienced and treated by the readers in real life (cf. Smith 2010, 254). If and when we aim for better understanding of this readerly aspect of the character, our view of the primary tension must be weighted differently, so that the readers' agency – which is nevertheless considered good enough to fill in the minor gaps according to conventions and heuristic probabilities – should not be discounted; it should be investigated further.

Second, as the theories of transtextuality and transmediality now recognize, "fictional universes" and characters can always be expanded with intertextual tensions (see ch. 3.1.2.). That is to say, reader-creators can, in fact, "contribute" new "pieces of knowledge" into the storyworld (cf. Eder et al. 2010, 12). Should they be in a suitable position of power, their creation could even be considered canonical, which means that it would likely reach a good portion of the Leviathan of readership and be incorporated in many readers' character experiences. If the reader-creator is a fan author or a fan artist, their impact on the Leviathan will inevitably be more modest, and the readers might interact with a fan creation with different assumptions than they would with a canonical text. Ultimately, no text can repair the holes in the fabric of the original text, of course, but both canonical and unauthorized texts can thus make the things uncreated by the original text "less" uncreated, by replacing complete blanks with intertextual tensions.

Third, and most importantly, perhaps characters should not be regarded as objects of "knowledge" at all, but as objects of possibility. We can, of course, know or not know what is said about a certain character in a certain text or a certain canon but, again, characters are not only of or about the text. Instead, it bears repeating that fictional things' true value lies precisely in their difference from the objects of knowledge that populate our everyday reality – that is, in their unavoidable gaps, and the imaginary options they leave for the readers to discover (see ch. 1.4.1).

This potential for multiple meanings and lives is yet another feature of characters that becomes more recognizable through the monster analogy than through the tradition of human-centric literary character theory. Concerning the differences between "*Homo Sapiens*" and "*Homo Fictus*", Baruch Hochman (1985, 60) notes that rather than real, breathing people, characters resemble "dead people", because they are already "written" – "finished" (cf. Article 2). By contrast, researchers like Fred Botting (1991, 68), who turn their gaze towards Frankenstein's nameless creation, can immediately see the generative potential of the gaps left in the characters. A blank space – be it a missing name, a missing trait, a missing moment, or, indeed, the glaring gutter between two comic

panels –"constitutes the space that is necessary for the writing to begin", "the mark that precedes inscription" (ibid.). To quote the title of Carey and Gross' *Frankenstein-* and character-themed comic, gaps are the parts of characters that are still *Unwritten.* Due to their incompleteness, characters thus have the seeds of Frankensteinian rebellion in them: bits that their authors have not defined and thus cannot control – bits that are "neither a place of death nor a source of full life" but the "difference between them", "unpresentable and yet infinitely derived" (ibid.).

To put this in more concrete terms, gaps – especially large gaps in characters' life histories or motivational arcs – are pockets of potential, which invite creative sense-making and, thus, prequels, sequels, retellings from alternative perspectives, and so on. As it happens, one of the target texts of this dissertation exemplifies exactly this type of potentiality: the fact that *The Sandman* begun with its protagonist exhausted by some mysterious ordeal made it both possible and tempting for Neil Gaiman to narrate that ordeal two decades later in *The Sandman: Overture* (see Gaiman et al. 2015, "Foreword"). "There were scenes I had wanted to write for so long, visions in my head that had lived with me for 20 years", Gaiman (ibid.) confesses. Similarly, the meaningful, secretive gap at the core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* could be one of the reasons the tale has continued to haunt our collective imaginations for 200 years: Frankenstein specifically refuses to reveal to Captain Walton how he managed to awaken his creation (Shelley 2012b, 151), so hundreds of adaptations and theories have been compelled to face the challenge and insert sensational lightning bolts or fantastical apparatuses to their re-enactments of the pivotal scene.

Curiously, even though this type of extensive, creative gap-filling is inspired by an artificial, nonhuman quality of characters – their incompleteness – its results can usually be integrated into the idea of the character as a coherent, mimetic entity. That is, when the transtextual additions do not contradict what the reader already knows about the character but only add to it, they seemingly confirm that characters do have lives beyond the texts that have already been created and consumed. However, as we have seen, this is only an illusion created by the galvanic trickery of enactive tensions, and characters do not really need to be "complete" or uncontradictory in the same way that conscious, fleshly entities are. We may only able to experience our own lives from one point of view, bound as we are to our continuous bodies and subjectivities, but nothing prevents characters from living multiple, parallel lives. To continue with the material rhetoric, what is still unwritten may loudly beg to be written, but this does not mean that what has been written, could not also be rewritten.

That is to say, the regenerative meaning potentials of characters are not limited to the gaps, since nothing prevents the reader-creators from also re-inventing characters in a way that does not so much complement as complicate them. As discussed in Article 4 and some of the previous chapters, fandoms often employ different strategies of rewriting in order to rebel against canons that "mistreat" beloved characters by taking them to directions that contradict the fans' values or feel incoherent and "out of character". "Fix-it fics", which

explicitly retell the parts of the canon that some fans find problematic, are already considered a genre of their own.[18] Moreover, in comics culture, it is not uncommon for the franchise-holders to also publish contradictory and hypothetical stories about the characters they own. Popular superheroes starring in long-running series occasionally become subjects to "retroactive continuities" or "retcons", meaning that they are extracted from the continuous plots in which they have previously participated, and rebooted, started anew. In addition, DC comics has an imprint called Elseworlds, under which authorized creators can publish stories that star familiar DC characters but take place in parallel universes (Daniels 2003, 208). *Gotham by Gaslight* (1989) by Brian Augustyn and Mike Mignola, for instance, transplants Batman into 19th century Europe. *The Unwritten* (#17), for its part, presents the life story of one of its protagonists in an issue that is structured like "a pick-a-story book": depending on what reading paths the reader chooses, they either learn that the character in question is as competent, brilliant and stable as she has seemed to be, or that she is insane and has hallucinated the entire story thus far.

One could, of course, argue that these forking paths divide the character into two or more different characters – that if Batman lived in a different timeline he would not be the same Batman as the original Batman. However, there is also some evidence to suggest that these hypothetical, contradictory and alternative stories do not necessarily disrupt the perceived coherence of the characters' identities entirely. Whether located in contemporary Gotham City or in Victorian Vienna, it is clear that the executives and creators of DC Comics still consider Batman to be Batman, one character brand. Overall, contradictions in comics universes are generally explained away with different continuities or parallel universes, not with different characters. Similarly, if the writers of fix-it fics did not presume that they were writing about the same character the canon "mistreated", they would not feel like they are "correcting" anything at all. Rather, the practice implies recognition that characters, which are always already hypothetical and unstable, can just as well be destabilized further by alternative hypotheticals – and that generating and navigating these hypotheticals gives the readers the power to actively mold their own experiences and conceptions of characters.

In conclusion, if we understand characters to be interpretive processes that unfold between different texts and readers, we must also accept that they are "never simple or single" (Sherwin 1981) but fractured and layered. Thus, rather than establishing rules for when a character split into two alternative versions or continuums becomes two characters, it is – again – more interesting and more true to the dynamic nature of experience to conceptualize these alternative layers or versions as tensions – to simply embrace the fact that some parts of these speculative beings are forever contradictory and unresolved. Surely, there must always be a breaking point, where the two versions of the character start to seem entirely unrelated, but in such a case, it is more likely that the initial recognition, which brings forth the tension, never happens at all (cf. inter-

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[18]   See e.g.: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fix-it

textual tensions). The continuity of characters is, in other words, always a balancing act between similarity and difference, repetition and suggestion of something new. In the world of fictional characters, new traits can always be added – to the point of contradiction – and new lives can always be lived – to the point of immortality. And thus, the "hideous progeny" are truly free to "go forth and prosper" (cf. Shelley 2012a [1831], 169).

4 LOOKING BEYOND: DISCUSSION

> Where should we be if no one tried to find out what lies beyond? Have you never wanted to look beyond the clouds and the stars, or to know what causes the trees to bud? And what changes the darkness into light? But if you talk like that, people call you crazy. Well, if I could discover just one of these things, what eternity is, for example, I wouldn't care if they did think I was crazy. (Henry Frankenstein in Universal's *Frankenstein* (1931, directed by James Whale))

4.1 Is it Alive?: Conclusions

And so it transpires that characters are, indeed, alive – but not in the same sense as conscious, fleshly creatures are. Their liveness is more akin to the liveness of electrical wires: their varied artificial forms hold powerful potential for narratives, meanings and experiences, but these potentials only spark when they come in contact with a reader who channels them through their thoughts and actions. To translate the same claim in the language of cognitive narrative theory, characters are person-like and meaningful only insofar as they are both depicted and enacted as such – only insofar as the readers meet the textual affordances with their transmedial knowledge, theory of mind, person schema, empathy, remembered, remixed traces of embodied experiences, and other suitable ingredients. In other words, fictional characters unfold in interactive interpretive processes that are realized in multitudes of different ways between different minds, contexts and textual environments. This is their primary mode of existence.

Consequently, characters can never be traced back to any one source or reduced to any particular signs. On the contrary, they almost always overflow single meanings, single texts, and the interpretations of single readers. In practice, this means that narrative research should move away from theories that treat characters only as static arrangements of signs or paradigms of traits. While these old models still have analytical value, the many functions and phenomenological effects of characters can only be explained by complementing the current understanding of characters' textual structures with deeper under-

standing of reading processes' cognitive and social aspects. Advancing on this path still requires extensive, methodologically varied and interdisciplinary research; this dissertation has only strived to tentatively open new theoretical discussions towards this end.

In terms of textual raw materials, I have endeavored to demonstrate that graphic narration can reveal and highlight aspects of characters that have remained uninvestigated in literature-oriented inquiries. The visual bodies of comic book characters seem to give grounds for especially diverse and important affordances: they can help to illustrate embodied and enactive cognition of both human- and nonhuman-seeming characters, and they appear to fortify characters' coherence and recognizability, which, in turn, should ease their transtextual propagation. The fact that the likenesses of characters can be reproduced of different materials and with various modifications by franchise holders and fans alike also create opportunities for different playful and social engagements between the characters, creators and fan communities.

Through these interactions, characters gain certain ghostly agency in real-world discourses and in the readers' minds. Like all the other toys, concepts and instruments, they invite and allow certain kinds of interpretations, interactions and effects, while preventing or hiding others. It would seem that characters are especially well suited for orienting the readers towards different story-worlds and social cognitions as well as towards the border zones between reality and fiction, and between self and other. In other words, fictional people are an important resource for narrative, speculative and human-centric thinking.

All this makes characters a special kind of species that has its own, specific niche in the textual-cognitive ecologies. While the theoretical explorations performed in this dissertation have proved that some manner of anthropomorphic mimesis is a vital feature of this species, they have also shown that the human analogy can mislead our theoretical thinking. That is to say, despite their mimetic aspect and despite the embodied human experientiality and mind-reading they often invite, characters can also slip beyond and between logical continuums and dichotomies, and readers always remain aware of their non-human artificiality. It is precisely this manifold hybridity of characters that makes them such opportune subjects for graphic and narrative human experiments: we can know them, own them, relate to them, mold them, discuss them, and even kill and resurrect them in ways that would be impossible with real people – but that can still, through analogical heuristics and enactive interactions, alter our perceptions of and relations with real people.

Because characters manifest, grow and work through tensions and potentialities, I have suggested that they should not be described as fictional humans any longer, but as interpretational Frankenstein's monsters. Only a figure as paradoxical and complex as the amalgamated Creature could ever be emblematic of the fragmentary existence of characters, who wander across texts and minds without ever truly becoming realized, understood or finished. That is to say, the blights of the monster draws critical attention to the fundamental in-

completeness, open-endedness, multiplicity and counterontology of fictional existents in ways that notions of "possible people" have not been able to do.

I would expect these intratextual, intertextual, cognitive, social, aspectual, chimeric and possible tensions to always factor in our experiences of characters in some ways, although some of these oscillations are likely to be more central to some characters than others. Not all fictional existents are conjured forth by more than one text, for instance, and the anthropocentric assumptions underlying the very concept of character mean that representationally nonhuman characters might struggle to find their place on some of these axes. Yet, even these kinds of characters would necessarily be made up of various textual fragments and the readers would perceive them simultaneously as mimetic and artificial. In conclusion, at least some parts of the network of tensions should apply to all fictional characters across genres and media, but comparative analyses might well find some fascinating qualitative differences between different types of characters.

4.2   Learn from My Miseries: A Brief Self-Reflection

Perhaps the best possible testament to characters' monstrous complexity, paradoxicality and hybridity is constituted by the failings of the current academic discourse on characters. As I have stated, my aim has not been to disprove any of the earlier structuralist, semiotic, phenomenological, cognitive or rhetoric approaches but, rather, to test their limits and to find phenomena they cannot quite explain as of yet. And I have found that, while all the previous theories offer a dazzlingly kaleidoscopic vision of characters' many facets when they are brought together, most individual theories have fixated too narrowly on literary texts, simple definitions and single models.

In my view, the greatest achievement of this dissertation is that it has at least attempted to "look beyond" the limited perspectives of previous theories, by openly mixing and matching frameworks, tools and research problems from various sources and directions. As mentioned in the introduction, cognitive literary scholars are typically accused of, not praised for, building such "methodological Frankensteins" and employing such speculative methods, but I committed both crimes knowingly and refuse to make apologies for either. In my view, this experiment with extensive meta-theoretical analogies has been an overall success, as it has guided me to question established definitions, shift between various perspectives and problems as well as to become more aware of the way language and concepts function as research tools. The bottom line is that, for all its grotesqueness and arbitrariness, I feel this "monster analogy" did produce something genuinely new. Whether the result will be deemed monstrous or amazing by the research community is entirely secondary, because one researcher's mistakes serve as excellent warning or road signs to other researchers – another lesson we can learn from *Frankenstein.*

Of course, much like Frankenstein's creation, my creation is far from seamless or symmetrical. Seeing that Shelley's work focuses on the relationship between the creator and the created, I should perhaps have directed more attention towards authors, for example. The cognitive framework persuaded me to substitute the author-creator with the reader-creators quite early on, but the Leviathan of readership admittedly struggles with slightly different problems than the lone genius and his solitary Creature. In general terms, we readers are less tied to the artificial creatures we create and, instead, more responsible for our social contexts than the hermit-like antiheroes of Shelley's novel are. While the fictional creatures themselves are free game for almost any kinds of speculative experiments, we still have the responsibility to create, read, propagate and recreate characters in such ways and in such contexts that they do not bring harm to any actual individuals or groups. One such problematic use of characters discussed in this dissertation is the rampant over-humanization of nonhuman others, and other comparable cases of misrepresentation or "interpretational violence" surely pertain to other marginalized groups as well. In sum, the ethical implications of characters differ quite notably from the ethical problems represented by Frankenstein's Creature, and not discussing this difference nor the role of the author are perhaps the biggest gaps remaining in my monster analogy.

Another regret I have is that my chosen research problems and the compilation format did not give me good opportunities for conducting more of the type of extensive cognitive comics analyses that Article 3 includes. My initial plan, back in 2014, was actually to write a monograph exploring the anthropomorphizing and experimental characterization techniques that comics, and only comics, have at their disposal. Vertigo was a key piece of this puzzle, as the series published under the imprint truly boast various practical graphic experiments: characters based on historical people, characters with extremely fascinating plant and animal traits, characters that challenge the distinction between space and figure, and characters with powers to warp their comic book surroundings. Analyzing more of these characters would undoubtedly have produced more valuable insights, which, in turn, might have improved the network of tensions presented in the "Anatomy" chapter even further.

However, the dissertation fragmented into its current article-based form due to various practical reasons, and *The Unwritten* nudged me towards an unexpected Frankensteinian path. As a result, the theoretical framework of comics studies was relegated to a more and more supporting role, and I let this happen because the new configuration presented me with a tempting opportunity to consider both some of the medium-specific means comics have for constructing characters (Articles 3 and 4) and the dynamics that seem to apply to characters more or less transmedially (Article 2, Anatomy chapter). Thus, while I credit my Frankensteinian method for giving my work greater theoretical breadth and depth than I ever intended, comics have been no less of an inspiration; they have also helped me to find questions, approaches and perspectives I would

have otherwise missed, and I can only hope that other comics researchers will salvage the parts of Vertigo corpus I left untouched.

4.3   Hear Thy Creatures: Recommendations for Future Research

Since this study has attached itself to so many theoretical approaches, its findings could also be applied and developed to several directions. There is still much work to be done under almost all of the subtitles in the "Anatomy" chapter, as the tension between synthetic and mimetic aspects is the only paradoxical quality of characters that has been recognized many times over. Detangling and explaining the different facets of the various phenomena labeled as "identification" or "parasocial relationships" appear to require especially extensive interdisciplinary work, both in terms of theoretical discussion and empirical testing. The social meanings and usages of characters in fandoms and beyond have also been investigated relatively little, and it would surely be interesting to adopt or critique some items of the fannish engagement terminology – such as "headcanon" – in academic contexts.

Furthermore, it might be useful to conduct some in-depth case studies based on my network of tensions: how are specific transmedial characters *actually* discussed and reproduced in the Leviathan of readership and what kind of textual and interpretive tensions do such discourses highlight exactly? Overall, I gladly invite other researchers to test and expand my monster analogy further. To refer back to my self-reflections, the implications that a Frankensteinian definition of characters have for posthumanist narrative studies and ethics would be an especially important issue to consider more carefully.

The field of comics research also continues to have many uncharted areas. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, there are no comics-specific theories of character, and since my research also shifted away from medium-specific concerns, this gap persists – although it has hopefully grown a tad narrower. My methodology and findings also corroborate the claims that analyzing comics can offer valuable starting points for transmedial narratology. Furthermore, comics appear to have unique potential for expressing and evoking nonhuman minds. This marginal medium should, therefore, be taken into serious consideration in the topical discussions about developing new transmedial and posthumanist perspectives in narrative studies. Cognitive narrative theory has also given comics rather scant attention so far, despite the affinity between second-generation theories and comic book characters' visually embodied and enacted minds.

Finally, I would like to return once more to the hidden creative potentialities of apparently alchemical methods, and defend the validity and utility of speculation in theoretical studies. As narrative scholars, we incessantly use speculative, textual instruments to dissect speculative, textual specimen, which requires us to remain supremely mindful of the constructedness and limits our theoretical frameworks and metaphors. After all, just as characters have the

agency to enable and limit our thinking, so, too, have the theoretical concepts: because we speak of the "inside" and "outside" of texts, and define characters as "human analogues" or "paradigms of traits", our theoretical speculations become tamed by and limited to these viewpoints, which are considered to constitute the hegemonic, "proper" conduct in the field. Given this constructed nature of narrative studies, we should perhaps take metafictional quips – like those presented in *The Unwritten* – more seriously from time to time. For "[w]here should we be if no one tried to find out what lies beyond?" What if we listened – *really* listened – to our fictional creatures and their wishes, instead of trying to make them into what the theoretical pedigrees want – "a more manageable species" (Forster 1962, 69)? Theory is read and interpreted as much as fiction is read and interpreted, so why should one always be the master and the other its wretched creature?

YHTEENVETO

Tämä sarjakuvahahmojen lukemista tarkasteleva väitöskirja muistuttaa monessakin mielessä Victor Frankensteinin kokeita, sillä se on harsittu kokoon useista eri teksteistä, lähestymistavoista ja teorioista. Tutkielman pohjana on kolme englanninkielistä ja yksi suomenkielinen artikkeli, jotka perehtyvät fiktiivisiin olioihin liittyviin ilmiöihin ja ongelmiin eri näkökulmista: jotkin osatutkimukset sisältävät sarjakuva-analyysiä, toiset keskittyvät enemmän teoreettiseen spekulaatioon; joissain artikkeleissa huomion kohteena on hahmojen yhtäaikainen inhimillisyys ja epäinhimillisyys, toisissa niiden asema eri tekstien ja viestinten välillä. Kaikissa kuitenkin yhdistyvät jollain tavoin kolme samaa teoriakehystä: henkilöhahmoteoria, kognitiivinen kertomusteoria ja sarjakuvatutkimus. Johdanto-osa puolestaan koostaa artikkelien löydösten sekä Frankensteinin hirviön ja henkilöhahmojen välisten yhtäläisyyksien pohjalta uuden teorian hahmoista jännitteisinä kognitiivisina prosesseina. Kaikkiaan työ pyrkii siis selvittämään, millaiseksi lukijoiden ja tekstien välinen vuorovaikutus muodostuu henkilöhahmojen välityksellä: miten luemme hahmot eloon ja kuinka ne ohjaavat ajatteluamme tekstien sisä- ja ulkopuolella?

Ollakseen lähes välttämätön osa lähes kaikenlaisia kertomuksia henkilöhahmot ovat saaneet kirjallisuudentutkijoilta hyvin niukasti huomiota, ja muilla aloilla fiktiivisiä henkilöitä on pohdittu vielä vähemmän. Suurin osa hahmoteorioista on kehitetty viimeisen sadan vuoden aikana, ne keskittyvät lähes poikkeuksetta verbaaliseen kerrontaan, ja ne voidaan jakaa karkeasti kahteen leiriin. Postmoderni kirjallisuus, strukturalismi ja semiotiikka ovat inspiroineet useita tutkijoita – esimerkiksi Roland Barthesia, Seymour Chatmania ja Uri Margolia – tarkastelemaan hahmoja merkkirakennelmina sekä tekstien tai kertomusten funktionaalisina rakenneosina. Sellaiset realistisesta kirjallisuudesta kiinnostuneet kirjailijat ja teoreetikot kuin E. M. Foster ja Baruch Hochman puolestaan ovat kiinnittäneet huomionsa hahmojen mimeettiseen puoleen, eli siihen kuinka lukijat kokevat hahmot hämmästyttävän ihmisen kaltaisina. Nämä kaksi näkemystä tuntuvat yhteen sopimattomilta, mutta molemmat ovat silti totta: hahmoista puhuessaan monet lukijat vuoroin suhteuttavat hahmoja kertomuksen kokonaisuuteen ja vuoroin esittävät oletuksiaan niiden ihmisenkaltaisesta toiminnasta. Uusimmat henkilöhahmoteoriat, kuten James Phelanin retorinen teoria, Aleid Fokkeman semioottinen teoria ja Ralf Schneiderin kognitiivinen skeemateoria ovatkin päätyneet pitämään fiktiivisiä henkilöitä ristiriitaisina, paradoksaalisina tai kahtalaisina olioina, joissa on sekä mimeettinen, oman ihmisyytemme kautta tulkittava puoli että synteettinen, tekstuaalisesti rakennettu puoli.

Vaikka kaikki nämä käsitykset henkilöhahmoista perustuvatkin varsin erilaisille teoreettisille lähtökohdille, tässä tutkimuksessa niitä lähestytään ja tulkitaan uudelleen lukijalähtöisesti, kognitiivisen kertomuksen tutkimuksen kehyksestä käsin. Sovellan erityisesti niin sanottuja toisen sukupolven kognitiivisia teorioita, jotka korostavat ajattelun kehollisuutta, kokemuksellisuutta ja tilanteisuutta. Erityisen keskeinen teoriasuuntaus on enaktivismi, jonka mukaan

merkitykset ja kognitiivinen toiminta ikään kuin keriytyvät auki tietoisen olennon ja tämän ympäristön välisen vuorovaikutuksen tuloksena. Toinen erityisen hyödyllinen teoriakimppu koskee niin sanottua mielen teoriaa, inhimillistä taipumusta olettaa tai simuloida toisten tietoisilta vaikuttavien olentojen aikeita ja tajunnantiloja. Kokemuksen henkilöhahmosta voidaan siis ajatella syntyvän siten, että lukija vuorovaikuttaa sellaisen tekstin tai teoksen kanssa, joka tarjoaa mahdollisuuden soveltaa mielen teoriaa johonkin tekstin osaan. Tällaista vuorovaikutuksen mahdollisuutta kutsutaan affordanssiksi eli tarjoumaksi.

