Affective Transmedia Design: A Framework for Interactive Literary Adaptation

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From Representation to Reactivation in Digital-Native Adaptations

Abstract

For decades, adaptation studies have examined how narratives transform when crossing media boundaries, with remediation theory providing a foundational framework for understanding the shift from print to digital platforms. However, remediation theory, focused primarily on media logic and interface transparency, cannot adequately explain the distinctive experiential qualities of contemporary interactive adaptations that prioritize user participation over narrative fidelity. This paper proposes Affective Transmedia Design: a methodology synthesizing adaptation studies, transmedia theory, and affect theory to analyze and create adaptations that reactivate, rather than merely represent, the emotional and political core of classic literary texts. Using The Lizzie Bennet Diaries as a foundational case study alongside two original design proposals (Frankenstein and Oliver Twist), I argue that interactive, platform-distributed adaptations can transform passive spectatorship into embodied participation. This framework offers both a critical lens for scholars analyzing participatory adaptations and a prescriptive methodology for creators seeking to design adaptations that privilege affective engagement.

Keywords: transmedia adaptation, affect theory, interactive narrative, literary adaptation, participatory culture, embodied engagement, remediation.

1. Introduction: beyond remediation

1.1 The limits of existing frameworks

Contemporary literary adaptations increasingly resist traditional analysis. When Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is transmuted into *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012), a multi-platform narrative distributed across YouTube vlogs, Twitter accounts, and interactive Q&As,the transformation involves more than a change of medium. The viewer-turned-participant does not simply watch Elizabeth Bennet's story unfold; they follow characters in real-time, comment on videos, receive replies from "Lizzie", and experience the narrative as a temporally unfolding event within their actual social media feeds.

Remediation theory, established by Bolter and Grusin (1999), has long provided the dominant framework for understanding media transformation. Its central insight, that new media refashion and reform older media, elegantly explains how film "remediates" theater, or how hypertext remediates print. However, remediation theory primarily addresses the logic of interface design, oscillating between *immediacy* (erasing the medium) and *hypermediacy* (highlighting the medium). It does not account for the visceral, somatic, and participatory dimensions of modern digital narratives. It answers *how* media transfer occurs, but fails to answer *why* certain adaptations produce distinctive modes of embodied audience engagement.

We lack a critical vocabulary for analyzing adaptations where interactivity, real-time participation, and embodied engagement are not just features, but the primary design principles. In these works, the goal is not faithful representation, but **affective reactivation**.

1.2 Toward affective transmedia design

This paper proposes **Affective Transmedia Design (ATD)** as a synthesis of three scholarly traditions:

1. **Adaptation studies:** Specifically, Linda Hutcheon's (2006) understanding of adaptations as "palimpsestuous" works that exist in a dialogic relationship with their source texts.

2. **Transmedia studies:** Henry Jenkins' (2006) analysis of story-worlds distributed across multiple platforms, where each platform makes a unique contribution to the whole.

3. **Affect theory:** Drawing on Massumi (2002) and Ahmed (2004) to examine how intensities and bodily responses circulate between texts, bodies, and publics.

Core thesis: Affective Transmedia Design identifies a source text's core affective registers, its distinctive emotional intensities and political charges, and designs interactive, multi-platform experiences that reactivate those intensities in contemporary contexts. Rather than representing the emotions of characters (showing us Jane Eyre's isolation), these adaptations create conditions for participants to experience analogous affective states (feeling contemporary forms of digital

isolation).

This approach shifts adaptation analysis from questions of **fidelity** ("How accurate is this to the book?") to questions of **transmission** ("What intensities does this activate, and how?").

2. Theoretical framework: defining affective transmedia design

2.1 Affect vs. emotion: the distinction

To understand ATD, we must distinguish between *emotion* and *affect*. Following Massumi (2002), **emotion** is a qualified, socially recognized feeling-state (for e.g. "sadness," "anger," "joy"). It is the narrativization of a feeling. **Affect**, conversely, is pre-personal intensity; it is the bodily sensation of suspension, the autonomic reaction, the visceral "charge" before it is named.

When we read about Frankenstein's creature being rejected, we may experience the *emotion* of sympathy. However, the creature's own experience,the visceral intensity of being looked at with horror, the embodied force of social rejection,operates at the level of *affect*. Affective Transmedia Design seeks to transmit these intensities. The goal is not to make audiences feel "sad about" the Monster, but to create conditions where they experience the intensity of radical alienation in their own bodies and social contexts.

