Transposons contribute to the functional diversification of the head, gut, and ovary transcriptomes across *Drosophila* natural strains

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ABSTRACT

Transcriptomes are dynamic, with cells, tissues, and body parts expressing particular sets of transcripts. Transposons are a known source of transcriptome diversity, however studies often focus on a particular type of chimeric transcript, analyze single body parts or cell types, or are based on incomplete transposon annotations from a single reference genome. In this work, we have implemented a method based on *de novo* transcriptome assembly that minimizes the potential sources of errors while identifying a comprehensive set of gene-TE chimeras. We applied this method to head, gut and ovary dissected from five *Drosophila melanogaster n*atural populations, with individual reference genomes available. We found that 18.6% of body part specific transcripts are gene-TE chimeras. Overall, chimeric transcripts contribute a median of 38% to the total gene expression, and they provide both DNA binding and catalytic protein domains. Our comprehensive dataset is a rich resource for follow-up analysis. Moreover, because transposable elements are present in virtually all species sequenced to date, their relevant role in spatially restricted transcript expression is likely not exclusive to the species analyzed in this work.

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the genome, an animal's transcriptome is dynamic, with cell types, tissues and body parts expressing particular sets of transcripts[1–4]. The complexity and diversity of the transcriptome arises from the combinatorial usage of alternative promoters, exons and introns, and polyadenylation sites. A single gene can, therefore, encode a rich repertoire of transcripts that can be involved in diverse biological functions, and contribute to adaptive evolution and disease (*e.g.,* [5–8]). The potential contribution of transposable element (TE) insertions to the diversification of the transcriptome was analyzed soon after the first whole-genome sequences were available[9–13]. TEs are present in virtually all genomes studied to date, are able to insert copies of themselves in the genome and, although their mutation capacity is often harmful, they also represent an important source of genetic variation[14–17]. While transposable elements are a known source of transcriptome diversity, the majority of studies so far rely on incomplete transposon annotations from a single reference genome (*e.g.*, [12]). Moreover, methodologies are often specifically designed for particular types of chimeric gene-TE transcripts, *e.g.* TE-initiated transcripts[18], particular types of TEs, *e.g.* L1 chimeric transcripts[19], or have been applied to individual cell types or body parts, (*e.g.*, [20,21]). As such, our knowledge on the contribution of TEs to gene novelty is still partial.

Two of the most studied mechanisms by which TEs can generate chimeric transcripts are by providing alternative promoters and protein domains. In human and mouse, 2.8% and 5.2% of the total transcript start sites occurred within retrotransposons[22]. In *D. melanogaster*, over 40% of all genes are expressed from two or more promoters, with at least 1,300 promoters contained in TEs[23]. As well as individual examples of TEs providing protein domains[24–26], a comparative genomic analysis of tetrapod genomes revealed that capture of transposase domains is a recurrent mechanism for novel gene formation[27]. There is also evidence for the retrotransposon contribution to protein novelty. Approximately 9.7% of endogenous retrovirus open reading frames across 19 mammalian genomes evolve under purifying selection and are transcribed, suggesting that they could have been co-opted as genes[28]. Across insects, and depending on the methodology used, the percentage of newly emerged domains (<225 mya) due to TEs was estimated to be 1.7% to 6.6%[29]. However, studies that identify and characterize a comprehensive set of gene-TE chimeras to provide a complete overview of their contribution to both transcriptome and protein diversification are still missing.

Besides describing the diverse contributions of TEs to the transcriptome, analyzing the relative contribution of gene-TE chimeras to the total gene expression is highly relevant, as it is informative of the potential functional relevance of the transcripts identified. Studies performed so far suggest that this contribution is related to the position of the TE in the transcript.

Transcripts with a TE inserted in the 5'UTR or internal coding exons show significantly lower mean levels of expression compared with non-chimeric TE-gene transcripts[20]. TEs inserted in 3'UTRs were associated with reduced gene expression both in humans and mice, but with increased gene expression in human pluripotent stem cells[20,22]. In addition, whether specific TE types contribute to tissue-specific expression has been explored in mammals, where retrotransposons were found to be overrepresented in human embryonic tissues[22,30]. In *D. melanogaster*, the contribution of TEs to tissue specific expression has only been assessed in the head, with 833 gene-TE chimeric genes described[21]. Thus, whether the contribution of chimeric gene-TE transcripts is more relevant in the *D. melanogaster* head compared with other body parts is still an open question.

Within genes, TEs could also affect expression by changing the epigenetic status of their surrounding regions. In *Drosophila*, repressive histone marks enriched at TEs spread beyond TE sequences, which is often associated with gene down-regulation[31]. However, there is also evidence that TEs containing active chromatin marks can lead to nearby gene overexpression[32]. Genome-wide, the joint assessment of the presence of repressive and active chromatin marks has been restricted so far to the analysis of four TE families[33] and has never been carried out in the context of chimeric gene-TE transcripts.

In this work, we performed a high-throughput analysis to detect, characterize, and quantify chimeric gene-TE transcripts in RNA-seq samples from head, gut, and ovary dissected from the same individuals belonging to five natural strains of *D. melanogaster* (Figure 1A[34]). We implemented a method based on *de novo* transcriptome assembly that (i) minimizes the potential sources of errors when detecting chimeric gene-TE transcripts; and (ii) allows to identify a comprehensive dataset of transcripts rather than focusing on particular types (Figure 1B[3535]. Additionally, we assessed the coding potential and the contribution of chimeric transcripts to protein domains and gene expression as proxies for their integrity and functional relevance. Finally, we took advantage of the availability of ChIP-seq data for an active and a repressive histone mark, H3K9me3 and H3K27ac, respectively obtained from the same biological samples to investigate whether the TEs that are incorporated into the transcript sequences also affect their epigenetic status.

RESULTS

10% of *D. melanogaster* transcripts, across body parts and strains, are gene-TE chimeras

We performed a high-throughput analysis to detect and quantify chimeric gene-TE transcripts in RNA-seq samples from head, gut, and ovary, in five *D. melanogaster* strains collected from natural populations (Figure 1A). The three body parts were dissected from the same individuals, and an average of 32x (22x to 43x) per RNA-seq sample was obtained (3 replicates per body part and strain, Table S1[36]. We *de novo* assembled transcripts in which we annotate TE insertions using the new *D. melanogaster* manually curated TE library[34]. We only considered *de novo* transcripts that overlap with a known transcript obtained from a reference guided assembly (Figure 1B). We then used the reference genome of each strain to define the exon-intron boundaries of each transcript and to identify the position of the TE in the transcript (Figure 1B). The alignment with the reference genome and the accurate TE annotation also allowed us to discard single-unit transcripts, indicative of pervasive transcription, and TE autonomous expression, which are two important sources of errors when quantifying the contribution of TEs to gene novelty (Figure 1B[35]).

Overall, considering all the transcripts assembled in the three body parts and the five strains, we identified 2,169 chimeric gene-TE transcripts belonging to 1,250 genes (Table S2A). Thus, approximately 10% (2,169/21,786) of *D. melanogaster* transcripts contain exonic sequences of TE origin. In individual strains, this percentage ranged between 5.4% to 6.7% (842-1,013 chimeric transcripts per genome) indicating that most of the chimeric gene-TE transcripts are strain-specific, as expected given that the majority of TEs are present at low population frequencies (Figure 1C[34]). While the overall contribution of TEs to the transcriptome is 10%, TEs contribute 18.6% (1,295/6,959) of the total amount of body part specific transcripts (Figure 1C).

We identified two groups of chimeric gene-TE transcripts (Figure 1D). The first group contains chimeric transcripts which have a TE overlapping with the 5'UTR, the 3'UTR, or introducing alternative splice (AS) sites (*overlap and AS insertions* group: 977 chimeric transcripts from 655 genes). While TEs have been reported to introduce non-canonical splice motifs[21], we found that the majority of the TEs in the *overlap and AS insertions* group were adding a canonical AS motif (65.2%: 172/264) (Table S2B). The second group contains chimeric gene-TE transcripts in which the TE is annotated completely inside the UTRs or internal exons (*internal insertions* group: 1,587 transcripts from 890 genes) (Figure 1D). We hypothesized that this group could be the result of older insertions that have been completely incorporated into the transcripts. Indeed, we found that TEs in this group are shorter than those of the

127 *overlap and AS insertion* group, as expected if the former are older insertions (75.99% *vs*.
128 23.75%; test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001; Figure S1; see *Methods*). Additionally, while the
129 majority of gene-TE transcripts in the *overlap and AS insertions* group were strain-specific, we
130 found more transcripts shared between strains than strain-specific in the *internal insertions*
131 group (test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001; Figure S2A and Table S2C). This observation is
132 also consistent with this group being enriched for older insertions, and remained valid when
133 we removed the shorter insertions (test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001; Table S2C).

134 To test whether the *overlap and AS insertions* and the *internal insertions* groups contribute
135 differently to the diversification of the transcriptome, we performed all the subsequent analyses
136 considering all the chimeric transcripts together, and the two groups separately. In addition,
137 because shorter insertions might be enriched for false positives, *i.e.,* not corresponding to real
138 TE sequences due to the difficulty of annotating these repetitive regions, we also performed
139 the analysis with the subset of chimeric gene-TE transcripts that contains a fragment of a TE
140 insertion that is ≥120bp (831/977 and 628/1587 for the *overlap and AS insertions* and the
141 *internal insertions* groups, respectively; see *Methods*).