Erilaiset tekstit tuottavat tietenkin erilaisia tarjoumia. Siksi myös tekstien ja viestinten erityispiirteet on otettava huomioon, vaikka aktiivinen fani voikin seurata hahmoa omien kognitiivisten kykyjensä ja taipumustensa turvin transmediaalisesti, teoksesta ja viestimestä toiseen. Sarjakuvien keskeisin erityispiirre on niiden monimediaisuus, eli luova ja joustava kuvallisten ja sanallisten kerronta- ja viestintäkeinojen yhdistäminen. Mitä tahansa minkä voi painaa paperille voi liittää osaksi sarjakuvakerrontaa, ja digitaaliset alustat ovat laajentaneet sarjakuvan ilmaisuvälineistöä entisestään. Tästä syystä sarjakuva on keskeinen risteysasema useiden eri viestinten välillä: kirjallisuuden hahmoja omitaan jatkuvasti sarjakuviin, ja sarjakuvahahmojen pohjalta rakennetaan hyvinkin laajoja transmediatuotantoja. Näin ollen sarjakuvat tarjoavat avaimia juuri monimediaisten ja tekstien välillä vaeltavien tarinaelementtien ymmärtämiseen.

Keskityn erityisesti hyvin frankensteinmaisia intertekstuaalisia toimintatapoja noudattavaan julkaisusarjaan, yhdysvaltalaisen DC Comicsin Vertigoon, joka tarjoilee kunnianhimoista kauhu-, fantasia- ja rikossarjakuvaa aikuisyleisölle. Useimmat Vertigo-otsikon alla julkaistuista sarjoista kierrättävät hahmoja kirjallisuuden klassikoista tai muokkaavat ja herättävät henkiin DC Comicsin omistuksessa olevia, jo unohdettuja hahmoja. Vertigon sarjat on suunnattu myös sellaisille lukijoille, jotka eivät ole kasvaneet sarjakuvien parissa, joten niissä yhdistyy hedelmällisesti sarjakuvakentän kaksi äärilaitaa: kaupallinen lähestyttävyys ja ennakkoluuloton kokeellisuus. Tarkemman analyysin kohteiksi tästä tekstijoukosta valikoituvat Mike Careyn ja Peter Grossin luoma *The Unwritten* (2009–2015) sekä Neil Gaimanin käsikirjoittaman ja kymmenien taiteilijoiden kuvittaman kulttisarja *The Sandmanin* (1989–1996) uusi epilogiosa *The Sandman: Overture* (2013–2015).

Tulkitsen kumpaakin teosta Karin Kukkosen kehittämän kognitiivisen sarjakuva-analyysin avulla, siis huomioiden sarjakuvan eri merkkijärjestelmien ja sommitelmien yhteisefektit. *The Sandman: Overturen* analyysissa olen lisäksi korostanut sarjakuvan lukemisen kokemuksellisuutta, mikä onkin hyvä tapa saada suhteellisen dynaaminen kokonaiskuva sarjakuvan monituisista, kaoottisinakin pidetyistä ilmaisumahdollisuuksista. Toisen sukupolven kognitiivisten teorioiden nojalla lukeminen – jopa ammattimainen teoriatekstien lukeminen – on aina väistämättä tilanteista ja subjektiivista, joten tutkijoidenkin olisi hyvä herkistyä omille lukuprosesseilleen ja ennemmin tehdä niistä näkyviä kuin häivyttää niitä valheellisen objektiivisuuden oletuksen taakse.

Vielä keskeisempi metodi on kuitenkin teoreettinen spekulaatio, jota tässä työssä ohjaa *The Unwritten* -sarjakuvan ehdottama analogia henkilöhahmojen ja

Frankensteinin hirviön välillä. Kuten Artikkelissa 2 esitellään, yhtäläisyyksiä on kieltämättä paljon: sekä hahmot että Frankensteinin hirviö ovat kuolevaisten luomia, keinotekoisia, hajanaisia olioita, mutta kuten monet hahmoteoreetikot ja fanit ovat todenneet, ne vaikuttavat silti kovin eläviltä. Ei ole myöskään tavatonta, että hahmot eläisivät kauemmin ja saisivat enemmän kulttuurista painoarvoa kuin tekijänsä.

Fiktiivisen olion ottaminen teoreettisen tutkimuksen johtolangaksi voi ehkä vaikuttaa satunnaiselta tai erikoiselta, mutta fiktio ja sen tutkimus ovat kumpikin pohjimmiltaan spekulaatiota, erilaisilla kielellisillä ilmaisuilla ja käsitteillä operoimista. Aiemmat henkilöhahmoteoriat ja kirjallisuudentutkimuksen kieli ovat jo vuosia ohjanneet tutkimusta tiettyyn suuntaan – tarjonneet vain yhdenlaisia tarjoumia. Niinpä täysin uuden – kuvitteellisen ja hirviömäisenkin – työkalun käyttöön ottaminen avaa väistämättä ajattelua uusille urille ja auttaa näkemään uusia aukkoja ja yhteyksiä. Empiirinen lukijatutkimus aivokuvantamismenetelmineen on vielä niin rajoitettua, että se ei tule tarjoamaan kokonaiskuvaa lukukokemuksistamme vuosikymmeniin, puhumattakaan siitä, että tällaisten tutkimusten tulokset saavat merkityksensä vain teoreettista ymmärrystä vasten. Hahmojen kokemisesta keskusteltaessa on lisäksi tärkeää muistaa, että kokemus on ennen kaikkea dynaaminen, laadullinen ilmiö, jota on siis oletettavasti helpoin lähestyä laadullisen tutkimuksen menetelmin.

Näistä teoreettisista ja metodologisista lähtökohdista ammentaen työhön kootut neljä artikkelia tarttuvat kukin omiin tutkimusongelmiinsa. Artikkeli 1 perustuu yhtäältä lisensiaatintyöhöni, toisaalta ensimmäiseen konferenssiesitelmääni, ja toimii siis mittatikkuna tutkimusprosessin aikana tapahtuneelle kasvulle. Se tarkastelee Vertigon ja muiden anglo-amerikkalaisten fantasiasarjakuvien kierrätettyjä henkilöhahmoja Wolfgang G. Müllerin interfiguraalisuutta eli eri teksteissä esiintyvien hahmojen välisiä suhteita koskevaa teoriaa vasten. Artikkeli toteaa, että esimerkkejä on helppo löytää kaikista Müllerin esittämistä suhdetyypeistä: anglo-amerikkalaisessa fantasiasarjakuvassa on viljalti niin "sellaisenaan" kierrätettyjä hahmoja, muihin hahmoihin viittaavia nimeämiskäytäntöjä, lukevia hahmoja, sisäkkäisissä kertomuksissa esiintyviä hahmoja kuin eri teoksista koottuja hahmoryhmiäkin. Lisäksi artikkeli toteaa, että esimerkiksi *The Unwritten* näyttäisi luovan hahmojen välisiä jatkumoita myös genretyypillisten trooppien avulla. Esimerkiksi kaikki vampyyrihahmot viittaavat siis jollain tavoin toisiinsa. Artikkeli kuitenkin huomauttaa, että mikään näistä suhteista ei syntyisi ilman lukijan vertailutyötä. Siksi Müllerin näkemys interfiguraalisuudesta avoimena, dynaamisena kenttänä on toimiva vain, mikäli se siirretään hänen ehdottamastaan strukturalistis-semioottisesta kehyksestä kognitiiviseen kehykseen.

Artikkeli 2 perehtyy syvemmin *The Unwritteniin* ja sen väittämiin henkilöhahmojen hirviömäisyydestä. Lisäksi tekstissä tulkitaan kirjallisuustieteen hahmoteorioiden evoluutiota Mary Shelleyn alkuperäisteoksen tärkeimpiä juonenkäänteitä vasten. Strukturalistien ja semiootikkojen kiinnostus hahmojen funktioihin ja rakenneosiin heijastelee Frankensteinin hybrisiä aikeita ja materiaalien keruuta: 1900-luvun puolivälissä tutkijat vielä kuvittelivat, Frankenstei-

nin tapaan, että kaikki kuolevaisten ihmisten luomat oliot ovat helposti eriteltävistä piirteistä koostuvia kimppuja, jotka palvelevat suurempia kokonaisuuksia tekijän suunnitelman mukaisesti. Kognitiiviset teoriat puolestaan saattelevat näyttämölle lukijan, jonka ajatustyö tekee hahmoista kokonaisempia ja inhimillisempiä. Samoin Frankensteinin hirviö rakentaa itselleen tietoisuuden ja identiteetin lukemalla kirjoja ja tekijänsä muistiinpanoja. Molemmat näistä lukemisprosesseista kuitenkin johtavat kapinaan: hirviö kohtaa ja voittaa tekijänsä, kun taas henkilöhahmo ryöstäytyy tekijän ja tekijän sanelemien tarinallisten funktioiden vallasta tulemalla osaksi eri lukijoiden moninaisia tulkintoja ja edelleen näiden tuottamia allusiivisia tekstejä. Kuten Barthes käänteentekevässä esseessään totesi, "Tekijän kuolema" kulkee siis käsi kädessä lukijan luomistyön ja "tekstikudosten" loputtomien merkityspotentiaalien avaamisen kanssa. Samalla tämä tekstuaalisten elementtien pidäkkeetön leviäminen muistuttaa myös transmediaalisen kertomusteorian muodikkaista kysymyksenasetteluista.

Artikkeli 3 perehtyy *The Sandman: Overturen* vieraannuttaviin, hybridisiin jumalhahmoihin ja avaruusolioihin, ja kysyy kuinka tällaiset täysin kuvitteelliset oliot voisivat auttaa ymmärtämään ei-inhimillistä kokemusta. Yhtäältä kertomuksia on pidetty erinomaisena tapana välittää kokemuksia ainakin Monika Fludernikin luonnollisesta narratologiasta lähtien. Toisaalta nämä kokemukset rajoittuvat väistämättä inhimilliseen; Thomas Nagelin klassikkoesseen mukaan ihminen ei voi tietää, millaista lepakolle on olla lepakko, sillä ihmismieli on liian sidoksissa inhimilliseen kehoon, ihmisyhteiskuntaan ja ihmiselle tyypillisiin toimintamahdollisuuksiin. Marco Caracciolon kokemuksellista kertomusteoriaa ja epäluonnollista narratologiaa seuraten voidaan kuitenkin todeta, että esimerkiksi kokeellinen ja fantastinen fiktio voivat tarjota lukukokemuksia, jotka eroavat ihmisen arkikokemuksesta ja siten laajentavat lukijan kokemuksellista kenttää. Samastuttavat henkilöhahmot auttavat näiden kokemusten muodostumisessa, kun taas yllättävät ilmaisukeinot outouttavat niitä. Artikkeli päättyy pitkään tekstianalyysiin, joka toteaa *The Sandman: Overturen* tuottavan tällaista tunnistetavan kokemuksen ja vaikeasti luettavan toiseuden ristivetoa esimerkiksi inhimillisiä ja ei-inhimillisiä piirteitä yhdistävien hahmojen, erikoisten sivu-layoutien sekä nokkelien peilimotiivien avulla. Lukijalle syntyy vaikutelma, että teksti vihjaa jonkin tuntemattoman ei-inhimillisen kokemuksen olemassaolosta, mutta ei lopulta voi muuta kuin peilata lukijansa ja tekijänsä inhimillisyyttä. *Overture* siis hahmottelee inhimillisen ymmärryksen rajat, ja alleviivaa siten ei-inhimillisten mielten perustavanlaatuista toiseutta ja saavuttamattomuutta.

Artikkeli 4 puolestaan pohtii, millaisia elämystuotteita sarjakuvahahmot ovat. Talouskonsultit B. Joseph Pine II ja James H. Gilmore uskovat, että erilaiset tuotteet ja palvelut kärsivät väistämättä inflaation, mikäli niitä ei osata paketoida kokonaisvaltaisemmiksi elämyksiksi. Sarjakuville on kuitenkin käynyt päinvastoin: ne olivat alun perin halpaa, pois heitettävää lukemistoa, mutta ovat sittemmin siirtyneet kirjakauppoihin tai saaneet huutokaupoissa jopa miljoonien hintalappuja. Kenties tämä johtuu siitä, että sarjakuva itsessään on vain pakkaus varsinaiselle tuotteelle, henkilöhahmolle, joka on aina ollut elämyksel-

linen. Henkilöhahmot ja niiden ominaisuudet näyttävätkin olevan tärkeitä yleisöjen ja yhtiöiden toimintaa ohjaavia tekijöitä, kun sarjakuvien pohjalta luodaan elämyksellisempiä transmediauniversumeita, ja tärkeimpiä muuttujia, kun suurten kustannustalojen supersankarikokoonpanoja yritetään "massakustomoida" entistä laajempia yleisöjä puhutteleviksi. Kaikkiaan hahmot muistuttavat arvoa lisäävän ja määrittävän funktionsa nojalla tuotebrändejä. Fanit eivät kuitenkaan osta kritiikittä sarjakuvateollisuuden tarjoamia hahmoja ja niiden edustamia arvoja ja identiteettejä. Pikemminkin hahmot ovat tärkeä polttoaine myös sellaisille kuluttamisen käytännöille, joihin kuuluu kaanonien muokkaus ja uudelleen kirjoittaminen, kuten fanifiktion kirjoittamiselle ja fanitaiteen tekemiselle. Yhtenä hahmojen tarjoumista voidaankin pitää sitä, että niiden kautta voidaan henkilöidä, markkinoida ja vastustaa eri tuottaja- ja kuluttajaosapuolten näkemyksiä siitä, millaisia elämyksiä ja muutoksen mahdollisuuksia fiktiolta toivotaan.

Kaikki nämä osatutkimukset paljastavat henkilöhahmoista valtavasti erilaisia ristiriitaisuuksia ja jännitteitä. Erityisesti sarjakuvien lukijalle on hyvin ilmeistä, että henkilöhahmojen kokeminen perustuu aina hajanaiseen ja moninaiseen tekstuaaliseen ainekseen, joka ei koskaan muodosta yhtenäistä oliota täysin saumattomasti ja automaattisesti. Sama koskee useammassa eri tekstissä esiintyviä hahmoja: erillisten teosten ja niiden esittämien olioiden välillä on aina aukkoja, eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä, joihin lukija voi suhtautua useilla eri tavoilla.

Tämän lisäksi lukeminen itsessään vaikuttaisi olevan monitahoinen ja -suuntainen prosessi: niin teoreettinen kuin empiirinenkin tutkimus antavat viitteitä siitä, että tyypillisesti hahmoihin suhtaudutaan sekä sympaattisesti, eli "ulkoa päin", että empaattisesti, eli ikään kuin "sisältä päin". Esimerkiksi Caracciolon mukaan lukijat kuvittelevat hahmojen kokemuksia "ensimmäisestä persoonasta", mutta liittävät nämä kokemukset samalla "kolmannesta persoonasta" ymmärrettyyn, suhteellisen itsenäiseen tekstuaaliseen olioon. Käytännössä tämä tarkoittaa, että normaalit, terveet lukijat kyllä kokevat itsensä ja hahmot koko ajan erillisinä ja ontologialtaan erilaisina yksilöinä, mutta väliin jää aina pieni harmaa alue, jossa fiktiiviset ja todelliset kokemukset päällekkäistyvät.

Hahmokokemukset ovat siis väistämättä hyvin henkilökohtaisia, mutta silti niistä keskustellaan myös muiden lukijoiden kanssa. Useat tutkijat uskovat tällaisen fiktiivisistä asioista juoruilun harjaannuttavan lukijan mielenteoreettisia taitoja, ja hahmosuhteista keskusteleminen voi toki vaikuttaa myös tosimaailman sosiaalisiin suhteisiin. On kuitenkin tärkeää huomata, että kaksi yksittäistä lukijaa ei koskaan voi kokea "samaa" henkilöhahmoa täysin samalla tavalla. Vaikka hahmoja siis usein käytetäänkin arkkityyppeinä tai kielikuvina, joiden merkitysten oletetaan olevan suhteellisen yleisesti jaettuja, eri ihmisten yksilöllisten hahmokokemusten joukko voi tosiasiassa hajota hyvinkin eri suuntiin.

Näitä ristiriitoja ja häilyvyyksiä ei suinkaan helpota se, että hahmot ovat lähtökohtaisesti kummallisia olioita. Kuten todettua, hahmojen yhtäaikaisesti koettu keinotekoisuus ja todenkaltaisuus on hämmentänyt henkilöhahmoteoreetikoita jo vuosikymmeniä. Vaikka hahmot ovat pohjimmiltaan keksittyjä,

tekstuaalisia, ei-inhimillisiä olioita, ne luetaan niin vahvasti erilaisten inhimillistävien mekanismien ja oletusten kautta, että ei-inhimillisten olioiden, kuten eläinten tai koneiden, kuvaaminen henkilöhahmoina muodostuu usein ongelmalliseksi. Henkilöhahmoteoreetikoiden olisikin jatkossa hyvä keskittyä siihen, missä määrin hahmojen ihmisyysilluusioon voi yhdistyä myös vieraannuttavia, ei-inhimillisiin mieliin ja kokemuksiin viittaavia piirteitä ja miten näitä piirteitä tulkitaan. Toinen hahmojen erityispiirre, joka usein jää oletetun ihmisyyden varjoon, on niiden virtuaalisuus, eli kyky monistua, haarautua ja elää loputtomat määrät useita ristiriitaisiakin elämiä. Myös tämä on hahmojen, ja muidenkin fiktiivisten olioiden, erityinen tarjouma, joka tekee niistä ainutlaatuisen välineen erilaisille kuvitteellisille ihmiskokeille.

Kaiken tämän nojalla ehdotan, että hahmoja ei enää tulisi pitää pelkästään tekstuaalisina rakennelmina tai edes kognitiivisina representaatioina, vaan eri tekstien ja lukijoiden välillä juoksevina kokemuksellisina prosesseina, joita kaikki edellä mainitut jännitteet pitävät liikkeessä. Hahmot siis näyttäytyvät elävinä ja dynaamisina juuri siksi, että ne eivät palaudu yksittäiseen tekstiin tai tulkintaan, vaan siksi, että ne voivat aina avautua uusiin suuntiin yhä uusista otollisista tarjoumista, kuten – esimerkiksi sarjakuvahahmojen tapauksessa – tunnistettavina toistetuista visuaalisista ruumiista. Tästä syystä hahmoja ei myöskään pitäisi enää kuvata kuvitteellisiksi henkilöiksi, vaan tulkinnallisiksi Frankensteinin hirviöksi – moniaineksisiksi, loputtomasti ja hallitsemattomasti kehittyviksi, keinotekoisiksi mutta silti mielen teoriaamme puhutteleviksi olioiksi.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

SOMETHING BORROWED:
INTERFIGURAL CHARACTERIZATION
IN ANGLO-AMERICAN FANTASY COMICS

by

Essi Varis, 2016

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Something Borrowed: Interfigural Characterisation in Anglo-American Fantasy Comics

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Abstract

It is no secret that the formal structure of comics resembles a pastiche: images, words and gaps of different styles and abstraction levels mix to tell a story that is more than their sum. Is it any wonder, then, that modern, myth-driven graphic novels tend to borrow their content elements – such as characters – from several heterogeneous sources as well? Wolfgang G. Müller's little-known but widely applicable theory of interfigurality (1991) shows how literary characters gain depth and resonance by sharing elements with characters in other works. The chapter revises his theory and shows how it could also be used in the analysis of comic book characters. Fantasy comics from Vertigo series like *Fables* and *The Sandman* to works like *Hellboy* or *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* draw their readerly and scholarly appeal from their eclectic, literary character galleries. Especially Mike Carey and Peter Gross' *The Unwritten* (2009–) realises every type of interfigurality Müller has identified in experimental literature, and even adds alternatives of its own. Close reading of this ongoing series underlines that interfigurality is a flexible, transmedial phenomenon: characters of words and images can parallel and reuse elements from purely textual characters in imaginative ways. This flexibility, however, renders Müller's name-bound character concept insufficient. Since comparing characters to one another – especially intermedially – would not be possible without complex cognitive processes, Müller's structuralistic view implies and should be supplemented with a cognitive basis. Thus, combined with the cognitive character theories developed by Baruch Hochman (1985) and Aleid Fokkema (1991), Müller's notion of interfigurality becomes a viable analysing tool for narratives of all kinds. Since comics is a medium of gaps, fragments and 'the invisible,' its heroes often read like puzzles, and some crucial pieces can occasionally be found through interfigural speculations.

Key Words: Interfigurality, intertextuality, transmediality, comic book character, character theory, cognitive theory, Vertigo comics.

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1. Intertextuality of the Graphic Novel

In the past few decades, comic books, especially Western graphic novels have become bustling meeting places for creatures that originate in all kinds of stories, realities and media. This intertextual movement seems to have started and found its culmination with DC Comics' Vertigo imprint, which was formed soon after the

unexpected, unprecedented popularity of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* (1989–1996). Just like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991) has inspired the still trending wave of graphically inventive, confessional autobiographical comics, so has *The Sandman*, often dubbed 'a story about stories,' seemingly launched a procession of fantasy works with highly intertextual, eclectic character galleries.

Ever since *The Sandman* sowed the seed of borrowing characters from far and wide, Vertigo writers and artists have continued to build new comic book mythologies out of the old literal ones with such series as *The Books of Magic* (1990–), *Fables* (2002–) and – most recently – *The Unwritten* (2009–). However, this surge in intertextual and literal comics can hardly be considered a private agenda of a single publisher, since many of Vertigo's titles are artist-owned and recycled heroes have starred in other publishers' popular titles as well. Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* (Dark Horse, 1994–) and Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (WildStorm, 1999–) would be the obvious examples. Since the genre has gained such vast popularity so quickly, one has to wonder: can its sudden emergence be explained by Vertigo's example alone, or is there something about comics as a medium that makes them especially fertile for such intertextual gatherings?

While, according to the Kristevan tradition, all texts could be claimed to be sewn up of several little loans and re-usages, the formal construction of a comic book is especially inviting to all kinds of styles and elements. This is because comics are essentially pastiche-like combinations of very diverse fragments. Since everything is divided into separate issues, panels and text boxes or bubbles, nothing really compels each element to be entirely uniform. In addition, every one of these fragments is often hand-made from scratch, typically by several different artists and writers; in which case keeping every element uniform actually becomes quite impossible. What results are extremely polyphonic jig-saw puzzles like *The Sandman*, where one wobbly speech bubble delivers the incoherent thoughts of a drunkard while another contains the formal utterances of a dream god; where one page brings to mind a sophisticated fairytale illustration while another resembles a painting by Piet Mondrian.

In these discontinuous, collaborative and eclectic spaces for storytelling, it seems perfectly natural that even such large and complex story elements as characters are more often than not recycled from other narratives. Further, the multimodality of comics allows recreating characters from any other medium. Because most fictional characters, regardless of their exact medial origins, have more or less unique names and prominent traits, they are often easy to recognise regardless of the exact medial renditions. On the other hand, when a book or a film character enters into a comic book, they also gain new dimensions. Literary characters are given perceptible physical forms, whereas character-focalised visual perspectives and text snippets can open new, revealing windows into the heads of cinematic – or even historical – figures.

Another equally plausible factor propelling these intertextual phenomena could be the long-standing tradition of comic book universes. The centralised copyrights of large comic book companies have for long allowed the interaction of characters that were originally created by different artists for different titles. Marvel and DC universes encourage, even oblige the characters and artists they involve to transtextual collaboration. Even if crossover titles like *The Avengers* (1963–) or *The Justice League of America* (1960–) were originally created for and because of commercial reasons, the phenomenon has definitely impacted comics as a medium by demanding more flexibility and a very unique brand of continuity from its storyworlds and characters. On the other hand, these projects have proved that comic book characters are capable of such a high level of transtextuality they can bounce from a title, storyline, artist or version to another almost boundlessly.[1] At the same time, this means that comic book readers, at least those faithful to superhero comics, have been habituated into following their favourite characters through very complex and fragmentary narrative constructions – a skill that has no doubt proved useful as Hollywood's newly found interest in superheroes and the fan cultures thriving in the internet have complicated the characters' existence even further.

It is only logical, then, that graphic novels, keen on luring mature readers and gaining recognition as 'proper' art, would rather share their universe with canonised literature. By applying the transtextual workings typical of comic books to the storyworlds of Victorian literature or fairytales, Vertigo comics have built new universes where new comic book creations and old characters from esteemed literary works co-exist. Since figures from Grimm's fairytales and the Bible or characters like Frankenstein's monster are so protean and widely recognised as to be considered cultural symbols, their very presence might grant their host-comics deeper resonance. At the same time, these archetypal characters are (once again) recreated and sustained through incorporating new, perhaps more contemporary meanings and visual features. Of course, such crossbreeding of round, 'high art' characters and 'low' comic book narratives also amplifies the pastiche-like quality discussed above.

