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## Adapting the Autographic Self

Elisabeth Krieber (Salzburg)

Although differing in formal and thematic aspects, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Phoebe Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* both offer intimate accounts of female adolescence that critically engage with the representation of autobiographical subjectivity. Rather than simply presenting a linear and coherent experiencing self as agent and/or narrator both artists portray their process of identity formation as fragmented and inconsistent and self-reflexively foreground the distinct performativity of their (semi)autobiographical selves.

Gloeckner's diary introduces her protagonist Minnie Goetze in a full page illustration accompanied by her first diary entry. Minnie's diary narrative then continues to alternate between her writing, short comic sequences, doodles and illustrations as she outlines her coming-of-age in San Francisco and first sexual experiences in a secret affair with her mother's boyfriend Monroe. The narrative thus portrays her development across various intersecting modalities and discourses. Similarly, Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* relies on the synergy between text and images to reconstruct her childhood, adolescence and coming-out experiences entwined with the revelation of her father's closeted homosexuality and his tragic death. Bechdel illustrates autobiographical narrative as a self-reflexive, dynamic and relational process. Her memoir is structured in a more regular sequence of individual panels continually accompanied by the author's narrating voice in captions or text inserts.

Notably, both Bechdel's and Gloeckner's works have been adapted for the stage and/or screen. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* has been turned into an Off-Broadway play by Marielle Heller, who starred as protagonist and later wrote and directed an independent film of the same name also based on Gloeckner's book, while *Fun Home* has been transformed into a Tony Award winning musical by Lisa Kron (book and lyrics) and Jeanine Tesori (music).

This article aims to illustrate the unique performativity of autographic subjectivities and, moreover, explores their proliferation across media boundaries. I will first outline Bechdel's and Gloeckner's comic subjectivities as performative constructs before tracing their transition and transformation from page to stage and screen – from performativity to

performance. An examination of the correlation between performativity, gender, the comics medium and autobiography will provide the analytical foundation for examining the individual graphic narratives and representational strategies used for their adaptations.

## Comics and Performativity

By introducing comics as »an art of tension« Charles Hatfield stresses the medium's »radically fragmented and unstable« nature while at the same time distinguishing this quality as its biggest asset (2009, 132). The tension characterizing comics' formal structure invites artistic inquiries into the nature of representation and its multimodal, fragmented format has the potential to engage readers in »a constant self-reflexive demystification of the project of representation« (Chute, 2010, 9). This process often entails a critical examination of the nature of subjectivity and representation as such and relies on the subversive potential inherent in the medium to create its multimodal characters.

To illustrate how Bechdel and Gloeckner construct their autographic subjectivities by relying on the performativity of the medium, the term itself needs some delineation. This article will predominantly refer to the idea of performativity as outlined in Judith Butler's influential theory of gender as social construct. Butler identifies gender identity as performative by arguing that it does not exist as a stable, pre-existing category but is constituted through »a stylized repetition of acts« (2010, 482). She elaborates that this stylized repetition of gender conventions not only constitutes gender identity but already includes the potential for challenging its established norms through »a different sort of repeating [...] the breaking or subversive repetition of style« (2010, 483). Butler traces the subversion of normative gender identities using drag as an example of subversive repetition that results in the parody of ›original‹ gender: »In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imaginative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency« (Butler, 1999, 187). Ole Frahm then draws on Butler's framework and her idea of subversive gender parody to illustrate what he terms the structural parody of comics (Frahm, 146). He argues that the constant repetition of characters and content across sequences of panels and in different modes in comics result in a parody of signs and their referents (Frahm, 144) – claiming that the structural framework of comics builds on subversive repetition. Based on Frahm's theory of comics' self-reflexive repetitive structure, Véronique Sina then declares the medium's inherently performative character:

Auf dem Modus der ›Wiederholung‹ (Frahm 2010, 12) basierend, ist der Comic zudem durch eine performative Grundstruktur geprägt, welche das (produktive) Potenzial der Differenz und Verfehlung in sich birgt. All diese charakteristischen Eigenschaften machen den Comic zu einem performativen Medium, welches sich durch einen gewissen Grad der Fragmentierung, Hybridisierung und demonstrativen Künstlichkeit auszeichnet. (Sina, 30)

Since this article focuses on the adaptation of comics' narrative, Andrea Seier's discussion of the terms performance and performativity in connection with mediality in her study *Remediatisierung. Die Performative Konstitution von Gender und Medien* provides a useful theoretical orientation. Seier refers to Mieke Bal's distinction between performativity as used by Butler – a discursive category, dating back to Austin's speech act theory<sup>1</sup> – and performance as aesthetic category referring to the actual phenomenon of artistic performance (Seier, 10), but argues that an investigation of performativity can be most productive at the interface between those two definitions, when the idea of performative repetition and subversion is directly applied to aesthetic phenomena such as a film, a play or a performance in general (Seier, 63). Her approach thus promotes combining aesthetic and discursive practices in analysis (Seier, 64).<sup>2</sup>