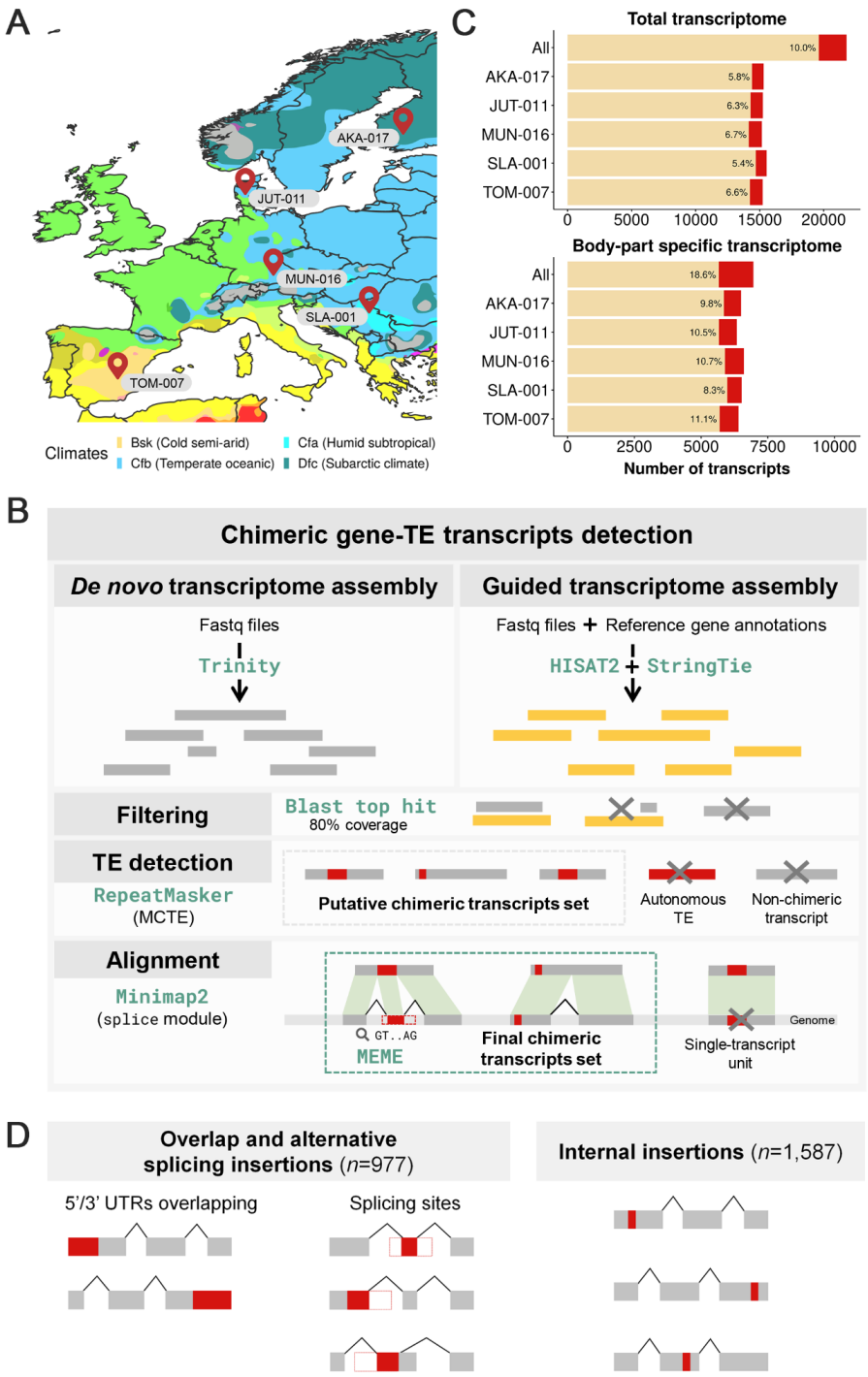
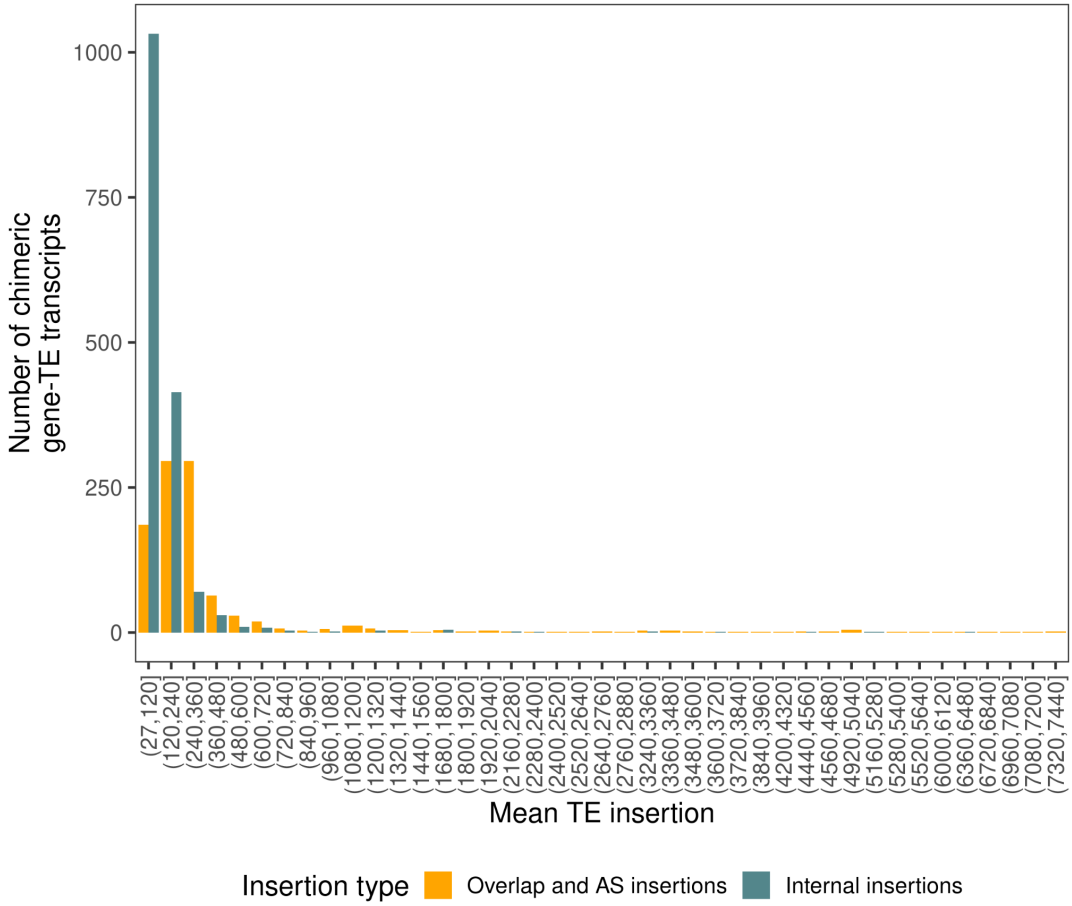


Figure 1. Detection of chimeric gene-TE transcripts in five strains of *D. melanogaster*. A. Map showing the sampling locations of the five European strains of *D. melanogaster* used in this study. TOM-007: Tomelloso, Spain (*BSk*); MUN-016: Munich, Germany (*Cfb*); JUT-011: Jutland, Denmark (*Cfb*); SLA-001: Slankamen, Serbia (*Cfa*); and AKA-017: Akaa, Finland (*Dfc*). Colors represent the climate zones according to the Köppen-Geiger climate distribution[37]. **B.** Pipeline to detect chimeric transcripts. Two types of transcriptome assembly were performed: a *de novo* assembly using Trinity[38] and a genome-guided transcriptome assembly using HISAT2[39] and StringTie[40]. We only considered *de novo* transcripts that had a minimum 80% coverage with a known transcript to be screened for TEs

151 insertions. RepeatMasker[41] is used with a manually curated TE library[34] to detect TEs in the *de novo*
152 assembled transcripts. An alignment against the reference genome of each strain is used to define the
153 exon-intron boundaries of transcripts and to identify the position of the TE in the transcript[42]. Transcripts
154 fully annotated as a TE or detected as single-transcript units are discarded. **C.** Contribution of chimeric
155 gene-TE transcripts to the total transcriptome and the body parts specific transcriptome globally and by
156 strain. *All* includes all the transcripts assembled in the three body parts and the five strains. **D.**
157 Schematic of the two groups of chimeric transcripts identified. *Overlap and alternative splicing (AS)*
158 *insertions* group, and *internal insertions* group. Note that these numbers total more than 2,169 because
159 some chimeric transcripts can have different insertions in different samples. Gray boxes represent
160 exons, red boxes represent a TE fragment incorporated in the mRNA, white boxes represent a TE
161 fragment that is not incorporated in the final mRNA. The black lines connecting the exons represent the
162 splicing events.



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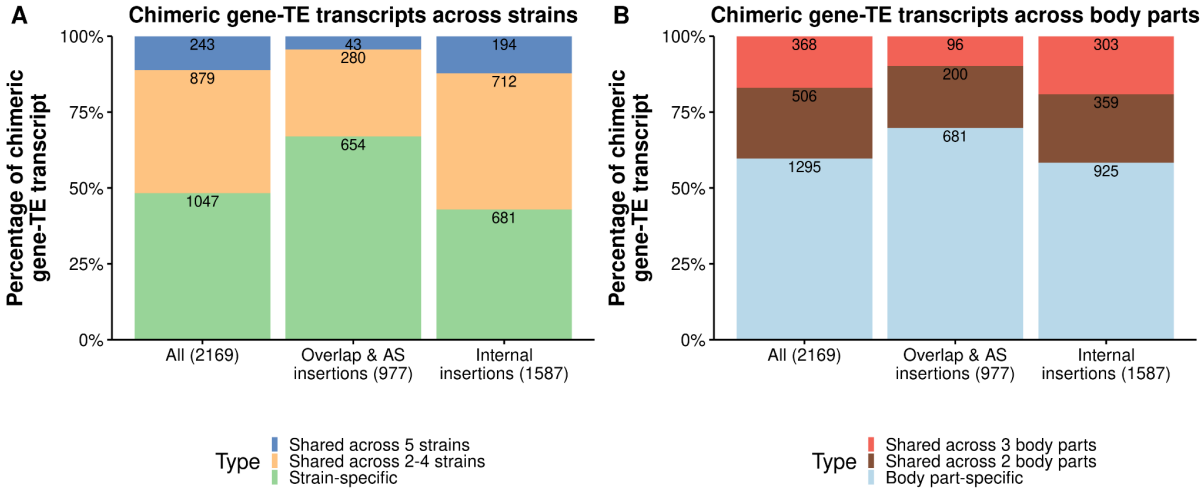
164 **Supplementary Figure 1. Histogram of the mean TE insertion length (bp) in chimeric gene-TE**
165 **transcripts of the *overlap and AS insertions* and *internal insertions* group.** 232 out of 977 (23.75%)
166 chimeric transcripts from the *overlap and AS insertions* group contain a fragment of a TE insertion <
167 120bp. 1,206 out of 1,587 (75.99%) chimeric transcripts from the *internal insertions* group contain a
168 fragment of a TE insertion < 120bp.