2. Intertextuality of the Character

The hypothesis that intertextual characterisation is especially typical of comics is supported by the fact that the phenomenon has barely been noticed in literary research. On the other hand, character research has been so astonishingly scarce even in literary studies it is no wonder that some of its subfields are still under-theorised. Any peculiarities of characters are usually treated as parts or instances of larger themes or structures, and this seems to be the case with intertextuality as well: although there is little mention of intertextuality in literary character theories, terms like intertextual characterisation or transtextual characters are readily recognised as derivatives of intertextual theory.

German literary scholar W.G. Müller has, nevertheless, coined a more specific term, which has, regrettably, not become a widespread part of the research vocabulary: *interfigurality* refers to the intertextual particles of characters or, reversely, to all manners of intertextual links manifesting through characters. The coinage seems a beneficial tool due to its transparency – its meaning is easy to decipher – and due to its flexible, hypernymic semantics. That is, it includes both the problematic ideas of intertextual characterisation and transtextual characters. The problem with the latter term is that it implies complete sameness and continuity, which has been declared impossible by several scholars, including Müller.[2] The former, on the other hand, seems to suggest construction of an entirely new and original character through the means of allusion. Müller's theory of interfigurality circumvents both implications by attempting to identify different degrees of sameness between the (more) original and the (more) derivative characters – or in Genettian terms, between the hypo- and the hypercharacters.[3]

The most extreme case of interfigurality is, of course, *re-used figures*, characters that are meant to be perceived as reincarnations of specific characters in some earlier narratives. This type of interfigurality is, in fact, almost synonymous with the more widely used notion of transtextual characters. Yet, Müller names Theodore Ziolkowski's *figures on loan* his sole inspiration, adding that the rhetoric of recasting would, however, be more appropriate than the rhetoric of borrowing.[4] After all, the characters are not temporarily transferred from a context to another only to be returned to their starting points later. More importantly, Müller, who conceptualises characters rather structuralistically, as 'coherent bundle[s] of qualities' bound together by 'identifying onomastic label[s]', maintains that the 're-used figure' can never be exactly the same as the 'original figure'; insofar as characters are considered organic parts of narratives, the perception of a character changes as the text matter generating it changes.[5]

This, of course, makes the exact boundaries of re-usage quite elusive. Obviously, the sameness of the author and the continuity of the 'onomastic labels' are helpful signals, but unlike another theorist, Brian Richardson, Müller does not limit the area of re-used figures solely to the autographic or legally valid namesakes.[6] Instead, he talks about absorbing 'the essential character' or the 'idea' of a character 'into the formal and ideological structure' of a new work.[7] Supposedly this means that there should not be major controversies between the traits of the two versions of the character, but its roles and symbolic meanings can change.

Since Müller resorts to such functional analysis, it seems reasonable to assume that when the character's meaning depends on it being recognised as something familiar and antecedent, it should be considered a re-used figure. Vertigo comics are filled with apposite examples: *Fables* would lose most of its sense, resonance and fantastic quality were the characters not recognised as actual fairytale figures but, for example, as dream images, vehicles for political satire or mental patients

pretending to be princes and princesses. In *The Unwritten*, many of the major themes hinge on the doubly made nature of Frankenstein's monster – it is thus important that Mike Carey and Peter Gross' version of the monster is not only identified as the same monster Victor Frankenstein created, but as the same character Mary Shelley wrote. Similarly, Neil Gaiman is so determined to convince the reader that Orpheus of *The Sandman* is the same unlucky bard as Orpheus of Greek mythology that he retells the entire myth in comic book form – and only makes additions that do not overtly contradict the original story (see *The Sandman*'s special issue, 'The Song of Orpheus', 1991).

Müller also lists three other types of interfigural phenomena that do not necessarily indicate the sameness of two characters but, rather, a link or an analogy between them: shared names, combinations and reader figures.

Since Müller bases his definition of character on the already cited 'onomastic labels,' it is no wonder that he puts much emphasis on character names. Whether unchanged or slightly distorted, the names provide clues for further interfigural links: they are important signposts in, for example, *Fables* or *The Sandman*, where re-used figures are many and some only appear quite briefly.[8] *The Unwritten*, on the other hand, challenges the reader with its name transformations: Harry Potter is not recast as 'Tommy Taylor' by accident but the occupational surnames are used to indicate an underlying theme of creation and being created.[9]

Character *combinations* are simply cases of interfigurality, where familiar faces (or names) from different works are brought together and made to interact.[10] Clearly, series like *The Sandman*, *Fables* or *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* – and, indeed, the very concept of comic book universes – are based on such combinations and draw much of their appeal and content from the new compounds that result.

Complicating the concept of the *reading protagonist* is the main attraction of *The Unwritten* This interfigural phenomenon is classically exemplified by Don Quixote, a character who identifies so strongly with the characters he reads about it actually changes his demeanour.[11] In *The Unwritten*, however, it is no longer clear who emulates whom: Tom the protagonist has to assume several interfigural roles as he navigates through his father's literary legacy – including the Harry Potter-like figure who is supposedly modelled on himself, not vice versa.

Even more interestingly, *The Unwritten* plays with and identifies its heroes through generic *character conventions* – not just specific, identifiable hypercharacters, on which Müller concentrates. For example, the vampire characters of *The Unwritten* do not seem to be based on a specific vampire mythology but borrow freely from different traditions. As one of the characters turns into a vampire, another character tests his new abilities noting: "Mostly, I just wanted to make sure you were a Wilson Taylor vampire, rather than, say, Stoker, Matheson or King."[12] Wilson Taylor is a fictional author featured in the series, and his vampire mythology, of course, is derivative of the said real-life authors.

3. Intertextuality of the Reader

The fact that every type of interfigurality discussed by Müller can easily be exemplified by cursory references to Vertigo comics indicates two things: that interfigurality is, indeed, quite an extensive phenomenon in this genre of graphic novels, and that Müller's theory is a good, transmedially applicable starting point for the study of this phenomenon. As the same examples prove, characters are immigrating more and more often from literature to comics. Also, comics are now being adapted more and more into movies. Thus, transmediality is no trivial selling point for today's character theories.

What makes Müller's literature-based theory and, in fact, the characters themselves so flexible, however, can hardly be something as feeble as the 'onomastic labels'. Even though literary, comic book and film characters are all likely to have names and can, naturally, share them as well, Müller's formal conception of character is ultimately unsustainable. Two empiric instances of a same name or a same 'character trait' can well exist in two different characters of two different texts but this means nothing as such. There are probably hundreds of fictional characters called Emma and even more characters that are promiscuous, but this does not mean that they all are interfigural homages to Flaubert's well-known heroine, for instance. What is more, empirically detectable, formal signs like names or visual trademarks are easily blurred by the different semiotic languages used in different media. Finally, if the detection of re-used figures really has to be based on such subjective notions as 'the essence' of the characters, it should be obvious that Müller is wrongly eliminating one important factor from his theory: the reader.

Practically speaking, interfigurality means comparing different characters and different stories. Making such connections is not possible without memory, perception and other cognitive processes that can only be attributed to the reader (and the writer, who also has to read in order to build intertextual links). Thus, it has to be argued that the entire concept of interfigurality only becomes possible if it is rooted in the cognitive conception of character proposed and developed by such literary scholars as Baruch Hochman and Aleid Fokkema. According to these theories, the character is not just a 'bundle of qualities' scraped together by a mere name but a malleable mental construction based not only on the semiotic data at hand but also on the reader's knowledge and beliefs about their previous experiences – including their experiences of other texts and narratives.[13]

Without acknowledging it or using the terminology, Scott McCloud's comic book theory, centred around the gaps and the 'invisible' of graphic narratives, also subscribes to a similar cognitive conception. He is very clear in his view that comics are special because of the many information gaps they entail and because those gaps can be turned into productive and unique associations in the readers' heads.[14] Allusions inherent in the characters and elsewhere in the narrative are simply another kind of readerly canvas, one that McCloud fails to recognise. This

might be due to the fact that interfigural elements are not gaps in the sense that they would be semiotically blank, devoid of any information and open to any interpretation. Yet, without the reader's cognitions, memories and/or active research they do lack at least a part of their meaning: the reader has to be the one to connect the dots, to respond to the interfigural cues with his or her memories. In this sense, the reader and the characters are partially 'made of' the same intertexts – a relation no less intimate than the physical, psychological and social assumptions about the character that the readers base on their knowledge of real human beings, including themselves.[15]

It is worth noting, however, that the filling of interfigural gaps requires more culture-specific knowledge than the filling of blank gaps. Thus, it is no wonder that Western graphic novels are especially fond of recasting the kinds of figures that are most widely recognised and most steeped in symbolism in Western cultures. Shakespeare as the unhappy genius in *The Sandman*, Frankenstein's monster as the ultimate symbol of identity crisis in *The Unwritten* or Vertigo comics' different renditions of Lucifer are all great examples. In this sense, the interfigural signs could also be understood and theorised in the same way as the other culture-specific, half-opaque signs of comic vocabulary, such as emotive symbols.

All in all, it should be concluded that interfigural elements and theory can mesh quite seamlessly with comic book elements and theory. In addition, both can benefit from each other: many of today's graphic novels require understanding of intertextuality, and due to their visuality and inherent fragmentariness, comics like *The Unwritten* can, perhaps, experiment with intertextuality in ways that literature cannot. The various comic book re-usages of classic literary characters also prove that character theories can no longer dwell in literature alone but a more multi- and transmedial perspective is required. The best starting point seems to be the entity that actually collects the data across the different texts and media and stitches them together into coherent, albeit slightly Frankensteinian characters – the reader.

Notes

[1] Essi Varis, *A Frame of You: Construction of Characters in Graphic Novels* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2013), 43–44.
[2] Heinrich Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1991), 107.
[3] Riikka Mahlamäki-Kaistinen, *Mätänevän velhon taidejulistus: Intertekstuaalisen ja -figuraalisen aineiston asema Apollinairen* L'Enchanteur pourrissant *teoksen tematiikassa ja symboliikassa* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2008), 40.
[4] Ibid., 102. Theodore Ziolkowski, *Varieties of Literary Thematics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 123–151.
[5] Plett, ed., *Intertextuality*, 103.

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[6] Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider, ed., *Revisionen: Characters in Fictional Works: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 530–539.

[7] Plett, ed., *Intertextuality*, 107–109.

[8] Ibid., 104–107.

[9] Essi Varis, *A Frame of You: Construction of Characters in Graphic Novels* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2013), 167–168.

[10] Ibid., 114–115.

[11] Ibid., 116–117.

[12] Mike Carey, Peter Gross, Vince Locke and Al Davidson, *The Unwritten 4: Leviathan* (New York: Vertigo, 2011), #21, [3].

[13] Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 31-33, 59–70. Aleid Fokkema, *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 181–182.

[14] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 60–69.

[15] Fokkema, *Postmodern Characters*, 74–76.

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II

THE MONSTER ANALOGY:
WHY FICTIONAL CHARACTERS
ARE FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTERS

by

Essi Varis, 2019

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The Monster Analogy:
Why Fictional Characters are Frankenstein's Monsters

Essi Varis

They are artificial human analogues; uncanny mirrors of humanity that mortals construct and bring to life for their own capricious purposes. Once they get off their creators' desks and gain minds of their own, however, there is little hope of controlling or destroying them. It is rather surprising that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818, 1831) has not repeatedly been interpreted as an allegory of fictional characters.

As this article will discuss, numerous literary theorists have foregrounded the paradoxical mimetic and artificial qualities of fictional characters, and the concurrent humanity and nonhumanity of Frankenstein's creation is even more difficult to ignore. Yet, never before have these dissonant beings been paralleled as closely as in *The Unwritten* (2009–2015), a metafictional fantasy comics series created for DC Comics' Vertigo imprint by writer Mike Carey and illustrator Peter Gross. The series, currently on hiatus, has so far centered on a mundane-seeming man called Tom Taylor, who discovers that he may, in fact, be a fictional character and that Frankenstein's monster – another abandoned creation – might therefore be the only entity who understands his existential sorrows. The comic explores many a resonant theme through this analogy, from the problems of identity and free will to the ethics of storytelling, which makes one wonder what would happen if these parallels were taken seriously; what if critical readings of *Frankenstein* were superimposed on different theoretical views on literary characters? Would this reveal previously ignored connections and disruptions between character theories, and thus benefit the current understanding of fictional entities? This article embarks to investigate these possibilities first by showing how Tom and Frankenstein's creature are paralleled in *The Unwritten.* This will serve as an introduction to the themes underlying and inspiring the more theoretical approach of the second section, which matches various structuralism-inspired, cognitive, and transmedial explanations of literary characters with the main plot points of *Frankenstein*.

In building these comparisons, I knowingly become the kind of Frankenstein that, according to Brian McHale (67–68), narratologists are wont to enact: I will stitch together a temporary theoretical chimera, following a predetermined formula. The result will unavoidably manifest some reductions and dissonances, but there is yet another parallel I wield as my defense: that readers, in trying to engage with fictional characters, are inclined to similar creative contortions, to forcing the nonhuman, artificial textual fragments into an illusory image of their own humanness. If nothing else, all these analogies and hybridizations make for an amusing thought experiment, and add another layer to the rich interpretation history of Mary Shelley's 200-year-old magnum opus. However, if McHale is right, and narratology has always consisted of monstrous creations – models and histories combining irreconcilable elements into seemingly sensible shapes – this assembly of theories should fit in well with previous scholarship and suggest valid new ways of conceptualizing fictional characters.

Unwritten Creatures

For the first few pages of *The Unwritten*, its protagonist Tom Taylor's life seems very normal, even tedious – apart from the fact that his absent father, Wilson Taylor, is a world-famous fantasy author, who has, in the tradition of A.A. Milne, decided to base the main character of his best-selling book series on him (*TU* #3, [10][1]). This series of *Tommy Taylor* books and the hype surrounding it bear many and deliberate similarities to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, and have ironically rewritten Tom's relatable and average identity into something extraordinary and iconic. The second scene of the series is set at "London Tommycon", where Tom is giving autographs and interviews to the public that identifies with his – or rather, his fictional avatar Tommy's – apparent blandness, which only serves to mask exceptional potential to magic (#1, [4–6]). Tom's half-reluctant celebrity routine is, however, interrupted unexpectedly when an audience member demands to know why many of the documents pertaining to his identity and childhood appear to be fabricated. And so, from this simple question – "who are you?" – unravels a wildly intertextual and metafictional journey of 66 issues, during which Tom endeavors to find out whether he is a real person or a fictional character; the "Tom Average" he thinks he is, or the Messianic boy wizard his father made him out to be (*TU* #1, [9]). Simply put, the series plays with the audiences' evolutionarily wired tendency to discuss and react to the fates of fictional characters as if they were real, minded entities with dreams and pains, hungers and futures (see e.g. Vermeule x, Zunshine 58). Although such overtly mimetic readings are commonly seen as fallacies in academic contexts, they appear oddly reasonable in the context of *The Unwritten*, where different levels of reality and textuality are constantly blurred together through stacked metalepses, concretized allusions, and crowds of borrowed characters.

The first 35-issue story arc, which concentrates specifically on Tom's identity crisis, finds especially close kinship with another story that comments on the fundamental issues of humanity and identity: the story of Frankenstein. When the Creature – as he asks to be called (#30, [15]) – appears to aid Tom, the readers are given an abundance of visual cues by which to recognize him (*TU* #3 [1–2]): his bulky frame towers over regular men, his gaze is darkened by a prominent, primitive brow, and his greenish, "shriveled complexion" (*F* 35) is riddled with scars. All these grotesque traits have been immortalized and added to our visual vocabulary by Boris Karloff's iconic performance in the Universal films of the 1930s (Baldick 5), but a more systematic analysis of every scene involving the character reveals that *The Unwritten* also recreates many such aspects of Shelley's original vision that most visual adaptations exclude. The Creature speaks, for instance, announcing his deeply ambivalent feelings towards his own existence (*TU* #7), and displays superhuman endurance of Arctic conditions (*TU* #32). Yet some other features of *The Unwritten*'s Creature reference neither the films nor the novel: "lustrous black, flowing hair" (*F* 35) is reduced to baldness, and – almost as a compromise between the novel's eloquence and the films' muteness – the Creature is made taciturn. He only speaks in about half of the panels in which he appears. These unorthodox traits may point towards other, less-known influences, which would render this version of the Creature a self-referential amalgamation of amalgamations befitting the series' poetics – as noted above, Tom, too, is an interfigural combination of Frankenstein's Creature, Christopher Robin, and Harry Potter (cf. Müller 115). Alternatively, these traits could mark growth and change, underlining that the Creature is no longer a newborn in a monstrous body but his two centuries of survival have molded him into a reliable, if melancholy, mentor figure.

There is another, even more important function the Creature serves in the series, however, the role he is made, and perhaps most known for: that of a foil or a mirror. Indeed, the series starts piling parallels between Tom and the Creature even before the two meet: like Mary Shelley — and John Milton before her — Tom's father has spent productive periods in Villa Diodati, the Swiss mansion where the fabled ghost story competition between Lord Byron, John Polidori, and the Shelleys took place in the summer of 1816 (Mazzarella 56–64; Shelley "Introduction"). As Tom (*TU* #2, [18]) phrases it, "–– Satan and Frankenstein were both born in the same house. Not to mention – you know – Tommy Taylor." In the early chapters of *The Unwritten* (*TU* #2–3), Tom returns to this notable childhood abode of his, in order to consult with his father, but finds instead a group of horror authors, who have gathered in the villa for an exclusive writing convention. As if history could not resist repeating itself, this convention of creatives, coinciding with a thunderstorm, "awakens" the Creature from its dormant state (*TU* #6, [22]), and endows Tom with some of his fictional alter

ego's physical calling cards: Tommy the boy wizard's compass tattoo inexplicably appears on the back of his hand, and a winged cat familiar, which should only exists his father's books, starts following him around (*TU* #2, [22]; #4, [22]).

This simultaneity of awakenings is no coincidence, as the gift of magic in the *Tommy Taylor* books bears the same moniker as the gift of life in *Frankenstein:* "the spark". Frankenstein remembers "infus[ing] the spark of being into the lifeless thing" at the end of his feverish toil (*F* 35), while the characters and fans of *Tommy Taylor* series assert their belief in magic by chanting: "All who have the spark must protect and stand by the spark" (*TU* #8, [12]). In both cases, the spark transforms the characters into something unnatural and paradoxical: a collage of corpses, a "lifeless thing", should not be walking and talking – even though he is – just like someone who lives as though he is a tangible, free-willed person should not also be a fictional character – and yet he is.

This "counterontological" condition of being dead but living, human but nonhuman, real but fictional, and minded but artificial derives from Tom and the Creature's unnatural origins[2]: they both begun as ordinary people, until "some guy with a god complex" (*TU* #30, [16]) decided to rearrange their physical and mental tissues, and bestow them with the "spark". Although Frankenstein refuses to describe his method in detail, its main principles are known to include "collect[ing] bones from charnel houses" and assembling them into a human-like shape (*F* 34–35, 151). Subsequently, the Creature continues his creator's collage-work on a cognitive level, by consuming an eclectic mass of fictional and philosophical texts (*F* 88–92). As Michael Holquist (94) notes, "Frankenstein's monster springs from the library as much as he does from the charnel house and laboratory: he is made up not only of other bodies from the past but – – from other books from the past." Wilson Taylor skips directly to this second phase: before long, the series reveals that Tom is, indeed, the writer's biological son but has, throughout his childhood, been subliminally force-fed carefully selected textual material while floating sedated in a sensory deprivation tank (*TU* #22, [16]; #23, [1]). The series' antagonist mockingly names the tank a "Frankenstein machine" and the "second womb" (#35, [17]), whereas Wilson Taylor himself refers to the process as "shaping", "making" or arming Tom to serve his purposes (*TU* #16, [5]). Upon finding his half-brother, who has gone through similar procedures, Tom compares the treatment directly to painful medical operations: "You know, Wilson was a **rotten** father to both of us. −−/ I **know** what it's like. To be laid out on a slab and **dissected**, when you're still alive. / To grow up in a glass **jar** on a shelf of a fucking laboratory."[3] (*TU* #30, [16].) In the end, Tom's mind is so meshed with stories that his DNA is not identifiable as that of a human's any longer (#26, [16–17]).

Once Tom and the Creature learn that they have been manufactured, rather than born, they also realize that they exist for a designed function, rather than for their own sake. Even though their many person-like qualities seem to warrant an ascription of a mind and an elusive, complex "essence" – which should be allowed to unfold through the course of their individual growth, as Shelley's mother's critique of Rousseau's educational ideals would demand (Baldick 38) – the fact that they are purposefully crafted likens them to artefacts, "which are generally synonymous with their functions" (Zunshine 7). That is, Tom and the Creature "straddle the respective domains of artefacts and living creatures" (Zunshine 75), and the cognitive dissonance resulting from the clash of these two categories is so momentous the readers must resolve it in one way or another – by sorting Tom and the Creature back into dead, moldable matter, or by granting them full, independent personhood. Both characters usher the reader towards the latter of these "cognitively satisfying" options by rebelling against their functions, and the makers who assigned them (Zunshine 86): although neither Tom nor the Creature commits a direct patricide, they do assert their own will both verbally and violently, and ultimately outlive their father-creators (*F* 101–104, 120–121; *TU* #15–16). This loosens their creaturely bonds and the reader's cognitive tension contextually, as demonstrations of agency and emotion triumph over the discourses and circumstances that would foreground their artefactual provenance. This does not erase the memory or the consequentiality of the essentialist categories the readers have first assigned to the characters, however: something that is not made human can never be perceived as truly human, and something made for a purpose can never be truly free of that purpose (Zunshine 79–85).

This inescapable power of origins is well illustrated through the naming of the characters. While the Creature's namelessness functions as a symbolic scar that forever marks his unusual birth, both Tommy Taylor's and his inspirational predecessor Harry Potter's surnames refer back to handicraft: a potter makes things out of clay and a tailor makes things out of fabric. Tom Taylor's mother, Sue Morganstern, does not only pay homage to *Frankenstein* through her Miltonic surname, but she also does ceramics for living (*TU* #2, [10]). For anyone who remembers *Frankenstein*'s subtitle, this is quickly connected to the Greek Titan Prometheus who, according to one myth, fashioned the humankind out of clay. As for Tom's father Wilson Taylor, he does not work with fabric but, as a writer, he does *fabricate* things. Insofar as clay is the mythical matter of man and yarn a figurative synonym for plot, it makes sense that these two would spin an artificial golem-child out of myths and stories.

The themes of creation and paternal control associated with it are further accentuated by paralleling both characters with Biblical figures, whose all-powerful creator also puts them through considerable ordeals, assumedly for the greater good. Tom and his

fictional avatar Tommy Taylor are wrought for the Messianic role of the sacrificial lamb, or "the word made flesh" (*TU* #1, [19, 31]), while Frankenstein's creature famously confesses identifying with Lucifer from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (*F* 90). Fittingly, the first meeting between Tom and the Creature takes place in a prison chapel, in front of a crucifix, which prompts the Creature to articulate many of the aforementioned parallels:

> I understand your **dilemma**. It is frightening to think of the world as having no firm foundations. Frightening to meet one's **maker**. / And to find him…unsatisfactory. / –– You. And myself. We have that in **common**. We are **creatures**. Made things. And those who made us do not **love** us. / –– I speak for those wrought and shaped by mortal men. For **monsters**. (*TU* #7, [2].)

Although Tom rejects these notions at first, he gradually internalizes them: by issue #30 ([16]), the foregrounded crucifix is replaced with a foregrounded Creature, and Tom repeats the thoughts of his enigmatic mentor to his stepbrother: "We are both *him*."

