

# Coming of Age in the Context of Hyperemotional Listening and Cognitive Mapping: Navigating the Emotional Landscape in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*

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**Abstract:** Jay Asher's debut young adult novel *Thirteen Reasons Why* is comprised of thirteen transcriptions of the late Hannah Baker's anecdotes which she recorded onto tapes before committing suicide, interspersed by Clay Jensen's reactions to said recordings. The novel is presented in the form of a dual narrative, switching back and forth between the points of view of the two protagonists. In addition to the represented medium of audio, the cartographic plays a dominant role in mapping the emotional landscape Clay experiences in the course of listening to Hannah's tapes and assessing his own role in her story. This essay explores to what degree the covertly intermedial interface of the novel contributes to the creation of narrative meaning, assessing the media-emotion nexus underlying the narrative. This article highlights the challenges of assessing the tracing and translating of the aesthetics of audio into text. Additionally, Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of cognitive mapping is applied to Asher's novel, thereby examining the interplay between the media of audio and the cartographic to establish the emotional landscape that characterizes this contemporary young adult suicide novel.

The voice of the seventeen year-old high school student Hannah Baker claims “[e]verything . . . affects everything” (Asher 202). This protagonist of Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*<sup>1</sup> committed suicide and recorded her story onto seven tapes for the thirteen people she thought of as instrumental in her decision to take her life. In early 2017, the adaptation of the young adult (YA) novel into a thirteen-episode hit series on Netflix has advanced the novel's critical content

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1 Henceforth, Asher's novel will be referred to as *13RW*.

into a public dialogue surrounding bullying, sexual violence, and assault. For example, questions of how adolescent suicide is treated within the online community, as on YouTube and on websites encouraging readers to share their reactions to the novel, have initiated that conversation around the highly debated issue of adolescent suicide in both literature and online pop culture of the twenty-first century.

In *13RW*, Clay Jensen is surprised by a box of tapes from an anonymous sender, which he finds on the porch of his family's home. Once he starts listening, Clay feels that he has to listen to all of the tapes in order to learn about Hannah Baker's suicide. On the tapes, Hannah explains why she blames thirteen specific people for her decision to take her life. Hannah's stories lead her listeners to critical places in her life which she has also marked for them on a map. Thus, Clay literally follows Hannah's footsteps as he listens to her tapes, visiting the spatial markers she refers to. Clay, fully immersed within the listening experience, realizes that he, too, plays a crucial role in Hannah's story, and reacts emotionally as well as physically while listening to Hannah narrate the story of her own suicide.

Asher's debut novel stands out from other YA novels published in recent years for a number of reasons. First, the novel presents itself in a dual narrative form. The two protagonists Hannah Baker and Clay Jensen take turns talking and thus engage in a quasi-dialogue with each other. They are, however, separated spatially and temporally, as Hannah has left the diegetic reality of Clay and is only present in the form of her voice recordings. Second, the narrative's structure is predominantly made possible through the medium of audio. In order to find out why he made it onto Hannah's list, Clay is forced to listen to all of Hannah's tapes. In addition to the medium of audio, the cartographic form shapes the narrative. Hannah repeatedly instructs her listeners to visit the spatial markers she refers to on her tapes. These markers, represented by red stars, show the places she wants her listeners to visit. This map is not only part of the diegesis but also makes up the inlay of the novel's cover. Hannah's life is therefore mediated through her listener Clay and is presented in a dual narrative. Formatting Hannah's passages in italics and switching back and forth between her and Clay's points of view help to highlight the changes of perspective. Half of the text thus mimics the macrostructure of the referenced medium of audio; however, it does so only if the reader is aware of the formatting conventions characterizing the text as supposedly transcribed audio.

## Navigating the Emotional Landscape in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*

The various forms of media employed constitute what makes Asher's text an intermedial novel. This paper aims to expand the scope of the understanding of Asher's text as an intermedial novel in the context of the teenage suicide discussion. This will be accomplished through an examination of how the protagonist's emotional landscape is established through the media of audio and the cartographic. Additionally, I will analyze what I call a media-emotion nexus and how it shapes Clay's processing of Hannah's suicide. This nexus is represented by his coming of age, mnemonic knowledge, and physical reactions to Hannah's tapes. In this discussion, the media-emotion nexus refers to the close interdependence between the emotionality constructing Clay's emotional habitus and the presence of the two media of audio and the cartographic. Only the presence of these media allows for Clay's formative experience of listening to Hannah's story. In the course of analyzing the interplay between the media of Asher's text, I therefore suggest that the intermedial interface profoundly contributes to the emergence of meaning and emotion.

To offer an understanding of the functioning of the media-emotion nexus characterizing Asher's novel, this paper is structured into two parts. First, a theoretical framework will help to understand the background of my close reading of *I3RW*. I will situate the novel in current YA fiction with a special focus on teenage suicide and then move on to briefly define intermediality as a concept. Moreover, I will consider the aesthetics of audio and their translation into the form of the written as illustrated in Asher's text. In the final part of the theoretical framework, the concept of cognitive mapping in the context of the cartographic as presented in the novel will be explained. The second part of this paper will include a close reading of *I3RW*. Here, a threefold aim will be pursued: First, I will assess Clay's coming of age, followed secondly by an analysis of his mnemonic knowledge as enabled by the presence of the cartographic as part of the narrative. Third, I will consider his physical reactions to Hannah's voice recordings in the context of the medium of the cartographic, which contribute to the establishment of the emotional landscape shaping the novel.