Supplementary Figure 2. Percentage of chimeric gene-TE transcripts strains and body parts. A. Bar plot showing the percentage of chimeric transcripts detected across strains. In the global set of chimeric transcripts (*All*), in the *Overlap and AS insertions* group, and the *Internal insertions* group. **B.** Bar plot showing the percentage of chimeric transcripts detected across body parts. In the global set of chimeric transcripts (*All*), in the *Overlap and AS insertions* group, and the *Internal insertions* group.

Gene-TE chimeric transcripts are more abundant in the head

Using high-throughput methodologies 833 chimeric genes were identified in the *D. melanogaster* head[21], however, the relative amount of chimeric gene-TE transcripts across body parts has never been assessed before. We found that the majority of the assembled chimeric gene-TE transcripts across the five strains analyzed were body part specific (60%: 1,295/2,169), with only 17% (368) shared across all three body parts (Figure 2A and Table S3A). The same pattern was found for the *overlap and AS insertions* group and for the *internal insertions* group, when considering all insertions and those ≥120bp (Figure S2B and Table S3A).

Head was the body part expressing the most chimeric transcripts (1,459) followed by gut (1,068) and ovary (884) (Figure 2A and Table S3A). Note that 208 of the chimeric transcripts identified in this work were previously described by Treiber and Waddell (2020) [21]. After accounting for differences in the total number of transcripts assembled in each body part, we still observed that the head was expressing more chimeric transcripts compared to gut and ovary (8.54% head *vs.* 6.61% gut and 7% ovary; test of proportions, *p*-value = 3.89×10^{-11} and 2.14×10^{-7}, respectively; Table S3B). On the other hand, the proportion of total transcripts that are chimeric was similar between gut and ovary (test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.337) (Table S3C). A higher proportion of chimeric transcripts in head compared with gut and ovary was

also found when the *overlap and AS insertions* and the *internal insertions* groups were analyzed separately, although in this last group the proportion across body parts is similar if we focus on ≥120bp insertions (Figure 2B and Table S3C). Overall, the same patterns were also found at the strain level, except for JUT-011 and MUN-016, where some comparisons were not significant (Table S3C).

Finally, the head was also the body part that expressed the most body part specific chimeric transcripts (48% head *vs.* 29% gut; test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001, and *vs.* 30% ovary, *p*-value < 0.001), while no differences were found between gut and ovary (30% ovary *vs.* 29% gut; test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.7; Figure 2A). In the three body parts, these proportions were higher than the total proportion of body part specific transcripts (21.3%, 13.1% and 9.4%, for head, gut and ovary respectively; test of proportions, *p*-values < 0.001 for all comparisons; Table S3B).

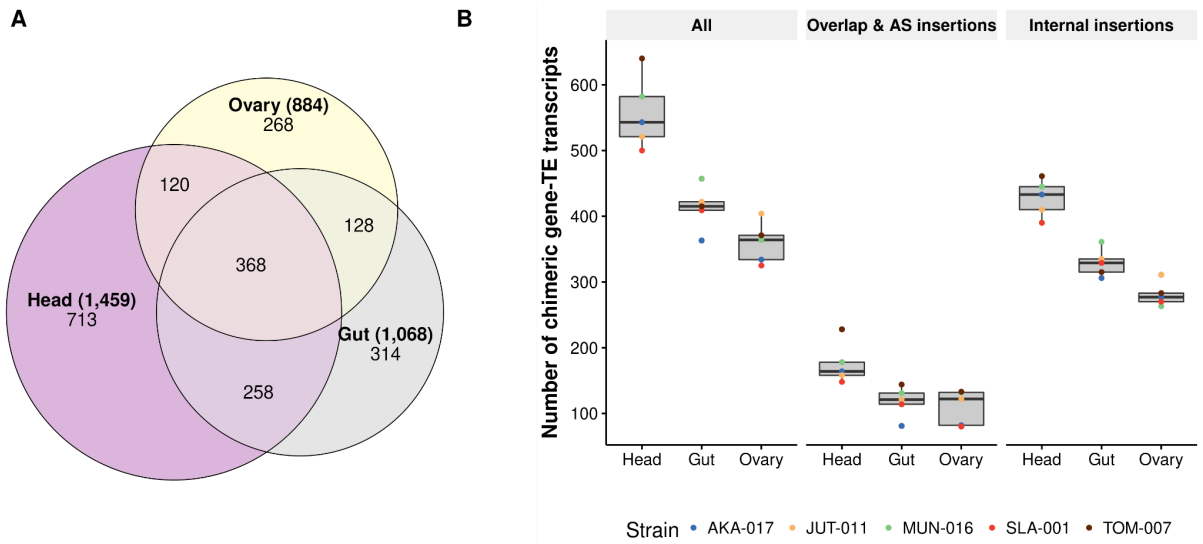


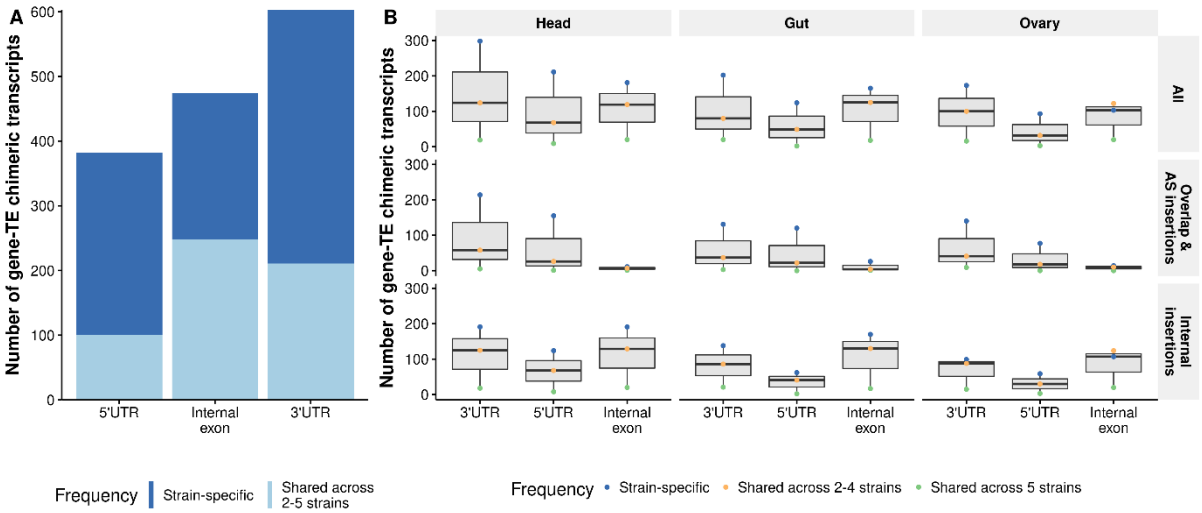
Figure 2. Distribution of chimeric transcripts across body parts and insertion groups. A. Venn diagram showing the number of chimeric transcripts shared across body parts. **B.** Number of chimeric gene-TE transcripts detected by body part, strain and insertion group. *All* includes all chimeric transcripts detected in all body parts and strains.

Most chimeric transcripts contain TE insertions in the 3'UTRs

Chimeric gene-TE transcripts are enriched for TE insertions located in the 3'UTRs in *D. melanogaster* and in mammals[12,13,20]. Consistently, we also found that most of the chimeric gene-TE transcripts contain a TE in the 3'UTR (1,084 transcripts from 662 genes) followed by internal exons (924 transcripts from 529 genes) and insertions in the 5' UTRs (703 transcripts

from 499 genes). Note that 34 of the 5' UTR insertions detected in this work were experimentally validated in a previous analysis that estimated the promoter TE usage across developmental stages in *D. melanogaster*[23]. Indeed, the number of chimeric genes with a TE inserted in the 3' and 5' UTRs is higher than expected when taking into account the proportion of the genome that is annotated as UTRs, while there is a depletion of TEs in internal exons (test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001 in the three comparisons; Table S4A). It has been hypothesized that the higher number of insertions in 3' UTRs could be explained by lack of selection against insertions in this gene compartment[11,12]. We thus tested whether 3'UTR chimeric transcripts were enriched for TE insertions present in more than one genome. However, we found an enrichment of unique insertions in 3'UTR chimeric transcripts suggesting that they might be under purifying selection (test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.033; Figure 3A and Table S4B).

While in the *overlap and AS insertions* group, TE insertions were also mainly located in the 3' UTRs (53.4%: 260/487), in the *internal insertions* group there were more chimeric transcripts with TE insertions found in internal exons than in the 3'UTR (448 *vs.* 343; test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001). This pattern still holds when we only consider ≥120bp insertions (166 *vs.* 125; test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.047; Table S4C). Figure 3B shows the number of chimeric gene-TE transcripts globally and by insertion group, body part and strain (Table S4D) where it can be observed that, overall, the previous patterns hold at the body part level.



238 **Figure 3. Position and frequency distribution of TEs in chimeric transcripts. A.** Number of gene-
239 TE chimeric transcripts by position and frequency**. B.** Number of chimeric gene-TE transcripts by
240 insertion group and body part, according to the insertion position (5'/3'UTRs or internal exons) and
241 frequency. Each dot represents the number of chimeric gene-TE transcripts according to the frequency:
242 strain-specific (blue), shared across two to four strains (orange) and shared across all five strains
243 (green). These analyses were performed with the subset of chimeric transcripts with only one TE
244 annotated in the same position across strains.