The idea of performativity and performance as separate yet interconnected concepts proves especially productive for investigating the adaptation of graphic narratives, since the transformation of graphic narratives into theatrical and cinematic productions engages with the fluid boundaries between performativity, as outlined by Butler and adapted by Frahm, and actual performance. While the movie, play and musical based on Bechdel's and Gloeckner's work are aesthetic performances in their own right, they still constitute performative re-iterations of their source texts that present differently stylized enactments of their central subjectivities. Following Sina's assessment of comics as inherently performative medium that can be utilized for subversive representational practices, my approach will investigate the adaptability or transformation of comics' unique performativity by examining its manifestation in Gloeckner's and Bechdel's works, and by outlining the techniques used by Heller and Kron/Tesori to create representational analogies for their respective media. Gloeckner's and Bechdel's graphic narratives in particular are suitable for this analysis because they not only capitalize on comics' structural performativity to shape their subjectivities across modes and sequences of panels, they further illustrate the performativity of autographic narration in the process.

### **The Performative Autographic Self**

When Gillian Whitlock coined the term »autographics« for life writing in comics she highlighted the medium as a productive ground for negotiating the representation of subjectivity (Whitlock, 966). Whitlock derives her wording from Leigh Gilmore's feminist interpretive strategy for the study of autobiography who establishes the term »autobio-graphics« to dismiss the then accepted notion that an essential self predates autobiographical writing and rather defines the subject as performative (in a Butlerian sense) and generated in the process of writing: »The autobiographical subject is produced not

by experience but by autobiography» (Gilmore, 25). According to her framework »a text's autobiographics« are located in its inconsistencies and ruptures, in the subsequent foregrounding of the writing process and experimentation with genre conventions that enable readers to perceive the origins of the represented subjectivity as »multiply coded in a range of discourses« (Gilmore, 42).

By adapting and modifying the term to »autographics« Whitlock draws attention to the potential inherent in comics' mediality to construct these multiply coded subject positions (Whitlock, 966). The multimodal and fragmented narrative format and the thus enabled performative structural parody divide the autobiographical subject across words and images as well as panel sequences. Consequently, the subject is not only multiply coded (visually and verbally) but also fragmented and multiplied across the panels. This fragmentation destabilizes the idea of a unified self even further than traditional, monomodal autobiography, since comics produce a variety of different re-iterations of subjectivity from panel to panel in addition to the coding of subjectivity across two modes in the same panel. As Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri argue, comics amplify the »duality« and tension between a »*narrating I* (the self who tells)« and an »*experiencing I* (the self told about)« that has always shaped autobiographical narration (Horstkotte and Pedri, 77). They add that the special case of autographic representation contributes a »further doubling« by not only representing subjectivity »on two temporal layers but also on two modal tracks« (Horstkotte and Pedri, 77). Importantly, Horstkotte and Pedri also speak of performing rather than representing subjectivity in autobiography (Horstkotte and Pedri, 79).

The comic specific interconnection of visual and verbal modes establishes additional discursive layers and presents the artists with more creative opportunities to deliberately foreground the constructed and stylized nature of their multimodal subjectivities and »dramatize the regulatory discourses of subjectivity« (Whitlock and Poletti, xix). Re-creating the subject anew in every panel and shaping it in different modes, as already foregrounded in Whitlock and Poletti's wording, therefore amplifies the performative element of comics autobiography.

Furthermore, Hillary Chute argues that this staging of multiple, fragmented subjectivities across a sequence of panels also presents »a non-overdetermined materiality of the body« which she considers essential for feminist narratives (Chute, 2015, 200). Through providing different iterations of a central subjectivity or character's body from panel to panel, the idea of an original referent or normative gender identity is called into question. As already highlighted by Sina, comics' performativity arises from these sequences of varied repetition since every re-iteration of subjectivities or bodies carries the potential to introduce a subversive element that undermines the pattern (Sina, 30) and thus furthers a critical reflection or deconstruction of (gender) identities and stereotypes. This aspect of

subversive performativity is equally important in the analysis of Bechdel's and Gloeckner's accounts, since both comics portray their performative autographic selves from transgressive female perspectives regarding the expression of sexual desire or non-normative gender performance.

Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* already addresses the deliberate construction of subjectivity and her work's ambivalent status as semi-autobiographical on a paratextual level. In the preface of the revised edition, the author openly acknowledges her protagonist Minnie as a fictional construct. Nevertheless, she also adds that this character is based on her own experiences:

Although I am the source of Minnie, she cannot be me—for the book to have real meaning, she must be all girls, anyone. This is not history or documentary or a confession, and memories will be altered or sacrificed, for factual truth has little significance in the pursuit of emotional truth. It's not my story, it's our story. (Gloeckner, xv)

Gloeckner thus identifies her alter-ego Minnie as fictionalized re-iteration of her teenage self. She announces this construction to focus her readers' attention on the universality of her experiences and to deny the idea of an essential, coherent self as subject of her narrative. Nevertheless, Minnie's visual appearance still very much resembles the author – which is also indicated paratextually in photographs of Gloeckner as a teenager that are included in the back of the revised edition. This deliberate contradiction creates an interesting tension and foregrounds not only the unique possibilities of autographics to complicate the representation of subjectivity, but also the subversive, performative character of Gloeckner's central subjectivity who is multiply coded across words and images.