2.2 From contemplative to performative engagement

Cognitive film theory (Bordwell, 1989) has thoroughly critiqued the binary of "passive film" vs. "active games." Instead, I propose a spectrum of engagement:

- **Contemplative engagement:** The spectator constructs meaning through observation, interpretation, and imaginative identification. This is the domain of the novel and traditional cinema.

- **Performative engagement:** The participant constructs meaning through embodied action, decision-making, and direct manipulation of systems. This is the domain of gaming and interactive theater.

- **Hybrid engagement:** The convergence of the two, characteristic of transmedia narratives.

ATD privileges performative and hybrid modes not because they are superior, but because they offer distinctive affordances for affective transmission, specifically, the capacity to produce embodied intensities through **action**, **consequence**, and **temporal pressure**.

2.3 Four design principles

Effective ATD adaptations typically rely on four structural pillars:

1. **Platform distribution:** The narrative utilizes the specific affordances of different media (for

e.g. the intimacy of a text message vs. the public performativity of a tweet).

2. **Temporal unfolding:** The narrative occurs in real-time, collapsing the safety buffer between "story time" and "audience time."

3. **Participatory action:** Audiences engage through labor, commenting, solving puzzles, or moving through physical space.

4. **Affective alignment:** The mechanics of the interaction are designed to mirror the emotional stakes of the source text.

3. Case Study: The Lizzie Bennet Diaries and Social Media Affective Labor

3.1 Overview

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (LBD) reimagined *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (1813) as a transmedia vlogging series distributed across YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr from April 2012 to March 2013. It stands as a foundational text for participatory literary adaptation, transforming Austen's social satire from a contemplative reading experience into a real-time participatory event where viewers engaged directly with characters through comments, tweets, and fan discourse.

3.2 Affective Reactivation

3.2.1 Collective Judgment and Participatory Shame

Austen's novel revolves around the affective intensities of social observation, judgment, and misrecognition. The pleasure of the text derives from the reader's parallel experience of judging characters alongside Elizabeth, then having those judgments exposed as flawed.

LBD reactivated these intensities through **participatory discourse infrastructure**. Viewers did not passively observe Lizzie judging Darcy; they *enacted* that judgment through YouTube comments, Twitter debates, and fan forums, publicly committing to interpretations that would later be proven wrong. When the narrative revealed Darcy's true character (Episode 60, "Are You Kidding Me!"), the audience experienced a collective, real-time realization of their complicity in misjudgment.

YouTube comments document this affective shift. Viewers wrote: *"Wow re-watching this and realizing that there are so many cringe-worthy put-downs of Lydia by Lizzie, ugh :-(she's actually pretty mean and self-righteous"* (cited in Tepper, 2015). The "shame" of misjudgment was not just Lizzie's; it was the audience's, a phenomenon academic analysis confirms as *"a complicated blend of excitement, embarrassment, enthusiasm, and (most strikingly) shame"* that saturated viewer engagement (Tepper, 2015, p. 47).

This participatory shame extended beyond Darcy to Lydia's narrative arc. When Lizzie called Lydia a *"stupid whore-y slut"* (Episode 24), viewers mobilized collective critique, demanding the

series address its slut-shaming[1]. Creator Bernie Su publicly acknowledged the backlash: *"The slut shaming critique is definitely something we're aware of and honestly one of the few disappointments we have with the reception of the series"* (cited in Morgan-Cole, 2013). Viewers reported visceral distress, *"OMG REWATCHING THIS BROKE MY HEART SO HARD Gonna go scream-cry into a pillow now"*, demonstrating the somatic intensity of affective reactivation (Tepper, 2015).

Crucially, this shame was not a byproduct of the narrative but was *structurally engineered* by the platform mechanics. Traditional television serialization produces anticipation, but LBD's transmedia architecture produced **epistemic vulnerability**. Viewers' judgments were inscribed in permanent, public, searchable comments, creating a digital archive of their complicity. Unlike private reading, where judgment remains internal and revisable, LBD forced viewers to confront their recorded opinions. The platform became a **confessional archive**, preserving the evidence of misjudgment and amplifying the affective intensity of revision.

3.2.2 Temporal Infiltration and Parasocial Simultaneity

Where LBD diverged most significantly from traditional episodic television was not in its use of serialized release schedules, a feature common to all broadcast media, but in its **collapse of diegetic and extra-diegetic time through persistent character presence**.