This avowal might, at a glance, seem baffling against the most common conceptions of monstrosity, as neither of the half-brothers have any physical deformities that would qualify them as monsters in a visual sense, for instance. Abject physical traits have been associated with evil and danger since the Middle Ages, which is why many critics harbor a dislike for visual adaptations of *Frankenstein*: they worry that the shock-horror spectacle of the Creature's creation or his grotesque appearance might evoke visceral fear and disgust responses that could inhibit more nuanced and sustained character engagement (Baldick 10–14; Mazzarella 172–73). Even the Creature itself is aware of the social obstacle its forbidding form constitutes, and tries to befriend a blind man before approaching any seeing humans (*F* 92–94). As a comic, *The Unwritten* is one of the adaptations that robs the readers of this mercifully blind position. Yet, it is also quick to disparage "mere grotesques" and "ersatz Hollywood zombie[s]", and explicitly evokes social explanations of monstrosity instead: several characters, including Wilson Taylor , maintain that nothing is "born evil" but monsters are made by "neglect" (#3, [6]; #21, [10–11]) . Since both Tom and the Creature are mistreated and abandoned by their father-creators this is, indeed, another trait they share, but it can hardly be separated from the unusual circumstances of their birth: perhaps those who made them do not love them, because "things" are rarely made to be loved; they are made to be used.

According to *The Unwritten,* the Creature, Tom, and – by extension – every fictional character walk the tightrope between reality and unreality, artificiality and humanity, predetermined functionality and rebellious agency. As this violates some of the most

basic terms by which we make sense of the world (Zunshine 66), creatureness in itself can be characterized as monstrous, a cognitively threatening and fascinating aberration. The next chapter explores how fictional characters, an entire species of anthropomorphic "made things", have been defined and theorized through this type of monstrosity.

Theoretical Monsters

In his capacity as a fictional character, the Creature is anything but neglected, as *Frankenstein* continues to invite ever new academic readings and artistic reinterpretations. According to many theorists, the secret to this lasting interest lies in the instabilities inherent in the novel's meanings and characters: the various embedded narrators and intertextual intersections amount to rather ambiguous messages about creation, humanity, and death, which the growing number of adaptations and reimaginings across media have further stretched towards new, even contradictory directions (see e.g. Baldick 2–5, 58–62; Botting 3, 37; Mazzarella 6–9; Vidal 94). As a result, the story of Frankenstein has become so protean it could mean almost anything. "[T]here is nothing to prevent critics from remaking the Creature in whatever image they wish", Paul Sherwin (889–90) remarks, and lists that the monster has so far been interpreted as a Freudian, Lacanian, Blakean and Wordsworthian figure, as well as from several Romanticist, Marxist, structuralist, religious and biographical perspectives. More recent publications have since added at least queer, ecocritical and posthumanist readings to the cavalcade (Smith).

These shifting meanings, along with Levi-Strauss' theorizations, have led Chris Baldick (2–4) to grant Frankenstein's tale the oxymoronic title of "a modern myth". By this Baldick means that Shelley's novel has given a powerful formulation to the core narratives of creation and rebellion that have recurred across human cultures since before Prometheus and *The Bible*. From this follows that, according to Baldick (3), the gist of the novel can be distilled into just two basic actions – or Aristotelian "mythos" – which are concise and recognizable enough to evoke or embed in copious contexts: "(*a*) Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses. (*b*) The creature turns against him and runs amok."

Despite approaching the tale from an entirely different perspective – that of Bakhtin's dialogism – another theorist, Michael Holquist, has unearthed largely similar patterns, only he distinguishes a third phase between the creation and the rebellion: "the second creation". Holquist observes that when the Creature opens its eyes, it is still very "unfinished", a tabula rasa with little more than a huge body and vast potential (*F* 70–71). It still needs to "metamorphose" itself into a fully minded, self-aware individual, and the main prerequisite for this is the acquisition of language. Thus, the Creature

becomes a person – or rather, a round character that invites the attribution of consciousness – only gradually, as it eavesdrops the de Lacey family in their cottage and, especially, as it studies "the Pandoran portmanteau", an incidental stash of books it finds in the woods. The act of reading is what allows the Creature to become aware of the unbridgeable gap between humankind and himself – which then leads to his rebellion. (Holquist 90, 96, 98.)

So as not to get lost in the labyrinthine folds and turns of the myriad critical readings of *Frankenstein* – or to over-interpret any small, convoluted details – I will continue to cross-read *The Unwritten, Frankenstein,* and a selection of literary character theories through the following synthesis of Baldick's and Holquist's distillations:

    a. Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses.
    b. The creature develops a mind of its own through reading.
    c. The creature turns against its creator and runs amok.

Having organized and reorganized an increasing number of different character theories according to this model half a dozen times, in previous drafts and conference papers, I find that the most compelling narrative the analogy generates is a heuristic, pseudo-chronological tale of the progression of literary character theory: the structuralism-inspired limb-collecting has slowly been replaced by cognitive approaches, which observe how the readers bestow the characters with the spark of life. The third, transmedial turn of character theory, where the multimodal creations escape the creative control of their authors and procreate across media cultures, has only started to gain momentum, however. The present discussion also excludes some, especially less extensive and Francophone, approaches to character, whose inclusion might have made a slightly different ordering of theories more interesting or productive. Indeed, this monstrous analogy is not meant to provide any definitive answers or models but to encourage new ways of evaluating and connecting pervious theories of fictional characters.

a.) Structural and Mimetic Creations

> –– but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man. –– After having formed this determination, and having spent some months in successfully collecting and arranging my materials, I began. –– A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent beings would owe their being to me. –– I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. (*F* 32–34.)

This is how Victor Frankenstein recounts the beginning of his misadventure: it starts with an ambition, a pile of "materials", and an idealized vision of humanness. Character theories of the 20th century echo similar interests, as they have mostly been preoccupied by the roles characters fulfill in the larger schemes of things, by their structural constituents, and, paradoxically, by their deceptive human-likeness.

As Roland Barthes (256) sums, most formalist and structuralist theories follow the Aristotelian notion that character is merely "the agent of an action", "entirely subordinated" to the plot – and hence to the author and text that originate it. Just like Frankenstein does not account for any troublesome idiosyncrasies but envisions a perfect, obedient creature, Vladimir Propp and A. J. Greimas envision characters not as "beings" or "essences", but as convenient automatons that "participate" in whatever actions are required of them in the "paradigmatic structure[s]" of plots and scenarios. According to them, characters should not be defined by what they are but by what they will always predictably do – because that is, in the end, *all* they are: heroes, villains, and bogus heroes, or actors grouped into actants (Barthes 256–58, Chatman 110–114). All in all, theories that approach characters through different agential categorizations tend to employ heavy "functionalist language" (Zunshine 89–100), which reduces characters into simple storytelling tools.

Seymour Chatman (111–112) takes issue with such function-driven approaches, because they dismiss all the meaningful differences between characters – even "appearance, age, sex or life concerns" – as "mere differences". Readers, Chatman (112) claims, can also "appreciate character traits for their own sake", not to mention that plenty of poststructuralist approaches to narratives specifically focus on the ways different characters portray traits like gender or ethnicity. Thus, from the 1980s to early 1990s, most theorists turned from functions and categorizations to examining the traits (Chatman), narrative techniques (Hochman), semiotic codes (Fokkema) and (inter)textual constituents (Müller) that form individual characters. These approaches have the advantage of allowing quite concrete analysis of characters' textual anatomy, and the disadvantage of only examining them one slice or limb at a time. They thus only constitute the first step of Frankenstein's genius or, worse yet, reverse it: when discussing characters one rarely rips them into separate words, frames or traits but refers to their nebulous, oddly vivacious sum. This becomes especially apparent in the context of comics, where characterization – like the rest of the storytelling – rests on various verbal and visual fragments, which may be created by several people and spread across several issues, series, or products. Text boxes and speech bubbles become the burial vaults; lines, shapes and colors the charnel-houses that the reader must rummage through in order to form a coherent view of the characters.

Thus, while trait theories are useful dissection tools, they only transfer the functionalist language of function-driven theories to a more minute level: they may not reduce characters into constituents of larger narrative structures but they view characters themselves as stable, artificial, purposeful structures. This does not quite grant them any spark of life, as Baruch Hochman (60) recognizes: before slicing his fictional specimen with eight characterization binaries – from stylization vs. naturalism to coherence vs. incoherence – he likens characters to "dead people". The reasoning behind this statement is that literary creations are not as much "the unwritten" as the-already-written: whereas real people generate a chaotic plethora of data about themselves and remain open-ended constructions until they die, the amount of "information" available on fictional people is teleological, limited, and purposefully organized by the author.

Yet, at the same time, Hochman (62) insists on the characters' likeness to humans, calling them not only "dead people", but also "possible people", and even *Homo Fictus*" – a new Frankensteinian genus! Indeed, despite the prevalent functionalist rhetoric of early theories, referring to characters simply as representations of "people" or "persons" has always been the focal point of any and all definitions of character (Chatman 107–8, Varis 13). This has guided, for instance, Aleid Fokkema's semiotic theory, which endeavors to pinpoint the laws or "codes" by which all the aforementioned signs, traits, and other pieces of character are assembled. She infers that enhancing the characters' "mimetic effect" requires constructing them according to sets of overtly humanizing presuppositions: like people, characters usually pertain to basic logical premises ("logical code"), seem to possess biological bodies ("biological code"), appear to entertain "inner worlds" ("psychological code"), and form (para-)social networks with fellow creatures ("social code") (Fokkema 74–75.)

This is not to say that these building blocks of humanity could not be manifested to a varying degree in different characters, as Frankenstein's creature himself illustrates. Biologically, he is made of human materials, has a human face, a human shape, and a human brain. He does not have biological parents, however, and his sole creator designed him not exactly as human, but as superhuman, "an animal as complex and wonderful as man", but one that is "proportionably large", "beautiful" and "invulnerable to any but a violent death" (*F* 23, 32–33). In the novel and in James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) alike, the Creature demonstrates high-level human-like cognition and self-awareness, when he identifies with his own reflection in a pool (*F* 78–79). In addition, he mediates his inner world to the other characters though eloquent speeches that involve moral judgements, another hallmark of humanity. His final address to Captain Walton, for example, is peppered with words like "pity", "remorse", "sympathy", "vice" and "virtue" (*F* 158–161). Yet, socially he

is not labeled a person but a "monster", a "fiend", an "insect", a "devil" and a "daemon" (*F* 68). This prompts the Creature himself to state that even Lucifer "had friends and associates in his desolation", whereas he is utterly alone. (*F* 160).

These hits and misses reaffirm Fokkema's (186–190) conclusion that although fiction could always confound any of these anthropomorphic expectations, abandoning them completely is surprisingly rare, perhaps even impossible, as the ontologically incommensurate categories of characterness and personhood are so closely intertwined. Indeed, Fokkema's analysis of postmodern novels shows that even the most experimental, intentionally flat or incoherent characters always retain some human qualities. She names such counterontological hybrids "borderline characters" (186–190), reminiscent of the scene in *The Unwritten* (#30, [14]) where the Creature states that Tom and himself – who could both be described as rather experimental characters in their respective contexts – "belong" on "the boundary", "the threshold" between humanity and nonhumanity, stories and reality. Similarly, Sherwin (892) seizes on Frankenstein's habit to call its creature a "daemon", a "marginal or boundary being" between "nature and supernature, objectivity and subjectivity".

It seems that fictional characters cannot be pinned down with a single approach any more than Frankenstein's Creature can. Although nobody denies that characters are parts of larger artistic structures – and can and should be analyzed as such – even structuralists admit that they also seem to take on "psychological consistency" (Barthes 256), a human surplus that exceeds all purely formal analyzes. Indeed, even though the heritage of new criticism has imprinted literary criticism with a lasting belief that thinking of characters as complete persons is naïve (Chatman 116–117; Hochman 16; Vermeule x), evaluating and classifying characters by their psychological depth and likeness to real people has still remained so common it is the cornerstone to, for instance, E. M. Forster's (73–89) influential classification of characters. These contradictory standards for what makes a good character and what makes a good character analysis have troubled the character theorists to the point they could be divided into two camps: those emphasizing the functional roles and those emphasizing the human qualities of characters (Fokkema 18–41; Varis 14–20).

Thankfully, some theorists have started to twist the strands of this double helix together. Fokkema's theory reportedly attempts such a synthesis, but James Phelan's rhetorical theory, proposed around the same time, has proved more applicable. It contains the counterontological tensions between functionality and humanity simply by conceptualizing characters around this very contradiction. That is, according to Phelan (2–3), all characters necessarily have both a mimetic and a synthetic aspect. Only the realization of these potentials seesaws, so that a character might, either

consistently or momentarily, be presented more prominently as person while the constructional, artificial aspect takes the backseat, or vice versa. Phelan's theory thereby declares all characters "borderline characters" in Fokkema's sense: if characters are "representations of persons", they must always be both representations and persons. Should they lose one or the other of these aspects they would not be considered characters anymore. Thus, they are not exactly analogous to humans, as Hochman proposes, but to Frankenstein's monster, as *The Unwritten* proposes: there is no need to decide whether they should be considered as skillfully crafted plot mechanisms or as startlingly relatable mock-humans because they are, by definition, both. Most character theories have, in fact, described characters with phrases like "double vision" or "double nature", or at least heavily implied some type of duality in their definitions and analyses (Fokkema 42–43; Hochman 72; Schneider 607; Varis 36–37). This acceptance of dissonant but concurrent aspects also forms an unsung basis for the cognitively-slanted character theories discussed in the next subchapter.

b.) Cognitive Second Creation

> As I read – – I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. (*F* 89.)

Although Frankenstein considers his creation finished the second it opens its eyes, the Creature itself can scarcely make sense of the flood of stimuli assaulting its senses at that moment. It starts to distinguish "sensations from each other" and understanding the world around it "gradually" (*F* 70–71), and only after reading *The Sorrows of Young Whether*, *Paradise Lost,* as well as Frankenstein's lab notes, he finally understands his place in the world; he builds himself a self – metamorphoses from an uninterpretable "it" into a minded "him" – by reading. Similarly, in *The Unwritten,* Tom owes his tortured selfhood to the reception of texts he was force-fed in the "second womb" of the sensory deprivation tank. In Wolfgang G. Müller's (116) terms, this makes both Tom and the Creature "reading protagonists", dual figures positioned as both the objects and subjects of reading and character engagement. As Holquist (99–100) notes, the Creature is repeatedly "misread" at face value, or interpreted "too literally" as a monster by the other characters, which prompts him "to author another version of himself" for the blind De Lacey and Frankenstein alike (*F* 68. 92–94). In parallel, one of Wilson Taylor's strategies in molding Tom is the complete rewriting of him as the heroic, exceptional Tommy. In this way, both *Frankenstein* and *The Unwritten* engage in metafictional commentary on the textual construction of the characters by the authors, as well as on the cognitive (re)construction of them by the readers.

The latter issue especially has also been the focus of recent cognitive approaches to characters. Ralf Schneider's cognitive model, for instance, attempts to explain how the pieces of characters are sewn together – much like Fokkema's semiotic theory does – but he hands the needle completely to the readers, who, according to him, build "mental models" of characters while reading – just like Tom and the Creature build ideas of themselves in interaction with texts. Frankensteinian sewing is an especially apt metaphor for what Schneider calls "bottom-up processing", where "bits of textual information are kept in working memory separately and integrated into an overall representation at a later point in time" (Schneider 611, 625). As Hochman (60) rightly notes, however, the information that any work in any medium can provide of any given character is unavoidably limited; no page nor screen could ever be assumed to capture the entirety of any real person, which is why the portrayals of characters can, by analogy, be viewed as incomplete. Therefore, in order to form mimetic, coherent characters the reader must complement the gap-ridden textual information with his or her "encyclopedic" knowledge reserves (Eder et al. 11–12; Jannidis). It is never once mentioned in Shelley's original text that the Creature has a stomach, or an abdomen or a torso, for instance, but as evidenced by visual adaptations of the character, most readers have still succeeded in attaching his limbs in their rightful places, in a normal humanlike fashion. This must have been achieved by drawing from a knowledge structure resembling Fokkema's biological code. In other words, this supplementary world-knowledge is the yarn that enables the readers to close the seams between the incomplete pieces of character information. Schneider (619–24) calls this type of sewing "top-down processing": when reading, one always activates "pre-stored knowledge structures", such as schemata of literary stock characters or social stereotypes, which can then be "tested" and individuated with further textual information.

Although literary theorists rarely pay any attention to it, this cognitive fusing of textual and real-life information must take place in the reception of other media as well. Even if Scott McCloud's (e.g. 156) ideas about readerly "closure" – the active imagining of what might reside between gutters and simplified lines – have been contested several times, it appears quite unlikely that anyone would truly perceive Tintin, or any other comic book character, as a two-dimensional being with little black beads for eyes. The CGI rendition of the leading actor Jamie Bell's features in Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson's animation film *The Adventures of Tintin: Secret of the Unicorn* admittedly match Hergé's *ligne claire* designs quite well, but the visual detail the adaptation adds does not necessarily amount to the exact replica of what each reader had imagined Tintin to look like. Hence, some might have reacted to the adaptation more negatively than others. This indicates that the readers of comics must have added something to the data provided by the stylized drawings.

Cognitive narratology has already moved forward from Schneider's initial mental model theory but the Creature's description of its reading experience still remains valid: study of the so-called "theory of mind" – which, incidentally or not, is often abbreviated "ToM" – has established that when reading, we indeed "apply" much to our own "feelings and condition": the same evolved social faculties that allow readers to make sense of their fellow humans are also used to "mind-read" fictional characters (see e.g. Leverage 1–2; Vermeule, Zunshine 58–62). Marco Caracciolo's experiential approach expands on this now-prevalent view of character engagement by suggesting that textual cues can coax the readers not only into attributing minds to (human-like) characters but also into enacting their experiences in a more holistic and empathetic way. That is, as the text describes what the character experiences, the reader may activate memory traces of his or her own approximate real-life experiences. This amounts to a "story-driven experience", which is — paradoxically — simulated or enacted by the reader but attributed to the character, so that the reader's first-person experiencing partially coincides with his or her third-person ascription of a mind to an imagined creature. This allows the reader to, indeed, "partly understand" the character's imaginary mind, to assume some aspect of the characters' perspective but still consider it a separate fictional being: "the overlap between the story-driven experience and consciousness attribution –– can never be complete", just as the counterontology of character can never be fully reconciled. (Caracciolo 122–23; see also Vermeule 40–45.)

On one hand, this forever-partial overlap makes characters safe vehicles for "trying on" different experiences "off-line", without having to act on any of the thoughts and emotions they, nevertheless, are able to evoke (Vermeule 45). On the other hand, allowing any creature any, even illusory, capacity to "think" can lead to unpredictability, conflict and loss of authorial control: an interview study conducted with adult fiction writers revealed that over 90 percent of creative writers on different professional levels have at some point experienced "the illusion of independent agency", or felt that their characters seemed to "have minds of their own". This phenomenon, the researchers hypothesize, is likely caused by the kind of attributions and enactments Caracciolo describes, if they can also run on an automatized, preconscious level. (Taylor et al. 361–63, 378; Vermeule 46.)

Conscious or preconscious, the readers' cognitions seem to be what truly lends the characters the Frankensteinian spark, an uncanny semblance of life. The downside is that these approaches entail a major metholodogical problem: that every reader's experiential background or encyclopedic knowledge reserve is as unique and difficult to grasp as their life history (cf. Caracciolo 42, Jannidis). From this follows, that even

if every reader is handed the same textual information, each one is bound to interpret or enact it differently in different situations, putting more or less effort into the task. As a result, the character as a live, minded, experiencing entity unravels into countless disparate, private, shifting mental models and fleeting, imaginary experiences that, indeed, flare and vanish like sparks. If the character is redefined like this – if they are not embedded in texts but suspended between texts and readings of them – how can they be dissected with any methods of literary research?

The act of reading, then, has two equally crucial but nearly opposing consequences. On the one hand, the cognitive process of reading allows the readers – and the Creature itself – to sew all the mismatched elements and traits into a coherent, human-like whole. On the other hand, the characters are thereby half-equated with these evanescent, subjective processes, which keep recombining the textual fragments with other, pre-exiting information in always new and different ways, to suit different contexts and desires. As a result, mimetic humanity becomes as elusive to the character theorists as it is to the Creature. Indeed, Botting (4) and Sherwin (889–891) describe the Creature as a "wandering signifier", "a genius of liminality", whose "principal virtue is virtuality" and who "operates along the borders of narrative and linguistic indeterminacy, traversing the indefinite boundaries which police the differences constitutive of meaning" – but does describing characters in the same terms constitute a workable theoretical model?

On the one hand, this problem may, indeed, be exacerbated by the aforementioned, necessary "gappiness" of fictional characters. As both Frankenstein critics and comics theorists are happy to reiterate, blank spaces – from lacking proper names to the gutters of comics – are extremely productive in their undefined chaos; they invite creativity from the recipient's part, increasing the amount of encyclopedic knowledge employed, and the number of ways of employing it (see e.g. Botting 68–69; McCloud). On the other hand, this "problem of other minds" (see e.g. Caracciolo 21) is by no means unique to our understanding of fictional characters. In *The Unwritten* (#28, [12]), Wilson Taylor views real people – or characters who are as real as he is – in exactly the same way: "Far as I can see, we mostly exist as **ideas** in each other's heads. The way y**ou** see me. The way my **boss** sees me. The way the **waitress** at Lindy's sees me. Skins on an **onion**, right? Except that's all there is to us. The **skins**." This generalization of the problem across the ontological boundaries, from fictional to real people, does not solve it, of course, but it hands it over to mind-scientists and philosophers of mind to ponder. Meanwhile, literary theorists can continue to build their theories around this unsolved "heart of darkness", just like the analyses and retellings of *Frankenstein* (151) are motivated by its eponymous scientists' refusal to disclose his method of resurrection (Botting 4).

The focus can still remain on the readers, whose cognitive work is, in any event, what forms and experiences all these singular versions of characters. Thomas Docherty's (xiv–xvi) character theory similarly discards the idea of characters as "established product[s]" or essences, and suggests viewing *both* the character and the reader as series of dynamic, incomplete, mismatched subjectivities instead. Although this proposal for monstrous fragmentation is more inspired by (post)structuralism and the incoherent, nameless characters of postmodern novels than by the slipperiness of cognitive processes, Docherty also posits the reader as the true Frankenstein, or the "center of consciousness" that ultimately "makes piecemeal sense" of the "fragmentary instants of subjectivity" (Docherty 30–31, 157). The *Unwritten,* meanwhile, goes on to sum "the minds of all the millions of people who read" into a "collective unconscious", which is not defined in reference to Carl Jung, however, but likened to Hobbes' Leviathan: just like the "power of a nation" derives from all of its people, so does Tom as a fictional yet agential entity ultimately "exist in the suspension of [the audience's shared] disbelief". (*TU* #23, [1, 17].)

In the light of cognitive character theories, fictional creatures have thus become "wandering signifiers", private and social processes of perception that do not dwell on desolate wastes of paper and ink anymore. Nor have they ever truly done so: Baruch Hochman (72) already noted in 1985 that characters pose a "paradox of utter embeddedness and radical detachability". Although they have so far been analyzed mostly as constituents of larger story structures like plots, themes and storyworlds, the building of mental models allows cutting them loose from these structures, peeling them off the page, and transplanting them somewhere else entirely. The next subchapter will investigate what kind of theoretical considerations this type of independence from a single text and a single author demands.

c.) Transtextual Rebellion

> "Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself ––. –– On you it rests, whether I quit for ever the neighborhood of man, and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow-creatures, and the author of your own speedy ruin." (*F* 68–69.)

With his newly acquired ability to read, the Creature is able to decipher the lab notes he finds in the pocket of his stolen coat. Deeply disgusted by what he learns, he promptly confronts his creator, pleading Frankenstein – under the threat of destruction and "desolation of his heart" – to recognize that his Creature will henceforth dictate his own thoughts and needs: he is no longer a functional artefact but a more complex, processual being capable of appealing to Frankenstein's feelings, if not to complete equality with him. (*F* 90–91, 102.) *The Unwritten (*#23, [1]; #27–30)

does not parallel this plot point to the letter, as Tom only finds and studies his fathers' diaries after his death. He does seek to confront his dad before that (#15–16), however, and starts using his magical abilities to his own ends later in the series, after he has fulfilled his function by defeating his father's enemies.

Following Jeff Thoss (189–190, 198), the revenge on the creator seems to be as common a theme in metaleptical narratives as it is in stories about counterontological, self-aware creations (Zunshine 51–116). Indeed, the theme has figured in other Vertigo series, such Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* (1988–1990) long before *The Unwritten,* complete with Biblical undertones. As Thoss (198) notes, these tales more often than not draw comparisons to Adam's and Lucifer's rebellions: if God created human into his own imperfect, rebellious image, what was human to do but to create character in his imperfect, rebellious image? In terms of literary theory, the cognitive dissonance caused by characters' "dual nature" (Schneider 607) – or the concurrence of their synthetic and mimetic aspects (Phelan) – is a cause for mental conflict. Situating the creator and the created metaleptically on the same ontological plane only allows this conflict to manifest socially as well.