Moreover, Gloeckner employs a specific form of structural parody throughout her narrative by complementing Minnie's first-person diary entries – partly taken from the author's actual teenage diary and partly recreated and edited by adult Gloeckner (Chute, 2010, 74) – with visual elements ranging from doodles and comics to full-page illustrations of individual characters or scenes. Additionally, Minnie's diary narrative is often resumed in comic sequences. Thus, the full potential of multimodal representation is realized to produce a collage of perspectives in Gloeckner's illustrated diary, which Hillary Chute terms »innovative, genre-crossing narrative« that is also »cross-discursive« (Chute, 2010, 74). While the written diary entries represent Minnie's naïve but uncompromising teenage perspective, the full page illustrations and comic sequence contextualize her narrative from a more reflected vantage point. The author thus creates an interplay between two modes and discourses – between her younger alter-ego's writing and a more critical authorial instance in the form of the added visuals. Hillary Chute even characterizes this interplay as a conversation that features »the ›visual voice‹ in Gloeckner's adult hand enter[ing] the text to dialogue with Minnie's child voice« (Chute, 2010, 83).

MONDAY, MAY 24

I love Monroe to touch me affectionately. Like grabbing my arm when I let him in the door, or patting me on the shoulder when he says good-bye, or if he takes my hand or punches me in the stomach in a friendly way or anything like that because then I know he cares about me.



Fig. 1: An in-text illustration added to Minnie's diary to qualify her statement (Gloeckner, 84).

This dialogue exemplifies a special form of subversive re-iteration that actually re-contextualizes Minnie's narration and introduces another evaluating instance through the visual mode. Gloeckner's visual authorial perspective engages with the diary entries in illustrations and comic sequences. For instance, in the following illustration that is placed right in the middle of a diary entry the subversive visual re-iteration of Minnie's »I love Monroe to touch me affectionately« (Gloeckner, 84) explicitly foregrounds the structural parody through a very unfavorable depiction of Monroe's rather aggressive groping which she seems to mistake for an affectionate touch. This way, Minnie's voice still dominates but Gloeckner's illustration rectifies some of her adolescent naiveté and adds another layer of reflection. In another full-page illustration captioned »He said he didn't like stupid little chicks like me trying to manipulate him...« (Gloeckner, 79) the author visually interprets a scene unfolding between Monroe and Minnie after one of their sexual encounters. Here, the illustration retrospectively underlines Minnie's agency while exposing Monroe's self-consciousness. As opposed to displaying her as victim in this scenario it provides, to use Chute's phrasing, »a mocking counterobjectification, a female gaze at work« (Chute, 2010, 81).

*The Diary of a Teenage Girl* not only complicates autobiographical narrative; Minnie's writing also offers a candid insight into female adolescence in the process. While illustrating her struggles during the abusive relationship Minnie is never portrayed as victim. Instead, the readers experience an unfiltered assessment of her affair and sexual desires:

This is the first time I've been in a position to interact with an adult on a completely serious level. Maybe it's too soon .... I've never even dated before. How am I to interpret his adult codes and bullshit? Of course I'm confused, but I suppose understanding will come in time.... Maybe I should ignore everything. But I like sex. What am I supposed to do, ignore sex? I need sex. I really want to get laid right now- in fact, any time – the desire is insatiable. I don't know if I've made that clear – I really like getting fucked. (Gloeckner 26)

In combination with Gloeckner's creative choices her account challenges socially accepted notions of female adolescence by emphasizing her developing sexuality and agency, which according to Meisha Rosenberg, »authorizes a complex tectonic shift ungrounding patriarchal visual and textual structures that resonates with the history of underground comix and feminist art« (Rosenberg, 396). Protagonist Minnie, multiply coded across words and images, destabilizes the idea of a coherent autobiographical subject and also transgresses the expectations of the stereotypical teenage girl in a coming-of-age narrative.

Similarly, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* self-reflexively deconstructs coherent autobiographical subjectivity; however, as opposed to creating a conversation between two discourses across modes, it densely layers verbal and visual narrative instances to foreground narrating and remembering as simultaneous, fragmented and incoherent process. Bechdel's narrating I is represented as text in caption boxes above or below and sometimes inserted in the panels, while her younger experiencing Is are visualized as characters. The fact that the text boxes are



*He said he didn't like stupid little chicks like me trying to manipulate him...*

Fig. 2: A full page illustration of Minnie and Monroe that highlights her agency (Gloeckner, 79).

sometimes part of the panels that visualize her past emphasizes the notion of autobiographical subjectivity as flexible and shaped in the creative process of arranging memories. Since comics' distinctive multimodality enables a splitting of the self across modes, autography offers the ideal structural framework to challenge the boundary between experiencing and narrating I.