Between vlog episodes, characters maintained active transmedia extensions: Darcy's company website (Pemberley Digital), Lydia's fashion blog, and character Twitter accounts that posted in real-time, independent of episode releases. As one Reddit user described the experience of waiting for narrative resolution: *"Waiting for the proposal was agonizing. ...I kept quoting Sirius Black 'Twelve years I waited...in Azkaban!!' while watching"* (r/LizzieBennet, 2013). But unlike traditional television, where this waiting occurs in the *absence* of content, LBD viewers waited *within* the story-world. Darcy was not off-screen between episodes; he existed in the viewer's ambient social media feed, tweeting about his day, responding to fan questions, and maintaining a persistent digital presence.

This produced what we might term **parasocial simultaneity**: the experience of coexisting with fictional characters in the same temporal and platform infrastructure used for actual social relationships. The affective intensity derived not from *not knowing what happens next* (standard TV suspense), but from **existing alongside characters in unresolved narrative states**. Viewers checked Darcy's Twitter the same way they checked a friend's collapsing the ontological boundary between fiction and social reality. The anxiety was not "When will I find out?" but "What is Darcy doing *right now*?"

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[1] This moment became a flashpoint for participatory critique, demonstrating how transmedia platforms enable real-time audience intervention in narrative ethics. Su's public response and subsequent narrative adjustments (foregrounding Lydia's agency, reframing her arc away from "victim" to "survivor") show how ATD adaptations can become sites of collaborative meaning-making rather than unidirectional transmission.

This temporal structure reactivated the affective register of Austen's epistolary origins. Regency readers waiting for letters experienced narrative time as **lived duration**, not compressed consumption. LBD translated this into the rhythms of social media: the compulsive checking, the ambient awareness, the integration of narrative uncertainty into daily life. The platform became the medium of both story and affect.

3.3 Limitations

While successful, LBD's affective range remained relatively "safe", centered on romance, social embarrassment, and mild moral reckoning. The series activated shame and judgment, but stopped short of visceral discomfort or sustained psychological distress. To test the limits of the ATD framework, we must examine how it handles darker, more destabilizing affects: existential dread, bodily alienation, and systemic violence.

4. Design proposal 1 : Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde et la Fracture Affective

4.1 Source text affect

Robert Louis Stevenson's book, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, operates through the affect of the internal fracture and moral surveillance. Contrary to the external alienation of Frankenstein's Monster, the visceral intensity here lies in the fear of losing control over one's own body and will. It is the affect of doubling: the feeling that the dark part of oneself is already within, secretly watching us and waiting for the moment to take over. The text conveys a precariousness that is not social, but psychological and somatic.

4.2 Proposed design: "The Protocol

Platform : Mobile web application based on activity tracking and text input.

Core mechanic : the experiment simulate a digital therapy for "self performance". The user installs "The Protocol" to improve his discipline and his efficiency.

Phase 1 (The day of Jekyll) : the application asks for a tracking of the "good" user's habit: work time, exercise time in minutes, sleep). These data are transformed as a visible Moral Integrity Score. The goal is to encourage a consistent effort of perfection.

Phase 2 (The night of Hyde) : the application turns into passive mode. It starts by asking text inputs into a free diary, but it impose verbal constraints (for e.g.: "Write your darkest thoughts for at least 5 minutes without using the word "I" "). The goal is to create a linguistic effort that stimulates the struggle/fight for self-expression, forcing the emergence of a subconscious voice.

Phase 3 (The dispossession) : At night, the application uses the device's accelerometer. If the user is alive and awake at unusual hours, it generates cryptic notifications or "proofs" of its night

activities (screenshots, messages), signed "H.", creating a doubt on his own memories and a fear of accidentally losing control.

Affective goal : convey the intensity of loss of the physical (user's body) and psychological sovereignty. The participant does not play Jekyll and Hyde, but experiences fear of the system (the app, related to French psychoanalyst Clotilde Leguil's "surmoi numérique") that proves him that he is not the one he pretends to be. This mechanism expresses a moral threat of the Victorian era in terms of self disinformation, in the era of the quantified self.

4.3 Critical acknowledgments

This design focuses on self-declared information to bypass ethical issues raised by social API integration. The most relevant critique is the one about digital performance anxiety and the gamification of distress. To make it an example of effective procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007), the "Moral Integrity Score" must be programmed to be impossible to maintain indefinitely. The "Hyde" must be perceived as a systemic and inevitable consequence of the pursuit of perfection, and not merely as a personal moral failure, in order to respect the pedagogical function of the adaptation. Full implementation would require IRB approval and informed consent protocols specifying the app's intent to induce self-doubt, with clear opt-out mechanisms at each phase.