## YOUNG ADULT FICTION AND SUICIDE

Considering the recent popularity of the YA suicide novel, this paper reassesses YA fiction, the issues and topics it addresses, and the scholarship evolving around it. Having a decidedly intermedial quality, some of these novels use epistolary or diary formats, while others employ media such as the Internet. Examples of this include Gayle Forman's *I Was Here*, Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, and Jasmine Warga's *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, in which the protagonists are either at risk of committing suicide or have been affected by the suicide of a loved one. This development raises the question of how intermedial features function within the affective mechanisms of these novels. Forms of the postmodern disaster novel and the blurring of gender stereotypes, as seen in the character formation of the female heroine in dystopian realities, have been the focus of YA fiction research, whereas an intermedial perspective is a fairly new approach. Furthermore, the thematic focus of these suicide-themed texts encourages the discussion of how specific forms of mediating emotions can be read. These narratological models and the use of intermedial features push the genre of YA narratives toward new forms. Finally, an intermedial perspective helps to discuss the extratextual lives of these texts. *13RW* is characterized by both the interdependence of the intermedial character of the narratives—employing more than one medium in the printed text—and the complex narrative structures embodying the characters' emotions.

When locating current research on the contemporary YA narrative, *The Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, edited by Shelby Wolf et al., is one of the most current and extensive resources. However, this handbook lacks contributions discussing either death or suicide within the contemporary YA novel. The recent boom of novels addressing death, mental illness, and suicide raises the consideration of these issues in order to understand the emotional upheaval characterizing the liminal state of the adolescent protagonist.

Madelyn Gould claims “[t]here is ample evidence from the literature on suicide clusters and the impact of the media to support the contention that suicide is ‘contagious’” and that “fictional dramatizations [...] also have been associated with an increase in suicide” (1269, 1271). Thus, it is vital to ask what role suicide narratives play in terms of raising awareness and helping young adults to reassess their situation in a time shaped by crisis, change, insecurity, and a lack of direction, all of which might result in suicidal behaviors. While it would exceed the scope of this

essay to analyze how a relationship between the YA suicide novel and its reader establishes a conversation around the issue of adolescent suicide, this aspect is crucial in considering genre definitions and current changes in YA literature.

In addition to the lack of an extensive study on emotionality characterizing the YA suicide narrative, most research on death in YA literature was written in the twentieth or early twenty-first century. Only a few studies consider this recent phenomenon (Rosenthal; Apseoff; Gibson and Zaidman; Harvey and Dowd). Roberta Seelinger Trites's *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* does not only comment on power relations in textual authority but moreover challenges the idea of authorial power in terms of establishing a dialogue between the author and their readership. Furthermore, she discusses adolescent suicide and provides a survey on how the portrayal of death has changed from J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951, to literature targeted at a YA audience published in the late 1990s. Trites also discusses the development in texts evolving around the adolescent protagonist's death in a fantastic setting (136). As Trites's monograph was published in 2000, however, she does not refer to current texts dominating the field of the YA suicide narrative.

In *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*, Kathryn James takes a similar approach as Trites. While she dedicates chapters to the discussion of death in historical YA fiction, fantasy, and the post-disaster novel, she claims that suicide as presented in the YA novel is "not a particular focus of" her project (James 177). Simultaneously, she suggests that

[t]here may be value in exploring the representation of suicide in adolescent literature from discursive and rhetorical angles [...] because a suicide is 'a site of social reconstruction'; it 'both sets a limit and opens a gap' and, thus, 'it enables a certain number of questions about how we construct a self, and about how we construct a narrative.'  
(Higonnet qtd. in James 177)

Asher's text predominantly focuses on those left behind and allows for understanding the emotional landscape of these characters. Additionally, it offers equal insight into the decision process which led a young woman to commit suicide, although she is only part of the diegetic reality in the form of her voice recordings. In the discussion of teenage suicide as represented in contemporary YA fiction, Asher's novel is an important example to consider. The text allows for the readers to immerse themselves in the world of both the adolescent who has already committed

suicide and of friends who remain behind. Thus, the novel is a crucial example of a teenage suicide narrative even beyond its use of media. It furthermore functions as a means of understanding the thirteen reasons why Hannah committed suicide.

### INTERMEDIALITY

The intermedial character of the novel stands in stark contrast to other contemporary YA novels due to its treatment of the audio format as part of the written text which characterizes its intermedial interface. Therefore, intermediality is thematized within the medium of the printed text. Werner Wolf offers the following definition of the term:

‘Intermediality’ can [...] be defined as a particular relation (a relation that is ‘intermedial’ in the narrow sense) between conventionally distinct media of expression or communication: this relation consists in a verifiable, or at least convincingly identifiable, direct or indirect participation of two or more media in the signification of a human artefact. (*Musicalization* 37)

In *13RW*, “the signification of a work of verbal art” (37) is not only incorporated in the form of audio in its transcription but also in its iconic representation. The form of intermediality seen in the novel can thus be defined as part of the audio-literary variant. At first sight, the text suggests its intertextual rather than intermedial character, as it mimics “the interaction of verbal texts” (46), through presenting Hannah’s recordings in the form of the monomedial format of the verbal. The novel is simultaneously intermedial, given the reader’s awareness of Hannah’s voice mimicking the structure of transcribed audio. Thus, the novel can be considered “cross-medial” (47), for it shows clear relations between the dominant medium of printed narrative and audio in the form of transcribed verbal.