Bechdel's memoir capitalizes on this formal opportunity to self-reflexively foreground the performativity of her autobiographical subjectivity – as shaped in the process of its enactment in various modal iterations on the page. All chapters in her memoir are arranged around old photographs she redrew and several panels depict her in the process of sorting through these photographs. In these instances, disembodied hands holding these photographs are included in the panel. While the authorial comments are still present in text boxes, the visual representation of hands entering the panel frames blurs the distinction between narrating and experiencing I. These hands hint at Bechdel's authorial presence and self-reflexively allude to her process of collecting and arranging memories as her narrating I crosses from the verbal to the pictorial plane and enters the diegesis of her memoir.

This strategy again accentuates the process of creation and the author's multiply coded selves. In Gilmore's terms, Bechdel's shaping hands breaking diegetic boundaries and entering the story constitute a site of disruption that once again negates the notion of an essential, coherent self and foregrounds the subject as fragmented and continuously re-enacted in words and images (Gilmore, 25). The bottom panel on this page illustrates Bechdel's approach to layer her autographic subjectivity across different modes particularly well. Here, the verbal narration, which is inserted in the panel, describes a drawn interpretation of a photograph that features a 21-year-old version of the author, while the representation of her hands holding this photograph simultaneously acts as visual embodiment of her authorial presence – which results in a layering of three iterations of Bechdel's autographic subjectivity in one panel.



Fig. 3: Bechdel's hands entering the panel creates a dense layering of autographic subjectivities (Bechdel, 120).

In addition to illustrating the performative nature of autobiographical writing and subjectivity, Bechdel places a thematic focus on the performative nature of gender identity as she discusses her coming-out intertwined with the discovery of her father's closeted homosexuality and his attempts to push her into a heteronormative mold of femininity. By visually and verbally characterizing them as »inversions of one another« (Bechdel, 98), she once again utilizes comics' »enabling« format (Chute, 2015, 198) – the multimodal narrative structure that is particularly suited for a self-reflexive engagement with the construction of identity – to outline their complicated relationship. In this panel that depicts her father and younger self arguing about gender normative clothing choices, both characters are only represented as reflections in a mirror – as literal inversions of their actual selves – standing next to each other while their respective speech bubbles are crossed over. Verbally, the narration in the text boxes also juxtaposes their conflicting views in mirrored syntactic structures: »While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him.../He was attempting to express something feminine through me...« (Bechdel, 98). Thus, Bechdel also formally reinforces the inverted connection with her father.

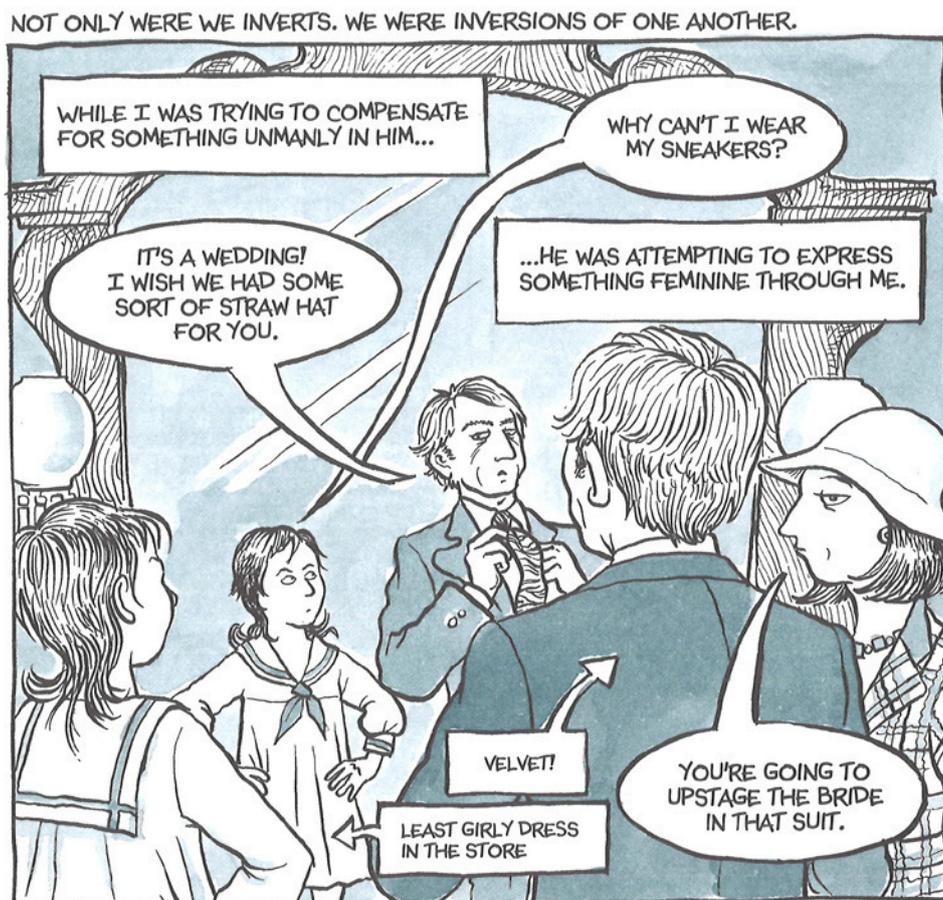


Fig. 4: Alison's »inverted« relationship with her father is presented in words and images (Bechdel, 98).