245

246 **Chimeric gene-TE transcripts are enriched for retrotransposon insertions**

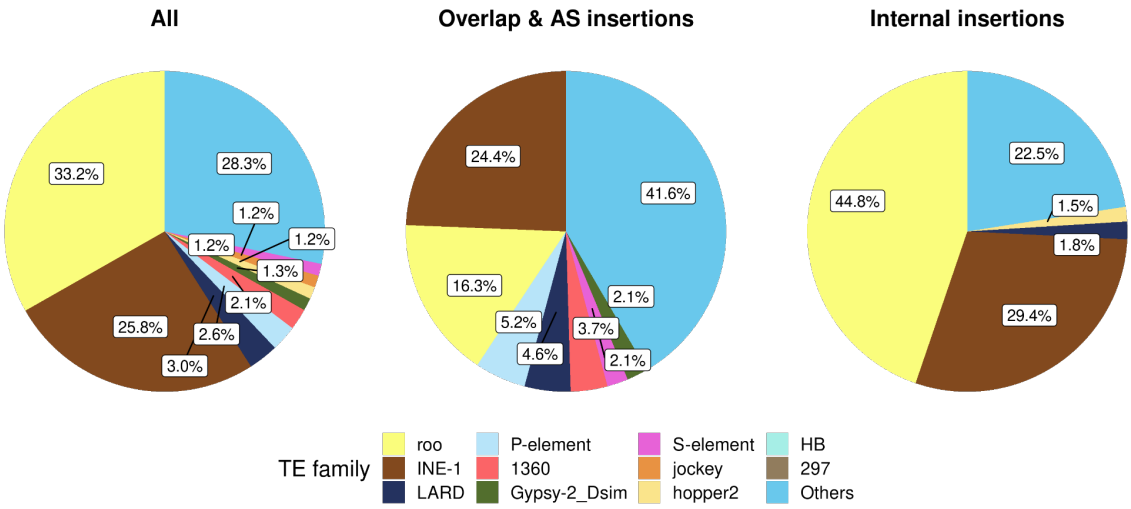
247 We assessed the contribution of TE families to chimeric gene-TE transcripts. We found that
248 the majority of TE families, 111/146 (76%), were detected in chimeric gene-TE transcripts, as
249 has been previously described in head chimeric transcripts (Table S5A[21,34]). Although
250 retrotransposons are more abundant than DNA transposons (61% on average in the five
251 genomes analyzed[34], the contribution of retrotransposons to the chimeric gene-TE transcripts
252 was higher than expected (81%: 90/111; test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001; Table S5B).
253 There were slightly more families contributing to the *overlap and AS insertions* group than to
254 the *internal insertions* group (98 *vs.* 82, respectively, test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.01), but
255 both groups were enriched for retrotransposons (test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001 and *p*-
256 value = 0.0179, respectively; Table S5C). More than half of these families (64: 57.7%)
257 contribute to chimeric transcripts in all body parts, while 24 families were body part-specific,
258 with 12 being head-specific, 6 gut-specific and 6 ovary-specific (Table S5A).

259 The most common TE families found were *roo* (33.2%) and INE-1 (25.8%) (Figure 4). Indeed,
260 these two families were over-represented in the chimeric transcripts dataset when compared
261 to their abundance in the genome: *roo* in the five strains (test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.0001
262 for all comparisons) and INE-1 in AKA-017 and SLA-001 (test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.004,
263 and *p*-value < 0.0001, respectively) (Table S5D). *Roo* and INE-1 were also the most common
264 families both in the *overlap and AS insertions* group (16.3 and 24.4%, respectively) and in the
265 *internal insertions* group (44.8% and 29.4%, respectively). The same pattern was found when
266 we analyzed only those chimeric transcripts with TEs ≥120bp (Figure S3 and Table S5E).

267 Because *roo* insertions were enriched in all the strains analyzed, we further investigate these
268 TE sequences. We found only two types of *roo* insertions: solo LTRs (23 insertions), that all
269 belong to the *overlap and AS insertions* group, and a short (45bp-217bp) low complexity
270 sequence mapping to the positions 1,052-1,166 of the canonical *roo* element (see *Methods*).
271 This short *roo* sequence is more common in the *internal insertions* group than in the *overlap*

and AS insertions group (911 *vs.* 61 insertions, respectively). Note that a recent analysis by Oliveira et al. [43] also found this same region of the *roo* consensus sequence to be the most abundant in chimeric gene-TE transcripts across four *D. melanogaster* strains[43]. The authors evaluated whether these short sequences were widespread repeats across the genome. They found that the majority of the *roo* fragments they identified (97.45%) have only one blast hit in the genome, suggesting that they are not. We argued that if these low complexity regions have a *roo* origin, we should find that at least some of them should also have a blast hit with a *roo* insertion. To test this, we used less strict blast parameters compared with Oliveira et al.[43] and found that 57 of the low complexity regions have a *roo* element insertion as the second best hit and 148 have a *roo* insertion in the top 5 hits, suggesting that indeed some of these sequences have a clear *roo* origin (Table S5F). Furthermore, we also tested whether this low complexity region was present in the *roo* consensus sequence from a closely related species, *D. simulans*, and found that this was the case strongly suggesting that this low complexity sequence is an integral part of the *roo* element.

We further investigated why this *roo* low complexity region was incorporated into genes. Because TEs can contain *cis*-regulatory DNA motifs, we performed a motif scan of the low complexity sequence from the canonical *roo* element. We found a C2H2 zinc finger factor motif repeated six times in this region. Note that this motif is only found once in the *roo* consensus sequence outside the low complexity region. A scan in the *roo* sequences from the chimeras revealed that 78% (753/972) of the transcripts with the low complexity *roo* sequence contains at least one sequence of this zinc finger motif, with 26% (196/753) containing 3 or more (Table S5G).



296 **Figure 4. TE families distribution in gene-TE chimeras, globally and by insertion group.**
297 Percentage of TE families contributing to gene-TE chimeras in the global dataset (*All*), in the *overlap*
298 *and AS insertions* group and in the *internal insertions* group. Only TE families found in more than 15
299 chimeric genes are depicted, otherwise they are grouped in *Others*.

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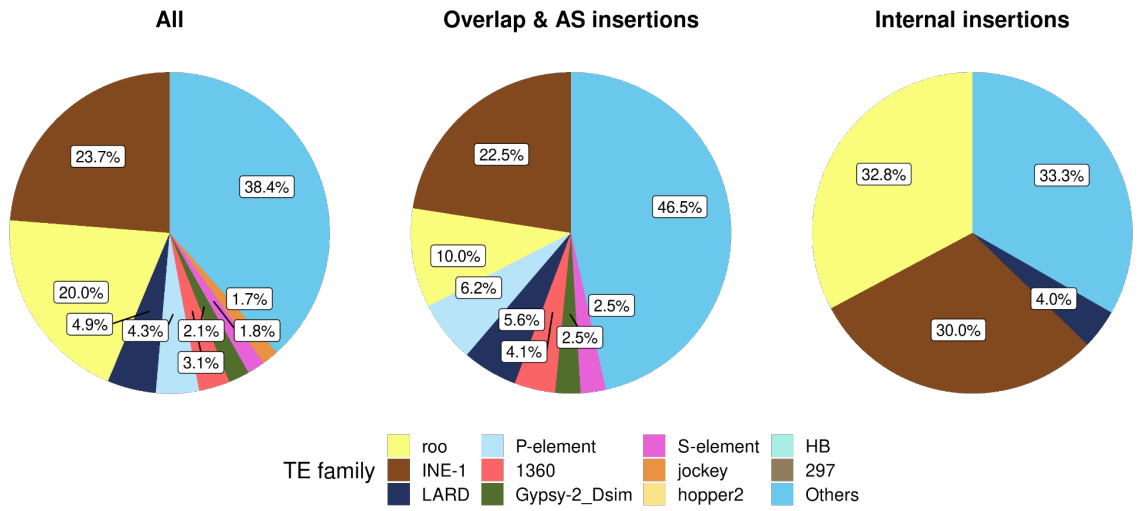

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303 **Supplementary Figure 3. TE families distribution in gene-TE chimeras, globally and by insertion**
304 **group considering insertions ≥120bp.** Percentage of TE families contributing to gene-TE chimeras
305 considering insertions ≥120bp in the global dataset (*All*), in the o*verlap and AS insertions* group and in
306 the *internal insertions* group. Only TE families found in more than 15 chimeric genes are depicted,
307 otherwise they are grouped in *Others*.

308

309 **Chimeric gene-TE transcripts contribute a median of ~38% of the total gene expression**

310 Besides identifying and characterizing chimeric gene-TE transcripts, we quantified the level of
311 expression of both chimeric and non-chimeric transcripts genome-wide. We focused on
312 transcripts with ≥1 TMM in at least one of the samples analyzed (1,779 out of 2,169 chimeric
313 transcripts, corresponding to 86% (1,074/1,250) of the genes (see *Methods*). We found that
314 chimeric gene-TE transcripts have lower expression levels than non-chimeric transcripts
315 (17,777; Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.001, Figure 5A). This is in contrast with previous
316 observations in human pluripotent stem cells that reported no differences in expression
317 between chimeric and non-chimeric transcripts[20]. We dismissed the possibility that the lower
318 expression of chimeric gene-TE transcripts was driven by the *roo* low complexity region
319 identified in 995 of the chimeric transcripts (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.0001; Figure 5A).
320 Lower expression of the chimeric gene-TE transcripts was also found at the body part and

strain levels and when we analyzed the *overlap and AS insertions* and *internal insertions* groups separately (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.001 for all comparisons; Figure 5A and Table S6A).

We further tested whether TEs inserted in different gene locations differed in their levels of expression compared with the non-chimeric TE transcripts. We found that chimeric transcripts had significantly lower expression than non-chimeric transcripts regardless of the insertion position (Wilcoxon's test *p*-value < 0.001 for all comparisons; Figure 5A). Furthermore, insertions in the 3'UTR appeared to be more tolerated than those in 5'UTR and internal exons, as their expression level was higher (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.005 for both comparisons; Figure 5A). Our results are consistent with those reported by Faulkner et al.[22] who also found that 3'UTR insertions reduced gene expression.

If we focus on the chimeric genes, 24% of them (259 genes) only expressed the chimeric gene-TE transcript (in all the genomes and body parts where expression was detected). Most of these genes (70%) contain short TE insertions and accordingly most of them belong to the *internal insertions* group (93%) (test of proportions, *p*-value < 0.001). For the other 76% (815) of the genes, we calculated the average contribution of the chimeric gene-TE transcript to the total gene expression per sample. While some genes contributed only ~4% of the total gene expression, others accounted for >90% (median = 22.7%) (Figure 5B). The median contribution to gene expression of the *internal insertions* group is higher than that of the *overlap and AS insertions* group, when considering all the insertions (25% *vs.* 14.3%, respectively; Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.001), and when analyzing only those transcripts with ≥120bp insertions (20% *vs.* 14.29%, respectively; Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value = 0.0015). Considering only the transcripts that do not contain the *roo* low complexity sequence, the median contribution to gene expression of the *internal insertions* group was still 20%. Overall, taking all chimeric genes into account (1,074), the median of the chimeric gene-TE transcripts' expression contribution to the total gene expression was 38%.