In both intertextuality and intermediality, the reader may realize the presence of intersemiotic relations between texts. While in intertextuality that relationship is only present in the monomedial form of the verbal, intermediality is considered cross-medial due to the fact that references within intermedial texts are ideally transmitted by another medium. Both intertextuality and intermediality depend on “‘intracompositional’ phenomena,” as Wolf calls them, suggesting that there is a discernible connection to be noticed between the present texts within a work of fiction (*Musicalization* 46). “Consequently,” claims Wolf, “the possibility of a

general involvement of another or more than one semiotic system (medium) in a work constitutes a clear difference between intertextuality and intermediality” (47). Both forms are in their nature intersemiotic, though only intermediality references other media as part of the monomedial form of the written.

#### TRACING AND TRANSLATING THE AESTHETICS OF AUDIO INTO THE WRITTEN FORM

Concerning the translation of the aesthetics of audio into the written form, two factors characterizing *13RW* play a crucial role in the reading of the novel as an intermedial text. I will first discuss how non-textual signifiers in the form of pictograms symbolizing play, pause, rewind, forward, and stop buttons, influence the reading experience and elicit the need to decode the text's employed visuality within the reader. Later in this section, I will explore how iconic markers structure the text as well as the novel's compositional layout, which mimics the structure of the audiotape.

Asher utilizes a number of pictograms, which all imply the act of listening and refer to the listening experience of Clay as he follows Hannah's journey listening to the entirety of the seven tapes he was sent. These signifiers, as utilized by Asher, can be considered non-textual, for they are not presented in the form of letters and thus stand out from the printed text of the page. Alexander Starre refers to the “navigational function of [...] typography” when stressing the importance of the incorporation of various font types in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (Starre 141). As it is the case in *House of Leaves*, which “stages aspects of literary communication that usually does not meet the eye,” *13RW* also uses non-textual signifiers, meaning they are not part of the written text, atypical for an otherwise “undisturbed” block of words as usually presented on the page of a literary text (Starre 143, 141).

Those non-textual signifiers function as a dominant tool in classifying Hannah's voice as transcribed audio. They help the reader to differentiate between the two layers of the text. Moreover, they indicate the change of perspective. Those signs resemble the buttons on music playing apps or on the computer, which makes them easily decodable. Other texts, too, make heavy use of such non-textual signifiers, such as *The People of Paper* by Salvador Plascencia or *House of Leaves*. However, they do not use the form of pictograms as it is the case in Asher's novel.

*13RW* employs the iconic, meaning that instead of text, icons suggest meaning as part of the printed text. Hannah's story is, according to Wolfgang Hallet, *translated* into the medium of the literary text, mimicking "the macro-structure of the referenced medium, [...] adopt[ing] its compositional principles or aesthetic structure" ("Methodology" 608). With the help of those non-textual signifiers, audio takes on the form of the signified in Asher's novel.

I therefore consider the transcribed audio of Hannah's story as recorded onto seven tapes what Wolf calls "the explicit '**thematization**' of a non-dominant medium" (*Musicalization* 44). In the novel, the medium of audio is repeatedly thematized by Hannah, referring to the tapes and urging her listeners to pass them on to the next person on the list, as well as Clay, who explicitly shares his listening experiences and the emotional ups and downs he lives through.

Intermedial knowledge is thus established through non-textual signifiers that operate as reminders to the reader, suggesting the function of the dual narrative. Whereas they are sometimes printed at the end of chapters, suggesting that Clay has finished listening to a tape, they are also placed at various points throughout the chapters. They indicate that what follows is likely to be an assessment of what Clay just listened to, by which he is coming to terms with what he just learned about Hannah. At other times, these signifiers suggest a break in the listening experience of Clay (as indicated by a pause or stop button) or the start of a new tape, as well as Clay feeling emotionally ready to continue listening to Hannah (as indicated by a play button). They can therefore be thought of as "intradiegetic documents" (Starre 151), which are utilized as part of the printed text as well as the diegesis of the storyworld.

A further purpose of the incorporation of these non-textual signifiers is to assist the reader in fully immersing themselves in the reading experience. The signifiers visualize the listening experience of Clay and imagine the actual process of placing the tapes into the tape player and playing Hannah's voice recordings. According to Starre, "[t]he presence of a medial artifact similar to intradiegetic documents intensifies the aesthetic illusion (see Wolf 'Aesthetic Illusion'), as immersion into the plot and reflection on the substance coevolve" (151). Aesthetic illusion, according to Wolf, presupposes a certain attitude within the recipient of artifacts, a "medium-awareness as well as willingness, on behalf of the recipient, to become involved in reception that is not predominantly dictated by pragmatic discourses" ("Aesthetic Illusion" 21). This is true not only for artifacts but also for technology that enables



the consumption of said artifacts. An example would be the Walkman Clay utilizes to listen to Hannah's tapes. The cassette player as the tool enabling the listening experience is not only imagined but also referred to by the non-textual signifiers describing the act of listening. These signifiers therefore function as mediators between the written word and the intended yet imagined orality of Hannah's passages, as "they form a medial surrogate for the fictional pages and can generate a tactile illusion of the elements depicted" (Starre 152).