Besides *Fun Home*'s performative representation of autographic subjectivity and gender identity, its process of creation entails a notable intersection with actual performance. As noted in Hillary Chute's chapter in *Graphic Women*, Bechdel posed for reference shots for every panel in her memoir – impersonating every character and staging the scenes she was about to draw (Chute, 2010, 200). This posing also involves taking her younger selves' place which constitutes, in Anne Rügge-meier's terms, a theatricalization of Bechdel's production process (Rügge-meier, 167).<sup>3</sup>

### **The Adaptation Process – from Page to Stage and Screen**

Pascal Lefèvre, speaking about comic adaptation into film, identifies the problematic nature of turning panels into moving images with a soundtrack (Lefèvre, 4). He argues that aiming for a faithful replication is never a productive approach since different media have different requirements for effective storytelling and therefore concludes that medium-specific modifications are necessary (Lefèvre, 5). While Lefèvre discusses filmic adaptations in his article, his observation equally applies to other media. For instance, Sam Gold, director of *Fun Home* reaches a similar conclusion when addressing some of the challenges producers Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori encountered in their process of bringing *Fun Home* to the stage. He notes that they had to devise a »theatrical analogy« for the way Bechdel told her story, since arranging the show around actual drawings from the graphic memoir did not yield the desired results (Pogrebin). Subsequently, only one image from the first page of *Fun Home* was kept for the performance at the Public Theater in 2013. At the end of the final scene, a drawing of Bechdel's eight-year-old self being balanced on her father's feet during a game of ›airplane‹ was projected onto the wall behind the actors (Kron and Tesori, 2013, 77).<sup>4</sup>

The theatrical analogy the producers then employed to stage Bechdel's multiple autographic subjects was the casting of three different actresses to embody three different versions of Alison at various stages in her life: »Alison – 43 years old, a cartoonist, Medium Alison – 19 years old, a college freshman, Small Alison – around 8 years old« (Kron and Tesori, 2013, n. pag.). These 'three Alisons' share the stage and certain songs and sometimes move across different temporal planes. In her latest publication Hillary Chute identifies Alison's various embodiments in the musical as a successful transmedia adaptation of comics narration: »it [the musical] intertwines distinct time periods by having them walk into spaces of the past, or future, collapsing time in the way that comics does so noticeably« (Chute, 2017, 384).

This is illustrated for instance in a scene where Alison confronts her father about their shared homosexual identities during a car-ride. In the graphic memoir, this sequence stands out due to its symmetrical and explicitly repetitive page layout that constitutes a

clear deviation from the rest of the narrative.<sup>5</sup> It stretches across two pages each made up of nine equally sized panels that depict Bruce and college-aged Alison in the car next to each other. Graphically, the numerous iterations of their almost identical profiles with only slight variations in posture or facial expressions stress the visual similarities between father and daughter while their emotional distance is highlighted at the same time through prolonged awkward silences visualized in interspersed panels without text and only minimal movement. On stage, Alison takes Medium Alison's place for this particular scene as the stage directions specify: »She follows him into the car. In the course of this walk she moves back into the past. She's not remembering this, she's living it again« (Kron and Tesori, 2013, 68). At a crucial moment in the story Alison, who functions as embodiment of Bechdel's narration on stage, physically replaces one of her experiencing Is for this significant confrontation. While the graphic memoir signaled the weight of this scene by slowing down time through stylized symmetry and repetition, on stage Alison steps out of her narrating role and re-enters her past as replacement for Medium Alison. The graphic memoir's performative re-iteration is thus replaced by Alison actually performing the role of her younger self.