Whenever this is not the case, however, characters require an accomplice that has the same ontological standing as their creators. In other words, it is the humanizing, cognitive process of reading that liberates the characters from the tyranny of the "Author-God", as Barthes declares in his seminal, unmistakably Frankensteinian essay, "The Death of the Author". Indeed, his (148) idea that "a text's unity lies –– in its destination" rather than in "its origin" closely resembles the stitching principles of cognitive theorists. Only Barthes is not at all wary of the multiple, elusive interpretations – a proliferation of unities – this entails. On the contrary, for him, the act of interpretation is what makes texts "truly revolutionary", "since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law" (Barthes 147) — transgressions to which Frankenstein and his Creature are both rather prone.

In the context of *The Unwritten* (#21, [12]), the Creature is also quick to disregard the author as "only one **man**", because the true power of Tom and, by analogy, all the fictional characters lies, first and foremost, in the Leviathan of readership (*TU #23)* and, secondarily, in the "grid" of intertexts (e.g. *TU* #14, [5]). As Barthes (146) declares, texts – and the characters they generate – are ultimately just "tissue[s] of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture". This robs the Author of his authoritative position as the texts' true origin. Like the reader, the author is only a way-station, a processor of texts, which extend far beyond him; all he ever does is reorder the fragments, "imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original".

Similarly, from this intertextual point of view, Frankenstein is not the unprecedented genius he purports to be but merely the "modern" reiteration of Prometheus, patching together recycled material "from other books from the past" (Holquist 88–89, 94). Victor Frankenstein has to die in the final act, because "[t]he birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 148) – and, at the same time, his Creation must live on, as his "tissues" will forever be reusable by ever-new Promethea.

When Tom first encounters the Creature, he tries to dismiss him as "just a character from a book, [a] really *old* book that nobody reads" (*TU* #7, [2]) but just as he utters these words he also admits recognizing the scarred hulk. This is because he is not only "a character from a book", but also the star of an entire "Frankenstein industry" (Vidal 92). Even if "nobody reads" the "original" book, the Creature is still familiar to us from the iconic Universal film series, from such contemporary retellings as *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016) or *Victor Frankenstein* (2015), and even from Halloween decorations. As this article has established, the Creature has an ancestral intertextual relationship to Tom as well. During their second encounter – which takes place on Pequod, inside the storyspace of *Moby Dick* – the Creature overtly asserts that "the bond" between Tom and himself is "so strong" because he was "the first" (*TU* #21, [9]), and in the context of the scene, he is quite right: *The Unwritten* and *Moby Dick* (Baldick 75–84) can both be considered thematic heirs of *Frankenstein*. In a larger scheme of things, the Creature is not the first or last of anything, however: Baldick and other theorists have found dozens of other rebellious creations across European and North American literature both preceding and following him.

Wolfgang G. Müller has identified several types of these intertextual inter-character relationships, proclaimed them an important tool for characterization, and gathered them under the umbrella term of "interfigurality". The main claim of this theory is that if two characters in two different texts share names, functions or traits, they also invite further comparisons, for instance, on the levels of themes and character configurations. In other words, while the discovery of his intertextual ancestors, such as Milton's Lucifer, only makes the mimetic aspect of the Creature realize the depths of his loneliness, these very same characters connect his artificial and thematic aspects to a textual genealogy that is not under the control of his "original" authors, Frankenstein and Mary Shelley – or indeed, under the control of any one person at all. Like all the other "modern myths" from Faust, Don Quixote and Robinson Crusoe to Dracula, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Baldick 2), the Creature has been repeated, recognized and repeated again so many times in so many contexts he has come to embody, all on his own, the entire symbolic weight of the textual structures to which he is supposedly enslaved.

Although Müller (103) implicitly pledges allegiance to the structuralist view of character when he defines characters as "bundle[s] of qualities (character traits)" identified by "onomastic label[s]", his theory also relies on recognition, comparison and recollection — in other words, the cognitive work of the reader. To match this, Schneider (620) infers that the cognitive processing of characters must also draw on readers' "literary knowledge", such as conceptions of genres and literary stock characters – and this type of knowledge must be based on intertextual or -figural observations. Thus, as Barthes' essay and Wilson Taylor's plan already hint, intertextuality and readers' cognitions are essentially the two sides of the same "radical detachment" coin, because characters' transtextual wanderings and genealogies must be based on both reading and repeating.

Indeed, when Hochman (59–61) declares characters "dead" and irrevocably beyond the readers' influence, he disregards the main lesson of Frankenstein: that the dead can always be resurrected – or rewritten. If even just chunks of past characters are repurposed these allusions can, following Müller's theory, prompt recollections – or cognitive resurrections – of entire texts and characters. However, these recollections can be accidentally or purposefully inaccurate, which grants the critics, illustrators, adaptors, borrowers, reinterpreters and actors of characters the power to invent new traits, unearth new nuances, and as a result, gain some influence over them – a power that fan fiction enthusiasts, for example, have readily embraced. Every new text, no matter how inaccurate it is in comparison to the "original", will generate new mental models in its readers, and the readers can use these mental models to transplant the mutated character into ever new texts. What results is the total loss of authorial control and armies of disfigured characters with potential for immortality.

Crucially, Schneider (610) underlines that the mental models that literary texts generate are also multimodal, because the text can attribute the character any abstract or concrete traits, detectable by any sensory or cognitive faculty – a notion that Caracciolo's emphasis on experientiality takes even further. This means that the cognitive view of character can also serve as the malleable basis of – or may even be a prerequisite for – inter- and transmedial characterization and transplantation.

Characters that wander across media borders are not a new phenomenon, of course: a good portion of visual art dating from antiquity depicts the same gods and heroes that were central subjects of the oral traditions of the era. Yet, digitalization has made multimodality so economic and ubiquitous that the pressure of transmedializing narrative theory is increasing by the day. With the author dead and the surrounding textual structures partially severed, theories based on character traits and copyright

laws (Richardson), or theories that reduce characters to embedded signposts of storyworlds (Wolf) are not sufficient for explaining how the many facets of character mesh with the many facets of these multimedia environments. Therefore, it seems probable that character theory will soon follow the triumphant, masterless Creature into unmapped territories.

Conclusions

To conclude, organizing different character theories around the skeletal model of *Frankenstein*, as suggested by *The Unwritten*, seems to produce this polysemous distillation:

    a. Bits of text form a functional, yet human-like creature.
    b. Reading transforms this creature into (a mental model of) a seemingly sentient being.
    c. This being can escape its authorial framework, mutate and multiply.

On the one hand, these three points roughly reflect the evolution of literary character theories during the past century. On the other hand, these theories overlap in surprising ways, in spite of their chronology or theoretical starting points. Making use of such overlaps allows portraying our fictional cousins in an exceptionally holistic way: as dynamic constructions that constantly negotiate mimetic humanity and unavoidable artificiality as well as elusive, inferred lives and multimodal, repeatable bodies. This monster analogy should, therefore, not only be viewed as a forced and reductive comparative survey but, rather, as a demonstration of how hybridizing theories could help us to understand the hybrid nature of fictional characters. All in all, characters are most like Frankenstein's monster in that understanding them requires two conflicting cognitive strategies: they are read as persons and used as artefacts. Reconciling these aspects causes some cognitive dissonance, which may explain why formalistic and humanizing views of character have been quite difficult to seam together. However, this counterontological dissonance seems to be at the heart of characters and allows them to function in unique ways, as flexible, potentially transmedial and immortal beings.

Of course, like Frankenstein, I am more than ready to admit that my construction is less than perfect. As "the second creation" is attributed to the reader, rather than to the Creature/character itself, as in Holquist's original proposal, both the reader and the author are alternately cast in the role of Frankenstein, and subordinating characters to a multitude of animators, instead of a single genius, differentiates them from the Creature in a decisive way: it enables them to change and procreate. Fictional

characters can thus build themselves as many funeral pyres as they like but someone can always continue their story, even if – and especially when – the author is dead.

Finally, the fact that the analogy was initiated by *The Unwritten*'s multimodal, metafictional treatment of the Creature directs the attention to comics and what insights they could provide into the puzzles of character. Unfortunately, the self-awareness of the series only reaches its fictionality, never its mediality: Tom never learns that he is not only a fictional character but also a comic book character, which means that the series scarcely experiments with medium-specific characterization devices. On a more abstract level, however, the mismatched collage quality of graphic storytelling, and the overt gaps that riddle each comic book page, do embody Frankensteinian aesthetics. If the Creature is "a genius of liminality", comics are the art of liminality, ideally situated between the various visual media, and the literary print media, on which the bulk of current narrative theory is based. Comics could thereby constitute an excellent laboratory for testing and improving character theories', and other narrative theories', transmedial applicability (cf. Kukkonen).

Notes

[1] Because the collected paperback editions of *The Unwritten* lack page numbers, references are made to individual issues, whose pages have been counted manually, starting from the first page that continues the story (i.e. blank pages, and pages with bonus materials are excluded from the count). The source listing specifies which issues are included in which albums. Issues beyond #35.5 are not discussed in this article simply because the Creature barely figures in the later story arcs. To make the references more concise, abbreviations are used to for the primary texts, Carey et al.'s *The Unwritten* (*TU*) and Shelley's "The Text of *Frankenstein* (1818)" (*F*).

[2] Cf. Zunshine's (51–131) discussion of "the Frankenstein complex".

[3] The slashes amidst the quotations mark progression from one speech bubble to another.

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III

ALIEN OVERTURES:
SPECULATING ABOUT NONHUMAN EXPERIENCES
WITH COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS

by

Essi Varis, forthcoming

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IV

HYLLYILTÄ RUUTUIHIN JA RUUDUISTA SYDÄMIIN: SARJAKUVAHAHMOT MUUTTUVINA ELÄMYSTUOTTEINA

by

Essi Varis, 2016

Elämykset kulttuurina ja kulttuuri elämyksinä. Kulttuurintutkimuksen näkökulmia elämystalouteen. Edited by Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Sanna Karkulehto & Juhana Venäläinen. 275-312.

HYLLYILTÄ RUUTUIHIN JA RUUDUISTA SYDÄMIIN: SARJAKUVAHAHMOT MUUTTUVINA ELÄMYSTUOTTEINA

Essi Varis

Lisenssitehtailua, Hollywood-filmatisointeja, miljardien dollarien hahmotalleja ja satatuhatpäisiä fanitapaamisia – sarjakuva on kulkenut pitkän matkan niistä neliväriliitteistä, joilla 1900-luvun alussa kasvatettiin sanomalehtien myyntiä. Silti sarjakuva on aina ollut ja tulee aina olemaan elämystaloutta eli jotain, minkä kauppa-arvo on aineettomassa – niissä ajatuksissa ja elämyksissä, jotka välittyvät eri tuotantoportaiden ja ilmaisukeinojen lävitse tekijältä lukijalle (McCloud 2000, 72). Tämä elämyksellisyys pätee toki muihinkin taiteisiin, ja muidenkin taiteiden elämyksillä on kaupallinen puolensa, mutta mikään muu taiteenlaji ei ole kietoutunut taloudellisiin päämääriin yhtä jatkuvasti, avoimesti ja bränditietoisesti kuin sarjakuva. Vaikka alan tutkijat mielellään sivuuttavat sarjakuvan kaupalliset sidokset, on yhtä helppo – tai jopa helpompi – puhua sarjakuvateollisuudesta kuin sarjakuvataiteesta tai -kulttuurista. Jokainen näistä kolmesta termistä kuitenkin viittaa laajoihin, toisiinsa limittyviin ilmiöihin ja niitä toimeenpaneviin tahoihin, jotka rakentavat mediumin todellisuutta ja asemoivat sitä osaksi taloutta ja kulttuuria omilla tavoillaan. *Sarjakuvataide* on sarjakuvantekijöiden ja heidän työtään legitimoivien instituutioiden käsissä hitaasti kasvava ja monipuolistuva ilmaisun laji, kun taas *sarjakuvakulttuurista* puhuttaessa on puhuttava pääasiassa sarjakuvafaneista. Nämä kaksi – tekijöiden taiteelliset pyrkimykset sekä lukijoiden maut ja tarpeet – näyttäytyvät julkisessa keskustelussa ja erityisesti fanitutkimuksessa usein vastakkaisina monimutkaiselle, monen alan ihmisiä työllistävälle ja siksi niin vaikeasti ohjattavalle *sarjakuvateollisuudelle*, mutta tosiasiassa mikään näistä kolmesta ei olisi olemassa ilman kahta muuta (Manninen 1995, 68–70; McCloud 2000, 56–79). Tätä vyyhtiä, jossa sarjakuvabisnes ja sarjakuvakulttuuri yhtäaikaisesti sekä vastustavat toisiaan että mahdollistavat toisen-

sa, voi avata esimerkiksi Pinen ja Gilmoren (2011) elämystalous-teorian avulla.

Antologiamme tavoitteena on tarkastella talouden ja kulttuu-rin jännitteistä suhdetta – sitä, kuinka kaupalliset näkökohdat ovat vaikuttaneet kulttuurin tuotantoon vuosien saatossa, ja sitä, kuin-ka massatuotettu elämystarjonta asettuu osaksi nykykulttuurin mer-kityskenttiä. Oma lähtöoletukseni on, että nykysarjakuvaa voidaan kehityshistoriansa vuoksi pitää yhtä kiistattomasti sekä taiteena että tuotteena, toisin sanoen läpeensä elämystaloudellisena. Vaikka valtavirtasarjakuvaa on aina tuotettu myyntilukujen ehdoilla, ovat myyntiluvut toisaalta riippuneet siitä, mitkä sarjakuvien sisältämis-tä elämyksistä – kuten maailmoista, hahmoista ja tarinoista – luki-jat ovat ottaneet omakseen. En kuitenkaan näe, että elämykselli-syys olisi vaihe, jonka sarjakuva olisi kehityksensä myötä saavutta-nut, kuten Pinen ja Gilmoren malli kenties antaisi ymmärtää, vaan jotain, mitä se on aina ollut, huolimatta pitkäaikaisesta statukses-taan poisheitettävänä matka- tai huussilukemisena. Ensimmäisessä alaluvussa tarkastelenkin sarjakuvaa tästä näkökulmasta, yhtäältä elämyksenä ja toisaalta hyödykkeenä, eli *elämyshyödykkeenä*. Tä-män kahtalaisen kehityksen taustalla on sarjakuvatuotannon histo-riallinen organisoituminen: se, miten ja miksi sarjakuvaa on tehty ja myyty, on vaikuttanut paitsi sen kulttuuriseen asemaan myös sen elämykselliseen sisältöön.

Toinen alaluku paneutuu siihen, kuinka muutamien senttien ar-voisissa lehtisissä esitellyistä hahmouniversumeista on vuosikym-menten kuluessa, Pinen ja Gilmoren kuvaamin elämyksellistämisen keinoin, muokattu yhä räätälöidympiä ja immersiivisempiä trans-mediatuotteita. Tässä prosessissa sarjakuva oikeastaan lakkaa ole-masta sarjakuva – nippu painettuja merkkejä – ja se, mistä asiakas on koko ajan maksanut – aineeton sisältö ideoineen, hahmoineen ja tarinoineen – alkaa liikkua viestimestä toiseen. Sarjakuvan entistä suurempi elämyksellistyminen liittyy siis kiinteästi intermediaali-suuden ja mediakonvergenssin kysymyksiin. Mediakonvergenssis-sa ja elämystaloudessa on osittain samat oireet ja päämäärät: mo-lemmissa tavoitellaan yhä suurempia voittoja yhdistämällä eri alo-

jen toimijoiden voimat tuottamaan mahdollisimman kokonaisval-
taisia, asiakkaan tarpeisiin mahdollisimman tarkasti vastaavia, mo-
niaistisia ja mieleenpainuvia kokemuksia (Herkman 2005, 71–78,
87–92; Jenkins 2006; Pine & Gilmore 2011).

Näihin pyrkimyksiin liittyy myös (ainakin näennäinen) ylei-
sön ehdoilla toimiminen ja osallistaminen. Konvergenssikulttuu-
rissa tarjolla on koko joukko mahdollisia mediumeja ja tuotteita,
joiden välillä navigoida: yksi lukee, toinen katsoo ja kolmas pe-
laa Batmaniaan mieluiten. Lisäksi digitaalinen media mahdollistaa
jatkuvasti suuremman interaktiivisuuden. Vuorovaikutus tuottajien
ja yleisöjen välillä on jopa niin vilkasta, että osapuolten välinen
raja on alkanut sumentua: fanituotanto sekä esimerkiksi sosiaalises-
sa mediassa tuotetut para- ja metatekstit toimivat paitsi reaktioina
myös vaihtoehtoina ja polttoaineena valtavirtavirtamedialle (Hirs-
järvi 2009, 105–123; Jenkins 2006). Elämystaloudessa puolestaan
pyritään minimoimaan asiakkaan kompromissit räätälöimällä tuote
juuri hänen tarpeisiinsa sopivaksi muun muassa *massakustomoin-
nin* eli tuotteen modulaarisen muuntelun avulla, joskus jopa yhteis-
työssä asiakkaan kanssa (*collaborative customization*, ks. Pine &
Gilmore 2011, 112–113). Kuten teoksemme johdannossakin tode-
taan, varsinainen elämys syntyy vasta näissä aktiivisissa vastaan-
oton prosesseissa, yleisön henkilökohtaisessa, vapaaehtoisessa ko-
kemisessa. Samoin kuin Lazzarato kuvailee aineettomien hyödyk-
keiden kulutusta "aivojen väliseksi yhteistyöksi" (ks. johdantoar-
tikkeli), Jenkins (2006, 3) toteaa medioiden yhteensulautumisen to-
teutuvan lopulta yleisön mielissä ja sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuk-
sessa – eli populaarikulttuurin elämyksellisyydessä. Nämä näke-
mykset eivät juuri eroa McCloudin (2010, 72) kuviosta, jossa luki-
ja saa sarjakuvan kautta suoralta tuntuvan "yhteyden" sen tekijään,
kaikkien tuotantoportaiden ja välikäsien ohi. Eivätkä ne juuri eroa
omasta kognitiivisesta hahmoteoriastanikaan, jonka mukaan lukija
rakentaa sekä sivuilla olevien merkkien että ihmisyyttä ja kerron-
nan konventioita koskevien tietorakenteidensa ohjaamana franken-
steinmaisen idean yhtenäisestä sarjakuvahahmosta (Varis 2013).

Koska yleisöllä siis on käsissään vähintään puolet sarjakuvan elämyksellisyyden muodostavista paloista, tarkastelen kolmannessa alaluvussa lyhyesti myös sitä, kuinka sarjakuvien ympärille kehittynyt fanikulttuuri käyttää sarjakuvateollisuuden tuotteita tavoilla, jotka paitsi tukevat ja heijastelevat myös vastustavat ja kiertävät sitä. Faniuden asemaa eräänlaisena vastakulttuurina alleviivaa esimerkiksi fani- ja mediatutkija Henry Jenkinsin (1992) lanseeraama termi *tekstuaalinen salametsästys* (*textual poaching*), jonka Urpo Kovala (2003, 198) on suomentanut muotoon *tekstuaalinen talonvaltaus*. Fanit siis jatkuvasti järjestävät ja kalustavat kaupallista massamediaa uudelleen tai jopa ryöstävät siitä elementtejä omien, arvoiltaan erilaisten ja suurimmaksi osaksi lahjatalouteen perustuvien alakulttuuriensa raaka-aineiksi (Hirsjärvi 2009, 114).

Merkitysten ja tarinaelementtien liikkuminen kädestä käteen ja mediumista mediumiin näyttäisi viittaavan siihen, että sarjakuvateollisuudessa sen paremmin kuin sarjakuvakulttuurissakaan ei itse asiassa ole niinkään kyse sarjakuvataiteesta ilmaisumuotona kuin tuon ilmaisumuodon piirissä alkunsa saaneista elämyksistä. Siksi tämän artikkelin ensisijaisina tarkastelukohteina eivät ole sarjakuvalehdet tai -romaanit, vaan yksi sarjakuvaelämysten keskeisimmistä komponenteista: sarjakuvahahmot. Sarjakuvalehti on yksinkertaisesti sarjakuvasankarin alkuperäispakkaus. Siksi sarjan nimi on useimmissa genreissä sen päähenkilön nimi, ja nimisankarin kuvaaminen lehden kannessa on yksi alan sitkeimmistä konventioista (Bender 1999, 24). Lehden sisältämien sarjakuvamerkkien lukeminen tuottaa mutkikkaiden ja vähän tutkittujen kognitiivisten prosessien seurauksena idean yhtenäisestä, enimmäkseen ihmisyyden logiikoita noudattavasta mahdollisesta olennosta, jota voidaan edelleen sovittaa uusiin tarina- ja mediaympäristöihin – ja siinä sivussa muiden kuluttajien käsityksiin samasta hahmosta. Näin fiktiivisten hahmojen kahtalainen olemus merkkirakennelmina ja niiden tuottamina mentaalisina rakennelmina toimii eräänlaisena kohtaamispaikkana sekä useille mediaalisille mahdollisuuksille että niille mielten kontakteille, joita esimerkiksi Scott McCloud (1993, 2000) on sarjakuvan olemusta pohtiessaan visioinut. (Varis 2013.)

Usein juuri sarjakuvan nimihahmo on keskeisin, tunnistettavin ja helpoiten brändättävä elämyksen siemen, joka lähtee vaeltamaan mediumista toiseen. Tätä todistavat paitsi lukuisat hahmolisensseillä tehdyt videopelit, elokuvat ja muut mediatuotteet myös loputon määrä muita oheistuotteita limsoista ja eväsrasioista kyniin ja T-paitoihin. Lisenssituotteita koristaa tavallisesti päähahmon kuva, nimi tai – supersankareiden tapauksessa – *embleemi* eli logo. Yksi suurimpia lisenssimenestyksiä on ollut Batman, jonka nimellä ja kuvalla on 1960-luvulla myyty jopa leipää (Daniels 2004, 143). Sarjakuvat ovat itsekin yltyneet kommentoimaan lisenssi-ilmiöitä aika ajoin asettamalla sarjojen henkilöiksi itse itseään tuotteistavia metasupersankareita, kuten *Watchmenin* (1986–1987) Ozymandiaksen, tai Batmanin, joka kouluttaa franchise-periaatteella uusia Batmaneita Grant Morrisonin kirjoittamassa sarjassa *Batman Incorporated* (2010–2013).

Tunnistettava henkilöhahmo on siis mitä suurimmassa määrin yhtä kuin *brändi*, aineeton lisäarvo, joka erottaa tuotteen tai palvelun sen kilpailijoista. Jossain määrin nimihahmon voisi kenties ajatella vastaavan myös Pinen ja Gilmoren (2011) ajatusta teemasta elämystä järjestävänä ytimenä, jolloin hahmoihin viittaavat lisenssi- ja fanituotteet jäsentyisivät teeman mukaisiksi muistoesineiksi (*memorabilia*, Pine & Gilmore 2011, 85–88).

Myös tuotantoyhtiöille – kuten Disneylle, Marvelille ja DC:lle – ja sarjakuvan tunnetuimmille tekijöille – kuten Stan Leelle, Neil Gaimanille tai Grant Morrisonille – on toki rakentunut vuosien varrella omat brändinsä. Henkilöhahmojen brändit eroavat näistä kuitenkin siinä, että hahmot persoonineen, ulkonäköineen, toimintatapoineen, ideologioineen, logoineen ja vihollisineen ovat samalla osa varsinaista tuotetta. Vaikka Gaimanin nimi saisikin sarjakuvan menemään kaupaksi, ostajat tuskin olettavat ostavansa palaa hänen elämästään. Raja saattaa tosin joskus olla häilyväkin: Spiegelman ja muut omaelämäkerrallisten sarjakuvien tekijäthän ovat omia henkilöhahmojaan ja siten sekä omia henkilö- että hahmobrändejään.