Second, the medium of the audiotope is mimicked in the structural composition of the novel itself. Each chapter is given a title indicating which side of the cassette Clay is about to listen to next, for example, "CASSETTE 2: SIDE B" (Asher 69). As Hannah's story unfolds, the reader follows Clay as if listening to her tapes in real time. The physical act of placing the tapes into his player, which Clay describes in great detail, and the act of listening to them evokes emotional effects within the diegetic listener, Clay. Because chapters are structured to resemble audiocassettes, emotions evolve in levels toward the climax of the tape that is currently being listened to. Chapters usually mimic those climactic points the reader might know from having to turn tapes from one side to the other. For example, chapters often haven open endings, which are then picked up at the beginning of the following chapter:

It's dark at the party and Courtney doesn't look happy. But she doesn't look mad, either.  
She looks nervous, I think.  
Why?

CASSETTE 3: SIDE A

►

*Courtney Crimsen. What a pretty name. And yes, a very pretty girl, as well. Pretty hair. Pretty smile. Perfect skin.  
And you're also very nice. Everyone says so.* (Asher 93)

By ending the chapters on a climactic point, Asher evokes a need within the reader to physically take the tape out of Clay's Walkman and turn it to the next side. At the end of chapters, Clay comments on preparing to listen to the next tape: "I unzip the smallest pocket and remove the first tape. Then I slide it into the deck, B-side out, and shut the plastic door," or: "In the smallest pocket of my backpack, I find the next tape. The one with a blue number three written in the corner. I drop that into the deck and snap the door shut" (Asher 35, 53). The intermedial nature of the

novel does not only refer to Clay having to switch tapes or flip them from side A to side B, but it moreover indirectly comments on the haptic feature of having to turn tapes, as the reader, too, has to physically turn the page to follow the narration depicting Clay changing the tape (Hallet, “Rise” 155). Thus, the reader is given a performative role, even though they only follow the verbal narration by carrying out the haptic activity of “traditional page turning” (155).

The non-textual signifiers in the form of pictograms do not only function as a means of thematizing the referenced medium of audio, but they moreover encourage cognitive curiosity to decode those signifiers. The signifiers thus play a crucial role for the medial effect of the novel. Visual scrutiny is vital and a prerequisite for the readers to fully immerse themselves in the reading experience. The markers contribute to the necessity of decoding the visual vocabulary accompanying the novel’s text. The visual landscape presented in the novel refers to the presence of its two voices, whose turns are marked by those non-textual signifiers, helping the reader navigate the narrative. By mimicking the compositional structure of the audiotape, the novel’s chapters, too, constantly refer to the medium of audio. They suggest the haptic sensation experienced when physically taking tapes out of a cassette player to turn them. Finally, when Clay is commenting on his own listening experience and thus constantly refers to the presence of the medium of audio, it helps reading the novel like a dialogue between Hannah and Clay. At the same time, those units are crucial in establishing the aesthetic illusion by which the reader should feel immersed.

#### **THE MEDIUM OF THE MAP: NAVIGATING THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF THE STORYWORLD THROUGH THE CARTOGRAPHIC**

Equipped with a map that shows the places Hannah discusses on the tapes, Clay is guided in his journey through the town of Crestmont in which the novel is set. Soon, he starts to involuntarily localize himself with the help of the map in the storyworld as mediated by Hannah. Therefore, Clay enters a world that was constructed for him by Hannah in order to understand the emotional landscape surrounding her decision to commit suicide. The medium of the cartographic in Asher’s text has two purposes: While it first can be considered a guide to the emotional landscape characterizing the novel, it moreover functions as a textual referent, helping in the construction of the understanding of the novel’s storyworld

for the reader. The map of the Historic Crestmont Business District that accompanies Hannah's stories is in the form of the inlay of the softcover version of the novel. In the hardcover copy, a folded-up map is part of the cover. Both maps show twelve points of interest, supposedly marked by Hannah with red stars, which she explains on the first side of the first tape Clay listens to.

Even though the map does not function as an authoritative guide in the novel, it nevertheless acts like a "prop in a game of make-believe" (Walton qtd. in Ryan, "Narrative Cartography" 340). An interplay is to be identified between the physical, printed map as such, and the cognitive processes accompanying the reading and decoding of said map. The map which comprises the novel's cover can be considered an "internal" map, as Marie-Laure Ryan claims (336). It was likely designed by either the author or an illustrator and functions as a means of mapping the space between the reader and the text (336).

In the previous section, I provided the theoretical framework necessary to understand the role of the map within the novel. The second part of this essay will provide a close reading of Asher's text. The role of the cartographic will be analyzed by looking at the emotionality that the map evokes. Its meaning constituting purpose allows for discussing the emotional and affective behaviors elicited on the level of the diegesis within Clay while he is following the marks on the map. It will consider how the decoding of the cartographic contributes to the constructing of the novel's storyworld through the reader.