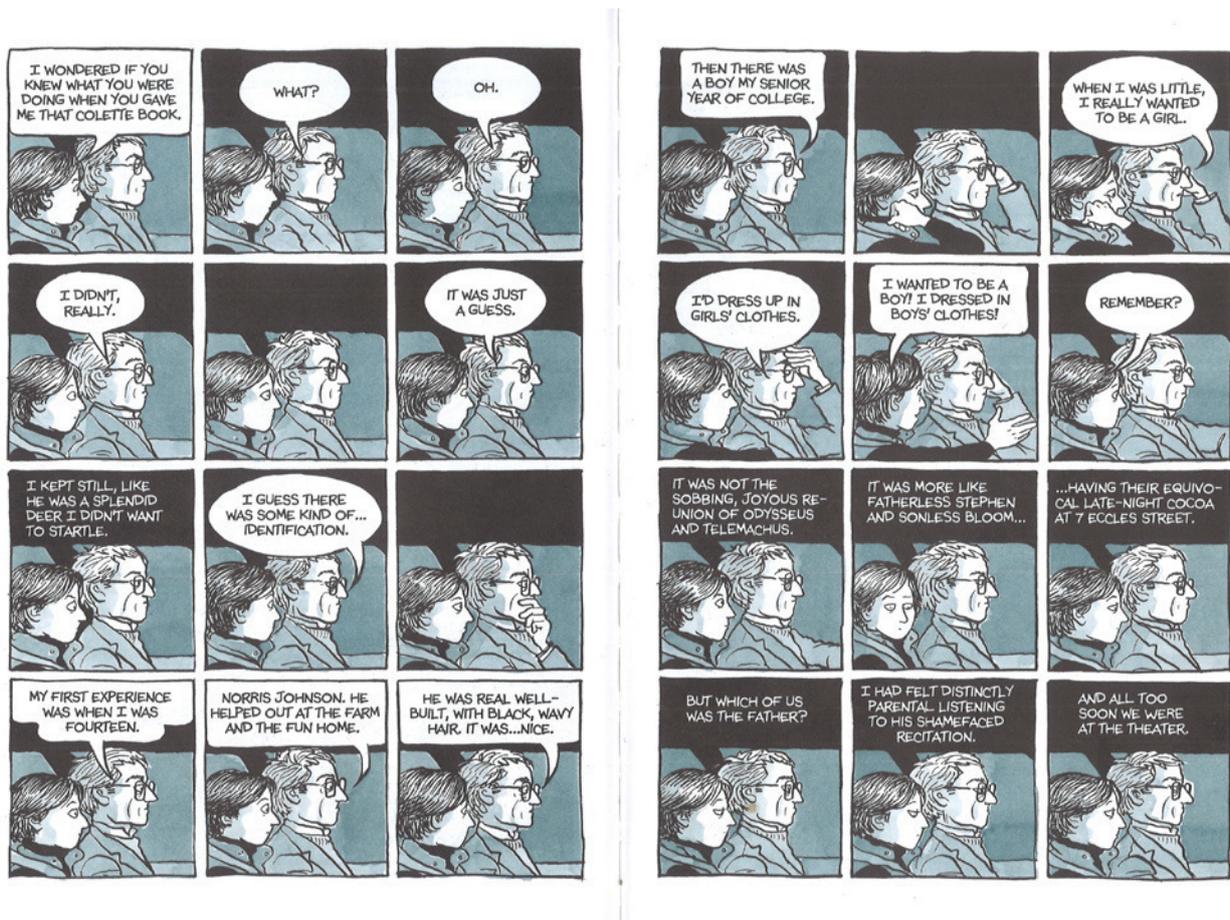


Fig. 5: The page layout foregrounds performative re-iteration in a crucial moment when Alison confronts her father about their shared homosexuality (Bechdel, 220-221).

This is the only scene in which Alison reciprocally interacts with another character in her story. However, as narrator she is also the most mobile character throughout the entire musical. She is present in the background of every scene either behind her drawing desk or sketching as an unseen presence that observes but also responds to her younger selves' comments and actions. Sometimes this produces a form of dramatic irony Alison shares with the audience, for instance, in a scene where college Alison comes out to her first girlfriend:

MEDIUM ALISON: My parents don't know because I just figured it out myself.

JOAN: Oh.

MEDIUM ALISON: About two weeks ago.

JOAN: Huh. With who?

MEDIUM ALISON: With who what?

ALISON (Overcome with humiliation at the memory of the awkwardness.): Oh god.

JOAN: Who were you with?

MEDIUM ALISON (Confused, then suddenly getting it): Nobody! Nobody. Oh my god, I'm so embarrassed.

ALISON (Quietly writhing in the refreshed humiliation.): Oh god.

(Kron and Tesori, 2013, 30)

Her temporal transgressions and interactions with her younger selves therefore demonstrate the complexity and layering of autobiographical narration that comics portray through performative repetition across panels with text and images. The musical thus exploits »the distance between a self who speaks, a self who sees, and a self who is seen, or the split between a narrating and an experiencing self« (Mikkonen, 170) and in doing so effectively adapts a representational technique Kai Mikkonen specifically ascribes to comics storytelling. On stage, the embodiment of her narrative voice as acting character in her story continues Bechdel's allusion to herself as both narrating and experiencing instance.

Marielle Heller approached the adaptation of Gloeckner's material for the theater stage from another angle. Her Off-Broadway play *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* is less concerned with adapting autographic elements than Kron and Tesori's musical. However, as opposed to *Fun Home* where the original graphic memoir source is only referenced indirectly through adult Alison who introduces herself as cartoonist and is constantly sketching behind her drawing desk on stage, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* play features some of the original illustrations as projections. The production notes in the script specify:

There are large video screens or walls where the video lives, which project Minnie's artwork (drawings, photographs and super 8 film recordings). The visual world tells its own story; that of the progression of Minnie as an artist. (Heller, 2011,4)

Even though Sean T. Collins, writer for *The Comics Journal*, who reviewed one of the performances at the 3LD Arts & Technology Center in New York, praises the play for creating enough room to showcase Gloeckner's art and retain the story's »portrait of the artist as a young woman« character (Collins), I would argue that using the illustrations simply as a backdrop to outline Minnie's artistic process sacrifices some of the dialogue between Gloeckner's visuals and her protagonist's words through cross-discursive interaction for a stronger focus on Minnie's perspective. As outlined in the script, the images thus appear to illustrate rather than critically evaluate.