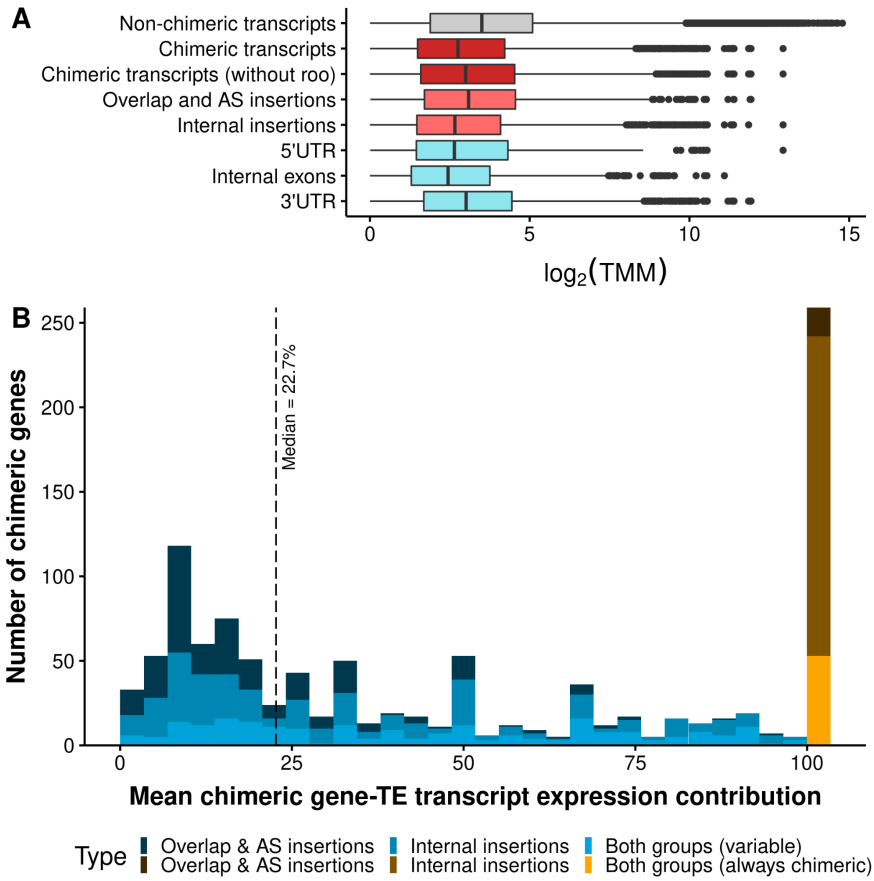

Figure 5. TE insertions within genes affect gene expression. A. Boxplots for the expression levels, measured as the logarithm of TMM: for all non-chimeric transcripts of the genome (17,777, in gray), all chimeric transcripts detected in the present study with TMM ≥ 1 (1,779, in dark red), chimeric transcripts without the short internal *roo* insertion (963, dark red), all chimeric transcripts belonging to the *overlap and AS insertions* group (758, light red) and *internal insertions* group (1,302, light red), and chimeric transcripts divided by position of the insertion (5'UTR: 546, internal exons: 741, 3'UTR: 906, cadet blue). **B.** Histogram showing the expression contribution of chimeric transcripts to the total gene expression. Blue bars represent the contribution of variable chimeric genes (815 genes), ranging from ~4% to >90% (median: 22.7%) and the orange/brown bar represents the genes that always produced chimeric transcripts in all the genomes and body parts where expression was detected (259 genes).

Finally, we evaluated whether there are differences between the expression levels of body part-specific and body part-shared chimeric transcripts. The breadth of expression, measured as the number of tissues in which a gene is expressed, is significantly and positively correlated with the level of expression in *Drosophila*[44] and humans[45]. Consistent with this, we found that body part-shared chimeric transcripts have significantly higher expression levels than chimeric transcripts expressed in only one body part (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.001; Table S6B), when considering the whole dataset and for chimeric transcripts with insertions ≥120bp (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.001; Table S6B). Since we observed that the head was

expressing more chimeric transcripts (Figure 2A), we next assessed if head-specific chimeric transcripts were also expressed at higher levels. We observed that the median expression of head-specific chimeric transcripts was higher than those specific of gut ($median_{head}$= 5.18 TMM [*n* = 527], $median_{gut}$= 3.8 TMM [*n* = 205]; Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value = 0.0021), but lower than ovary-specific chimeric transcripts ($median_{ovary}$= 8.52 TMM [*n* = 210]; Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value = 1.35×10^{5}). However, this is similar to the expression level of genes in these tissues (median of gene expression in ovary>head>gut: 20.2>9.7>8.5).

Interestingly, strain-shared chimeric transcripts (expressed in the five strains) also have significantly higher expression levels than strain-specific chimeric transcripts (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value < 0.001; Table S6C).

11.4% of the TEs within chimeric gene-TE transcripts could also be affecting gene expression via epigenetic changes

We tested whether TEs that are part of chimeric transcripts could also be affecting gene expression by affecting the epigenetic marks. We used ChIP-seq experiments previously performed in our lab for the three body parts in each of the five strains analyzed for two histone marks: the silencing mark H3K9me3[46,47] and H3K27ac, related to active promoters and enhancers[48,49]. We focused on polymorphic TEs because for these insertions we can test whether strains with and without the insertion differed in the epigenetic marks (755 genes). For the majority of these genes (534), we did not observe consistent epigenetic patterns across samples with and without the TE insertion, and these genes were not further analyzed. Additionally, 86 genes did not harbor any epigenetic marks while 49 genes contained the same epigenetics mark(s) (H3K27ac, H3K9me3, or both marks) in strains with and without that particular TE insertion (Table S7). Overall, only for 11.4% (86/755) of the genes, we observed a consistent change in the epigenetic status associated with the presence of the TE. This percentage is similar for the *overlap and AS* group and the internal insertion group (10.4% and 11.8%, respectively). The majority of TEs showing consistent changes in their epigenetic status were associated with gene down-regulation (50/86; Table 1). While 70% (534/ 755) of the genes analyzed were expressed in the head, only 57% (49/86) differed in their epigenetic marks (test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.03).

396 **Table 1. Expression changes associated with epigenetic status of strains with and without the**
397 **TE insertion.** Highlighted in bold, genes showing the expected change in expression according to the
398 gained histone mark.

Fold change	Gain of H3K27ac	Gain of H3K9me3	Gain of both marks	Loss of H3K27ac	Loss of H3K9me3
FC > 1	**15**	5	13	1	2
FC < 1	26	**9**	14	1	0

399

400 **Gene-TE chimeric transcripts are enriched for DNA binding molecular functions**
401 **involved in metabolism and its regulation, and development**

402 To get insight on the biological processes and molecular functions in which the gene-TE
403 chimeric transcripts are involved, we performed a gene ontology (GO) clustering analysis[50].
404 We analyzed the chimeric genes detected in each body part separately, using as a
405 background the total genes assembled in the corresponding body part. We found that chimeric
406 genes are enriched in general cell functions, such as metabolism and its regulation, and
407 development (Figure 6A and Table S8A). Some functions are particular to a body part, *e.g.*
408 *response to stimulus and signaling* in the head, *anatomical structure development and*
409 *regulation,* and *signaling and communication* in the gut, and *cellular component organization*
410 in the ovary. Note that the *overlap and AS insertions* group is enriched for *cellular component*
411 organization, and *nucleosome and cilium assembly and organization*, across tissues (Figure
412 6A and Table S8C).

413 Finally, regarding the molecular function, chimeric genes are enriched for DNA binding
414 processes and *RNA polymerase II transcription* across body parts (Figure 6B and Table S8B),
415 while in head they are also enriched for *transmembrane transporter activity* and in ovary for
416 *transcription factor activity*.