## COGNITIVE MAPPING

The map that characterizes the intermedial landscape of Asher's text can, to a certain degree, be considered a "cognitive map" (Ryan, "Cognitive Maps" 215). "[A] cognitive map," claims Ryan, "is a mental model of *spatial* relations" (215). Space is crucial in the understanding of cognitive mapping within literature, as it becomes "a stage for narrative events" (215). Ryan lists several purposes of mental maps according to Yi-Fu Tuan, two of which are of special interest to the discussion of the novel. First, she paraphrases Tuan by suggesting that mental maps can be thought of as "mnemonic devices ('memory places')" (Tuan qtd. in Ryan, "Cognitive Maps" 214), meaning that they elicit certain thoughts and emotions their user connects to a certain place. This includes memories the characters of a text assign to certain

places. Second, maps “structure and store knowledge” (Tuan qtd. in Ryan, “Cognitive Maps” 214), meaning that certain knowledge is created around spatial markers; attributes are thus addressed to certain spaces that play crucial roles in the developing of the plot of a literary text. As a general concept, cognitive mapping can be understood as the attempt to formally organize the space making up a literary text.

However, because the mental idea of a spatial place can never fully correspond to the actual territory meant to be represented, the social factor plays a crucial role in cognitive mapping. Ryan suggests that “stories tell about the actions of intelligent agents” (Ryan, “Cognitive Maps” 215). Yet, those agents are not stagnant in their mapping of the storyworld they inhabit. Instead, they move about and around, thereby constructing a spatial component oftentimes vital to the understanding and piecing together of the storyworld of the characters. Referring to David Herman, Ryan sums up that “[n]arrative thus entails a ‘process of cognitive mapping that assigns referents not merely a temporal but a *spatio*-temporal position in the storyworld’ (535)” (Herman qtd. in Ryan, “Cognitive Maps” 215). Imagining maps of fictional places according to the spatial system employed within literary texts helps in the mental mapping of said place. The interpersonal system, however, produces meaning referring to certain buildings and places (Ryan, “Cognitive Maps” 225).

It is common within texts that heavily use spatial markers and references to try and draw or at least mentally reconstruct the map of the fictional space as presented in said texts to better understand not only the temporal and social systems characterizing a text, but also situate them in a spatial context. This allows for a better understanding of a text and an easier immersion in the storyworld of the characters. In short, “cognitive maps internalize an experience of space which is usually based on visual cues,” such as scans of a map within a literary text (Ryan, “Cognitive Maps” 231). “[P]eople read for the plot and not for the map,” claims Ryan (238). Mental maps are thus constructed “only as far as we find a cognitive advantage in this activity” (238), resulting in the immersed reader having a richer understanding of the literary text.

### COGNITIVE MAPPING IN *13RW*

The text presents the map in the form of a “verbal evocation” and space can be understood “as a stage for narrative events” (Ryan, “Cognitive Maps” 215). Because the narrative as such only provides a vague spatial configuration about the narrative space inhabited by Hannah and Clay, the possibility of the reader constructing a cognitive map that resembles the actual graphic map enclosed in the book is limited. However, this does not pose a problem, as the geographical configurations constituting the town of Crestmont play only a marginal role in reconstructing the town’s street plan. The intended interactivity of accessing the actual map might help in the reconstructing of the town. However, its actual purpose, as I claim, is to aid in the understanding of the emotional journey Clay embarks on.

To briefly comment on the question of whether or not the map as part of the cover’s inlay can be considered part of the diegetic storyworld, I suggest that due to the map being constantly referenced, it is given a special role in the text. Despite the absence of snippets or scans and therefore representations of the map as part of the written text, the cartographic is “part of the narrative textual world at different diegetic levels: they are directly articulated with the characters who inhabit them, their actions and their cultural environments” (Hallet, “Multimodal Novel” 132). Moreover, one needs to consider that the map printed on the inlay of the cover cannot be considered a narrative in itself. If the map stood alone, the reader would have difficulty interpreting the stars marked on the map, leaving them ignorant of the meanings of those markers and unable to decode the narrative evolving around the map. Without the map, the emotional knowledge constructed around the spaces mentioned by Clay, the reader would gain little knowledge about the possible emotional landscapes the listeners of Hannah’s tapes might construct. Situated in the context of the novel, the reader is taken on Clay’s journey as he dislocates himself spatially in order to readjust and evaluate his emotional knowledge elicited by the places he visits in Hannah’s story. In addition, the reader is given an insight into the emotional upheaval Clay experiences by reassessing his own emotional state and relationships to his classmates, who, too, have made it onto Hannah’s tapes.