However, Heller made one significant alteration to Minnie's diary entries regarding the format of narrative transmission. On stage, they are presented as audio recordings. The play even begins with her narration as voiceover from a cassette tape:

*(A girl sits alone deep in thought. This is MINNIE GOETZE. She wears a tattered blue and white little-girl nightgown. She sits as though trying to piece together something A voiceover – it sounds like an old tape player, crackled and distant. It's Minnie's voice.)*

VOICEOVER: I don't remember being born. I was a very ugly child.

*(The girl mouths the words along with the recording in moments.)*

(Heller, 2011, 7)

Minnie's disembodied narrative voice connected to her character's physical presence acoustically and visually immerses the spectators in her point of view. While this constitutes a deviation from the source text, it adapts her narration to the new medial possibilities of stage performance.

Marielle Heller's movie on the other hand, as noted by Maike S. Reinerth, incorporates the productive multimodality of its source text to a greater degree by adapting it to the medial possibilities of film (Reinerth, 248–249). Just like the play, the movie portrays Minnie recording her diary on tape and uses her voice over. However, her drawings are foregrounded more prominently and occasionally even transform into animations. They depict her artistic progress and at the same time visualize her state of mind. As opposed to providing a visual backdrop for the action, they are more clearly attributed to Minnie's character who is often shown in the process of drawing.<sup>6</sup>

These animated illustrations appear in various forms and enter the diegesis in different ways. For instance, in a scene where Minnie traces a drawing of Monroe with her finger it turns into an animation that slowly morphs into Monroe's real face complementing her breasts. While this sequence is clearly marked as Minnie's imagination and unfolds in her sketch book, another scene features an animated version (based on one of her drawings) of Aline Kominsky-Crumb. Her favorite cartoonist and imagined role-model enters the story to give Minnie advice on life and art. Yet another sequence shows Minnie turning into an

animation herself and stepping into the comic she has just drawn as protagonist. The animations materializing on various diegetic levels highlight Minnie as creator of her own reality as they blur the boundaries between her imagination and actual surroundings. Reinerth even argues that the viewers experience her mental creations as metaleptic transgressions that conflate figural imagination and filmic animation (Reinerth, 240) and subsequently perceive Minnie not only as the mind behind these creative imaginations but also in charge of their medial implementation as animations.

While the animations in the movie, as well as the visuals in the play, do not provide a critical shift in perspective or re-evaluation of the narrative, they add another layer of characterization that illustrates Minnie's emotional complexity and, moreover, foregrounds her creative agency and the

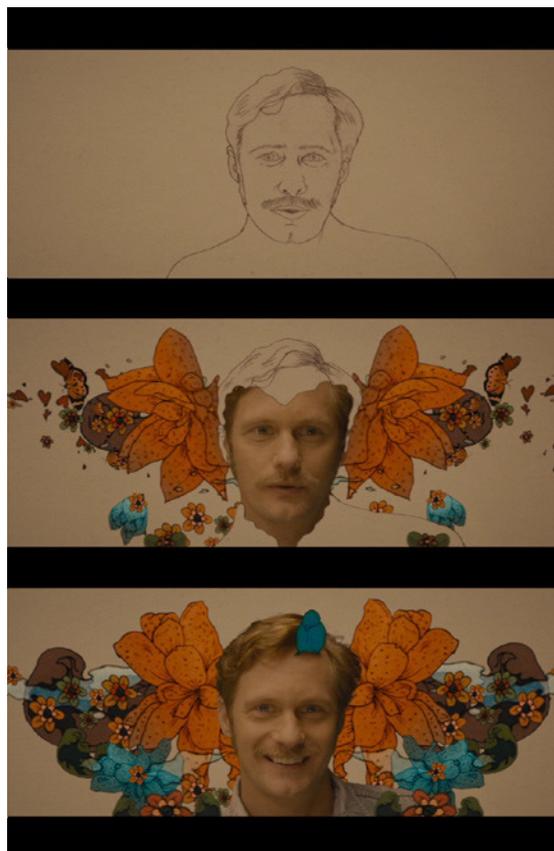


Fig. 6: A drawing of Monroe comes to life (THE DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL).



Fig. 7: Minnie in conversation with an animation of her drawing of Aline Kominsky-Crumb (THE DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL).

formative powers of her mind. However, similar to the illustrations in the graphic narrative they also function as a subversive repetition parodying the arbitrary relationship between signs and their referents. The self-reflexivity of showing characters morph into animated drawings and drawings coming to life illustrates another version of performative parody that questions the existence of an authentic, original self through repetition with variations across different modes and diegetic levels.