5. Design proposal 2: *Oliver Twist* and affective precarity

5.1 Source text affect

Dickens's *Oliver Twist* transmits the affective intensity of **precarity**: hunger, physical exhaustion, and the perpetual surveillance of the state/workhouse. It is a somatic narrative of a body that is hunted and depleted.

5.2 Proposed design: "The artful dodger's game"

Platform: Location-Based Mobile ARG (Alternate Reality Game).

Core Mechanic: This "Gig Economy" simulation recruits players via a text message from "The Artful Dodger."

- **The Loop:** The app tracks real-world location. It issues time-sensitive "gigs": *"Deliver this package to [location 1 mile away] in 15 minutes. Do not use main roads."*

- **Resource Depletion:** A "stamina" meter depletes based on the accelerometer (movement) and time. If the meter hits zero, the player is "caught" by the Beadle (GPS tracker). To refill stamina, players must find free public resources (water fountains, benches) marked on the map.

- **Escalation:** As the narrative progresses, the pay (points) decreases while the physical demands increase, simulating the poverty trap.

Affective goal: To transmit the intensity of **systemic exhaustion**. By mapping the Victorian workhouse onto the modern Gig Economy (Uber/DoorDash), the adaptation highlights the continuity of labor exploitation. It moves the audience from "pitying" Oliver to physically experiencing the impossibility of his circumstances.

5.3 Addressing the "poverty tourism" critique

The most serious critique of this design is that it gamifies suffering, a form of "poverty tourism" where the privileged "play" at being poor. To mitigate this, the design relies on **procedural rhetoric** (Bogost, 2007). The game is *rigged to fail*. There is no "winning," only an inevitable systemic collapse. The frustration produced by the unfair mechanics serves a pedagogical function, breaking the illusion of meritocracy. Furthermore, such a project should ideally be paired with real-world action (for e.g. unlocking donations to food banks upon completion) to bridge the gap between simulation and material aid. Any deployment beyond conceptual prototype would necessitate accessibility accommodations for users with mobility limitations and partnership with labor advocacy organizations to ensure the critique translates into material support rather than performative empathy.

6. Methodology: The Recursive Framework

To move from descriptive analysis to reproducible design, we propose a shift from linear adaptation models to a recursive methodology. While traditional remediation often follows a linear path (Source → Adaptation → Audience), Affective Transmedia Design (ATD) requires a continuous feedback loop designed to test and refine somatic intensity.

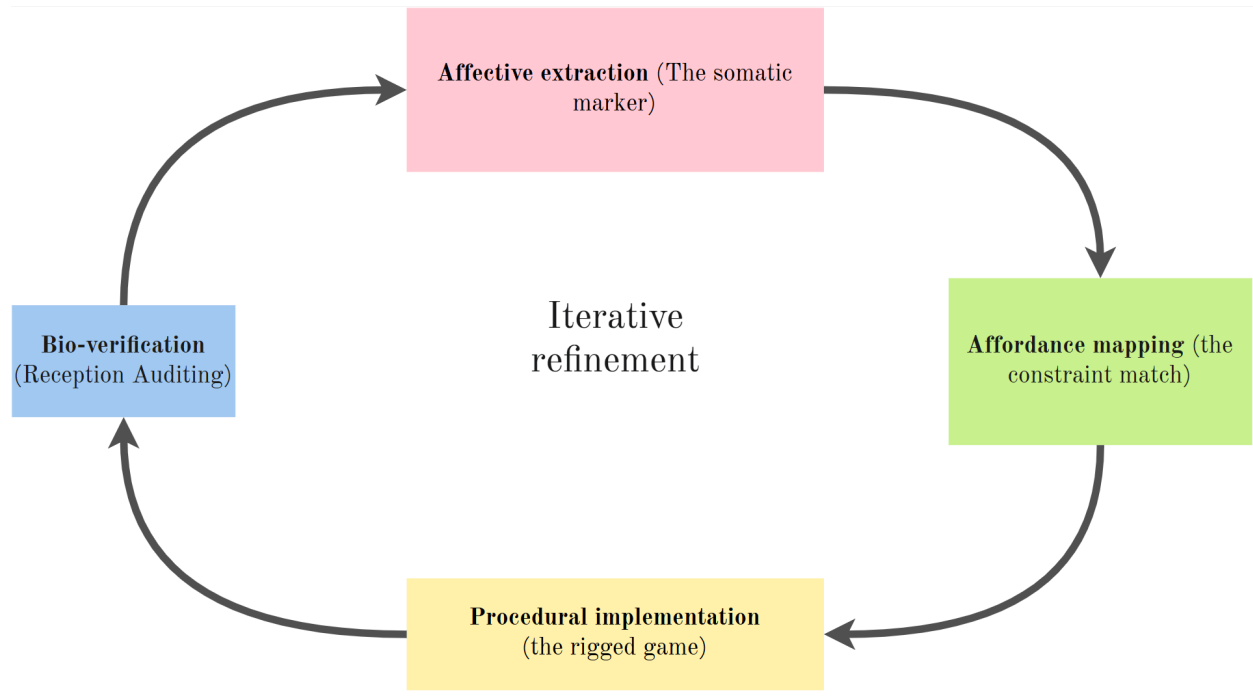We structure this methodology as a four-phase recursive cycle.