Tekijät päätyvät harvoin myöskään fanituotannon aiheeksi, eivätkä tosifanit tietysti ryöstä tai tuunaa varsinaisia sarjakuvalehti-

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äkään. Tekstuaalisen talonvaltauksen kohteeksi voi sen sijaan ajatella sarjakuvien fiktiivisen tilan, eli tarinamaailman. Esimerkiksi Marvel- ja DC-kustantamojen tuotteet muodostavat omat *universuminsa*, joiden loogisesta jatkuvuudesta niin tekijät, tekijänoikeuksien omistajat kuin lukijatkin ovat tarkkoja. Alkuperäisen termin mukainen "tekstuaalinen salametsästys" tapahtuu epäilemättä samoilla mailla, mutta sen muokkausvoiman kohteeksi on ajateltava pikemminkin hahmot. Tarkemmin katsoen hahmot, niiden väliset suhteet ja niiden *tapahtumasarjakuvissa* (*event comics*) kokemat mullistukset ovat myös universumien tärkeimpiä rakenneosia: esimerkiksi DC:n ja Marvelin jatkuvia tarinoita erottaa todellisesta maailmasta pääasiassa supersankarien olemassaolo. Vaikka tekijöillä ja laajemmilla tarinakokonaisuuksilla siis onkin osuutensa elämyksellisessä markkinoinnissa ja faniudessa, useimmat markkinoinnin keinot ja fanitoiminnot ovat varsin henkilöhahmokeskeisiä. Esimerkiksi suurin osa *fanifiktiosta* perustuu siihen, että tutut hahmot sijoitetaan uuteen juoneen tai ympäristöön. Hahmoista tulee näin mentaalisen leikin välineitä, joihin kuvitellut elämykset kiinnittyvät.

Artikkelini keskittyy kaupalliseen länsimaiseen valtavirtasarjakuvaan, joka painottuu suuresti yhdysvaltalaiseen tuotantoon. Yhdysvaltalainen tuotanto puolestaan painottuu suuresti supersankarisarjakuvaan, joka julkaisua dominoivat jo edellä mainitut, ylikansalliset ja -mediaiset Marvel Comics ja DC Comics. On tosin huomattava, että yhdysvaltalaisen sarjakuvaperinteen vaikutus globaaliin sarjakuvatuotantoon, myös omaleimaisina pidettyihin Ranskaan ja Japaniin, on ollut huomattava (Azuma 2001, 11; Manninen 1995, 21–22). Näin Yhdysvaltojen sarjakuvamarkkinoiden tarkasteleminen auttaa jossain määrin ymmärtämään sarjakuvan kuluttamista myös maailmanlaajuisesti. Haen kuitenkin vertailukohtia muilta kulttuurialueilta, kun sille on tilaa tai tarvetta.

Aukkoja jää silti väistämättä: henkilöhahmojen rooli on oletettavasti hieman erilainen eri genrejen kerronnassa ja markkinoinnissa, eivätkä supersankarit välttämättä ole edustavin esimerkki hahmokeskeisestä sarjakuvasta. Monissa strippisarjakuvissa ei koskaan näytetä juuri muuta kuin hahmojen välistä dialogia, ja esimer-

kiksi Umberto Eco (1985) on ylistänyt Charles M. Schulzin *Tenavat*-sarjakuvaa (1950–2000) siitä, kuinka vivahteikkaasti se hyödyntää ihmisyyden koko kirjoa. Mikäli mittarina kuitenkin käytetään hahmokeskeisyyden sijaan tuotteistamisen ja transmediaalistumisen astetta, supersankarit hävinnevät korkeintaan suosituimmille manga-sarjoille.

Elämyshyödykkeistä hahmohistoriallisiksi reliikeiksi

Mitä pidemmälle tuote on jalostettu, sitä suurempi sen arvo. Raaka-aineista tehdään hyödykkeitä, hyödykkeiden saantia ja käyttöä helpotetaan paketoimalla ne palveluun, ja jokainen uusi pykälä prosessissa tuottaa yhä uusia voittoja yhä uusille toimijoille. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 7–18.) Näin myös paperille piirtelystä on viimeisen vuosisadan kuluessa kasvanut sarjakuvabisnes pitkälle erikoistuneine tuotantoportaineen ja levityskanavineen (McCloud 2000, 67–79). Pinen ja Gilmoren mukaan seuraava, lähes väistämätön lenkki tässä kaikkia aloja hallitsevassa arvokehityksen ketjussa on yhdistää hyödykkeet ja palvelut entistä huolellisemmin suunnitelluksi kokonaisuudeksi, elämykseksi. Toisin sanoen Pine ja Gilmore näkevät elämystalouden poikittaisena, kaikki alat kattavana ja vuosituhannen vaihteelle leimallisena trendinä pikemminkin kuin taiteen ja matkailun tapaisiin aloihin kiinteästi kuuluvana osana. Nähdäkseni mikään ei kuitenkaan ole estänyt ainakaan sarjakuvaa olemasta yhtä aikaa sekä edullinen, kertakäyttöinen hyödyke että elämys, jota kulutetaan lähinnä sen tarjoamien aineettomien hyötyjen kuten viihteen, huumorin tai vaikkapa henkilöhahmoihin samastumisen vuoksi. Sarjakuvaa on erityisesti juuri halvassa, massatuotetussa muodossaan pidetty haitallisena teini-ikäisten poikien eskapismin välineenä, jopa huumetripin kaltaisena uppoutumisena, joka juurruttaa lukijaan vääriä arvoja ja käyttäytymismalleja (ks. esim. McCloud 2000, 100–125; Versaci 2007, 4–6; Wertham 2009). Vaikka elämysten arvioitu laatu siis olisi vaihdellutkin, sarjakuva on aina ollut olemukseltaan elämystuote, ei kehittynyt sellaiseksi.

Tästä huolimatta sarjakuvan muodon ja markkinoinnin kehitystä voidaan tarkastella nousuna Pinen ja Gilmoren arvokehityksen portaita pitkin. Vastaavan nousun voisi mahdollisesti löytää myös muiden taiteenlajien kehityksestä, mutta sarjakuvan nousu on ollut kaikkiin muihin elämysaloihin nähden poikkeuksellisen pitkä ja jyrkkä. Tällä en viittaa pelkästään siihen, että sarjakuvan noin 150-vuotinen historia on johtanut paljon laajempaan ja rahakkaampaan hahmolisensointiin kuin vaikkapa kirjallisuuden monin verroin pidempi historia. Sarjakuva on myös aloittanut taipaleensa monia muita elämysaloja alempaa, hyödykeportaan kertakäyttökastista.

Vaikka alan teoreetikot mielellään jäljittävätkin kuvakerronnan juuret aina luolamaalauksiin, egyptiläisiin hautakuvituksiin tai Trajanuksen pylvääseen saakka, sarjakuva nykyisessä muodossaan – paperille painettuna, populaarina kerrontamuotona puhekuplineen ja muine erikoismerkkeineen – alkoi kehittyä vasta 1800-luvulla, kun teollisuuskasvu mahdollisti populaarin massakulttuurin synnyn (Manninen 1995, 12–14; McCloud 1994, 10–13; Sabin 2010, 11). Tuolloin, painotekniikan kehittyessä yhä uusin harppauksin, havaittiin, että kirjat myivät paremmin, mikäli niissä oli kuvia. Sanomalehtimarkkinoilla otaksuttiin saman pätevän muihinkin painotuotteisiin, joten palstatilaa alettiin varata piirrostaiteelle – ensin poliittisille karikatyyreille ja lopulta kuvasarjoille. Nykysarjakuvan juuret eivät siis ole niinkään taiteellisissa kuin taloudellisissa pyrinnöissä, ja ilmaisu joutui hakemaan muotoaan enemmän sanomalehtikustantajien kuin itsenäisten piirtäjien ohjaamana. Toisin sanoen sarjakuvien alkuperäisenä tavoitteena oli aivan toisen mediumin myyntilukujen kasvattaminen ja uusien yleisöjen tavoittaminen. (Manninen 1995, 14; McCloud 2000, 65–66.)

Britanniassa piirroshuumori ja karikatyyrit siirtyivät omiin lehtiinsä (*funny papers*) varhaisimmin, jo 1800-luvun puolivälissä, sillä halvalle, kevyelle viihteelle ja kertakäyttöiselle, nopealukuiselle satiirille oli kysyntää erityisesti pitkäveteisillä junamatkoilla ja työväenluokan keskuudessa (Sabin 2010, 12, 18). Pian myös Yhdysvalloissa sarjakuvien yleismaailmallisen kuvakerronnan oivallettiin tekevän lehdet houkuttelevammiksi kielitaidottomille maa-

hanmuuttajille (Sabin 2010, 20). 1900-luvun alkupuolella sarjaku-
vat kunnostautuivat myös mainosmediumina ja monenlaisten tuot-
teiden myyntiä edistävinä, ilmaisina kylkiäisinä (Duncan & Smith
2009, 105). Nykyään negatiiviseksi ennakkoasenteeksi muuttunut
käsitys sarjakuvista humoristisena tai sensaatiomaisena, helposti
ymmärrettävänä kertakäyttöviihteenä oli siis se suunta, johon sar-
jakuvia alun perin muovattiin täysin tarkoituksellisesti. Näin sarja-
kuvat eivät ole pelkästään elämystalouden tuote vaan myös väline:
ne ovat tehneet muun muassa sanomalehtien lukemisesta mieleen-
painuvamman ja aisteihin vetoavamman kokemuksen.

Kaupalliset näkökohdat ovat vaikuttaneet alusta pitäen myös sii-
hen, millaisiksi sarjakuvasankarit ovat muovautuneet. Esimerkiksi
Teräsmiehen tunnuksena loistavat päävärit eivät välttämättä edusta
alkuperäisen piirtäjän Joe Shusterin taiteellista näkemystä tai sym-
boloi hahmon ominaisuuksia. Pikemminkin Teräsmiehen räikeä ul-
koasu heijastelee sitä, mikä sen syntykontekstissa meni parhaiten
kaupaksi: koska värikkäät lehdet myivät mustavalkoisia paremmin,
haluttiin omiin lehtiinsä eriytyneiden sarjakuvien ensimmäisestä
supersankarista juuri niin huomiota herättävän värinen kuin vuo-
den 1938 painotekniikka suinkin salli (McCloud 1994, 187–188).

Hahmoja alettiin lähes välittömästi käyttää markkinoinnissa
myös siten, että ne suunniteltiin aiotun yleisön, tai asiakassegmen-
tin, maun ja arvojen mukaisiksi. 1800-luvun Britanniassa pennin tai
parin arvoiset huumorisarjakuvat olivat erityisesti työväenluokan
suosiossa, joten ajan suurimmasta menestystarinasta, Ally Slope-
rista, leivottiin ennen kaikkea työväen sankari: hahmo, johon työ-
läiset saattoivat samastua ja jonka huumori syntyi juuri siitä, että
sen törmäykset yläluokkaa parodioivien hahmojen kanssa vastasi-
vat lukijoiden omia asenteita ja kokemuksia (Sabin 2010, 15). Sa-
maa strategiaa on käytetty myös Japanin markkinoilla, missä raja
genren ja asiakassegmentin välillä on häilyvä. Tarjonta jaetaan poi-
kien (*shōnen*), tyttöjen (*shōjo*), miesten (*seinen*) ja naisten (*josei*)
mangaan, joista jokaisella on omat, pääasiassa kohdeyleisöön ve-
toavat tyyppitarinansa ja -hahmonsa (Thompson 2007, esim. 171–
172, 327–329, 334–336, 338–340).

Ally Sloperista saivat alkunsa myös monet muut trendit, jotka ovat olleet tärkeä osa transmediaalista hahmobrändäystä tähän päivään asti. Ensinnäkin hahmon ympärille kehittyi varsin suosittu oheistuoteperhe mukeineen, nukkeineen ja julisteineen. Toiseksi, hahmon suosio säilyi, vaikka piirtäjä vaihtui. (Sabin 2010, 18.) Tämä osoittaa arvon kiinnittyvän juuri hahmoon, ei esimerkiksi itse sarjakuvaformaattiin tai yhdenkään hahmoa kehittäneen taiteilijan piirrostyyliin. Kolmanneksi, suurin osa lehdillä ja oheistuotteilla tehdyistä voitoista meni julkaisijoiden eikä piirtäjien taskuun (Sabin 2010, 18). Harva sarjakuvataiteilija haalii rahaa tai mainetta vielä nykypäivänäkään siksi, että suurimmat rahat tehdään juuri hahmolisensseillä, jotka tyypillisesti ovat kustannusyhtiöiden, eivät hahmon luojien omistuksessa (McCloud 2000, 58). Hyvin brändätyt hahmot tuovat siis laillisille omistajilleen yhä lisää rahaa yhä uusien tuotteiden ja adaptaatioiden myötä vielä vuosikymmeniä sen jälkeen, kun hahmon alulle panneet taiteilijat on jo unohdettu. Lähes jokainen tietää, kuka Batman on, mutta huomattavasti harvempi on lukenut Batman-sarjakuvia, ja vielä harvempi muistaa hahmon edesmenneen luojan nimeä.

Sarjakuvataiteilijoiden asemaa, ja vastaavasti sarjakuvan asemaa taiteena, syö myös kaupallisen sarjakuvan liukuhihnamainen massatuotanto, jossa tuotantoprosessi jaetaan eri vaiheisiin ja jokainen vaihe annetaan eri tekijän huoleksi (*industrial process*, Duncan & Smith 2009, 88). Käsikirjoittajan, piirtäjän, tussaajan, tekstaajan, värittäjän ja toimittajan roolit on usein eritelty taiteellisesti kunnianhimoisissakin valtavirtasarjakuvissa, kuten DC Comicsin Vertigo-sarjoissa (McCloud 2000, 74; Rogers 2011, 149). Prosessin tavoitteena on tietenkin tuottaa mahdollisimman tehokkaasti mahdollisimman ammattimaiselta näyttävää sarjakuvaa. Tällaisessa tuotannossa ylimmällä sijalla eivät siis ole myyttisen, yksinäisen taiteilijaneron suuret ideat vaan myyvä, pintapuolisesti huoliteltu tekninen toteutus. Kuvaavaa on, että kaikki sarjakuvalehdet eivät ole edes maininneet tekijöidensä nimiä: esimerkiksi suomalaisissa *Aku Ankoissa* eri tarinoiden piirtäjät ja kirjoittajat on systemaattisesti kirjoitettu näkyviin vasta vuodesta 1998 (Kontturi 2014, 29).

Liukuhihnakäytäntö on siis osaltaan leimannut sarjakuvat pikemminkin tuotteiksi kuin taideteoksiksi – ja sarjakuvahahmot kiiltokuviksi vailla syvyyttä. Yli viiteen osaan eriytyneet liukuhihnaprosessit ovat kuitenkin olleet tyypillisiä vain suurille kustantamoille, joita on kehittynyt pääasiassa Yhdysvaltoihin ja Japaniin. Esimerkiksi Suomen pienillä markkinoilla tuotantotehokkuuden maksimoiminen olisi käytännössä tarpeetonta, ja useimmilla kotimaisilla sarjakuvilla onkin vain yksi tai kaksi tekijää.

Liukuhihnaprosessin kehittyessä kulisseissa sarjakuvateollisuuden tuotantoketju sai viimeisen loogisen jäsenensä, kun sarjakuvien erikoisliikkeet ilmestyivät Yhdysvaltojen katukuvaan 1970-luvulla. Tämä paransi sarjakuvalehtien saatavuutta ja valikoimaa siinä määrin, että ne alkoivat kehittyä kertakäyttöhyödykkeistä keräilyesi-

Kuva 1: Midtown Comics lähellä New Yorkin Times Squarea on harvinaisen suuri ja tunnettu sarjakuvien erikoisliike. Se on ollut toiminnassa vuodesta 1997. Kuva: Essi Varis.

neiksi, joista maksetaan yhä kymmeniä, tuhansia ja jopa miljoonia dollareita. (Duncan & Smith 2009, 98–102; McCloud 2000, 10, 66). Ensimmäisen Teräsmies-tarinan sisältäneestä *Action Comics* -sarjan ensimmäisestä numerosta maksettiin vuonna 2010 ennätykselliset miljoona dollaria. Ennätys rikottiin vielä samana vuonna, kun *Detective Comics* -sarjan numerosta 27 maksettiin peräti 1 075 000 dollaria. Tuon numeron teki erityiseksi tietenkin Batmanin esiinmarssi. (Rogers 2011, 151–154.)

Vaikka harvinaisuutta ja kuntoa pidetäänkin hinnoittelun pääkriteereinä (Duncan & Smith 2009, 100–102), lehtien rahalliset arvot näyttävät korreloivan voimakkaasti myös niissä esiintyvien hahmojen fiktiivisten henkilöhistorioiden kanssa. Toisin sanoen lehdet, joissa suosikkihahmot esiintyvät ensi kertaa tai kuolevat, ovat tyypillisesti saaneet suurimmat hintalaput. Elokuussa 2014 toinen kappale ensimmäistä *Action Comics* -lehteä huutokaupattiin entistä ennätyksellisemmällä 3,4 miljoonalla dollarilla keräilijä Stephen Fishlerille, joka perusteli ostostaan sillä, että tuo nimenomainen lehti on supersankareiden alkukoti: "It's hard to believe that a kid's 10 cent comic could be worth that much money, but it is Superman." (BBC News 2014.) Viimeistään tässä kehitysvaiheessa näyttää selvältä, ettei sarjakuvalehtiä voi pitää pelkkinä hyödykkeinä, sillä materiaalisesti hyvin samankaltaisten tuotteiden valtavat arvoerot voivat nähdäkseni selittyä vain symbolisella tai elämyksellisellä arvolla. Huomionarvoista on sekin, että hahmohistoriallisten lehtien arvo säilyy tai kasvaa, kun taas arvon keinotekoiseen manipulointiin perustunut spekulaatio osoittautui kuplaksi. Kun sarjakuvalehtiin sijoittaminen saavutti huippunsa 1980-luvun lopulla, julkaisijat lisäsivät lehtien harvinaisuutta esimerkiksi levittämällä samaa numeroa useilla erilaisilla kansilla (*variant covers*). Niille löytyi kyllä aluksi ostajia, mutta keräilyarvot jäivät lopulta vaatimattomiksi. (Rogers 2011, 151.)

Suurin keräilyinnostus kuivui kaiken kaikkiaan kokoon 1990-luvulla (Versaci 2007, 10), ja sarjakuvien arvon nostamiseksi on uudella vuosituhannella jouduttu keksimään uusia keinoja. Yleisin strategia tuntuu olleen kertakäyttöisten lehtien ylevöittäminen kal-

liimmiksi, esteettisesti miellyttävämmiksi kirjaesineiksi. Alun perin sanomalehtiliitteinä tai irtonumeroina levitettyjä klassikkosarjakuvia julkaistaan nykyään erilaisina juhla- ja keräilypainoksina tai kokoelma-albumeina (*trade paperback*). Samalla yhä suurempi osa uusista sarjakuvajulkaisuista päätyy suoraan koviin kansiin, *sarjakuvaromaaneiksi*. Myös myyntipaikkana toimii yhä useammin kirjakauppa eivätkä perinteiset kioskit, sekatavarakaupat ja erikoisliikkeet (Duncan & Smith 2009, 104). Toisaalta kirjakauppamyynnin rinnalle on lanseerattu Amazonin ylläpitämän Comixologyn kaltaisia digitaalisia levityspalveluita, joiden myyntivalttina on laajojenkin valikoimien nopea ja helppo saatavuus.

Sarjakuvien saatavuuden paraneminen ja käyttöiän piteneminen heijastelevat mediumin vähittäistä ilmaisullista kypsymistä ja institutionalisoitumista: tekijät, lukijat ja kulttuurin portinvartijat alkavat nähdä sarjakuvat taiteena, jolla katsotaan jo määritelmällisestikin olevan pysyvää, jopa transsendentaalista itseisarvoa. Ne eivät enää ole pelkkiä viihteellisiä, poisheitettäviä elämyshyödykkeitä vaan – ainakin joissain tapauksissa – keräiltyjä, vaalittuja taideteoksia. Ne ovat yhä vähemmän elämystalouden väline ja yhä enemmän sen tuote. Sarjakuvan taiteellistuminen ei kuitenkaan vähennä henkilöhahmojen painoarvoa markkinoinnin välineinä: monissa sarjakuva- ja kirjakaupoissa sekä kirjastoissa sarjakuvia ei edelleenkään hyllytetä tekijän vaan hahmon (eli sarjan) nimen mukaan.

Transmediamaailmojen massakustomoidut asukkaat

Samaan aikaan, kun joitain sarjakuvasankareita sidotaan hienompiin kansiin, toiset ovat karanneet kansista kokonaan. Koska sarjakuva on kehityshistoriansa vuoksi asettunut osaksi populaaria massamediaa ja se on tekstiä ja kuvaa yhdistävän perusolemuksensa nojalla myös multimedia, sen on alusta asti ollut helppo vuorovaikuttaa muiden mediumien kanssa ja osallistua siten mediakonvergenssin syventämiseen. Kuten todettua, nykymuotoinen sarjakuva versoi 1800- ja 1900-luvun taitteessa sanomalehdistä, ja erityises-

ti kaupallinen sarjakuvakerronta ahmi itseensä samaan aikaan muitakin intermediaalisia elementtejä: stereotyyppisiä hahmoja ja muita konventioita lainattiin esimerkiksi 1900-luvun alun kioskikirjallisuudesta ja vaudeville-teatterista (Sabin 2010; McCloud 1994, 10–19; 2000, 27; Manninen 1995, 14). Sitä ennen materiaalia, jonka voi taannehtivasti luokitella sarjakuvaksi, tuotettiin lähinnä kuvataiteen piirissä: alan teoreetikot ovat kiinnittäneet jonkin verran huomiota paitsi muinaisten kansojen kuvakertomuksiin myös William Hogarthin ja Lynd Wardin kaltaisten piirtäjien ja graafikoiden teossarjoihin (McCloud 1993, 10–19). Elokuvavaikutteita sarjakuviin on tihkunut koko niiden yhteisen historian ajan. Toisaalta liike on ollut vilkasta myös toiseen suuntaan: sarjakuvahahmot ovat vaeltaneet erilaisiin oheistuotteisiin Ally Sloperista lähtien, ja jo ensimmäiset supersankarit kaapattiin niin radioon kuin televisioonkin sellaisella innolla, että sarjakuvahistorioitsija Roger Sabin (2010, 18, 61) kutsuu sitä suoranaiseksi "hyväksikäytöksi".

2000-luvulla tapahtuneet mediakentän muutokset ovat kiihdyttäneet liikettä entisestään. Henry Jenkinsin (2006, 2–3) mukaan mediakonvergenssiin, eli viestimien yhä tiiviimpään yhteensulautumiseen, vaikuttaa ainakin kolme rinnakkaista kehityskulkua: 1) *tuotannollinen konvergenssi* eli eri alojen ja yritysten välinen yhteistyö ja fuusioituminen; 2) *transmediaalisuus* eli yhtenäisen tarinamaailman rakentaminen monialustaisesti, useassa eri viestimessä ja 3) *interaktiivisuus* eli yleisön aktiivinen osallistuminen ja valikoiva viestimestä toiseen navigoiminen. Tarkastelen seuraavaksi, kuinka nämä kolme tekijää – tuotannollinen konvergenssi, transmediaalinen tarinankerronta ja yleisön huomiointi – ovat ilmenneet sarjakuvateollisuudessa. Teknologista kehitystä on myös pidetty konvergenssin avaintekijänä, mutta sen roolina on pikemminkin ollut mahdollistaa muut kehityskulut; mediasisällöt eivät muutu mitenkään automaattisesti digitaalistumisen myötä, vaan vasta siihen liittyvien kulttuuristen, taloudellisten ja sosiaalisten muutosten myötä (Jenkins 2006; Herkman 2005, 71–73). Näin ollen pidän esimerkiksi sarjakuvien digitaalista levitystä ja muuta viihdeteknologian kehitystä pelkkinä taustatekijöinä, jotka tukevat sarjakuvahah-

mojen uudenlaista leviämistä ja siitä seuraavaa evoluutiota mutta eivät itsessään muuta hahmojen ominaisuuksia.