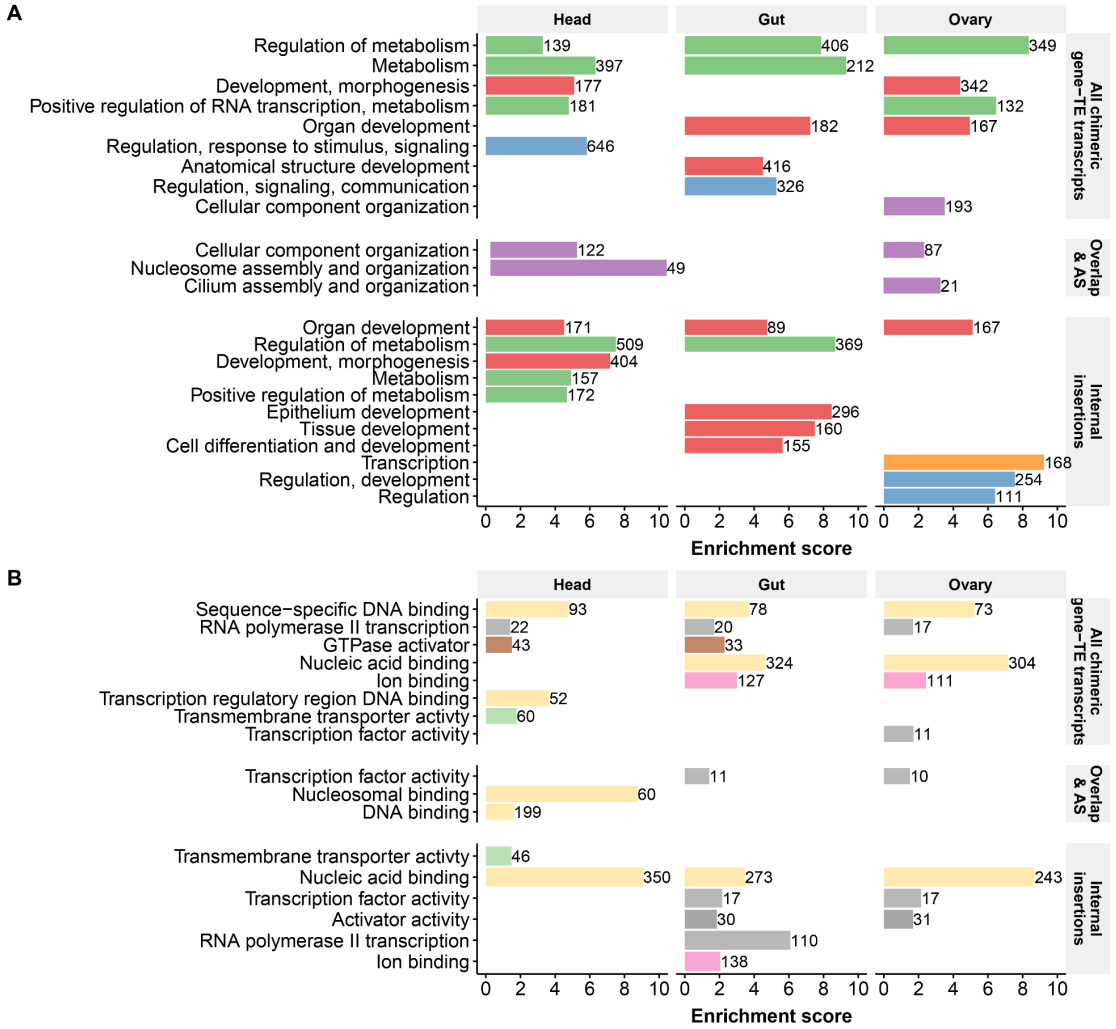

Figure 6. Biological processes and molecular functions of chimeric gene-TE transcripts. A. Biological processes clustering. **B.** Molecular functions clustering. The length of the bars represents the cluster enrichment score. The number in the bars represents the number of genes in each cluster. Names of the annotation clusters are manually processed based on the cluster's GO terms. Colors represent similar annotation clusters. Detailed GO terms of each cluster are given in Table S8.

Both DNA transposons and retrotransposons add functional protein domains

We next assessed whether TE sequences annotated in internal exons provided functional domains. We first confirmed, using the Coding Potential Assessment Tool (CPAT[51]) software, that the majority of chimeric protein-coding gene-TE transcripts that have a TE annotated in an internal exon have coding potential (95.12%: 858/902; Table S9A). Using PFAM[52], we identified a total of 27 PFAM domains in 36 different chimeric transcripts from 29 genes (Table 2 and Table S9B). These 27 domains were identified in 24 TE families, with 16 TE families providing more than one domain. The size of these domains ranged from 9bp to 610bp (mean

of 123.5bp; Table S9B). Note that 10 of these 29 chimeric genes have been previously described in the literature (Table 2). Most of the transcripts (67%: 24/36) belong to the *overlap and AS insertions* group. Finally, we found chimeric transcripts adding domains in the three tissues analyzed (Table 2), with an enrichment in ovary compared to head (test of proportions, *p*-value = 0.027).

The majority of TEs adding domains were retrotransposons (22/29) and most TEs provided a nearly-full domain (24/29, ≥50% coverage), including 9 TEs adding a full-size domain (Table 2). Almost 30% (9/29) of the chimeric genes are related to gene expression functions and 20% (5/29) are related to cell organization and biogenesis (Table S9C). The majority of these chimeric genes (21/29) have evidence of expression, ranging from 1.05 to 47.14 TMM (Table 2, median = 8.26 TMM). The median expression was higher for the transcripts with complete domains compared to partially/uncompleted domains (median TMM 22.16 *vs.* 9.03), although the difference was not statistically significant (Wilcoxon's test, *p*-value = 0.08). The majority of TEs for which the population TE frequency has been reported, are fixed or present at high frequencies (12/22 TEs; Table 2).

We assessed if the domains detected in the TE fragment of the gene-TE chimera were also found in the consensus sequence of the TE family. Because most TE families were providing more than one domain, in total we analyzed 54 unique domains. We were able to find the domain sequence for 50 unique domains from 20 TE consensus sequences (Table S9D). Note that for five of these domains (from four TEs), we had to lower PFAM detection thresholds to detect them (see Methods). The four domains that were not identified in the consensus sequences, were smaller than the average (ranging 18bp-101bp, mean: 62.25bp) and were not detected in the chimeric fragments as full domain sequences.

A PFAM domain enrichment analysis considering domains annotated with nearly-full domains and in transcripts expressed with minimum of 1 TMM using dcGO[53], found enrichment of the molecular function *nucleic acid binding* (6 domains, FDR = 4.12×10^{-4}) and *catalytic activity, acting on RNA* (4 domains, FDR = 4.12×10^{-4}) (Table 3). All the enriched domains are found in retrotransposon insertions. Consistent with the enrichment of the molecular functions, these domains were enriched in the *nuclear body* and in *regulation of mRNA metabolic process* (Table 3).

462 **Table 2. Description of the 29 chimeric genes containing a TE providing a protein domain.**
463 NA in the *splicing motifs* column represents cases in which there are not splicing signals because the
464 TE was found inside an exon (*internal insertion* group) while NC stands for non-canonical splicing motif.
465 TMM is the expression level and it is the average if more than one transcript was detected across body
466 parts or strains. TE frequency (*Freq.*) was retrieved from Rech et al.[34]. Superscript numbers in the *gene*
467 column represent literature describing these chimeric genes: [1] [21], [2] [12], [3] [54], [4] [55], [5] [56], [6] [57], [7]
468 [32], [8] [58].

Gene	TE class: family	PFAM domains (%coverage)	TMM	Splicing motifs	Freq.	Body parts
CHKov1[1,2,3,4]	RNA: Doc	Exo_endo_phos_2 (98.3%), RVT_1 (100%)	16.77	NA	0.85	Head, Ovary, Gut
nxf2[5]	RNA: TART-A	TAP_C (89.8%)	15.55	NA	1.00	Gut, Ovary
Pld[1]	RNA: I-element	RNase_H (21%)	5.27	NC	1.00	Gut
Smn	RNA: TART-A	TAP_C (89.8%)	6.04	NA	1.00	Ovary, Gut
Brf	RNA: jockey	Exo_endo_phos_2 (99.2%), PRE_C2HC (98.5%), RVT_1 (100%)	4.63	AG/GT	0.02	Gut, Head
Dbp45A	RNA: Doc6	Exo_endo_phos_2 (84%), RVT_1 (98.7%)	0	NC/GT	0.04	Ovary
Fer2LCH	RNA: blood	Integrase_H2C2 (96.6%), RT_RNaseH_2 (100%), RVP (86.1%), RVT_1 (99.1%)	3.88	NC	0.04	Ovary
smg	RNA: rover	Baculo_F (23.4%), Integrase_H2C2 (87.9%), RT_RNaseH (99.1%), RVT_1 (98.7%)	0	NC	0.04	Ovary
eIF4B	RNA: Invader2	rve (78.4%)	26.99	AG/GT	NA	Gut
CG7465	RNA: NewFam16	GYR (98.6%), YLP (92.6%)	4.58	AG/GT	1.00	Gut
CG7582	RNA: jockey	PRE_C2HC (98.5%)	0	AG/GT	0.02	Head
CG17883[1]	RNA: Quasimodo	Integrase_H2C2 (87.9%), RT_RNaseH (100%), RVT_1 (99.6%)	29	AG/GT	NA	Ovary
Prat2	RNA: Gypsy-2_Dsim	Integrase_H2C2 (100%), RT_RNaseH (100%), RVT_1 (100%), rve (93.1%)	0	AG/NC	0.02	Gut
CG32032	RNA: jockey	PRE_C2HC (98.5%)	28.14	AG/NC	0.06	Head
Nlg1[2]	RNA: Invader3	SAP (88.6%), zf-CCHC (83.3%)	0.58	AG/GT	0.17	Head
CG33178	RNA: mdg3	zf-CCHC (88.9%)	3.36	NC	0.02	Head
stw[1]	RNA: F-element	Exo_endo_phos (100%), RVT_1 (100%)	3.49	AG/GT	NA	Ovary
l(3)80Fj	RNA: Cr1a	RVT_1 (39.2%)	29.89	AG/NC	NA	Head
l(3)80Fg	RNA: gypsy8	RT_RNaseH (87.6%)	8.26	AG/NC	NA	Gut
Mctp	RNA: Burdock	Integrase_H2C2 (94.8%), RT_RNaseH (98.1%), RVT_1 (98.7%)	1.05	NA	0.02	Gut
CG2162[1,2]	RNA: diver	DUF1758 (93.3%), DUF1759 (96%), Integrase_H2C2 (86.2%), Peptidase_A17 (80.9%)	47.14	NA	0.02	Ovary
pps	RNA: Transpac	Integrase_H2C2 (94.8%), RT_RNaseH (100%), RVT_1 (99.1%)	22.94	NA	0.02	Ovary
Gmd	DNA: S-element	HTH_Tnp_Tc3_2 (50%)	15.04	NA	0.98	Ovary, Head

Ppcs[1]	DNA: Bari1	DDE_3 (89.7%), HTH_28 (98.1%), HTH_Tnp_Tc3_2 (100%)	40.96	NA	1.00	Gut
CG2225[1]	DNA: HB	HTH_Tnp_Tc3_2 (84.7%)	0.44	AG/GT	NA	Gut
CG1671	DNA: pogo	DDE_1 (98.9%), HTH_23 (80%), HTH_Tnp_Tc5 (95.5%)	0	NC	0.11	Head
Cyp12a4[1,6,7,8]	DNA: Bari1	DDE_3 (89.0%), HTH_28 (98.1%), HTH_Tnp_Tc3_2 (100%)	0.29	AG/GT	1.00	Ovary
Idh3b	DNA: P-element	THAP (90.7%), Tnp_P_element (38.4%)	1.46	AG/GT	0.11	Ovary
CG14043	DNA: S-element	HTH_Tnp_Tc3_2 (50%)	1.28	NA	0.98	Ovary

Table 3. PFAM domain enrichment analysis

dcGO enrichment results using 'Gene Ontology (GO)' under FDR < 0.01.