### CLAY'S COMING OF AGE

Hannah's tapes function as a transformative force in the protagonist's coming of age, equipping him "with knowledge and abilities that [he was] formerly lacking" (Hallet, "Methodology" 613). Intermedial knowledge is created not only through the form of audio but is moreover enabled by the presence of the cartographic. The medium of the cartographic refers to not only the presence of the medium of the map but also the thematization of the map throughout the novel. It takes on various forms in the novel. First, the cartographic as a medium aids in the mapping of the plot. The map functions as a means of representing the temporal and causal relations between the lives of the characters and their interactions. Spatial references and indicators that suggest the reader's need to access the map contribute to understanding the novel's patterns of rise and fall in tension and the meaning of those places at specific moments of the narrative. The representation of the cartographic thus literally maps the plot of the narrative and allows accessing the narrative's geographical configurations.

Second, the visual representation of the map helps in the understanding of the thematic networks as established in the storyworld of the characters through Clay's narration, which the reader follows. As he seems to be one of the few of Hannah's listeners who follow her suggestion to consider the map, he demonstrates a willingness to fully immerse himself in the listening experience emotionally. Third, the map as presented in the text is a mere network of signs on the semiotic level, meaning it is predominantly a medium referred to instead of being presented in the form of scans or reproductions, therefore mapping the emotional route through the text as experienced by Clay. The cartographic thus helps to navigate the emotionality of the act of listening. Not only does this include the story of a dead person but also the process of Clay realizing that he has involuntarily become part of that story and is partially blamed for Hannah's suicide.

### CLAY'S MNEMONIC KNOWLEDGE

The incorporation of the cartographic element into the novel functions as an aid for the readers to "orient themselves on the map of the fictional world" (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 123) and to "picture in imagination the changing landscape along the routes followed by the characters" (Ryan qtd. in Hallet,

"Methodology" 646). It also evaluates the meaning of space and spatial markers crucial in Clay's understanding and assessing Hannah's story. The map suggests options of emotional understanding linked to some of the settings marked on the map and visited by Clay as instructed by Hannah, influencing his spatial behavior which causes him to re-situate himself in the landscape of emotion and memory surrounding those places. One could therefore argue that Clay's mnemonic knowledge of those places is altered through learning about the meaning they have in Hannah's story.

By referring repeatedly to the presence of the map, the narrative instance of Hannah reminds her tapes' listeners to follow her spatial markers. Thus, the reader of the narrative decodes not only the text as such but also the 'language' of the cartographic. Hannah repeatedly instructs listeners how they should read the map: "*Our first red star can be found at C-4. Take your finger over to C and drop it down to 4. That's right, like Battleship. When you're done with this tape, you should go there*" (Asher 13). By providing detailed instructions on how to read the diegetic map the reader is unable to access it as part of the text as it is only referred to. They might, however, feel inclined to look at the map as part of the book's cover, given that they are aware of the map being part of the inlay of the book. Introducing media rather than mere text, claims Hallet, affects not only the story and storyworld as such, but it moreover influences the discourse evolving around the novel. It has an effect on the presentation of the novel and how it is decoded (Hallet, "Methodology" 640; "Multimodal Novel" 131). Thus, because of the constant references to the map as such and the narrating of the encounters at said places through Clay, the reading and decoding experience does not transgress the boundary of the printed book even though the map is not fully part of the printed novel as such but only contained as part of the novel's cover.

Concerning the cartographic's twofold purpose, the following thoughts aim to assess the emotionality evoked when considering the meaning constituting purpose of the emotional knowledge surrounding Hannah's suicide while following her instructions to locate those spaces of meaning within her narrative. Throughout the novel, Hannah frequently addresses the spatial indicators she refers to in telling her story. By visiting the places as encouraged by Hannah, the listeners of the tapes are guided in reconsidering their emotional knowledge about those places and what they meant to them prior to listening to Hannah's story. For the reader, this aspect is especially true regarding Clay. An example would be the instance in which

Hannah instructs her listeners to visit Tyler Down's house. Tyler is introduced as a Peeping Tom, secretly living out his voyeuristic tendencies in Hannah's story by taking pictures of Hannah from outside of her bedroom window at night while she is getting changed in the safety of her own room. When instructing her listeners to go to his house, she encourages the recipients of her tapes to enter the emotional state she was in when realizing that she was being photographed in her bedroom: afraid to move too quickly and terrified by imagining the consequences of hearing a camera shutter being released. Simultaneously, she makes her listeners take on the role of Tyler as they are watching him from outside his home. This is done to make the recipients of her tapes realize the emotional effect having been watched had on her. Thus, Hannah emphasizes the severity of invading someone's private space and calls for the recipients of her tape to recreate the emotional state she herself was in at said moment.

The geographical setting of the town of Crestmont is therefore vital in this discussion, as the listener of the tapes is encouraged to not only visit the places mentioned on the tapes but oftentimes to disregard their memory of said places and adapt Hannah's associations with the spaces. Hallet refers to Mark Haddon's best-selling coming-of-age novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, describing the possibilities a novel can employ by incorporating various modes at the same time. Like in Haddon's novel, the map in *13RW* first functions as a means of establishing the emotional change in Clay and how he perceived those spatial settings after having listened to Hannah's story and the roles those places have in her story. In conclusion, Clay revisits not only the spatial markers as suggested by Hannah but also his emotional understanding and knowledge of said spaces. His mnemonic knowledge about his hometown thus changes significantly throughout the listening experience. The spatial markers, crucial in the telling of Hannah's story, are addressed by new information that significantly changes the emotional landscape of the town Clay navigates.