Kaiken kaikkiaan puhe uudesta, uljaasta mediamaailmasta muistuttaa paljon Pinen ja Gilmoren visiota elämysten maailmasta: kaikkiin aisteihin ristiriidattomasti vetoava, osallistava, viihdyttävä, opettavainen, esteettinen ja eskapistinen elämys, jollaista Pine ja Gilmore (2011, esim. 45–47) opastavat yrittäjiä luomaan, on epäilemättä myös suurten mediayhtiöiden tavoitteena. Ei siis ihme, että yksi Pinen ja Gilmoren (2011, 70) suosikkiesimerkeistä on konvergentti multimediayhtiö Disney, jonka elämyksellisyys ja mediarajojen rikkominen kulminoituvat erityisesti Disneyland- ja Disney World -huvipuistoissa, "piirroselokuv[issa], joihin yleisö voi itse mennä mukaan".

Disney on tietenkin kustantanut sarjakuvia, kuten suomalaisten suosikkia *Aku Ankkaa*, jo kauan, mutta kuten mediateollisuuden piirissä etenevän tuotannollisen konvergenssin henkeen kuuluu, yhtiö osti vuonna 2009 myös Marvel Comicsin, toisen Yhdysvaltojen sarjakuvakenttää pitkään hallinneista jättikustantamoista (Goldman 2009). Toinen kahdesta suuresta, DC Comics, on puolestaan kuulunut Time Warner yhtiölle jo 1960-luvulta lähtien (Duncan & Smith 2009, 90). Marvel ja DC Comics jakavat noin 70 % Yhdysvaltojen sarjakuvamyynnistä, mikä tarkoittaa, että leijonanosa sikäläisestä sarjakuvatuotannosta on nykyään sidoksissa ylikansallisiin multimediayhtiöihin (Diamond Comics 2015; Miettinen 2013).

Tällainen *horisontaalinen tuotannon konvergenssi*, eli mediarajat ylittävän sisällöntuotannon keskittyminen tietyille yhtiöille, on suhteellisen yleistä (Herkman 2005, 76) ja näkyy muun muassa sarjakuvista ponnistavien supersankarihahmojen levittäytymisenä eri viestimiin ja kulttuureihin. Kun Disney osti Marvel Comicsin, Disneyn toimitusjohtaja Robert Iger myhäilikin hankkineensa "yli 5 000 hahmon aarrearkun" (Goldman 2009). Itse asiassa Marvel Entertainment ja DC Entertainment, jotka edelleen jatkavat supersankaripainotteista julkaisutoimintaansa emoyhtiöidensä alaisuudessa, eivät enää itsekään perusta identiteettiään sarjakuville vaan transmediaalisille hahmobrändeilleen. Marvel ei omilla verkkosi-

vuillaan suinkaan tunnustaudu sarjakuvakustantamoksi vaan "henkilöhahmoille perustuvaksi viihdeyritykseksi" (Marvel 2014). Samantapainen luonnehdinta löytyy myös DC Entertainmentin sivuilta: yhtiö ilmoittaa tehtäväkseen "levittää tarinoita ja henkilöhahmoja halki kaikkien joukkoviestimien" (DC Entertainment 2014). Käänne on sikäli ymmärrettävä, että sarjakuvien myynti on Yhdysvalloissakin enää kymmenyksen 1940-luvun kulta-ajoista, kun taas supersankarilisensseillä tehdyt elokuvat nettoavat parhaillaan miljoonia (Miettinen 2013). Esimerkiksi Marvelin suosituimpia hahmoja hyödyntävään *Avengers*-sarjaan perustuva samanniminen filmatisointi (2012, ohj. Joss Whedon) oli teatteriesitystensä loputtua kaikkien aikojen kolmanneksi tuottoisin elokuva (Hughes 2012).

Avengers-brändi, eli suomalaisittain Kostajat-brändi, onkin erinomainen esimerkki siitä, kuinka tuotannon konvergenssi mahdollistaa, ja usein myös tuottaa, transmediaalista tarinankerrontaa. Se, että suuri osa sarjakuvien tunnetuimmista hahmobrändeistä on Yhdysvalloissa keskittynyt kahdelle suurelle kustannusyhtiölle, on jo vuosikymmenien ajan mahdollistanut *Avengersin* tapaiset yhdistelmäbrändit tai crossover-sarjat, jotka kokoavat omissa nimikkosarjoissaan fanipohjaa keränneet sankarit saman otsikon alle. Kun horisontaalinen tuotannon konvergenssi on laajentunut, eli kun sarjakuvakustantamot ovat siirtyneet yhä suurempien multimediayhtiöiden omistukseen, samat yhdistelmäbrändit on voitu levittää myös sarjakuvien ulkopuolelle. Sen lisäksi, että *Avengers*-elokuvat ehtivät vuonna 2015 jo toiseen osaansa, tarinamaailmaa täydentämään on tehty muun muassa *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013–) ja Agent Carter (2015–) -televisiosarjat, Disney-kanavan piirrosanimaatiosarja *Avengers Assemble* (2013–) sekä *Marvel Avengers: Battle for Earth* (2012) ja *LEGO Marvel's Avengers* (2016) -videopelit. Myös jotkin Kostajat-ryhmän hahmoista (Iron Man, Captain America, Hulk ja Thor) ovat saaneet useita omia nimikkoelokuvia.

Lähes kaikkien elokuvien ja sarjojen vanavedessä on tietenkin julkaistu runsaasti oheistuotteita tai muistoesineitä (*memorabilia*), joiden avulla kuluttajat voivat pitkittää mediaelämysten tuottamia tunnelmia ja palata niihin (Duncan & Smith 2009, 105–106; Pine &

Gilmore 2011, 85–88). Marvel-sarjakuvien tapaan nämä – ja jopa varsinaisen Avengers-brändin ulkopuoliset Marvel-tuotteet, kuten *Daredevil*- (2015–) ja *Jessica Jones* (2016–) -sarjat – noudattavat yhtenäistä aikajanaa ja viittaavat tavan takaa toisiinsa synnyttääkseen vaikutelman yhtenäisestä Marvel-universumista. Myös henkilöhahmot pyritään pitämään ainakin ulkoisilta ominaisuuksiltaan, kuten ääneltään ja ulkonäöltään, mahdollisimman yhtenäisinä tuotteesta toiseen.

Transmediaalisen tarinankerronnan logiikat tuntuvat palaavan jatkuvasti juuri tarinamaailman käsitteeseen, ja moniaistiset ja -alustaiset fiktiiviset tilat näyttäytyvät jonkinmoisina graalinmaljoina myös Jenkinsin sekä Pinen ja Gilmoren esityksissä. Jenkins (2006, 114) toteaa, että yksittäinen tarina ei enää riitä juuri mihinkään: suosittu hahmohan riittää kannattelemaan useaa heikompaakin tarinaa, ja onnistunut tarinamaailma voi sulkea sisäänsä useita hahmoja – siis lukemattomia brändejä ja tarinoita. Pine ja Gilmore (2011) puolestaan ihailevat Disneylandin teemoitettujen aktiviteettien, rooliasuisten työntekijöiden ja brändin mukaisia muistoesineitä kauppaavien liikkeiden potentiaalia kokonaisvaltaisten elämysmaailmojen tuottamisessa. Lieneekin vain ajan kysymys, milloin Disney luo omistamiensa Marvel-supersankarien ympärille teemapuistoja. Sarjakuvahahmoille perustuvat teemapuistot eivät tosin tähänkään asti ole olleet Disneyn yksinoikeus: Japanissa ja Taiwanissa oli vielä 2000-luvulla Pokémon-lisenssiin perustuvat huvipuistot, kun taas Ranskalla on Parc Astérixinsa ja Suomella Muumimaailmansa.

Transmediapuhe herättääkin useita mielenkiintoisia kysymyksiä elämyksellisten tarinamaailmojen ja niiden sisältämien henkilöhahmobrändien suhteesta. Transmediaaliset maailmat ovat epäilemättä se varsinainen elämys, jota mediayhtiöiden on elämystaloudellisessa markkinaympäristössä kaupattava, mutta henkilöhahmot ovat se kiteytynyt naula, jonka varassa mediakonvergenssin viisari liikkuu. Toisin sanoen, kun tarinankerronta hajoaa polveileviksi medialabyrinteiksi, henkilöhahmobrändi on se konkreettinen ja tunnistettava tuote, joka vetää yleisöt yhden viestimen ääreltä toiselle. Onhan

huomattavasti helpompaa brändätä ja tunnistaa yksittäinen hahmo kuin laaja, moniulotteinen maailma, jonka kuva ei mitenkään mahdu mainosjulisteeseen ja jonka ensyklopediseen taustatietoon keskivertokuluttaja tuskin viitsii paneutua lainkaan (maailmojen ensyklopedisesta potentiaalista ks. Jenkins 2006, 97–99).

Mediakonvergenssin kolmannella akselilla, yleisön osallistamisessa, henkilöhahmon rooli lienee kuitenkin vielä merkittävämpi. Kognitiivisessa kirjallisuuden ja median tutkimuksessa on jo useaan kertaan todistettu, että maalaisjärkevä oletus henkilöhahmoista eräänlaisina tarinamaailmojen käyttöliittyminä pitää paikkansa: kun koemme transmediaalisia tarinamaailmoja, näkökulmamme päällekkäistyy hahmojen kuvitteellisten näkökulmien kanssa (Smith 1995; Vermeule 2010). Tähän liittyvää kansanpsykologista ajatusta siitä, että yleisön on houkuttelevampaa kiinnittyä omia piirteitään ja arvomaailmaansa vastaavan hahmon näkökulmaan, ei vielä ole pystytty todistamaan, mutta se ei ole estänyt mediayhtiöitä räätälöimästä hahmojaan kohdeyleisöjen oletettujen makujen mukaisiksi.

Massakustomointi (*mass customization*) on elämystalouden käytäntö, jossa asiakkaiden toiveet pyritään täyttämään mahdollisimman tarkasti tuotteen modulaarisen muuntelun avulla (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 112–113). Erilaisten vaihtoehtoisten kansien painaminen samalle sarjakuvalehdelle (edellä mainittu *variant covers* -ilmiö) on kenties oire tällaisesta ajattelumallista. Siinähän tiettyä osaa (kantta) tuotteesta (sarjakuvalehdestä) muunnellaan vastaamaan tietyn kohdeyleisön (sarjakuvakeräilijöiden) tiettyyn tarpeeseen (osallistua harvinaisten sarjakuvalehtien keräilyyn). Käytäntö perustui kuitenkin vähintään yhtä paljon sarjakuvan tuottajien ja levittäjien kuin yleisöjen tarpeisiin, eikä se luultavasti lisännyt sarjakuvilla keinottelun elämyksellisyyttä merkittävästi. Näin ollen sarjakuvahahmot ovat huomattavasti osuvampi esimerkki siitä, kuinka massakustomoinnin ideaa on sovellettu sarjakuvateollisuudessa.

Korkeakulttuurin portinvartijoiden ja mediakriitikkojen suureksi närkästykseksi lähes kaikki supersankarisarjakuvat toistavat samaa kaavaa: nimihenkilö saa trauman, joka antaa hänelle motiivin,

ja mahdollisesti myös kyvyn, taistella pahoina tai väärinä näyttäytyviä tahoja tai asioita vastaan (vrt. esim. Coogan 2009). Mikäli haluaa lukea supersankaritarinan – tarinan jotakin itseään suurempaa vastaan taistelevasta poikkeusyksilöstä – on siis oikeastaan yhdentekevää, mitä supersankarigenreen kuuluvaa lehteä ostaa ja lukee. Taiteilijabränditkään eivät välttämättä auta ostajien ohjaamisessa, sillä useimpien sankareiden piirtäjät ja kirjoittajat ovat vaihtuneet useaan otteeseen. Tietyn taiteilijan kätten jäljen seuraamista saattaa lisäksi vaikeuttaa edellä esitelty liukuhihnaperiaate ja transmediaalistuminen. Se, että Marvel ja DC tavoittavat suurimman osan yleisöstään nykyään juuri audiovisuaalisen median kautta, tarkoittaa, ettei asiakkaiden enemmistö ole lojaali edes sarjakuvalle ilmaisumuotona. Tällöin ainoaksi erottautumisen keinoksi – brändiksi, joka saa tietyn lukijan ostamaan juuri tietyn lehden tai DVD:n – näyttää jäävän henkilöhahmo.

Hahmopiirteiden optimaalisen uudelleenyhdistelyn merkitys on tunnistettu myös Japanin markkinoilla. Mangateoreetikko Hiroki Azuma väittää, että postmodernismin romautettua suuret narratiivit sarjakuvien keskiöön ovat tulleet *chara-moe*-elementit, visuaaliset tai tarinankerronnalliset yksityiskohdat, jotka herättävät faneissa kiintymystä, eli *moe*-tunnetta hahmoja kohtaan (2001, 26–53; Galbraith 2014, 5–7). Esimerkkejä tällaisista suosituista piirteistä voisivat olla mangahahmojen suunnittelussa usein ilman erityistä syytä toistuvat kissankorvat (*nekomimi*), salaperäinen supervoima tai orpous. Azuma katsookin, että sarjakuvien ja muun populaarikulttuurin tuottaminen ja kuluttaminen on itse asiassa tällaisten kuluttajia syystä tai toisesta kiinnostavien, hahmoihin ankkuroituvien sarjakuvaelementtien loputonta alkemiaa. Koska kulutuksen kohteena on näin viime kädessä eräänlainen yksityiskohtien ja elementtien paradigma, Azuma (2001, 53–55) kutsuu ilmiötä tietopankkikuluttamiseksi (*database consumption*). Taloustieteellisemmin katsottuna näistä tietopankeista poimiutuvia *moe*-elementtejä voisi pitää moduuleina, joiden muuntelu ja yhdistely genrekohtaisten tyyppihahmojen puitteissa tuottavat juuri (oletetun) yleisön (oletetun) maun mukaisia, massakustomoituja hahmoja. Mikä paras-

ta, koska *moe*-tunne kohdistuu juuri fiktiivisiin hahmoihin tai, Azuman teorian tapauksessa, hahmoelementteihin eikä tiettyyn materiaaliseen tuotteeseen, kuluttajat saattavat ostaa erilaisia moe-tunteeseensa vastaavia, lisensoituja "muistoesineitä" teoriassa rajattomasti. (Galbraith 2014, 7.)

Millaiset hahmopiirteet länsimaisia lukijoita sitten kiinnostavat? Supersankareissa muuntelun kohteiksi tuntuvat joutuvan pääasiassa hahmon sukupuoli, moraalikäsitys sekä taustatarinan ja siviilipersoonan yksityiskohdat. Universumien jatkuvuusperiaatteet asettavat erityisesti viimeksi mainittujen piirteiden muuntelulle tiettyjä rajoitteita, mutta mikäli suositun hahmon taustan peukaloimiselle näyttää löytyvän riittäviä taloudellisia paineita, jokin fantastinen tai supersankarin kaksoisidentiteettiin liittyvä tarinallinen tekosyy yleensä löytyy. Niin sanotuilla *retconeilla* (*retroactive continuity*) onkin kaupallisissa sarjakuvissa pitkät perinteet (ks. esim. Miettinen 2012, 38). Hahmojen moraalimuutoksissa sen sijaan on havaittu laajempiakin trendejä: kun sarjakuvakauppojen synty auttoi kasvattamaan omistautuneen fani- ja keräilijäkunnan, joka ei luopunut sarjakuvatavoistaan täysi-ikäistyttyäänkään, monia hahmoja alettiin suunnata vahvemmin aikuisille lukijoille, toisin sanoen muokkaamaan synkemmiksi, poliittisemmiksi ja moraalisesti monitahoisemmiksi (Sabin 2010, 159–160).

Sukupuoli taas on noussut viime vuosien kuumimmaksi kiistakapulaksi, kun sarjakuvien naislukijat ovat kiinnittäneet yhä enemmän ja yhä äänekkäämmin huomiota sarjakuvateollisuuden miesvaltaisuuteen sekä naissupersankareiden seksistiseen kuvaukseen. Suurennuslasin alle ovat joutuneet niin naishahmojen epärealistinen anatomia ja epäkäytännöllinen vaatetus (ks. esim. Lepore 2015; Ami Angelwings 2011–), naishahmoihin perustuvien fanituotteiden vähyys (ks. esim. White 2015) kuin pinup-henkiset, heteroseksuaalisen miehen katseelle alisteiset visuaaliset troopitkin (ks. esim. Scott 2015; Gingerhaze 2012–). Suzanne Scott (2015, 155) kritisoi myös sitä, että useimmat naissupersankarit ovat oikeastaan pikemmin miessupersankareista *franchise*-periaatteella kehitettyjä valmiin brändin jatkeita kuin omia, itsenäisiä brändejään. Paitsi että

kritiikki on johtanut seksistisinä pidettyjen asujen ja lehtien kansien vaihtamiseen (Scott 2015, 159; Ching 2015), Marvel on tasapainottanut tarjontaansa siirtämällä esimerkiksi Thorin vasaran naishahmon käsiin naisistaen näin yhden vanhimmista ja tunnetuimmista hahmobrändeistään.

Kuten Ally Sloper aikoinaan, monet edelleen suosituista hahmoista ovatkin syntyneet aikansa tuotteiksi. Teräsmiehen välittömän jättisuosion saattaa selittää esimerkiksi se, kuinka hyvin hahmo palveli kohdemarkkinoidensa eli esiteini-ikäisten poikien voimafantasioita: perinteisesti maskuliininen mutta trikoisiin puettu supersankari on varsin yleisesti hyväksytty mutta samalla samastuttavan infantiili miehen malli (Manninen 1995, 15, 75). 1940-luvulla, kun supersankarisarjakuvien niin sanottu kulta-aika oli huipussaan ja kylmä sota alkoi, tuon voimafantasian voi katsoa yleistyneen heijastelemaan koko Yhdysvaltojen unelmaa oikeamielisestä maailmanvaltiudesta (Sabin 2010, 61). Vastaavasti toinen maailmansota synnytti Kapteeni Amerikan, jonka tunnusvärit ovat samat kuin Yhdysvaltojenkin ja joka lyö Hitlerin kanveesiin ensimmäisen nimikkonumeronsa kuuluisassa kansikuvassa (Sabin 2010, 62–63). Batman puolestaan on nähty vastauksena 1800-luvun lopulla syntyneelle goottilaiselle kaupunkikauhulle, jossa kaupungistumisen aiheuttamat pelot ruumiillistetaan pimeillä kujilla vaaniviin väkivaltaisiin rikollisiin (British Library 2014).

Sarjakuvamarkkinoiden muuttuminen jatkuvasti globaalimmiksi ja muutenkin kirjavammiksi kohdistaa hahmoihin yhä uusia muuttumispaineita. Mediakonvergenssi ja sarjakuvien sähköiset jakelupalvelut ovat väistämättä tavoittaneet uusia yleisöjä, mistä naisten aiempaa laajempi (tai ainakin aiempaa julkisempi) kiinnostus sarjakuviin ja supersankarituotteisiin lienee yksi esimerkki (McNally 2015). Kun sarjakuvan lukija on yhä harvemmin stereotyyppinen yhdysvaltalainen teinipoika, sarjakuvateollisuudella ei enää ole varaa tarjota supersankareiksi pelkkiä stereotyyppisiä valkoisia alfauroksia. Niinpä supersankareiden ja -sankarittarien uuden sukupolven *pantheoniin* on piirretty niin muslimeja kuin homoseksuaalejakin, vaikka kumpaakin ihmisryhmää on kauan pi-

detty periamerikkalaisten ja -maskuliinisten supersankaritrooppien vastaisina (Miettinen 2013, 75–135). Esimerkiksi *X-menin* nykyiseen hahmogalleriaan kuuluu perinteiseen hijabiin pukeutuva sankaritar Dust ja *Astonishing X-menissä* (#51) nähtiin vuonna 2012 kahden miespuolisen hahmon häät. Vielä huomattavampia esimerkkejä ovat pakistanilaissyntyinen Kamala Kahn uutena Miss Marvelina ja avoimesti homoseksuaali Kate Kane uutena Batwomanina, sillä molemmat seikkailevat omissa, hyvin menestyvissä nimikkojulkaisuissaan.

Kuten feministisen mediakritiikin seurauksena tehdyt suunnanmuutokset osoittavat, sarjakuvateollisuus ei massakustomoi hahmoja pelkkien arvaustensa perusteella, vaan lukijoilla on aktiivinen rooli siinä, millaisiksi hahmot vuosikymmenten saatossa muodostuvat. Ennen nykyisiä, konvergentteja mediakeskustelun mahdollisuuksia perinteiset vaikuttamisen keinot rajoittuivat oman ostokäyttäytymisen säätelyyn ja sarjakuvalehtien kirjepalsoihin (*letter columns*) (McCloud 2000, 115–116). Kirjepalstoilla fanit ovat muun muassa neuvoneet uusia tekijöitä kohtelemaan suosikkihahmoja "oikein" sekä reagoineet hyvinkin tunteikkaasti hahmojen kuolemiin ja muihin hahmosuhteiden mullistuksiin (Pustz 1999, 170–171). Mahdollisuudet suoraan vaikuttamiseen ovat olleet harvinaisempia, mutta eivät sentään tavattomia: kun DC Comicsin toimittajat totesivat olevansa tyytymättömiä vuoden 1988 Robinin, Jason Toddin ylimieliseen persoonaan, he järjestivät kaksipäiväisen puhelinäänestyksen, jossa lukijat saivat päättää, päästettäisiinkö hahmo päiviltä vai ei. Äänestys kääntyi niukalti Toddia vastaan, joten sarjaan marssitettiin uusi hahmo, Tim Drake, jonka kevyemmän, lapsenomaisemman Robinin katsottiin sopivan paremmin Batmanin vastinpariksi. (Daniels 2004, 200–201.) Nykypäivänä kaanonin muutoksiin tyytymättömille on kuitenkin tarjolla lähes yhtä transmediaalinen, moniäänisempi vaihtoehto: erityisesti internetiin ja sarjakuvatapaamisiin pesiytynyt fanikulttuuri.

Fanien ja hahmojen transformaatiokarnevaalit

Mediakonvergenssista ja massakustomointiponnisteluista huolimatta suuret tuotantokoneistot laahaavat aina yleisöjen tarpeiden perässä, ja siksi innokkaimmat rakentavat "parempaa odotellessa omia merkityssisältöjään" (Hirsjärvi 2009, 110). Toisin sanoen, kun elämystuote lopulta koostetaan koetuksi elämykseksi yleisön syvissä riveissä ja aivopoimuissa, virallisten tuottajien ylhäältä saneleman kaanonin rinnalle versoo moniäänisempi ja häilyvämpi *faanon*, fanien omien keskustelujen ja tuotosten muovaama, sosiaalisesti jaettu käsitys fanitetuista tarinamaailmoista ja hahmoista (esim. Hirsjärvi 2009, 113). Tässä alaluvussa pureudun yhä syvemmälle siihen, kuinka mediakonvergenssi osallistaa yleisöä ja hämärtää tuottajien ja vastaanottajien välistä rajaa. Osittain kyse on juuri kaanonin ja faanonin vaikeasta suhteesta, mutta fanikulttuuri on paljon muutakin: erikoistuneita, usein hahmovetoisia fanitoimintoja, identiteettityötä ja, kenties, Pinen ja Gilmoren esittelemää transformaatiotaloutta.

Kulutettavan mediatuotteen voidaan aina ajatella sisältävän sekä kaanonin että faanonin tasot – ainakin potentiaalisesti. Kaikki tuotteen kohtaavat eivät toki osallistu aktiivisesti sitä ympäröivän fanikulttuurin tuottamiseen tai kulutukseen, mutta kuten olen edellä pyrkinyt osoittamaan, sarjakuvateollisuuden ja -kulttuurin ristiaallokot tulevat usein jollain tavalla esiin myös itse elämystuotteen, kuten sarjakuvahahmon, sisällössä. Nämä vaikutukset mielletään konvergenssikulttuurissa usein synergistisiksi, eli tuottajat ja fanit ruokkivat toisiaan. Fanitutkimuksessa sen sijaan korostetaan faniuden asemaa vastarintaisena alakulttuurina. Fanikulttuurissa keskeiseksi katsotaan siis fanituksen kohteen "salametsästäminen", eli leikillinen muokkaaminen ja symbolinen haltuunotto (Jenkins 1992; Manninen 1995; Nikunen 2008; Saarikoski 2008). Mediakonvergenssin luonteeseen taas kuuluu, että nämä laina- ja muokkaussuhteet muuttuvat kaksisuuntaisiksi, eli mediateollisuus alkaa yhä enenevissä määrin kierrättää elementtejä fanien jo kertaalleen

kaappaamasta ja muokkaamasta materiaalista (Jenkins 2006, 135–139).