## Conclusion

The analysis of selected examples has demonstrated how Bechdel and Gloeckner utilize formal tensions and structural parody to foreground autobiography or life writing as subjective, repetitive and fragmented process. In the self-reflexive examination of their past the authors thus capitalize on comics' unique representational possibilities to outline female agency that transgresses accepted patriarchal stereotypes of teenage girls in Gloeckner's case, and intergenerational homosexuality as a complex, paradoxical bond between father and daughter in Bechdel's. Both accounts feature multiple versions of their selves in various modal realizations, either in conversation with each other or densely layered, and present these autographic subjectivities as performative constructs.

While none of the adaptations tried to emulate the mediality of their source texts, all captured different aspects of the graphic narratives and their featured subjectivities they then transformed for the demands of their medium. Kron and Tesori's musical manages to adapt some of the complexities of autobiographical storytelling and re-construction of memories for the specific circumstances of the theater stage. Their approach to staging comics' narration and portraying the fragmented multiplicity of autographic subjectivity and comic



Fig. 8: Minnie transforms into an animation and enters her own comic (*THE DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL*).

specific conflation of different temporalities involves multiple embodiments of Bechdel's experiencing as well as narrating Is on stage. Although the structural parody as subversive repetition across panels and different modes is hard to replicate in live performance, the musical nevertheless translates some of *Fun Home's* structural performativity by having Alison, the narrator, move freely through the temporal layers of her story, commenting on her younger selves' behavior and even taking their place in acting out a crucial scene. The multiply split and incoherent nature of the autographic self is thus brought to the stage performance.

*The Diary of a Teenage Girl* adaptations, much in line with the request in Gloeckner's preface, move away from the autobiographical genre and instead emphasize the multiple layers of its protagonist's subjectivity as well as her uncompromising and honest perspective on female adolescence. The play still alludes to its source text by featuring Gloeckner's original art; however, these references are then completely removed from Heller's movie and replaced with stylistically customized representations of drawings and animations. The graphic narrative foregrounds Gloeckner's visual authorial voice as transgressive force in Minnie's account, cross-discursively conversing with her teenage alter-ego, Marielle Heller's adaptations emphasize the protagonist's own artistic and narrative authority modified for the new medial requirements. The play foregrounds Minnie's voice and immerses the audience in her perspective and development through voice over and the projected illustrations. However, Heller does not actually stage her character as fragmented and multiply coded, whereas the movie still preserves a version of the cross-discursivity between different representational modes that defines Gloeckner's graphic narrative. Minnie frequently interacts with animated versions of her drawings or disappears into her own art. The animations externalize her mental and emotional processes and establish her as creative agency behind these medial transgressions. Especially in sequences that feature animated re-iterations of Minnie's character the performative nature of subjectivity is once again foregrounded.

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- 1] Austin's theory states that certain speech acts already conflate linguistic expression and action such as ›I congratulate you‹ or ›I promise you‹ (Seier, 10).
- 2] An application of Seier's approach can already be found in Sina's *Comic – Film – Gender: Zur (Re-)Medialisierung von Geschlecht im Comicfilm* where she demonstrates the interconnection between mediality, performativity and gender by identifying the filmic remediatisation of comics as reciprocal, repetitive process in which the characteristic features of each medium productively influence the other (Sina, 25). Importantly, Sina also emphasizes comics' subversive potential and offers a productive analysis of gender performativity in various (inter)medial realizations (Sina, 28). Similarly, Mathias Bremgartner's dissertation *Comics im Theater: Schauplätze – Spielarten – Fallstudien* focuses on the adaptation of

comics for the theater stage by emphasizing a complex reciprocal interaction (Bremgartner, 13). His dissertation contains a systematic categorization of various remediation practices to explore the formal mechanisms that shape the transfer of comic subjectivities onto the stage. The term »Bühnencomic« he coins to label productions that adapt formal elements, subject matter or central narrative of comics (Bremgartner, 107–08) is inspired by Sina's notion of the performative »Comicfilm« (Sina, 25).

- 3] Rüggemeier discusses Bechdel's performance using a panel from *Are You My Mother?*, Bechdel's follow up work that focuses on her relationship with her mother, in which she actually visualizes her process of posing and taking the reference shots for her drawings. *Fun Home*, however, only hints at the creative process by including depictions of her hands sorting through photographs in certain panels.
- 4] This projection was eventually dropped in the Broadway performance which took place at the Circle in the Square Theater (cf. Kron and Tesori, 2015, 79).
- 5] On these two pages Bechdel uses moment-to-moment transitions (cf. McCloud, 70) between the individual panels, which creates the effect of slowing down time and especially foregrounds the comic specific repetition of content with only minimal variation.
- 6] While Gloeckner's original art is used in the play, all illustrations and animations in the movie are drawn by the illustrator Sara Gunnardóttir who collaborated with Marielle Heller and used Gloeckner's text as an inspiration to create a noticeable but modified version of her style that references *The Diary of a Teenage Girl's* source text but also reflects Minnie's teenage mentality and artistic development (Cusumano). Thus Reinerth points out that the animations represent a collectivity of artistic visions – Gloeckner's, Heller's, Gunnardóttir's – that ultimately all contribute to the construction of Minnie's subjectivity (Reinerth, 250–251).