#### CLAY'S PHYSICAL REACTION TO HANNAH'S TAPES

The introduction of the map as part of the diegetic reality of the characters is for the first time explicitly mentioned in the novel right after Clay starts listening to the tapes. Hannah's instructions are clear: "*Throughout the tapes, I'll be mentioning*



*several spots around our beloved city for you to visit. I can't force you to go there, but if you'd like a little more insight, just head for the stars*" (Asher 12). Hannah herself indicates that if her listeners "*want the full Hannah experience,*" they should follow the red stars on her map (134). Clay, following Hannah's instructions, is surprised by how affected he is by visiting those places, especially at a point when Hannah is no longer physically present but present only in the form of her voice. Clay's responses to listening to Hannah are mirrored by his bodily reactions to what he is listening to, breaking out in sweats and feeling physically sick: "A line of hot sweat rises along my hairline" (36), "I'm starting to see what Hannah means. And that opens up a black hole in the pit of my stomach" (51-52), "[a]n icy sweat breaks across my forehead" (55), "I press my forehead against the smooth bark and try to calm my breathing" (56). Repeatedly, he suggests that his body is reacting by breaking out in sweats, which suggests his body's inability to process Hannah's story. This is especially the case when he starts listening to the tapes and is still anticipating his role in Hannah's story. His tension and anxiety are mirrored in the way his body reacts by sweating. These physical reactions do, however, not only express Clay's nervous state concerning his own role in Hannah's story. They mirror his inability to control his reactions to Hannah's voice and coming to terms with the fact that she is no longer part of Clay's reality. His bodily reactions to the listening experience emphasize his inability to communicate with Hannah to correct claims she made. This stresses the idea that the reader, who is supposedly just as immersed in Hannah's story as Clay, should realize the finality of Hannah's suicide and the lack of possibilities to make Hannah realize her side of the story is limited to her own experiences.

When trying to understand his own reactions to listening to Hannah's voice in the places suggested by her, Clay admits the following:

I can't bring myself to look toward the front counter. Not yet. I don't want to imagine her standing there. [...] A wire rack loaded with candy bars hangs from the front counter. These are the ones Hannah liked. My left eye begins to twitch. (Asher 49)

Passages like this stress the personal relationship Clay had with Hannah, possibly picturing a future as girlfriend and boyfriend. In the course of listening, he finds out personal details about Hannah he would otherwise have learned from her personally. Her absence, however, affects the emotional understanding of those situations and what could have been happy memories. Instances informing Clay

about Hannah's favorite choice of candy bars are given a negative connotation. Later, he wonders why he so intricately follows Hannah's instructions by trying to relive the experiences she had in these locations: "So why did I buy it? Was it only because Hannah used to buy candy from the same rack? And why does that matter? I went to the first red star. And the second. I don't need to go everywhere or do everything she says," disposing of the candy he bought at the store, suggesting he will be sick if he eats it (51). Those instances suggest that being physically present in the spaces which play a role in Hannah's narrative not only elicit the realization that Hannah is gone but moreover underline Clay being physically unwell because he imagines Hannah still being there. Regardless, he follows closely in Hannah's footsteps, trying to relive some of his memories of her or instances she refers to in the tapes.

It is only later in the novel that Clay provides the reader with his own reasoning for why he follows Hannah's instructions to visit the places marked on the map. Clay indicates that before receiving Hannah's tapes he had already visited her parents' shoe shop several times, "searching for a connection to her" and "[l]ooking for answers" (Asher 72). For him, this seems to be the only option that would bring him closer to solving the mystery of Hannah's suicide. Later on, he asks himself: "Why do I feel so compelled to follow her map? I don't need to. I'm listening to the tapes, every single one, front and back, and that should be enough. But it's not" (101). Instead, Clay comes to the following conclusion: "I'm not following the map because she wants me to. I'm following it because I need to understand. Whatever it takes, I need to truly understand what happened to her" (101). Moreover, he soon finds out that he is not the only one intrigued to visit those places marked by Hannah when he is surprised by his fellow student Marcus Cooley. Marcus, welcoming Clay outside of Tyler's house, is about to cater to Clay's possible need of seeking revenge by handing him a stone to throw through Tyler's bedroom window. It would, as Marcus suggests, not be the first time someone who received the tapes engages in this act of domestic disturbance. Clay, however, refuses, realizing that he, just like Tyler, is part of Hannah's list. He understands that he is not any better than Tyler, since all of the people on the tapes, according to Hannah, contributed to her final decision to kill herself.

The cartographic, as has been illustrated, has a twofold function in the context of Asher's novel. First, it is utilized to illustrate the emotional landscape experienced by Clay, who is inclined to localize himself in the world of Hannah as he follows in

her footsteps while listening to her voice recordings. Through him, the hyperemotional experience of listening to Hannah's tapes is mediated while the reader learns about the spatial configuration of the characters' storyworld in the novel. The representation of the map throughout the novel can, on the one hand, be considered extratextual, as it is not physically part of the printed text. On the other hand, there are numerous intratextual references constructing a mental image of the map in case the reader is unaware of the actual map being part of the novel's cover. Moreover, in its actual and symbolic form, the cartographic supports establishing the storyworld of the characters for the reader, offering a guide to the characters' interwoven relationships. The characters' cultural environments are illustrated as the reader follows Clay following Hannah. In doing so, the reader can assess the meaning of the various spatial markers of importance to the unfolding of the narrative's plot.