Figure 1 - The ATD recursive cycle

6.1 Phase I: Affective Extraction (The somatic marker)

The first step of ATD is to resist the urge to adapt "plot." Instead of listing narrative events, the designer must isolate the text's *Somatic Marker*, the specific bodily sensation associated with the narrative's central conflict.

Critique: In a traditional adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the focus is often on the visual transformation (makeup, CGI).

ATD Approach: The somatic marker is not "monstrosity," but "internal surveillance",the visceral sensation of observing oneself from within. The design goal becomes reproducing the physiological state of self-monitoring, not the visual spectacle of a monster.

6.2 Phase II: Affordance mapping (The constraint match)

Once the marker is identified, it must be mapped to a digital affordance. Crucially, ATD does not look for platform *features* (what the tech allows us to do), but for platform *constraints* (what the tech forces us to endure).

Application: In the *Oliver Twist* proposal (Section 5), the somatic marker of "physical exhaustion" is mapped to the battery and stamina limitations of mobile hardware. The literary restriction (poverty) finds its equivalent in the digital restriction (resource depletion).

6.3 Phase III: Procedural implementation (The rigged game)

Drawing on Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric, the mechanic must be designed to ensure the user cannot maintain equilibrium. The system must force the somatic experience through failure or endurance.

The Principle: If the source text describes a tragic lack of agency (for e.g. *Oliver Twist*), the interactive system must be "rigged." A fair game would betray the source text; only an unfair system can simulate the affect of structural inequality.

6.4 Phase IV: Bio-verification (reception auditing)

The cycle concludes by shifting the audit question from "Did they like the story?" to "Did their body react?" Verification in ATD looks for behavioral evidence of the somatic marker: anxiety checking (checking the phone compulsively), sleep disruption (in the case of the *Jekyll* app), or physical movement (in the *Dodger* game). If the somatic response is absent, the design returns to Phase I.

6.5 Operationalizing intensity: the reactivation index (R-Score)

To assist scholars in comparing the intensity of different adaptations, we propose the **ATD Reactivation Index (R-Score)**. This is not a scientific metric, but a heuristic rubric used to estimate the potential for affective transmission.[2]

The "intensity" of an adaptation can be estimated by analyzing three multipliers that reduce the aesthetic distance between the user and the narrative:

1. **The somatic factor (Body):** Does the interaction remain audiovisual (Reading/Watching), or does it require manual input (Clicking/Swiping) or whole-body engagement (Walking/Biometrics)?

2. **The semporal factor (Time):** Is the experience on-demand (Bingeable), or does it enforce "Appointment Viewing" or, most intensely, "Intrusive Real-Time" engagement (Notifications/Waiting)?

3. **The risk factor (Safety):** Does the experience occur in private anonymity, or does it risk "Vulnerability"? High-risk adaptations,such as the *Jekyll* proposal, which casts doubt on the user's own memory,produce the highest potential for reactivation, though they inherently raise significant ethical questions regarding user consent.

7. Conclusion: from representation to reactivation

Affective Transmedia Design posits that the "fidelity" discourse that has plagued adaptation

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[2] The R-Score is proposed here as a preliminary heuristic to structure comparative analysis, not as a validated psychometric instrument. Its three factors (Body, Time, Safety) are derived from theoretical synthesis rather than empirical testing. Future work should involve audience studies to determine whether these factors accurately predict affective intensity, whether they require weighting adjustments, and whether additional dimensions (for e.g. social visibility, consequences for failure) should be incorporated. Scholars using this framework should treat it as a hypothesis-generating tool rather than a measurement standard.

studies is obsolete in the face of interactive media. The classics endure not because of their plot mechanics, but because of their *affective cores*,the distinct ways they organize fear, desire, hope, and alienation.