GO term	Z-score	FDR	Annotated domains
Molecular function			
Nucleic acid binding	4.62	4.12×10^{-4}	PF00098 (zf-CCHC); PF00665 (rve); PF02037 (SAP); PF03372 (Exo_endo_phos); PF03943 (TAP_C); PF05485 (THAP)
Catalytic activity, acting on RNA	5.99	4.12×10^{-4}	PF00078 (RVT_1); PF00098 (zf-CCHC); PF00665 (rve); PF03372 (Exo_endo_phos)
Cellular component			
Nuclear body	7.61	1.11×10^{-3}	PF02037 (SAP); PF03372 (Exo_endo_phos); PF03943 (TAP_C)
Biological process			
Regulation of mRNA metabolic process	9.26	1.57×10^{-3}	PF00098 (zf-CCHC); PF02037 (SAP); PF03372 (Exo_endo_phos)

DISCUSSION

TEs contribute to genome innovation by expanding gene regulation, both of individual genes and of gene regulatory networks, enriching transcript diversity, and providing protein domains (*e.g.*, reviewed in Chuong et al.[59] and Modzelewski et al.[60]). While the role of TEs as providers of regulatory sequences has been extensively studied, their contribution to transcriptome diversification and protein domain evolution has been less characterized. In this work, we have identified and characterized chimeric gene-TE transcripts across three body parts and five natural *D. melanogaster* strains, and we have quantified their contribution to total gene expression and to protein domains. While previous studies were hindered by the incomplete annotation of TEs in the genome studied[12,21], in this work, we took advantage of the availability of high-quality genome assemblies and genome annotations for five natural strains to carry out an in depth analysis of gene-TE chimeric transcripts[34]. We found that TEs contribute 10%

487 to the global transcriptome and 18% to the body part specific transcriptome (Figure 1).
488 Contrary to other studies that mostly focus on a single type of chimeric gene-TE transcript, we
489 investigated a comprehensive dataset of chimeras. Indeed, we found that besides insertions
490 affecting the transcription start site, transcript termination, and adding spliced sites (*overlap*
491 *and alternative splicing insertions*), we also identified a substantial number of TE sequences
492 that were completely embedded within exons (*internal insertions;* Figure 1D). These two types
493 of chimeric gene-TE transcripts shared many properties, *e.g.* they were enriched for body part
494 specific transcripts and for retrotransposons (Figure S2B and Figure 4), and they showed
495 lower expression levels than non-chimeric transcripts (Figure 5A), suggesting that they both
496 should be taken into account when analyzing the contribution of TEs to gene novelty. The
497 *internal insertions* group contributed more to total gene expression (Figure 5B), however, we
498 dismissed the possibility that this increased expression was due to shorter TE insertions,
499 which are more likely to be enriched for false annotations compared with longer insertions[34].
500 We found, both based on size and frequency, that the *internal insertions* group is likely to be
501 enriched for older insertions. As such, a higher level of expression of these likely older TEs is
502 consistent with previous observations in tetrapods suggesting that over time gene-TE chimeric
503 transcripts often become the primary or sole transcript for a gene[27]. Overall, and taking only
504 into account those gene-TE chimeric transcripts with evidence of expression, we found 155
505 (8.6%) insertions disrupting the coding capacity, 415 (22.9%) affecting the coding capacity,
506 314 (17.3%) and 591 (32.6%) affecting the 5' and the 3' end of the gene, respectively, while
507 338 (18.6%) affected multiple transcript positions.

508 Our finding that TEs contribute to the expansion of the head transcriptome supports the results
509 of Treiber and Wadell (2020) [21] suggesting that ~6% of genes produce chimeric transcripts in
510 the head due to exonization of a TE insertion. However, because we also analyzed gut and
511 ovary, we further show that TEs can significantly contribute to the expansion of other body
512 parts transcriptomes as well (Figure 2). The observation that there are more chimeric
513 transcripts in the head is consistent with a higher transcriptional complexity in the *Drosophila*
514 nervous system tissues[3]. The fact that chimeric gene-TE transcripts tend to be tissue-specific
515 could be especially relevant for adaptive evolution as tissue-specific genes can free the host
516 from pleiotropic constraints and allow the exploration of new gene functions[45,61,62].

517 Finally, we identified a total of 27 TE protein domains co-opted by 29 genes (Table 2 and
518 Table S24). Ten of these genes have been previously described as chimeric based on high-
519 throughput screenings or individual gene studies, with some of them, *e.g. CHKov1* and *nxf2,*
520 having functional effects[54–56] (Table 2). The majority of the domains were present in the TE
521 consensus sequences (Table S9D). Furthermore, the 27 domains identified were enriched for

522 *nucleic acid binding* and *catalytic activity, acting on RNA* molecular functions (Table 3).
523 Although there is evidence for DNA binding domains being recruited to generate new genes,
524 previous data comes from a comparative genomic approach across tetrapod genomes that
525 focused on DNA transposons as a source of new protein domains[27]. The available data for the
526 genome-wide contribution of retrotransposons to protein domains so far is restricted to
527 endogenous retroviruses in mammals[28]. In our dataset, that includes both DNA transposons
528 and retrotransposons, the enrichment for DNA binding domains and for catalytic activity is
529 indeed driven by the retrotransposon insertions (Table 2). Although most of the TEs providing
530 protein domains identified in this work for the first time were present at low population
531 frequencies, four were fixed and two present at high population frequencies and are thus good
532 candidates for follow-up functional analysis (Table 2).

533 Although we have detected more chimeric transcripts than any prior *D. melanogaster* study to
534 date, our estimate of the potential contribution of TEs to the diversification of the transcriptome
535 is likely to be an underestimate. First, and as expected, we found that the contribution of TEs
536 to the transcriptome is body part specific[22,30] (60%, Figure S2B) and strain-specific[34] (48%
537 Figure S2A). Thus analyzing other body parts and increasing the number of genomes
538 analyzed will likely identify more chimeric gene-TE transcripts. And second, although our
539 estimate is based on the highly accurate annotations of TE insertions performed using the
540 REPET pipeline[34], highly diverged and fragmented TE insertions are difficult to be accurately
541 annotated by any pipeline and as such might go undetected[63,64]. Still, the combination of an
542 accurate annotation of chimeric gene-TE transcripts, with expression data across tissues, and
543 the investigation of protein domain acquisition carry out in this work, not only significantly
544 advances our knowledge on the role of TEs in gene expression and protein novelty, but also
545 provides a rich resource for follow-up analysis of gene-TE chimeras.

546

547

548 ## MATERIAL AND METHODS

549 ### Fly stocks

550 Five *D. melanogaster* strains obtained from the European Drosophila Population Genomics
551 Consortium (DrosEU), were selected according to their different geographical origins: AKA-
552 017 (Akaa, Finland), JUT-011 (Jutland, Denmark), MUN-016 (Munich, Germany), SLA-001
553 (Slankamen, Serbia) and TOM-007 (Tomelloso, Spain).

554 **RNA-seq and ChIP-seq data for three body parts**

555 RNA-seq and ChIP-seq data for the five strains were obtained from [36]. A full description of the
556 protocols used to generate the data can be found in [36]. Briefly, head, gut and ovary body parts
557 of each strain were dissected at the same time. Three replicates of 30 4-6 old-day females
558 each were processed per body part and strain. RNA-seq library preparation was performed
559 using the TruSeq Stranded mRNA Sample Prep kit from Illumina, and sequenced using
560 Illumina 125bp paired-end reads (26.4M-68.8M reads; Table S1). For ChIP-seq, libraries were
561 performed using TruSeq ChIP Library Preparation Kit. Sequencing was carried out in a
562 Illumina HiSeq 2500 platform, generating 50bp single-end reads (22.2M-59.1M reads; Table
563 S1).

564 **Transcriptome assembly**

565 ***Reference-guided transcriptome assembly***

566 To perform reference-guided transcriptome assemblies for each body part and strain (15
567 samples), we followed the protocol described in Pertea et al.[40] using HISAT2[39] (v2.2.1) and
568 StringTie[40] (v2.1.2) . We used *D. melanogaster* r6.31 reference gene annotations[65] (available
569 at: ftp://ftp.flybase.net/releases/FB2019_06/dmel_r6.31/gtf/dmel-all-r6.31.gtf.gz, last
570 accessed: October 2020). We first used *extract_splice_sites.py* and *extract_exons.py* python
571 scripts, included in the HISAT2 package, to extract the splice sites and exon information from
572 the gene annotation file. Next, we build the HISAT2 index using *hisat2-build* (argument: *-p 12*)
573 providing the splice sites and exon information obtained in the previous step in the *-ss* and -
574 *exon* arguments, respectively. We performed the mapping of the RNA-seq reads (from the
575 fastq files, previously analyzed with FastQC[66]) with HISAT2 (using the command *hisat2 -p 12*
576 *--dta -x*). The output sam files were sorted and transformed into bam files using samtools[67]
577 (v1.6). Finally, we used StringTie for the assembly of transcripts. We used the optimized
578 parameters for *D. melanogaster* provided in[68] to perform an accurate transcriptome assembly:
579 *stringtie -c 1.5 -g 51 -f 0.016 -j 2 -a 15 -M 0.95*. Finally, *stringtie --merge* was used to join all
580 the annotation files generated for each body part and strain. We used *gffcompare* (v0.11.2)
581 from the StringTie package to compare the generated assembly with the reference *D.*
582 *melanogaster* r.6.31 annotation, and the sensitivity and precision at the locus level was 99.7
583 and 98.5, respectively.

584 ***De novo transcriptome assembly***

585 A *de novo* transcriptome assembly was performed using Trinity[38] (v2.11.0 with the following
586 parameters: *--seqType fq --samples_file <txt file with fastq directory> --CPU 12 --*

587 *max_memory 78 G --trimmomatic*. To keep reliable near full-length transcripts, we used
588 blastn[69] (v2.2.31) to assign each *de novo* transcript to a known *D. melanogaster* transcript
589 obtained from the *Reference-guided transcriptome assembly*. Next, the script
590 *analyze_blastPlus_topHit_coverage.pl* from Trinity toolkit was used to evaluate the quality of
591 the BLAST results, and we followed a conservative approach that only kept a transcript with a
592 coverage higher than 80% with a known *D. melanogaster* transcript, thus, keeping 144,099
593 transcripts across all samples.