Sarjakuvamaailman ilmiöistä löytyy jälkiä molemmista kierrätyksen tavoista. Esimerkiksi omakustanteiset underground-sarjakuvat, jotka alun perin syntyivät vastalauseena Comics Code -sensuurin suitsimalle valtavirtasarjakuvalle, ovat antaneet paljon aineksia omaelämäkerralliselle sarjakuvatuotannolle, joka lisää sarjakuvaromaanien myyntiä ja valtavirtaista arvostusta nykypäivänä: undergroundille keskeistä *Raw*-lehteä (1980–1991) toimittanut Art Spiegelman on nykyään sarjakuvamaailman ainoa Pulitzer-voittaja, ja marginaalisena queer-sarjakuvan tekijänä aloittaneen Alison Bechdelin omaelämäkerrallisesta *Fun Home* -teoksesta (2006) on jo adaptoitu suosittu Broadway-musikaali. Näissä tapauksissa lopputuotteet – sarjakuva-Pulitzer ja -musikaali – ovat selvästi tulosta virallisen sarjakuvan valta- ja alakulttuuristen sekä laajempien korkea- ja popularikulttuuristen virtojen taiteellisesti ja taloudellisesti hedelmällisistä törmäyksistä ja synteeseistä.

Toinen taloudellisesti merkittävä esimerkki vastaavasta synergiasta on se, että fanien ruohonjuuritoiminta luo jatkuvasti uusia markkinoita tekemällä mediatuotteita näkyvämmiksi. Esimerkiksi mangan ja animen rantautuminen länsimaihin 1900-luvun lopussa oli enimmäkseen fanien laittoman käännös- ja levitystyön ansiota (Jenkins 2006, 156–161). Vastaavasti internet-meemit ja -yhteisöt saattavat maksaa tekijänoikeusrikkeidensä tuottamat oletetut tappiot takaisin moninkertaisina luomalla tiettyjen mediatuotteiden ympärille aktiivisia *fandomeja*. Toisaalta tällaisten fanidiskurssien ja -yhteisöjen suosiota saattaa selittää juuri niiden vastarintapositio: vapaus kaupallisia sisällöntuottajia kahlitsevista hierarkioista ja taloudellisista tavoitteista mahdollistaa poikkeavia, vaihtoehtoisia ja parodisia näkökulmia, jotka saattavat houkutella tuotteen pariin uusia, jopa ironisia tai antifaneiksi luokiteltavia yleisöjä (Jenkins 2006 131–169; Manninen 1995; Nikunen 2008, 9–10; Hirsjärvi 2009, 64).

Voidaan olettaa, että osa sarjakuvafaniuden tuottamasta mielihyvästä kumpuaa juuri alakulttuurisen identiteetin mahdollistamas-

ta vapaudesta ja voimaantumisesta, mutta viime kädessä vastakulttuuriset toiminnat ja identiteetit määrittyvät aina sen valtakulttuurin ehdoilla, jota vastakulttuurissa väännellään (Manninen 1995, 61–75). Fanit voivat kyllä positioida itsensä monin eri tavoin – Hirsjärven (2009, 290–292) mukaan yksilöllisessä mediafaniudessa risteävät eri ajanhetkinä eri kuluttamisen ja tuottamisen muodot ja asteet yliolkaisesta seuraamisesta aina aktivismiin ja pientuottamiseen – mutta faniuden kohteiden viralliset omistajat, tässä tapauksessa sarjakuvien julkaisijat, määrittelevät sen tilan, josta nämä positiot etsitään. Jopa itse fanitoiminta on sarjakuvien piirissä alkanut julkaisijoiden aloitteesta ja kaupallisilla foorumeilla. Sarjakuvalehtien kirjepalstat, joiden kautta 1900-luvun puolivälin fanit pääasiassa tavoittivat toisensa, olivat lehtien julkaisijoiden toimittamia, eikä periaatteista, joilla julkaistuja kirjeitä mahdollisesti on valikoitu tai muokattu, ole virallista tietoa (Pustz 1999, 177). Ensimmäiset, erityisesti lapsille suunnatut faniklubit, kuten Merry Marvel Marching Society, olivat nekin "virallisia", ja tietysti maksullisia. Tee-se-itse-henkinen julkaisutoiminta (esim. *fanzinet*) ja tapahtumakulttuuri (esim. *conit*) omaksuttiin scifi-kirjallisuuden faniyhteisöiltä vasta hieman myöhemmin, 1960-luvun aikana. (Duncan & Smith 2009, 177–183.)

Uudemmissa, yleisölähtöisemmissä fanitoimintamuodoissa sarjakuvakulttuurin ja -teollisuuden monitahoinen vuorovaikutus on esillä monin tavoin, ja kansainvälisesti näkyvin sarjakuvatoimijoiden yhteen tulemisen muoto lienevät *sarjakuvaconit* (*comic book convention*). *Coneja* järjestävät monenlaiset tahot ammattimaisista tapahtumanjärjestäjistä faniyhdistyksiin, ja eri intressit tuottavat hyvinkin erilaisia ohjelmakarttoja. Esimerkiksi ympäri Brittein saaria ja Ruotsia järjestettävissä MCM Expoissa ohjelma rajoittuu lähinnä sarjakuvalisensseillä tehtyjen fanituotteiden myymiseen. Toisaalta kaupallisimmissakin coneissa on tyypillisesti varattu tilaa fanien omalle luovuudelle: omia sarjakuviaan tai erilaisia kotitekoisia fanituotteita kaupustelevat indie-tekijät voivat varata itselleen myyntipöytiä (*artists' alley*), ja erilaiset fanien taideteoksia ja rooliasuja esittelevät näyttelyt ja kilpailut ovat suosittuja. Tokiossa jär-

jestettävässä Comiketissa faniuden ja kaupallisuuden suhde on erityisen yhteen kietoutunutta, sillä tapahtumassa on kyse yksinomaan fanien oman (fani)sarjakuvatuotannon (eli *dōjinshien*) kaupittelemisesta (Thompson 2007, 82–83). Suomessa kaikki conitoiminta on leimallisesti fanien itsensä järjestämää, voittoon tähtäämätöntä, puheohjelmaan painottuvaa ja eri populaarikulttuurin genrejä sekoittavaa. Erityisesti sarjakuvaan keskittyviä suomalaisia tapahtumia voisi kuvailla enemmän kaupunkifestivaaleiksi, mutta sarjakuvafanit ja -ohjelma toivotetaan tervetulleiksi myös kotimaisiin anime- ja scifi-coneihin. Tyypillisesti conit siis saavat sekä messujen että fanitapaamisten piirteitä. Joihinkin, esimerkiksi San Diegon maailmankuuluun Comic-Coniin, kuuluu vuosittain myös akateeminen osuus, Comics Arts Conference.

Kuva 2: MCM London Comic Con järjestetään nykyään kahdesti vuodessa. Vuonna 2014 kävijämäärä ylitti ensimmäistä kertaa 100 000 henkeä. Kuva: Essi Varis.

Paitsi tekijöiden ja yleisön myös eri yhtiöiden, kulttuurien ja viestimien väliset rajat häilyvät sarjakuvaconeissa. Koska ne harvemmin ovat yksittäisten sarjakuvakustantamojen järjestämiä, samasta tapahtumasta voi tavallisesti ostaa niin indie-tuotteita, uusimpia supersankaritarinoita, *Tintti*-albumeita, mangapokkareita kuin jo lopetettujen sarjojen antiikkisia irtonumeroitakin. Vastaavasti fanituotetarjonta ulottuu yleensä mangahahmoja esittävistä pehmoleluista supersankarifiguureihin, ja innokkaimmat fanit ovat pukeutuneet suosikkisupersankareikseen, japanilaisen pop-kulttuurin ikoneiksi tai jopa videopelihahmoiksi. Conien elämyksellisessä maailmassa virallisten tuotteiden ostaminen sekä kotikutoiset, tekijänoikeuksien vastaiset luomukset lyövät kättä ja kaikki hahmot ja maailmat eri viestimistä sulautetaan osaksi samaa harrastuskulttuuria ja kollektiivista fantasiaa. Ne ovat siis eräänlainen mediakonverginssin ruumiillistuma, joiden kautta fanit voivat osallistua erilaisiin sisällön tuottamisen rajankäynteihin esittelemällä ja kauppaamalla omia luomuksiaan, valitsemalla ja ostamalla laajasta tarjonnasta sekä tapaamalla niin sarjakuvateollisuuden kuin -kulttuurinkin eri toimijoita. Conit lisäävät sarjakuvaharrastuksen elämyksellisyyttä myös antamalla sarjakuvatarinoiden kuluttamiselle määrätyn fyysisen ja sosiaalisen, teemoitetun tilan (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 63–64). Ainakin osittain samoja funktioita voivat tosin saada myös sarjakuvien erikoisliikkeet, joissa myyjät ovat tavallisesti vähintään yhtä syvällä samassa faanonissa kuin kuluttajatkin, ja joiden valikoimaan usein kuuluu sarjakuvien ohella muutakin mediaa, esimerkiksi genrekirjallisuutta ja roolipelejä (Swafford 2011). Näitä populaarikulttuurin konvergenssisolmuja on hiljan alettu kutsua mediassa, pikemminkin neutraaliin kuin halventavaan sävyyn, *nörttikulttuuriksi* (*geek culture*) (ks. esim. McNally 2015).

Sarjakuvaconeissakin leikitellään hahmoilla erityisesti teemapukeutumisen ja lisenssituotteiden kautta, mutta monet muut sarjakuvakulttuurin fanitoiminnot keskittyvät tuottamaan uusia tulkintoja ja käyttötarkoituksia nimenomaan henkilöhahmoille. Esimerkiksi fanifiktiossa ja fanisarjakuvissa tutut hahmot asetetaan uusiin juonirakenteisiin, maailmoihin tai genreihin. Varsin suosittua on

myös niin sanottu *crossover*-fiktio, jossa eri tekijöiden, sarjojen ja mediumien hahmoja törmäytetään toisiinsa sarjakuvamaailmasta tuttujen crossover-sarjojen tapaan. Erityisesti coneissa harrastettu *costume play* eli *cosplay* puolestaan on erilaisiksi hahmoiksi pukeutumista. Cosplay-kilpailuihin valmistelluissa lavaesityksissä asiaan kuuluu visuaalisen jäljittelyn ohella myös hahmon persoonaan eläytyminen tai ainakin sen ilmentäminen (Suomen käsityön museo 2015). Lisäksi suosikkihahmot vaikuttaisivat olevan tärkeä – ellei jopa tärkein – fanituotteiden keräilyä ohjaava tekijä: yli puolet Brownin (2011, 284, 288) haastattelemista lisenssipaitojen ostajista keskittyi hankkimaan tiettyjä hahmoja esittäviä paitoja siksi, että he pitivät näitä hahmoja idoleinaan tai kokivat niiden arvomaailmat itselleen läheisiksi.

Hahmojen rooli fanikulttuurissa ei kuitenkaan ole yksiselitteinen. Vaikka nykyaikainen käsitys faniudesta on versonut teatterimatineoihin ja vanhaan Hollywoodiin kontekstualisoituvasta henkilönpalvonnasta, fanitutkimus on pitänyt varsinaisena tutkimuskenttänään faniuden subjekteja, ei sen objekteja. Toisin sanoen fanien suhteita toisiinsa ja ihailunsa kohteisiin pidetään keskeisempinä fani-ilmiöiden syntymiseen vaikuttavina tekijöinä kuin fanitettujen tuotteiden tai henkilöiden ominaisuuksia. (Hirsjärvi 2009 76–80, 97–98.) Myös niin sanotun *fani-identiteetin* katsotaan määrittyvän lähinnä sosiaalisesti: fani assosioi itsensä samaan ryhmään muiden samoista asioista kiinnostuneiden kanssa ja erottautuu kategorisesti tämän ryhmän ulkopuolisista, faniuden kohdetta ymmärtämättömistä henkilöistä ja yhteisöistä (Brown 2011, 285; Swafford 2011; Manninen 1995 61–64; Nikunen 2009).

Silloin kun fanituksen kohteen huomataan vaikuttavan fandomin sosiaalisiin suhteisiin, tällaiseksi kohteeksi hahmottuu yleensä laajempi, jaettu estetiikka, maku tai genre, joka järjestelee bourdieulaista symbolista ja kulttuurista pääomaa uudella tavalla (Hirsjärvi 2009; Manninen 1995). Fiktiiviset hahmot redusoituvat tällaisten estetiikkojen pikkuruisiksi rakenneosiksi. Hirsjärvi (2009, 99) toteaa, että fanitettu tähti voi yhtä hyvin olla fiktiivinen hahmo kuin julkisuuden henkilö – ovathan näidenkin imagot usein keino-

Kuva 3: Viestinrajat ylittävää hahmovalikoimaa New Yorkin Comic Conissa vuonna 2010. Kuva: Essi Varis.

tekoisia – mutta väittää, Richard Dyerin tähtitutkimukseen vedoten, että hahmot ovat olemassa ja kiinnostavia vain siksi, että ne ovat osa laajempaa tekstiä. Edellä esiteltyjen sarjakuvamarkkinoinnin keinojen ja fanitoimintojen valossa väite on ongelmallinen: mikäli yleisöjen kiinnostus suuntautuisi ensisijaisesti teksteihin ja genre-estetiikkoihin eikä henkilöhahmoihin, miksi kukaan kiinnostuisi transmedia, spin-off- ja oheistuotteista, saati fanifiktiosta, -taiteesta ja -videoista, joissa hahmot on irrotettu alkuperäisistä emoteksteistään ja asetettu uusien tarinoiden vetureiksi? Myös japanilainen diskurssi, jonka mukaan moe-tunne suuntautuu niin voimakkaasti juuri hahmoihin, että ne saatetaan jopa julistaa omaksi puolisoksi (Galbraith 2014, 7–9) kielii, että hahmot eivät ole pelkästään tekstien, vaan myös fanisuhteiden ja -affektien funktioita.

Kaiken kaikkiaan hahmojen roolin voi nähdä melko samankaltaisena fanikulttuurissa kuin sarjakuvateollisuudessa ja transmediakerronnassakin: koska niiden muoto on rajatumpi ja konkreettisempi kuin kokonaisten tekstien tai maailmojen, niitä voi pitää risteävien juonien, arvojen, estetiikkojen ja keskustelujen kiteytyminä – tai, kenties oikeammin, ruumiillistumina. Näin ne toimivat eräänlaisina merkkeinä ja heuristiikkoina (Vermeule 2010; Hirsjärvi 2009, 102) useille sellaisille asioille ja ideologioille, joista kaanonin ja faanonin yhteentörmäyksissä neuvotellaan – sukupuoli ja rotu ovat vain ilmeisimpiä esimerkkejä. Tämä ei tietenkään tarkoita, että hahmojen merkitykset olisivat sen vakioisempia kuin muidenkaan tekstielementtien; niitä arvioidaan jatkuvasti uudelleen sekä itseä, tarinamaailmaa että laajempaa kulttuuria vasten peilaten. Ne ovat siis eräänlaisia viehättävän visuaalisessa ja ihmisen muotoisessa pakkauksessa tulevia "palimpsestisia heijastuspintoja" (Hirsjärvi 2009, 102), joiden kautta sarjakuvakerronnan, -teollisuuden ja -kulttuurin diskursseihin orientoidutaan. Ne ovat merkitykseltään huokoisia kiintopisteitä muuttuvien positioiden virrassa.

Ei siis näytä kaukaa haetulta olettaa, etteivätkö fiktiiviset, fanituksen kohteiksi otetut hahmotkin jollain tavoin vaikuttaisi siihen identiteettityöhön, jota fanitoimintoihin on liitetty (Hirsjärvi 2009, 19, 79–80). Deidre Lynchin mukaan henkilöhahmojen lukemises-

ta tuli eräänlainen itsetuntemuksen areena jo 1700-luvun lopussa eli juuri silloin, kun massoille markkinoitava painokulttuuri syntyi. Kun hahmoista näin tuli koko kansan omaisuutta, itseään sivistyneinä pitävien täytyi kaapata hahmot itselleen lukemalla niitä "taitavammin" ja ymmärtämällä niitä "syvällisemmin", eli ottamalla ne samastumiskohteiksi ja eräänlaisiksi identiteettityökaluiksi. (Lynch 1998, 123–163.) Kun tällainen henkilökohtainen tulkinta- ja projisointisuhde konkretisoituu oheistuotteiden kulutuksessa tai erilaisissa fanitoiminnoissa, se muuttuu myös julkiseksi (Brown 2011; Manninen 1995, 65), mikä saattaa edelleen vaikuttaa sosiaalisen fani-identiteetin ja muiden sosiaalisten suhteiden muodostumiseen.

Vaikka samastuminen on sotkuinen ja liian vähän tutkittu käsite käytettäväksi erityisen tieteellisessä mielessä (Smith 1995), voidaan siis spekuloida, että fanit samastuvat jossain määrin paitsi toisiinsa myös kuluttamiinsa hahmoihin. Ainakin muutamissa tutkimuksissa (Saarikoski 2008; Brown 2011) faniuden kohteiden ominaisuuksien tunnistamisen itsessä tai haluamisen itselle on huomattu motivoivan fanikäytänteitä ja ryhmäytymistä. Vastaavasti sarjakuvamarkkinoinnin rivien välistä, esimerkiksi massakustomoinnista, on ajoittain ollut tulkittavissa pyrkimystä fiktiivisten idoleiden tuottamiseen. Erityisesti Comics Code -oikeudenkäynnit 1950-luvun Yhdysvalloissa pakottivat niin kustantajat kuin kuluttajatkin miettimään, millainen vaikutus sarjakuvahahmoilla on ja pitäisi olla nuoriin lukijoihin (ks. esim. Manninen 1995, 16; Sabin 2010; Wertham 2009). Keskustelu oli kuitenkin siinä mielessä naiivia, että mikään elämystaloudellinen tuote ei voi sanella kuluttajilleen, mitä heidän tulisi ihailla tai olla. Niin mediakonvergenssin, faniuden kuin samastumisenkin tutkijat ovat Pinen ja Gilmoren kanssa yksimielisiä siitä, että varsinainen, vaikuttava elämys syntyy vasta monitahoisen, tietoisen vastaanottoprosessin kautta (ks. esim. Hirsjärvi 2009, 49, 54; Jenkins 2006; Saarikoski 2008, 88; Smith 1995, 40–54).

Kuten muunkin median, sarjakuvan aktiiviseen vastaanottamiseen liittyy siis kanonisten, fanonisten ja henkilökohtaisten intres-

sien yhteensovittelu, joka kääntyy usein erilaisiksi "vastakarvaan lukemisen" tavoiksi (Hirsjärvi 2009, 49, 54). Toisin sanoen hahmosuhteita ei aina motivoi puhdas ihailu tai *moe*, vaan tekstuaalinen salametsästys voi yhtä hyvin olla kumouksellista tai parodista, samaan aikaan ymmärtävää ja kritisoivaa kierrättämistä (Manninen 1995, 66–67). Tällaiset strategiat, joiden avulla yhtäältä tunnustaudutaan parodioidun tuotteen kuluttajiksi, mutta toisaalta sanoudutaan irti sen arvoasetelmista, ovat erityisen yleisiä tietyissä fanikäytänteissä, kuten internetin meemeissä ja fanivideoissa (Jenkins 2006 139–166) – sekä sarjakuvassa. Mannisen (1995, 84) empiirinen tutkimus lasten piirtämistä sarjakuvista osoittaa, että parodia on jopa alaikäisille faneille hyvin yleinen tapa ymmärtää sarjakuvien maailmaa ja osoittaa suhtautumista sen konventioihin.

Paljastavaa on sekin, että nörttikulttuurissa viime vuosina varsin rumiakin muotoja saanut sukupuolikeskustelu (ks. ed.) on sarjakuvan piirissä purkautunut erityisesti parodiana. Kenties keskeisin esimerkki tästä on "Hawkeye Initiative", fanitaidemeemi, jonka tarkoituksena on piirtää seksistisinä pidetyt sarjakuvakannet ja -ruudut uudelleen siten, että pinup-asentoon taivutetun, vähäpukeisen naishahmon tilalle on vaihdettu yhtä väännelty ja yhtä niukasti verhottu miespuolinen supersankari – tavallisesti Kostajat-ryhmän Hawkeye (Gingerhaze 2012–, Scott 2015). Tulokset ovat poikkeuksetta koomisia ja alleviivaavat sitä, että sarjakuvafanit eivät hyväksy kritiikittömästi niitä ihanteita ja hahmoja, joita sarjakuvateollisuus heille tuottaa. Fanikäytänteet, erityisesti parodiset, tarjoavat mahdollisuuden muokata hahmoja ja laajempiakin tekstikokonaisuuksia omien arvojen, ihanteiden ja halujen mukaisiksi sekä sanoutua näyttävällä tavalla irti ei-toivotuista piirteistä. Virallisten massakustomointikoneistojen hyväksyntää tai mukaan ehtimistä ei tarvitse odotella.

Hahmoihin liitetyistä arvoasetelmista voi kieltäytyä myös muilla tavoin. Esimerkiksi monet cosplay-harrastajat eivät välttämättä valitse, miksi hahmoiksi pukeutuvat, hahmojen persoonan tai arvomaailman mukaan vaan puhtaasti visuaalisista syistä eli sen mukaan, mikä tuntuu esteettisesti kiehtovalta tai olisi kiinnostavaa to-

teuttaa käsityönä. Tällöin myös vastakkaista sukupuolta esittäväksi hahmoksi voi pukeutua ilman erityistä stigmaa (*crossplay*). (Suomen käsityön museo 2015.)

Median aktiivinen muokkaustyö sekä hahmoilla ja identiteeteillä leikittely, johon sarjakuvan kulutus omistautuneimpien fanien kohdalla kärjistyy, muodostavat mielenkiintoisen vertailukohdan elämystalousajattelun huipennukselle, transformaatiotaloudelle. Edes elämykset eivät nimittäin ole turvassa Pinen ja Gilmoren arvonkehityskaavan antagonistilta hyödykkeistymiseltä ja siitä seuraavalta arvonmenetykseltä. Vaikka arkipäiväistymistä vastaan taisteltaisiin esimerkiksi monialustaisuuden ja massakustomoinnin keinoin, Pine ja Gilmore uskovat, että kaupalliset elämykset alkavat lopulta menettää tehoaan. Tällöin markkinoinnin paino on siirrettävä itse elämyksistä niiden asiakkaissa aiheuttamiin pysyviin muutoksiin, transformaatioihin. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 241–245.)

Edellä olemme todenneet, että elämyksellistyvän sarjakuvateollisuuden varsinainen tuote on henkilöhahmo. Transformaatiotaloudessa puolestaan ”asiakas on tuote” (Pine & Gilmore 2011). Loikka edellisestä jälkimmäiseen näyttää ehkä suurelta, mutta juuri fanikulttuurista, jossa pohjimmiltaan on kyse erilaisista transformaatioista, saattaa löytyä vihjeitä siihen, kuinka se voidaan tehdä. Niin sarjakuvista kuin henkilöhahmoistakin on toistaiseksi niin niukalti tutkimusta, että sarjakuvahahmoihin muodostettujen fanisuhteiden väittäminen transformatiivisiksi on vielä villiä spekulaatiota. On kuitenkin selvää, että hahmot itse kokevat fanikulttuurissa monenmoisia muutoksia. Mikäli ne tämän myötä vaikuttavat fanikulttuurin sisäisiin rajanvetoihin tai voidaan ottaa joko identiteettityökaluksi tai arvokeskustelun välineeksi, ei liene kohtuutonta väittää, että lukijan ja henkilöhahmon suhde on monimutkainen ja jossain määrin kaksisuuntainen siinä missä sarjakulttuurin ja -teollisuudenkin suhde. Lasketaan se transformaatiotaloudeksi tai ei, fanikulttuuri on joka tapauksessa eräänlainen elämystalouden päätepiste, sillä varsinaiset elämykset, transformaatioista puhumattakaan, voivat syntyä vasta kulttuurin aktiivisessa vastaanotossa.

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