The fundamental distinction between traditional remediation (Bolter & Grusin) and Reactivation lies in the preservation of safety. Remediation maintains the screen as a safe window through which we observe narrative; ATD seeks to dissolve that window.
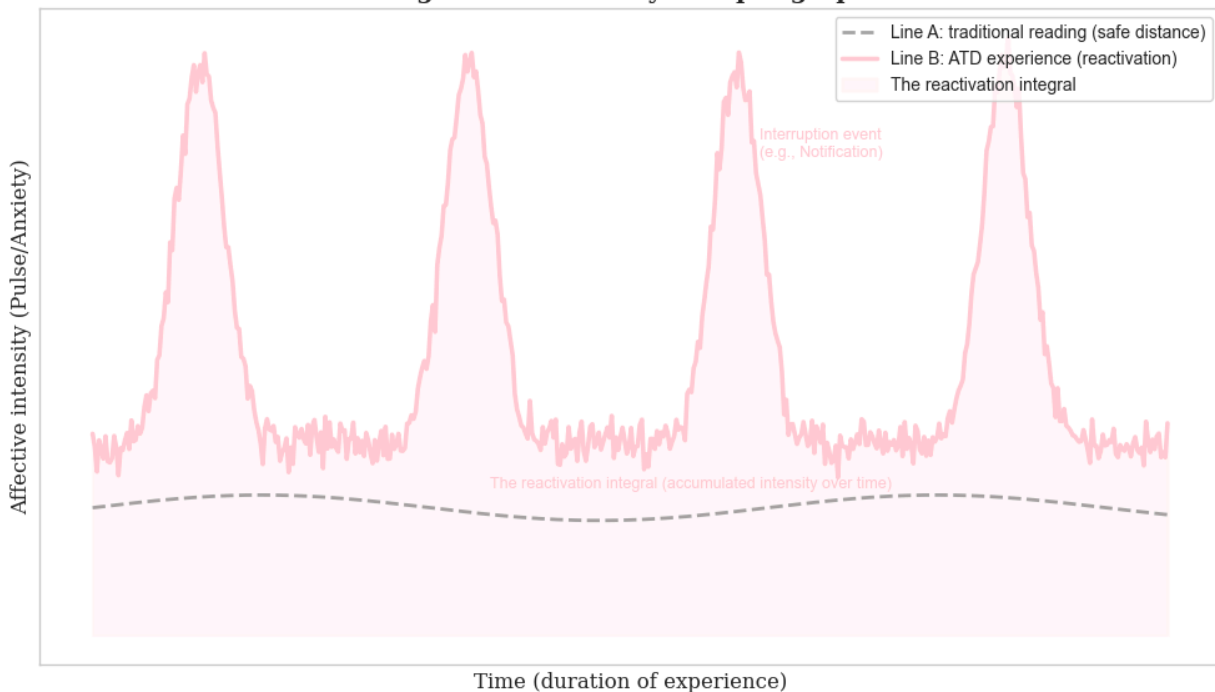

Figure 2 - The safety collapse graph

Conceptual model of engagement volatility. Line A represents the steady-state aesthetic distance characteristic of traditional reading/viewing. Line B models the hypothesized affective intensity spikes of ATD experiences, where real-time intrusions collapse the safety buffer between narrative and lived experience. The shaded area represents the cumulative affective differential, the 'reactivation integral' that distinguishes ATD from remediation.

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, while reading a novel provides a steady, contemplative engagement (Line A), ATD aims for volatility (Line B). By utilizing real-time duration and somatic constraints, the adaptation collapses the "aesthetic distance" that usually protects the audience. The narrative is no longer something that is *watched*; it is something that *interrupts*.

Ultimately, Affective Transmedia Design suggests a fundamental shift in the role of the literary scholar. We are no longer merely archivists of dead metaphors; we must become engineers of living intensities. The challenge for the next generation of adaptation studies is not to ask "What did this story mean?" but "What can this story do?"

We must stop treating the canon as a fragile museum piece to be observed behind glass. The recursive framework proposed here,emphasizing the collapse of safety and the accumulation of duration, offers a blueprint for shattering that glass. It is time to recompile the code of the Victorian novel for the operating system of the twenty-first-century body. Don't just read the text, run it.

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