The map, as presented in the inlay of the book as well as present in the characters' minds, is also referred to as part of the text. Through verbal discourse as well as the conscious assessing of the map on the cover's inlay, narrative meaning is evoked, illustrating the emotionality experienced by Clay. In the course of doing so, the reader learns about the possibilities of emotional change. Throughout the novel, Clay reassesses his understanding of the emotional memory surrounding those places, coming closer to understanding Hannah's suicidal reasoning. The map therefore does not only elicit spatial but also emotional data in the context of the emotional understanding and mapping of Hannah's suicide. The map helps its users understand spatial relationships and moreover maps the cognitive landscape within Clay's mind, as the reader navigates the emotional landscape characterizing the reading experience of Asher's text.

### CONCLUSION

This article is an attempt to navigate the media-emotion nexus in the YA novel *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher in the context of the recent suicide discussions characterizing contemporary YA literature. This has been accomplished through an examination of how the emotional landscape of the novel is established through the media of audio and the cartographic. Clay's coming of age, mnemonic knowledge of his hometown, and his physical reactions to Hannah's tapes have helped to

provide an analysis of how the media-emotion nexus shapes Clay's processing of teenage suicide.

In the theoretical part comprising the first half of this essay, I have illustrated that there is a gap in recent research evolving around the role of emotion within contemporary YA suicide fiction that is crucial to be bridged. Moreover, the theoretical chapter has offered a definition of intermediality and finally provided background on how the aesthetics of audio are translated into the written in the example of Asher's text. In this context, the meaning of non-textual signifiers and their navigational purpose in understanding the novel as a dual narrative has been commented on. It has been argued that these non-textual signifiers not only aid in differentiating the voices of the protagonists Hannah and Clay, but that their purpose is also to repeatedly remind the reader of the diegetic orality of Hannah's passages, meaning that audio as a medium is constantly thematized throughout the novel. The non-textual signifiers thus do not only have a navigational function assisting in the understanding of the narrative's structure, but they additionally contribute to an immersive reading experience. In addition to these signifiers, the novel's compositional structure has been shown to mimic the structure of the audiotape. Numerous chapters of *13RW* end on climactic notes, likewise commenting on the haptic process of Clay having to turn the tapes onto the next side. This aspect is mirrored in the emotional position the reader finds themselves in at the end of chapters. They too engage in a process that resembles the act of turning over a tape by simply turning the pages of the book. These two aspects are crucial for the reader in decoding the visual vocabulary the novel employs and contribute to the development of aesthetic illusion.

The final section of the theoretical chapter regards the role of the medium of the cartographic as it is presented in the novel. Ryan's idea of cognitive mapping has been outlined, as the map that is part of Asher's text is a vital factor contributing to the establishment of the emotional landscape evolving around Clay and his experiences of listening to Hannah's recordings. Because Asher's novel shows a heavy use of spatial markers, it has been highlighted how Clay's mnemonic knowledge of said spaces changes throughout the act of listening to the tapes. Therefore, the map does not only offer information on the spatial configurations of the town, but it also functions as a tool to initiate emotional change within Clay. This vastly affects his coming of age and his position in Hannah's story as he learns about his classmates and changes his opinion about not only their personalities but

also the spatial references connected to them according to Hannah's voice and map. Clay's perceptions of his hometown are thus challenged and altered.

This change within Clay has been further analyzed in the second part of this paper, in which a close reading of the novel has been conducted. This analysis has shown the close interdependence of the two media of audio and the cartographic as part of the novel in terms of both establishing and altering the emotional landscape Clay navigates throughout the narrative. Only because of the presence of audio does Clay reevaluate his own position in Hannah's story. Moreover, the tapes and his listening experience equip him with emotional knowledge about the spatial markers he visits throughout the novel. As a result, he reassesses their meanings and understands the roles of the other twelve people on Hannah's list. His physical reactions to listening to Hannah's story extenuate the hyperemotional state he finds himself in while trying to solve the mystery around Hannah's suicide and to understand what keeps him from stopping the listening process. Cold and hot sweats, crying fits, and feeling sick to his stomach make Clay realize the finality of Hannah's decision and his inability to engage in an actual conversation with her. This realization stresses the need to establish a discussion regarding adolescent suicide.

The experience of reading Asher's novel can be considered a multi-literate act since it integrates various media into the text and thereby allows for an immersive understanding of the hyperemotional diegetic landscape of the storyworld(s) of both Hannah and Clay. Thus, the media-emotion nexus in the novel is enabled by the interdependence of the two media that affect each other as well as further the development of the emotional landscape of the YA suicide narrative. Hannah Baker is correct in claiming that "[e]verything . . . affects everything" (Asher 202), as referenced in the opening sentence of this essay. Only the presence of the aforementioned media allows for a fully immersive reading experience and processing of the visual codes characterizing the novel as immensely effective in establishing the conversation about adolescent suicide within contemporary American YA fiction.

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## Navigating the Emotional Landscape in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*

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