594 **Identification and characterization of chimeric gene-TE transcripts**

595 We focused on the set of assembled *de novo* transcripts that passed the coverage filtering to
596 identify putative chimeric gene-TE transcripts. We tried to minimize the possible sources of
597 confounding errors by excluding transcripts that were not overlapping a known transcript
598 (tagged by StringTie as *possible polymerase run-on* or *intergenic*). To annotate TEs in the *de*
599 *novo* assembled transcripts, we used RepeatMasker[41] (v4.1.1[41] with parameters *-norna -*
600 *nolow -s -cutoff 250 -xsmall -no_is -gff* with a manually curated TE library[34]. Note that
601 RepeatMasker states that a cutoff of 250 will guarantee no false positives[41]. We excluded
602 transcripts for which the entire sequence corresponded to a transposable element, indicative
603 of the autonomous expression of a TE. To infer the exon-intron boundaries of the transcript,
604 we used minimap2[42] (v2.17[42] with arguments *-ax splice --secondary=no --sam-hit-only -C5 -*
605 *t4* to align the transcript to the genome of the corresponding strain from which it was
606 assembled. We excluded single-transcript unit transcripts, that could be indicative of pervasive
607 transcription or non-mature mRNAs. With this process, we obtained the full-length transcript
608 from the genome sequence.

609 We ran RepeatMasker again (same parameters) on the full-length transcripts to annotate the
610 full TEs and obtain the length of the insertion. Finally, we used an *ad-hoc* bash script to define
611 the TE position within the transcript and define the two insertions groups: the *overlap and AS*
612 *insertions* group and the *internal insertions* group. The *overlap and AS insertions* group have
613 a TE overlapping with the first (5'UTR) or last (3'UTR) exon, or overlap with the exon-intron
614 junction and thus introduce alternative splice sites (see *Splice sites motif scan analysis*). The
615 *internal insertions group* corresponds to TE fragments detected inside exons.

616 **TE insertion length**

617 As mentioned above, for each chimeric gene-TE transcript, we obtained the length of the TE
618 insertion from the TE annotation in the full-length transcript. We considered that short
619 insertions are those shorter than 120bp[34].

620 **Splice sites motif scan analysis**

621 We followed Treiber and Waddell (2020) [21] approach to detect the splice acceptors and splice
622 donor sites in the *alternative splice (AS) insertions* subgroup of chimeric gene-TE transcripts.
623 In brief, we randomly extracted 11-12bp of 500 known donor and acceptor splice sites from
624 the reference *D. melanogaster* r.6.31 genome. Using the MEME tool[70] (v5.3.0), we screened
625 for the donor and acceptor motifs in these two sequences, using default parameters. The
626 obtained motifs were then searched in the predicted transposon-intron breakpoints position of
627 our transcripts using FIMO[71] (v5.3.0 with a significant *p*-value threshold of < 0.05).

628 ***Roo* analyses**

629 **Identification of the position of the *roo* sequences incorporated into gene-TE chimeric**
630 **transcripts in the *roo* consensus.** To determine the position of the *roo* insertions, we
631 downloaded the *roo* consensus sequence from FlyBase[65] (version FB2015_02, available at
632 https://flybase.org/static_pages/downloads/FB2015_02/transposons/transposon_sequence_
633 set.embl.txt.gz). We extracted the *roo* fragments detected in the chimeric gene-TE transcripts
634 using *bedtools getfasta*[72] (v2.29.2), and used *blastn*[69] with parameters *-dust no -soft_masking*
635 *false -word_size 7 -outfmt 6 -max_target_seqs 1 -evalue 0.05 -gapopen 5 -gapextend 2*
636 (v2.2.31) to determine the matching position in the consensus sequence.

637 **Identification of transcription factor binding sites in *roo* sequences.** We retrieved from
638 JASPAR[73] (v2022) the models for 160 transcription factor binding sites (TFBS) motifs of *D.*
639 *melanogaster*. We used FIMO[71] (v5.3.0) to scan for TBFS in the repetitive *roo* sequence from
640 the consensus sequence (region: 1052-1166), as well as in the fragments incorporated in the
641 gene-TE chimeras, with a significant threshold of 1×10^{-4}.

642 **Genome-wide BLAST analysis of *roo* low complexity sequences**. We performed a BLAST
643 search with *blastn*[69] (v2.2.31) (with parameters: *-dust no -soft_masking false -outfmt 6 -*
644 *word_size 7 -evalue 0.05 -gapopen 5 -gapextend 2 -qcov_hsp_perc 85 -perc_identity 75*).
645 Next, we used *bedtools intersect*[72] (v2.29.2) with the gene and transposable elements
646 annotations to see in which positions the matches occur. We analyzed the top 20 matches of
647 each blastn search.

648 **Identification of *D. simulans roo* consensus sequence.** We obtained a superfamily level
649 transposable elements library for *D. simulans* using REPET. We used *blastn*[69] (v2.2.31) with
650 a minimum coverage and percentage of identity of the 80% (*-qcov_hsp_perc 80 -perc_identity*
651 *80*) to find the sequence corresponding to the *roo* family. Then, we used again *blastn*[69] (with
652 parameters *-qcov_hsp_perc 80 -perc_identity 80 -dust no -soft_masking false -word_size 7 -*

max_target_seqs 1 -evalue 0.05 -gapopen 5 -gapextend 2) to check if the *roo* sequence from *D. simulans* contained the repetitive region present in the *D. melanogaster roo* consensus sequence. The *roo* consensus sequence from *D. simulans* is available in the GitHub repository (https://github.com/GonzalezLab/chimerics-transcripts-dmelanogaster).

Retrotransposons and DNA transposons enrichment

We used the percentage of retrotransposons and DNA transposons of the genome of the five strains provided in Rech et al (2022) [34] and performed a test of proportions to compare this percentage to the percentage of retrotransposons and DNA transposons detected in the chimeric gene-TE transcripts dataset.

Expression level estimation

To estimate the level of expression of the whole set of transcripts assembled we used the script *align_and_estimate_abundance.pl* from the Trinity package[38] (v2.11.0), using salmon[74] as the estimation method. We next used the script *abundance_estimates_to_matrix.pl* from the Trinity package to obtain the level of expression of transcripts using the TMM normalization (Trimmed Means of M values). For each transcript, the expression levels of the three replicates were averaged. For the analyses, we considered transcripts with a minimum expression level of one TMM. Genes were categorized in three groups: (i) genes that were never detected as producing chimeric isoforms, (ii) genes that always were detected as producing chimeric gene-TE transcripts and (iii) genes producing both chimeric and non-chimeric isoforms. For the later type of genes, we calculated the fraction of the total gene expression that comes from the chimeric transcript.

Coding capacity assessment

We assessed whether protein-coding chimeric gene-TE transcripts can produce a protein by using the Coding Potential Assessment Tool (CPAT) software[51] with default parameters. CPAT has been optimized for the prediction of coding and non-coding isoforms in *Drosophila*. Thus, we used the coding probability cutoff at 0.39[51].

PFAM scan of domain analysis and enrichment

To scan for PFAM domains[52] in the TEs detected in an internal exon, we extracted the TE sequence from the chimeric transcripts using *bedtools getfasta*[72] (v2.29.2[72], translated it to the longest ORF using *getorf*[75] (EMBOSS:6.6.0.0[75] and scan it using the script *pfam_scan.pl*[52,76] (v1.6) to identify any of the known protein family domains of the Pfam database (version 34). We used dcGO enrichment online tool[53] to perform an enrichment of the PFAM domains detected.

686 We scanned the consensus TE sequences for the domains present in TE fragments detected
687 in the chimerics transcripts using *pfam_scan.pl*[52,76] (v1.6). If the domain was not detected
688 using pfam default parameters, we lowered the hmmscan e-value sequence and domain
689 cutoffs to 0.05.

690 **Chip-seq peak calling**

691 ChIP-seq reads were processed using fastp[77] (v0.20.1) to remove adaptors and low-quality
692 sequences. Processed reads were mapped to the corresponding reference genome using the
693 *readAllocate* function (parameter: *chipThres = 500*) of the Perm-seq R package[78] (v0.3.0), with
694 *bowtie*[79] (v1.2.2) as the aligner and the CSEM program[80] (v2.3) in order to try to define a single
695 location for multi-mapping reads. In all cases bowtie was performed with default parameters
696 selected by Perm-seq.

697 Then, we used the ENCODE ChIP-Seq caper pipeline (v2, available at:
698 https://github.com/ENCODE-DCC/chip-seq-pipeline2) in *histone* mode, using *bowtie2* as the
699 aligner, disabling pseudo replicate generation and all related analyses (argument
700 *chip.true_rep_only = TRUE*) and pooling controls (argument *chip.always_use_pooled_ctl =*
701 *TRUE*). MACS2 peak caller was used with default settings. We used the output narrowPeak
702 files obtained for each replicate of each sample to call the histone peaks. To process the peak
703 data and keep a reliable set of peaks for each sample, we first obtained the summit of every
704 peak and extended it ±100bp. Next, we kept those peaks that overlapped in at least 2 out of
705 3 replicates (following [81]) allowing a maximum gap of 100bp, and merged them in a single file
706 using *bedtools merge*[72] (v2.30.0). Thus, we obtained for every histone mark of each sample a
707 peak file. We considered that a chimeric gene-TE transcript had a consistent epigenetic status
708 when the same epigenetic status was detected in at least 80% of the samples in which it was
709 detected.

710 **GO clustering analysis**

711 The Gene Ontology (GO) clustering analysis in the biological process (BP) and molecular
712 process (MP) category was performed using the DAVID bioinformatics online tool[50]. Names
713 of the annotation clusters were manually processed based on the cluster's GO terms. Only
714 clusters with a score >1.3 were considered[50].

715 **Statistical analysis**

716 All statistical analyses were performed in R (v3.6.3) statistical computing environment[82].
717 Graphics were created using *ggplot2* R package[83].

718 **Data availability**

719 RNA-seq and ChIP-seq raw data is available in the NCBI Sequence Read Archive (SRA)
720 database under BioProject PRJNA643665. The set of chimeric transcripts detected are
721 available in GitHub (https://github.com/GonzalezLab/chimerics-transcripts-dmelanogaster).
722 DrosOmics genome browser[36] (http://gonzalezlab.eu/drosomics) compiles all data generated
723 in this work.

724 **Code availability**

725 Scripts to perform analyses are available at GitHub
726 (https://github.com/GonzalezLab/chimerics-transcripts-dmelanogaster).

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